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# Editorial

British Art Studies Editorial Group

## **Authors**

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## **British art, international audiences**

The first issue of *British Art Studies* went live just over four months ago on 30 November 2015. In the short time since its publication nearly 10,000 readers around the world have accessed the journal. While the majority of the readership is located in Britain (56 percent), followed by the United States (27 percent), the journal has also been read in Italy, France, Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Poland, Colombia, and Russia—to name just some countries. The statistics suggest that an interest in British art and architecture is wider and more international than conventionally assumed.

This is a direct outcome of the free and open access policy we adopted for *BAS*, and reflects our hopes and intentions for the journal. At the same time, we are conscious that, so far, submissions to the journal have mostly come from researchers based in Britain and the United States; similarly, the materials and subjects addressed in these submissions have predominantly been located within the British Isles. We are pro-actively seeking to expand the field of British art for future issues, by representing a broader community of scholars and a wider realm of subject matter. Our summer issue on *British Sculpture Abroad*, which will be published in July, begins this process. It will include essays by individuals who do not identify themselves as “British art” experts, and who have come into contact with British sculpture through exhibitions outside Britain. Several of the essays will be translated into English from other languages. For future issues, we are keen to continue supporting the translation of research and enabling scholars in all parts of the world to publish and circulate their work on British art. *BAS* has been designed as an interactive and collaborative platform for research—this means we are open to suggestions about how we can encourage and support a diverse range of voices. These can be emailed to the editors at any time: [journal@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk](mailto:journal@paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk)

## **New technologies**

As with the first issue of *BAS*, much of this issue’s content has been specifically created and designed to capitalize on the open-access digital platform. We are committed to developing new ways of publishing art-historical research, and Issue 2 contains a rich mixture of text, images, film, and audio. The metrics from Issue 1 are proving a useful indicator of how readers are using *BAS*. Content that incorporates film and audio has so far received the greatest number of hits. This encourages us in our belief that the digital platform offers opportunities for displaying and inflecting art-historical research in ways that are only just beginning to become apparent. This is not simply about creating visually rich content, but also about

developing new methodologies for exploring relationships between objects, data, and historical context, and for presenting and layering information in ways that yield new insights.

A major theme of Issue 2 is the relationship between art history and conservation. Our aim is to foster a dialogue between these two related, but often disconnected, modes of research. The digital platform allows us to integrate complex technical information with visual and critical analysis, in ways that bring the worlds of the art historian and the conservator closer together. For example, by using simple digital tools such as the overlaying of images, technical information can be understood in direct relation to the object. Conservation and technical research often appear in specialist publications; our aim is to resituate this work in an art-historical context and enable it to be accessed and understood by a wider audience. Some of the digital tools we have employed to display this information are in the public domain and freely available [as open source software](#). Looking further ahead, we have articles in development that focus on network-mapping and the visualizing of “big data” and other kinds of information, which we hope will contribute in new ways to the buoyant debates animating digital humanities scholarship.

Conservation and transformation are also the main themes of our “cover” in this issue. A series of moving images capture details from the conservation of Louis I. Kahn’s Yale Center for British Art in New Haven. The project will soon be completed and the museum reopens to the public on 11 May. The images mark a fleeting moment in the building’s life, in which it was emptied of art and stripped back to its architectural bones. The animated cover underlines our aim to use every part of the journal in ways we could not do in print.

Social media is an important tool for *BAS*, which we use to distribute and enrich our content. We use Twitter to promote connections between *BAS* and the activities of museums, galleries, and scholars. This has already yielded some exciting results, such as conversations with librarians about our pioneering use of DOIs (digital object identifiers) at paragraph level, and with archivists about issues of cataloguing and digital preservation. Katy Barrett’s “Look First” feature will climax with a “Twitter tour” and a digital map containing linked data on 25 June—the anniversary of the “Hogarth Act” (the Engraving Copyright Act of 1734). This is especially pertinent given our commitment to promoting fair use/fair dealings of images for art-historical research.

## Conversations continued

Conversation and collaboration remains central to *British Art Studies*. Following on from the lively debate generated by “There’s No Such Thing as British Art” in Issue 1, Patricia de Montfort and Robyne Calvert have convened a similarly important Conversation Piece titled “Still Invisible?”, to tackle issues around the presence and absence of works by women artists in galleries and museums. This conversation was generated by a [British Art Specialist Subject Network](#) event held at the Hunterian Art Gallery at the University of Glasgow in December 2015. As an online journal, *BAS* can respond quickly to ideas and debates as they unfold. As with Issue 1, this conversation will be released in “waves”, with new contributions added over the coming weeks. Since we are keen to encourage dialogue, not simply to publish views and opinions, the comments function allows readers to add their voices to the conversation. Our fourth wave, relating to the [Art + Feminism wiki edit-a-thon](#) that is to be held at the Glasgow Contemporary Art Centre on 25 May, will provide further opportunities for contributing to the debate and for raising the visibility of women artists and their work.

The topic of this Conversation Piece also links to themes raised by Giulia Smith’s article on Magda Cordell McHale and Catherine Spencer’s article on Prunella Clough in Issue 1. We are interested in developing themes from issue to issue and facilitating connections across the journal. Readers can use the “Search” function to roam content through keyword searching. Our data shows, not surprisingly, that this is how many readers arrive at content selection, either from a web search outside the journal or through keyword searches within it. We want to facilitate these non-linear ways of navigating the journal; there is no set route through each issue.

*BAS* is a collaboration in digital publishing between the Paul Mellon Centre and the Yale Center for British Art. The process of developing and designing the first two issues has arisen out of a series of conversations between our two research centres. An audio-visual essay on John Singleton Copley’s prints presenting a conversation between Jules Prown, founding director of the Yale Center for British Art, and Mark Hallett, the current Director of Studies at the Paul Mellon Centre, is a reflection of this ongoing intellectual exchange. *BAS* is still a relatively new venture: as we move forward, we hope that this transatlantic collaboration will continue to encourage the growth and scope of the field in exciting and experimental directions.

# Changing Subjects: The Gallery at Cleveland House and the Highland Clearances

Anne Nellis Richter

## Abstract

*In 1812, a porter named William Cantrill published a small volume of etchings dedicated to his employer, the Marchioness of Stafford. Cantrill characterized his reproductions of a select group of small Netherlandish pictures from the art gallery at the Marchioness's London residence, Cleveland House, as "first attempts from an untutored hand", calling attention to his status as a servant and untrained artist. In this article, I examine this idiosyncratic volume in light of the reception of small subject pictures in the early nineteenth century, and also within the context of the Marchioness of Stafford's involvement in the Highland Clearances. At a moment when the Marchioness and her husband were under scrutiny for the heavy-handed tactics used against their Scottish tenants, this book used the category of genre painting to smooth over the gaps between landowner and tenant that the Clearances had made evident.*

## Authors

Lecturer at American University in Washington, DC.

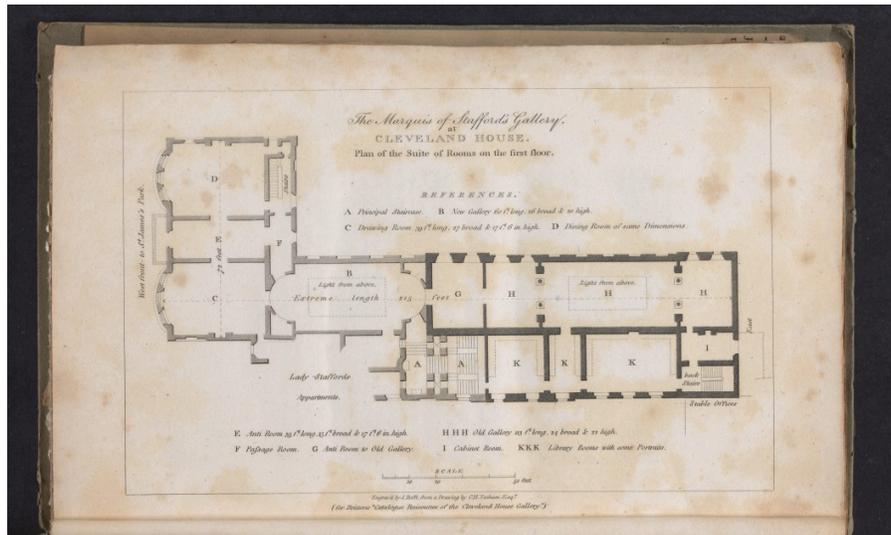
## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction



**Figure 1.**

John Roffe (engr.) after Charles Heathcote Tatham (arch.), *The Marquis of Stafford's Gallery at Cleveland House*. Plan of the Suite of Rooms on the first floor, in John Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures Belonging to the Most Honourable the Marquis of Stafford, in the Gallery of Cleveland House* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 23 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, N5245 S75

Cleveland House, a sixteenth-century Palladian townhouse, was renowned as London's most luxurious and cosmopolitan venue for looking at old master paintings in the early nineteenth century. The house, which was the London residence of George and Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford, enjoyed a glamorous reputation centred on its considerable collection of large-scale historical and mythological pictures by Italian and French masters, including Raphael, Poussin, Titian, Claude, and Annibale Carracci. The Marquess's family had acquired many of the most important pictures during the dispersal of the Orleans Collection in the 1790s—the transfer of such a significant collection of paintings into English ownership was declared “an aera in the history of our opulence and taste”.<sup>1</sup> In order to more suitably accommodate these pictures after inheriting both the house and the collection in 1803, the Marquess commissioned architect Charles Heathcote Tatham to make additions and renovations to Cleveland House which were completed in 1806.<sup>2</sup> The finished gallery comprised twelve lavishly decorated rooms which were open to a limited public during the social season; it also served as a glamorous setting for the many social and diplomatic events hosted by the family (fig. 1). The transformation of an aristocratic townhouse into a gallery for the exhibition of art made for a magnificent spectacle for those able to obtain admission. American Envoy Richard Rush wrote, “There is said to be no such private collection in Europe.

It comprehends the productions of the first masters of the different schools . . . These works of genius glowing from every part of the walls, formed a high attraction.”<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with its illustrious reputation, Cleveland House was celebrated in a variety of publications, including a widely circulated guidebook written by the antiquarian John Britton, printed in 1808, and a four-volume illustrated catalogue raisonné assembled by William Young Ottley, printed in 1818. Though they differ in significant respects, both Britton and Ottley’s catalogues were elaborate and ambitious attempts to record the quality and depth of Cleveland House’s collection of art.<sup>4</sup> Britton’s book, though small in size and likely intended to be carried while walking in the gallery, provided a laudatory introduction to the gallery, extensive notes on the pictures from the Italian and French schools, as well as a floor plan and view of the New Gallery, the largest of the gallery’s twelve rooms. By contrast, Ottley’s effort was a folio-sized catalogue raisonné, illustrated with colour plates, and bound in Russia leather for the enormous sum of £178 10s.; this luxurious edition was clearly intended to proclaim the collection’s significance on the national, and international, stage.<sup>5</sup> Despite their differences, both adhered to a set of established conventions for catalogues and guidebooks of aristocratic collections produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> They emphasized the most prestigious pictures from the Italian and French schools, particularly those from the Orleans Collection, and praised the Marquess of Stafford for his “patriotic zeal” and “noble” example.<sup>7</sup> The authors of catalogues and guidebooks assumed that their audience was the educated and polite public and that their purpose was to celebrate the collector’s magnanimity in making his house and pictures available to members of this group.

In 1812, however, an idiosyncratic project upended these assumptions. William Cantrill, a porter in the employ of the Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford, dedicated a privately printed book of etchings to her ladyship titled *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery*. Consisting only of a title page, dedication, and six etchings, it stands out not only for its modesty but for its unusual choice of pictures from the collection—Netherlandish and French genre paintings.<sup>8</sup> Passing over the Italian and French mythological, religious, and historical paintings that dominated both the physical spaces of the gallery and its public reputation, Cantrill instead offered readers a narrow subset of “subject” pictures, scenes of daily life, and animals. His choice of pictures should remind us that the “lesser” schools and genres were just as amply represented in the collection as their Italian and French counterparts. Of the 229 paintings on display at Cleveland House in 1806, more than half came from the northern schools of art, which were represented by such esteemed names as Rembrandt,

Rubens, Ruisdael, and Cuyp, in a range of genres from religious subjects to landscape and still life. The gallery's 138 "northern" pictures were densely hung in elaborate, nearly symmetrical patterns in a very large room designated as the Old Gallery, which was abundantly furnished with suites of Oriental and upholstered furniture. In most catalogues, these paintings barely warrant a mention; in Cantrill's they are the exclusive focus, though he offers no explanation or justification for his selection.

As if confirming Cantrill's unconventionality in focusing on small subject pictures, the catalogue departs in almost every way from the template established by other catalogue writers of the period. The etchings, attributed to Cantrill, are clearly the work of an amateur. Although slim and light, the catalogue is nevertheless too large to be comfortably used while strolling through the gallery, conforming neither to the expectations of a guidebook nor to the genre of catalogue. It is neither comprehensive nor lavishly presented. It contains no laudatory essay nor scholarly apparatus. Intriguingly, while most catalogues of the period were offered as tributes to the patriotic and public-spirited nature of their male owners, Cantrill's is dedicated to "Her Ladyship", the Marchioness. The catalogue is presented as a private, personal homage to a benevolent mistress, rather than as an intellectual or patriotic undertaking. In keeping with its somewhat mysterious origins, few copies survive in public repositories. One, illustrated here, was presented to the Society of Antiquaries in 1812 by a distant relation of the family; another is in the collection of the British Museum.

By virtue of its remarkable difference from other catalogues made of important art collections in this period, the Cantrill catalogue (if that term even adequately describes it) may appear to be little more than a charming curiosity. Yet its eccentricity presents an opportunity to consider the Cleveland House gallery afresh, in particular to reflect on the role that the Netherlandish pictures played in shaping both the collection's identity and visitors' reactions to it. Despite being glossed over by authors like Britton and Ottley, Netherlandish genre painting had become quite fashionable in the early nineteenth century amongst collectors, the general public, and artists, although its popularity sometimes sat awkwardly with its tendency to depict "everyday life" (which, as David Solkin has noted, can be read as a gloss for "lower-class life") without the veneer of politeness or middle-class morality that audiences preferred.<sup>9</sup>

Why, then, these pictures? What purpose could such an idiosyncratic tribute to the Marchioness and to Cleveland House serve? In this article, I will argue that Cantrill's publication is much more than a haphazard assemblage of little-known subject paintings, and that instead, it can be read as a narrative assembled from pictures hanging in Cleveland House. This narrative, I will suggest, can be "read" like a wordless story in pictures centring on the

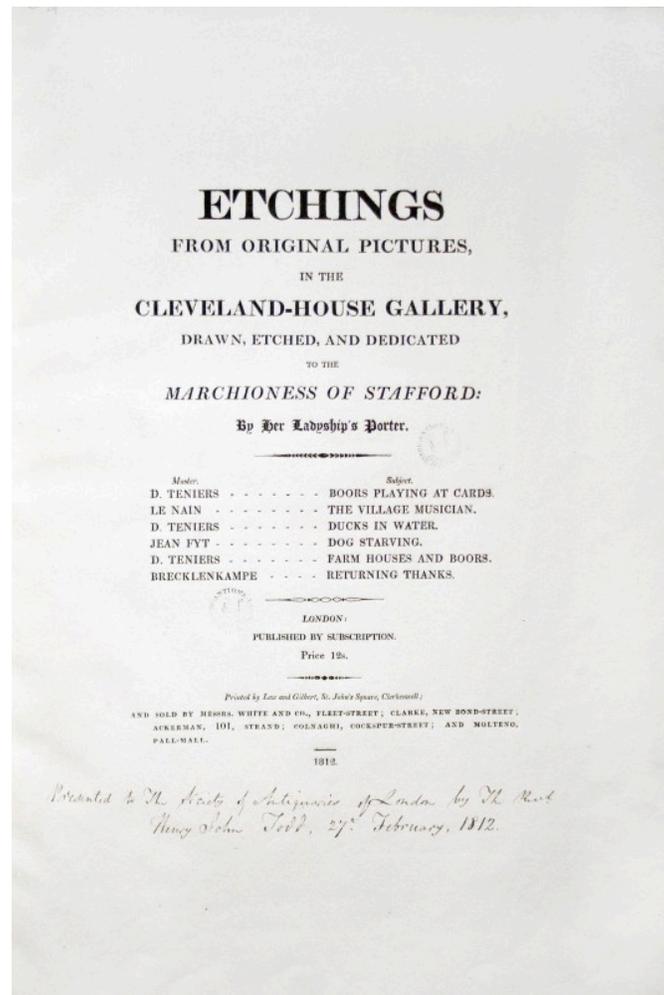
virtues of village life, the miseries of poverty, and the possibility of redemption at the hands of a female benefactress, creating not only a narrative, but also a thematic connection between pictures which would not otherwise exist.

Cantrill's catalogue was timely, and at its heart, carried a moral. At the time the book appeared in 1812, the Marquess and Marchioness had been undertaking improvements on the Marchioness's hereditary estates in Scotland for some years; these were part of a series of controversial land-management decisions which have become popularly known as the Highland Clearances. The Marquess and Marchioness's names became irrevocably associated with the controversy, and widespread condemnation of their actions appeared in the Scottish and metropolitan press. In 1819 the poet Robert Southey wrote: "There is at this time a considerable ferment in the country concerning the management of the M. of Stafford's estates: they comprise nearly 2/5<sup>th</sup> of the county of Sutherland, and the process of converting them into extensive sheep-farms is being carried on. A political economist has no hesitation concerning the fitness of the end in view, and little scruple as to the means."<sup>10</sup> Once set in motion, the controversy surrounding the Highland Clearances persisted for decades—Karl Marx invoked the Clearances as the example *par excellence* of the triumph of "capitalistic agriculture"<sup>11</sup>—and was revived in 1963 with the publication of John Prebble's popular history, *The Highland Clearances*, a polemical and highly emotional account that portrays the Staffords as members of a greedy aristocracy with a near-genocidal mania to replace human tenants with sheep.<sup>12</sup> More recently, the economic historian Eric Richards has published numerous books examining the complicated finances of the Leveson-Gowers and the subtle interrelationships between their canal and railroad holdings and the Highland properties as both sources and sinks of wealth.<sup>13</sup> Despite the international notoriety of the Clearances, however, no art historian has considered the Leveson-Gowers' role as patrons and collectors in the context of their activities in the Highlands.<sup>14</sup>

Cantrill's book provides an opportunity to connect and reinterpret the history of the gallery and of the Clearances and examine how they inflected one another. By reproducing only a handful of pictures from the collection at Cleveland House, the book operates as a form of synecdoche, mobilizing a few carefully chosen examples of subject painting to create a vision of Cleveland House as a repository of small-scale genre scenes that runs counter to its reputation as a collection of important Italian old master paintings. The book's narrative, drawing upon both the conventions of genre painting and its display, promotes and endorses the notion that the gallery

was not merely a space of glamour, but one that stitched together the lives of aristocrats and their tenants, and where empathy and care for dependent people was literally “on display”.

## Cleveland House and its context



### Figure 2.

William Cantrill, Title page, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

Upon opening Cantrill’s catalogue, the reader is greeted by a page titled “Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery”. The words are in bold capital letters, suggesting that what follows should be understood as an encapsulation of the treasures found in that great house (fig. 2).

Cleveland House was situated in the elite London area near St James’s Park and Green Park. The Marquess of Stafford inherited the house and its

collection in 1803 following the death of his uncle, the Duke of Bridgewater. The Duke had been a prominent figure in late eighteenth-century English society, known both for the immense industrial fortune he had accumulated through the building of a canal system in the west of England and for collecting Continental paintings *en masse* following the French Revolution. He was also admired for his patronage of contemporary British painters, including J. M. W. Turner, whose *Dutch Boats in a Gale* was one of just a few examples of contemporary English art on display in the gallery.<sup>15</sup> The Duke left everything of significance—the canals, the townhouse, and its immensely prestigious collections of art—to his nephew. The inheritance made the Leveson-Gowers one of the wealthiest families in the country, and their names became synonymous with a lavish, aristocratic lifestyle.

The collection had already been open to a limited audience in the Duke's lifetime. To facilitate the continued exhibition of the collection, the Marquess commissioned a renovation and expansion of the gallery and established a ticketing system.<sup>16</sup> While the transparency with which this regime was made known to the public (the regulations were published in Britton's catalogue) theoretically made Cleveland House one of the most accessible spaces in which to view old master paintings in London, in practice those granted admission usually had a personal connection to the Marquess of Stafford's family or letters of introduction from Royal Academicians. During its first few years a number of writers energetically promoted the idea that the gallery was more than just a private collection of interest to connoisseurs; commentators noted that it was "a National Museum rather than [a] private collection",<sup>17</sup> one which gave "the idea of a national establishment rather than of the collection of an individual".<sup>18</sup> Cleveland House cultivated this image with great success, coming to be regarded as a space with an important role to play in the development of public taste. In order to carry out this function pictures were hung according to national schools, giving priority to the most important Italian historical and religious subjects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Given the limited public for the gallery, whether it was actually successful in altering public taste is debatable. What is certain is that the act of opening the collection to the public greatly enhanced the reputation of the Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford. Upon the Marquess's death in 1833, a widely circulated obituary emphasized his "liberal and judicious" patronage, which had "added most materially to the satisfaction of that class of society, whose leisure and education render the improvement of the Fine Arts a principle part of their enjoyment".<sup>19</sup>

## The Sutherland estates

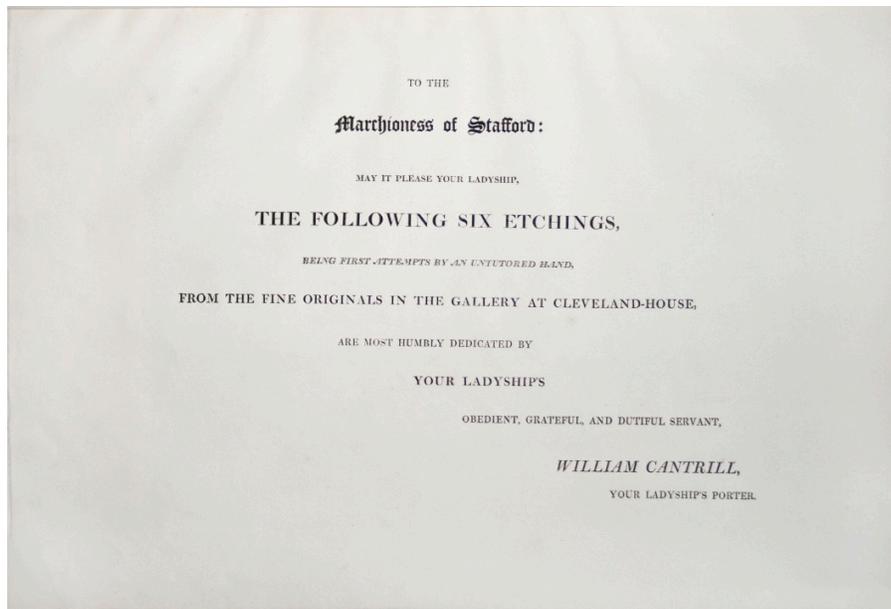
The Cleveland House gallery appeared, in the eyes of contemporaries, to be the quintessential symbol of aristocratic patriotic benevolence. At the same time, however, its glamorous image stood in stark contrast to that of other properties owned by the family—the small, poorly maintained cottages (Robert Southey used the term “man-sties”) occupied by their Scottish tenants.<sup>20</sup> This dichotomy has persisted in art history, where the Marquess of Stafford has been studied primarily for his importance as a patron and collector, with little attention given to the socio-political context of the family’s involvement in important economic developments. Yet, in 1806, the very year the Cleveland House gallery opened to the public, the Marquess and Marchioness undertook a campaign of enclosures and improvements on their estates, marking the beginning of a series of actions that would ultimately rank the family amongst the most controversial landlords of the nineteenth century. The Marchioness of Stafford, who also bore the title Countess of Sutherland in her own right, brought nearly one million acres of northeastern Scotland to her marriage in 1785.<sup>21</sup> Known as the Sutherland estates, they were a mixed blessing, as both land and tenants were poor.<sup>22</sup> Upon receiving the Bridgewater inheritance, the Marquess and Marchioness quickly took steps to invest in a scheme of “improvement” on the estates intended, at least in part, to ameliorate conditions for the tenantry. Improvement, as employed throughout Britain in this period, meant the consolidation of land: as landlords increased their acreage, smaller farms were absorbed into larger ones in a bid to increase productivity and profitability. An outcome of consolidation was that lands which had traditionally enjoyed common use by villagers became fenced property and subject to modern agricultural farming techniques, a process often referred to as “enclosure”. From the landlord’s point of view, enclosure made land more productive. From the tenant’s point of view, enclosure and related efforts at “improvement” represented the seizure of public property by private, landed interests. The mixture of self-interest and benevolence that characterizes the Sutherland case was therefore not unusual; on the contrary, the improvements planned for the Sutherland estates were born of the landowning classes’ preoccupation with improvement during this period.

Enclosures in the Scottish Highlands, which have come to be known generally as the Highland Clearances, are amongst the most scarring episodes in Scottish history. The euphemistic term “enclosure” smoothed over a process that was often contentious and occasionally violent. In theory, the Clearances were intended to improve the land by converting small farms into large grazing fields for sheep and removing the impoverished tenants to the coast, to pursue fishing and other occupations as a more economically viable way of life. In practice, however, many Highlanders violently resisted the changes, in which they had no say. Local people, many of whom were left

unemployed, hungry, and uprooted from their communities, were angry at the methods undertaken by landlords to effect change on the Highland estates, and anger quickly turned to violent resistance in the form of rick-burning and related means of protest.<sup>23</sup> Many of those who refused to accept the schemes emigrated to Australia, Canada, and the United States; much of the worldwide Scottish diaspora today can be traced to these events.

Gossip, pamphlets, and articles circulated criticizing Highland landlords for their greed and heavy-handed tactics, or for both. By the 1810s, observers were making a more explicit connection between the effect of the Clearances on the poor, and the expensive, cosmopolitan lifestyle pursued by their London-based landlords. In 1819 the *New Monthly Magazine* delivered a crushing assessment: “When all is amassed that law and threats of displacement can procure, the parties enriched leave the parties impoverished, to squander their earnings and to forget their woes amid the luxuries of the metropolis.”<sup>24</sup> Even as these events were underway, it is clear that the family’s growing reputation as patrons of the arts helped deflect criticism. For example, agricultural reformer Thomas Bakewell, no fan of landowners who mistreated their dependants, raised the possibility that the Marquess’s reputation as “a highly esteemed nobleman . . . who is the general arbiter of taste in one of the fine arts” somehow provided an alibi for alleged unethical acts toward his tenants.<sup>25</sup>

## **Reading Cantrill**



**Figure 3.**

William Cantrill, Dedication page, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

It is in the light of these socio-economic developments that I wish to consider Cantrill's catalogue. Produced in 1812, in the midst of the turmoil caused by the Clearances, the catalogue appears to have been calculated to stitch together the rifts these events had revealed between landlord and tenant, master and dependant. The book's dedication—the only context given for its creation—reads: "May it please your ladyship, the following six etchings, being first attempts by an untutored hand, from the fine originals in the gallery at Cleveland-House, are most humbly dedicated by your Ladyship's obedient, grateful, and dutiful servant, William Cantrill, your ladyship's porter" (fig. 3). Cantrill's authority to produce such a book is linked to his position as a "porter", a trusted member of the household staff. It hardly needs stating that a domestic servant made an extraordinarily unusual author for such a book. Catalogue and guidebook authors generally enjoyed established reputations in the London art world. John Britton, for example, whose popular catalogue and guidebook of Cleveland House was published in 1808, was an accomplished antiquarian and topographer, identified on the title page by way of his membership in the Society of Antiquaries (designated F.S.A.). William Young Ottley, whose four-volume illustrated catalogue raisonné of Cleveland House appeared in 1818, was an amateur artist and collector and, later, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. Both Britton and Ottley were men whose vocations as artists and writers provided a social footing on which to enter the orbit of a collector like the Marquess of Stafford, in stark contrast to Cantrill's status as a servant.

Cantrill's dedication does not downplay his lack of professional credentials; in fact, he points out that the etchings are "first attempts from an untutored hand". A comparison of one of the etchings to the painting on which it is based, Antoine Le Nain's *The Village Piper* (now in the Detroit Institute of Arts) (figs. 5 and 6), supports this assertion.<sup>26</sup> While faithful to Le Nain's composition, Cantrill's etching is an ungainly translation of the painting's sensitively rendered flageolet-player and listening children. In contrast to Le Nain's picture, which situates the figures within a deftly suggested darkened and ambiguous picture space, Cantrill's figures float on an empty white page, given depth only with awkward hatching suggesting shadows near the feet of the girl and boy towards the right-hand border of the image. The worn and patched clothing depicted in Le Nain's painting creates an atmosphere of pathos that contributed to the painting's appeal to nineteenth-century viewers. Cantrill copies the clothing in his etching but without capturing its scrupulous attention to detail, despite the fact that Cantrill's reproduction is larger than the original painting, which measures only 22.5 x 30.5 cm. For example, the thread trailing from the shirt of the boy in the red cap is indistinct in Cantrill's reproduction.

The very clumsiness of the etchings, however, lends them an air of unpretentiousness. By assuming the perspective of a humble, even unsophisticated, viewer, the catalogue may have held a special appeal to the Marchioness and the book's other "readers". Cantrill's explicitly identified status as a domestic servant highlights the potential social and moral benefits of the gallery as an agent of working-class improvement. In general, domestic staff were not included in the polite and artistic crowds granted official tickets to the open days at the Cleveland House gallery, though they were present—as attendants dressed in uniform or in service at parties. While they thereby had access to works of art, they were excluded from circulating amongst the elite visitors to whom printed tickets were issued and could not have enjoyed many opportunities to glance at the pictures while carrying out their official duties. We can only surmise that the Marchioness herself encouraged Cantrill to demonstrate his affection and support for her by testing his artistic potential in this way; in turn it was almost certainly she, or her husband, who secured the funding necessary for printing this book.

Cantrill's role as a porter placed him a unique position in relation to the gallery's spaces, and provides an intriguing clue as to his relationship to the art displayed there. In general, a porter was a person responsible for opening the door to a house, a role particularly important in urban townhouses where visitors came and went on a regular basis.<sup>27</sup> As such, porters in these houses were both literal and symbolic gatekeepers, monitoring, granting, or refusing access to the interior of the house. The open days at the gallery at Cleveland House represent a complicated variation on the typical duties of the porter. Cleveland House was notionally open to the public during viewing

hours, yet in practice the list of people given access was closely monitored. It was the porter who was entrusted with the responsibility for managing the list of people who were to be given access to the gallery on open days—Britton tells us that applications to enter the gallery were “inserted in a book by the Porter, at the door of Cleveland-House, any day except Tuesday; when the tickets are issued, for admission on the following day”.<sup>28</sup> While I have found no explicit evidence that Cantrill was in fact the same porter given responsibility to keep the book of applications to enter the gallery, in light of the publication of his etchings it seems likely that he was the porter who occupied this position in 1812. As a member of the working classes normally excluded from the gallery’s rarified list of attendees, Cantrill nevertheless had access to and responsibility for managing both the inclusion and exclusion of visitors. As such, he needed to understand who would qualify for access and act as a conduit for his employer’s assumptions about social class.

Cantrill’s position as a porter at Cleveland House and as an amateur artist encouraged by his employers suggests that the images in his catalogue may have been chosen to represent the values that a mistress and her “grateful, and dutiful” servant were expected to share. In order to elucidate this, we should study these pictures as a contemporary “reader” may have done, in the order in which they appeared. By virtually “reading” the book, a narrative emerges that puts on display both the picturesque and the undesirable aspects of poor, rural life, before offering the possibility of redemption. Such a reading suggests the ways in which subject painting was particularly well suited to constructing a narrative that could be understood across the boundaries of social class separating Cantrill and the ostensible audience for this book.



**Figure 4.**

William Cantrill after David Teniers the Younger, *Boors Playing at Cards*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

As we turn over the dedication page, the first image we encounter is an etching after David Teniers's *Boors Playing at Cards* (fig. 4). This image depicts the interior of a pub, with a group of men gathered around a half-barrel which has been pressed into service as a card table. Two other men smoke while a dog looks out from the right-hand corner. The picture, as interpreted by Cantrill's etching, exhibits many of the characteristics stereotypically associated with genre scenes—lower-class people at their leisure, drinking and playing cards in a humble setting. Scenes like these, executed with great charm and a high level of finish, made Teniers one of the early nineteenth century's most beloved and eagerly collected Flemish subject painters (not to mention the most valuable). Given the ample selection of pictures by Teniers available in the Staffords' collection, it is unsurprising that half of Cantrill's etchings were based on works attributed to him. All three are typical examples of Teniers's art, demonstrating picturesque qualities of variety, roughness, and attention to detail. Though the original picture after which Cantrill's engraving was made is in a private collection, a tavern scene by Teniers in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington exhibits similar characteristics. In this version, the tavern is populated with men playing cards, drinking, snoozing, and urinating in a darkened corner—though Cantrill's etching, and presumably, the Cleveland House original, includes no such urinating figure (see David Teniers the Younger, *Tavern Scene*, 1658, and, from much earlier in his career, Teniers the Younger, *Peasants in a Tavern*, ca. 1633).

Cantrill's catalogue continues with two further subject paintings depicting common life. Turning the page, we find Antoine Le Nain's *The Village Piper* (figs. 5 and 6), which depicts a group of poor but healthy youngsters gathering around a musician. The third plate, Teniers's *Ducks in the Water* (fig. 7), exhibits more of the artist's renowned charm by adapting the conventions of genre to animal painting, as a female duck and ducklings turn their necks to admire the plumage of their male companion. Taken as a group, the first three images, all of which in some way relate to village or family life, demonstrate the qualities of northern European genre paintings that made them beloved by British audiences in the period. Subject pictures typically offered urban viewers a picturesque and comforting view of the rural way of life that traditionally had underpinned the wealth of landed families like the Staffords. Teniers's family of ducks occupies a peaceful corner of a pond, suggestive of the natural order of social hierarchies as of benefit to all. As Sarah Monks has written, such works appealed to British viewers who wished to believe in their "apparent revelation of nature's aesthetic and social harmoniousness".<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Le Nain's image of poor youngsters (or in John Britton's words, "a group of five ragged children") gathering around a village musician may have conjured up an image of Lord and Lady Stafford's own tenantry, who relied upon their landlords' goodwill for their continued prosperity.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 5.**

William Cantrill, fourth page: William Cantrill after Antoine Le Nain, *The Village Musician*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 x 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London



**Figure 6.**

Antoine Le Nain, *The Village Piper*, 1642, oil on copper sheet, 22.5 x 30.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, Michigan



**Figure 7.**

William Cantrill after David Teniers the Younger, *Ducks in the Water*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 x 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

At this point Cantrill introduces an image that appears to disrupt the narrative. Jan Fyt's *Starving Dog* (fig. 8)<sup>31</sup> depicts a chained dog whose plate of food is just out of reach; the chain pulled taut, the dog appears unable to reach the crust of bread that has been tossed into his bowl, his tongue lolling out of his mouth in hunger. The image introduces an unsettling element into a sequence that heretofore was suggestive of relaxed comfort and harmonious social relations. The dog is chained to a small door on the interior of what appears to be the gatehouse of an immense estate. In the background an urn containing a small tree perches on the edge of a low stone wall topped by a decorative coping. The impression is of a grand dwelling just out of sight.



**Figure 8.**

William Cantrill after Jan Fyt, *The Starving Dog*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

Fyt's picture seems an unlikely choice for a catalogue whose intent is to honour an aristocratic lady. *The Starving Dog* suggests the neglect of a dependent creature by a careless master or mistress; an alert viewer might have been reminded of the distress of the Highland tenants, their homes and livelihoods in a state of upheaval as a result of Lord and Lady Stafford's improvements. Stories that circulated about the Clearances, both at the time and during subsequent decades, frequently made recourse to the notion that the tenantry had been treated like animals; a woman named Betsy MacKay, who was sixteen when her family was evicted in 1814, recalled much later, "the people were driven away like dogs who deserved no better, and that, too, without any reason in the world."<sup>32</sup> Stories like this one caused

widespread outrage. From this perspective, Cantrill's use of Fyt's picture might be interpreted as subversive, emphasizing rather than rebuffing the possibility that Lord and Lady Stafford were not the benevolent landlords they purported to be.



**Figure 9.**

William Cantrill after David Teniers the Younger, *Farm Houses and Boors*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

However, this suggestion is undone when we turn the page. Teniers's *Farm Houses and Boors* (fig. 9) offers a palliative to *The Starving Dog*, depicting the tidy dwellings of a small farm and villagers at play.<sup>33</sup> At the centre of the picture a woman bearing a platter of food is shown making her way through a doorway. The sustenance that her offering implicitly provides pulls together the disparate elements of the picture—one man urinating immediately to the woman's right, other men playing nine-pins scattered across the foreground.<sup>34</sup> David Solkin has astutely observed that a common device in Teniers's pictures is the "way in which his figures tend to be arranged into groups or individuals who remain resolutely separate from one another, their dispersal acting as a spatial sign for the aimless nature of their daily existence". This aimlessness exhibited by the playing and urinating men might be interpreted as another way of describing the sloth or "idleness" that the upper classes assumed was endemic to the Highlanders—a lack of motivation which had been invoked as a justification for improvements and clearance in the first place. The arrival of a benevolent female figure transforms the story from one of starvation to contentment, aimless wandering to productivity. Binding together the composition, she improves the lives of the tiny figures who

inhabit it. Appearing at this point in the catalogue's narrative, this figure could be interpreted as a substitute for the Marchioness, so as to cast her attention to the needs of the Highlanders in a positive light.

As if to emphasize the point, Cantrill ends his catalogue with a final interior scene which focuses the viewer's attention on a moral female figure, in Quirijn van Brekelenkam's *Returning Thanks* (fig. 10). We turn the page to find a woman praying at a small table in a simple domestic interior. Her hands clasped and eyes closed, she presents an image of piety, grateful for the loaf of bread on the small table before her. Brekelenkam was known for his prolific production of small-scale paintings of "virtuous elderly women", which typically featured female figures in simple dress, eating plain meals of bread or soup, in demonstrably poor surroundings.<sup>35</sup> A viewer considering Brekelenkam's image within the framework of Cantrill's catalogue might see the woman as a Highland tenant, grateful to a benevolent mistress for the tidy house and ample food to which she now has access. The representation of a pious woman could simultaneously burnish the reputation of the Marchioness by associating her name with an image of industriousness, wisdom, and gratitude. *Returning Thanks* thereby emphasizes the notion of a mutually beneficial relationship between superiors and dependants that the Marchioness seems to have been at pains to establish.



**Figure 10.**

William Cantrill after Quirijn van Brekelenkam, *Returning Thanks*, in Cantrill, *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery* (London: Published by subscription, 1812), 46.4 × 36.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries Library, London

Serving as a transition between images of peaceful village life and those of improvement and contentment, *The Starving Dog's* position at the midpoint of this catalogue represents a pivotal moment in the development of its narrative and the ideological message it carries. The inclusion of *The Starving Dog* acknowledges the rumours about the Marchioness's lack of compassion for her tenants, and serves as a moment of transition. The images in Cantrill's catalogue present this story, then turn to images which seem to suggest the benefit of female intercession on behalf of the people. Following the image of extreme suffering represented by *The Starving Dog*, the nadir of a downward slide into hunger and desperation, the sequence of images ends with two pictures which both rely upon the imagery of women's intervention, both material and spiritual, to improve the condition of humanity.

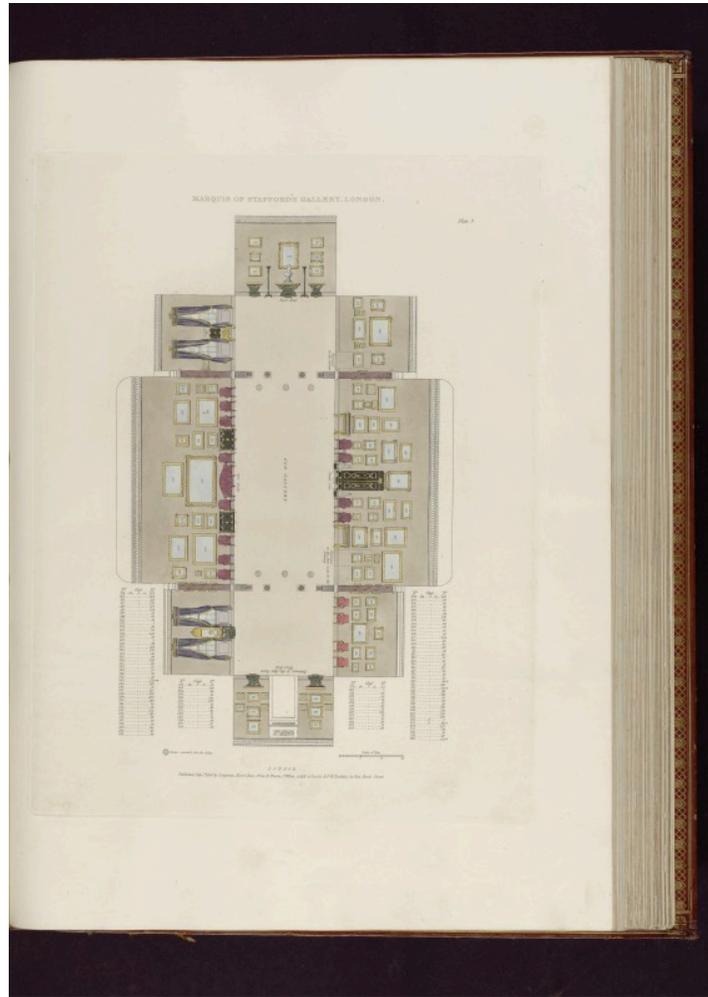
Considered as a whole, the selection of pictures and the narrative structure imposed by their ordering within the book invited viewers to reflect upon the peaceful and harmonious rural life that the processes of enclosure and eviction were intended to create, as opposed to the chaotic and violent one they had set in motion. Turning the pages as Cantrill's readers might have done, the sequence of images tells the story of lower-class life and of its amelioration through benevolence and philanthropy. The lowly nature of the images presented in Cantrill's catalogue also draws a sharp contrast with the Marchioness's reputation for lavish living, associating her with humble virtues and deflecting attention from the controversial treatment of her tenants. Images of poor but contented rural folk, such as those featured in the first three images, who are then struck by neglect and starvation, reproduces the aristocratic understanding of Highland history in pictorial form.

### **Looking at subject pictures in the Cleveland House gallery**

The narrative reading of Cantrill's book that I have proposed functioned as an alternative to interacting with and looking at genre pictures within the physical, intellectual, and pedagogical frameworks offered by the gallery itself. The book, by imposing a viewing order, and bringing the pictures into close proximity to the reader, permitted a re-framing and re-purposing of pictures which in the gallery played secondary roles in the arrangements of pictures on the wall. How then, did Cantrill's catalogue shift the terms of looking at the pictures it chose to represent? One of the book's most meaningful interventions in the relationship between picture and viewer was to bring small genre scenes, several of which were tiny to begin with, down from the walls and to place them in the viewer's hands, offering an opportunity to engage with them directly. Measuring 55 x 38 cm, Cantrill's book was a sizeable (though lightweight) object; as such, it was not a guidebook. It was almost certainly intended to be looked at in a library or

perhaps on a drawing room table, conjuring up a vision (or memory) of the gallery's interior that was quite different from the experience that a viewer would have in person. I will now consider how the pictures Cantrill chose for his book were displayed in the physical space of the gallery from which they were drawn, and how the relationship between book and gallery might have inflected the reception and interpretation of these six pictures.

All six of the pictures in Cantrill's catalogue were hung in the Old Gallery at Cleveland House, the room that came last on the route prescribed for visitors. The collection was exhibited in a series of rooms organized by schools; the route, which began in the New Gallery, gave precedence to the venerated pictures from Lower and Upper Italy, upon which Cleveland House's reputation rested, followed by the French, Spanish, British, and Netherlandish schools. Following the plan provided in Britton's catalogue ([fig. 1](#)), visitors were directed up the grand staircase and then immediately into the three rooms holding the great Italian pictures, namely the New Gallery, the Drawing Room, and the Dining Room. Visitors then retraced their steps back through the New Gallery and into an anteroom, hung with a few select paintings from the British school. Finally, at the end of the route, visitors arrived in the Old Gallery, densely hung with the "Northern Schools", a capacious category comprising Belgian, Dutch, Flemish, and German painters.



**Figure 11.**

John Roffe (engr.), Old Gallery, in William Young Ottley, *Engravings of the Most Noble the Marquis of Stafford's Collection of Pictures in London* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1818), 61 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut

A detailed plan of the Old Gallery published in 1818 (fig. 10) permits a reconstruction of the hanging locations of many of the pictures on display at this date, including all of those in Cantrill's book. Inherent in the small size and elaborate detail of genre pictures was the notion that they should be viewed up-close and intimately. At Cleveland House, the art-historical structure that was imposed on the hanging meant the most prominent locations were reserved for the larger pictures—thus, the Old Gallery was dominated by a large allegorical painting by Rubens, *Peace and War*, which was centred over the mauve upholstered sofa on the left-hand wall, where it could be easily seen from all angles. In contrast, many of the smaller pictures were hung high above doors and in remote corners; the smaller pictures were often well above a viewer's eye-line. Overall, the small sizes of the

pictures and their sheer number created a richly patterned wall surface which visually subsumed individual paintings. Teniers's *Farm Houses and Boors* hung over a passage door leading from the far end of the Old Gallery into the Library, a room excluded from the gallery route; similarly, Teniers's *Boors Playing Cards* was hung well above eye-level on the right-hand wall, below a much larger picture of a Dutch festival by a much lesser-known painter, Cornelius Molinaer. Le Nain's tiny *Village Piper* was situated on a supporting column at the lower left-hand side of the plan, which illustrates its obscured position by way of a thin gold rectangle representing its frame as seen from the side. Brekelenkam's *Returning Thanks* hung on the opposite column, near Fyt's *Starving Dog*, which was very high on the wall at the right-hand side of the plan. Teniers's *Ducks in the Water* was hung above a table on one side of the entrance to the Old Gallery, depicted at the bottom of the plan; it would have been to a visitor's back as he or she entered the room.

The location of northern genre pictures at the end of the gallery route marked them as lesser in significance, more understandable, and more relatable to daily life than the grandiose mythological and historical subjects that preceded them. John Britton's 1808 guidebook had largely dismissed the "Northern Schools" as works which did not offer much beyond "commonplace objects, and vulgar personages".<sup>36</sup> Even as pictures featuring "low" subject matter, particularly those by Teniers, became sought after in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they continued to occupy an ambiguous place on the walls of upper-class interiors. The vulgarity of these pictures, while part of their appeal, presented particular challenges when displaying art in a gallery purporting to elevate the taste of the public, as Cleveland House did. In 1808, for example, Humphry Repton, in reviewing a picture by Adriaen von Ostade, remarked on its unsuitability for the polite audiences who frequented Cleveland House (it featured a lawyer using his spittoon); Repton wrote that it was "in no respect inferior [but] seems to have been placed in an obscure corner for reasons perfectly consonant to our notions of delicacy: it is, therefore, seldom seen, and often only glanced at and avoided by the ladies who visit this gallery".<sup>37</sup> As Repton's comment implies, the role that northern paintings played within the gallery's art-historical narrative could come into tension with their visual coarseness, an issue addressed by hanging such pictures in less visible locations. Fyt's *Starving Dog*, for example, hung quite high on the wall, was likely placed there in order to prevent visitors from being forced to confront its upsetting subject matter too directly.

At the same time, genre pictures featured homely subjects and naturalistic technique that invited not only close looking, but expressions of emotion on behalf of the figures they depicted, and were sometimes displayed to accommodate this type of viewing. In June 1806, fifteen-year-old Frances

Waddington witnessed such a public display of feeling when the renowned actress Mrs Siddons visited the gallery: “At length she picked out a painting of some Dutch fishwomen, the last thing upon earth you could call interesting, and ‘what a sweet composition is that!’ was pronounced in her deepest tragedy tones.”<sup>38</sup> Waddington cannily understood that Siddons was using the picture to perform her skills as a dramatic actress, but her encounter with Siddons also demonstrates how privileged gallery visitors might draw upon the pictures’ “common” subject matter to enact their understanding of the way of life portrayed and exhibit their sympathetic reaction to it.<sup>39</sup> While the pictures in question had not necessarily been painted with a moralizing message embedded into them, the personal interactions taking place in the gallery permitted such sympathetic and moralizing messages to emerge in the context of a society in which the personal expression of “sensibility” had become desirable.<sup>40</sup> Cantrill’s catalogue enables such displays of sensibility by placing an exclusive emphasis on such “vulgar personages”, permitting viewers to engage with them directly and intimately, often in direct contrast to the way the same pictures were presented out of convenient viewing distance on the gallery walls. The catalogue’s focus on scenes of village life suggests that the selection was calculated to permit sustained consideration of the images and, on occasion, empathy with the downtrodden figures they represented. The framework for viewing pictures that Cantrill’s book provided ensured that they would be explicitly associated with the name of the Marchioness of Stafford, and is emblematic of the relationship the Marchioness wished to maintain with her tenants and employees—one in which they saw each other eye to eye, but with a full understanding of the differences that lay between them.

## **Conclusion**

The controversy over the Staffords’ handling of their Sutherland estates was not yet over by the time Cantrill’s book appeared, and indeed was to worsen (in 1815, one of the Stafford’s employees was put on trial for murder after a cottage eviction went disastrously wrong).<sup>41</sup> As Eric Richards has demonstrated, both the Marquess and Marchioness were keen to manage their family’s reputation through recourse to the press; by 1808 the estate was already issuing “flat denials” to critical reports in Scottish newspapers.<sup>42</sup> The censorious comments further circulated through rumour and gossip in the Marchioness of Stafford’s social circles. In private correspondence, she took steps to rebut the accusations, writing to one acquaintance:

We have lately been much attacked in the newspapers by a few malicious writers who have long assailed us on every occasion. What is stated is most perfectly unjust and unfounded, as I am convinced from the facts I am acquainted with, and I venture to trouble you with the enclosed . . . If you meet with discussions on the subject in Society, I shall be glad if you will show this statement to anyone who may interest him or herself on the subject. <sup>43</sup>

Cantrill's book can be interpreted as one shot fired in the battle over reputation taking place during these eventful years. An appeal to the collection offered an ideal way to change the subject, from the controversy surrounding land management to the family's most visible and admired contribution to the public good: the gallery at Cleveland House. From the evidence that survives, a few crucial hints as to the book's intended audience and possible use may be gleaned. Cantrill's catalogue is precisely the type of object that might circulate within the intimate circles of a family—it could function as a memento honouring the lady of the house, while wordlessly reminding the reader of her beneficence as an employer, patroness, and benefactress of the arts. Cantrill's book was privately printed; few copies survive in public collections, suggesting that unlike other catalogues it was intended for circulation amongst a small, hand-picked audience. The copy reproduced here was presented to the Society of Antiquaries in London by Revd Henry John Todd, who had a distant, but personal, connection to the Marquess and Marchioness, having served as the private chaplain to the 7th Earl of Bridgewater, a cousin of the late Duke of Bridgewater whose collections formed the Cleveland House gallery's core. <sup>44</sup> The title page bears a price, 12s., and indicates it could be purchased at a number of booksellers, including Ackermann, Colnaghi, and Molteno. Yet, the scarcity of copies in public collections (the Society of Antiquaries and the British Museum are the only two I have located) suggests that it did not circulate widely; its audience was probably primarily family and friends.

From its dedication, which positions the collection as the personal domain of the Marchioness, to its final image, associating her with the domestic morality betokened by its subject, Cantrill's book presents a way of thinking about the gallery and its purpose that runs counter to the public virtues that the gallery had elsewhere been used to promote. As noted above, most catalogues, like those by Britton and Ottley, focused on the Marquess of Stafford's patriotic and noble example, a gentleman enacting his duty to the nation in making his collection accessible to the public; Cantrill's is dedicated exclusively to the Marchioness. The Sutherland estates were *her* ancestral property, and it was she who bore the dual titles of Marchioness of Stafford and Countess of Sutherland. This shift in focus to the Marchioness allows the

book to appeal to its audience along traditionally gendered lines, linking the collection to the feminine (and private) virtues of domesticity and conscientious household management. The “humble” dedication from a “grateful and dutiful servant”, emphasizes this personal, domestic connection between author and dedicatee, offering the series of etchings it contains as a token of devotion, supporting the notion that the bond between aristocrat and dependant had not been as completely broken as events in the Highlands might suggest. Of course, nowhere does Cantrill’s catalogue directly mention the unrest on the Marquess and Marchioness’s Scottish estates; on the contrary, it implies an easy and naturally ordered relationship between the Marchioness and her dependants. In doing so, it presents the relationship between mistress and servant as one which is mutually beneficial while remaining appropriately deferential. An appeal to the subjects of common life also disassociated the Marchioness of Stafford from the Continental and sensual Italianate pictures which gave Cleveland House its reputation.<sup>45</sup> Although the pictures chosen were somewhat incongruously associated with “vulgar” subjects which might have been unsuitable for dedication to a female patron, the choice of imagery emphasizing an easily comprehensible social order allows Cantrill’s offering to the Marchioness to be interpreted as a validation of her authority and actions as a mistress and landowner. By extension, it associates the grand public space of Cleveland House’s gallery with a private and moral sensibility.

The celebration of Cleveland House as a “national museum” suggests that the art for which it was famed, in particular the works of Italian Renaissance masters, could be understood as an overarching culture that included all citizens of the nation, from London to the furthest reaches of Scotland and Wales; from townhouse to cottage. This catalogue’s presentation as a token of affection from an “untutored” porter to one of the richest and most dazzling aristocratic hostesses of the age implies a symbiosis between the aristocracy who collected pictures and the tenantry whose work enabled such collecting. However, in practice, the bringing together of the various parts of Britain under one cultural umbrella was a fractured process, one which the Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford’s far-flung personal empire demonstrates. The geographical and cultural divide separating the rural estate from urban life could be difficult to reconcile, and the notion that the “national” culture being forged in the Cleveland House gallery was truly intended for a seamlessly integrated Great British public is self-evidently problematic. The people living on the Marquess and Marchioness’s Scottish (and English, for that matter) estates were not part of the public for the gallery—their humble cottages were the obverse to the glamorous and urbane life the family enjoyed in London. The Marquess and Marchioness belonged to an aristocracy whose cultural and political authority superseded such national designations in a way their tenants never could. Cantrill’s catalogue, through the deployment of scenes of everyday life, glosses over

the conflicts which had arisen between the Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford and their tenants, and promotes an aura of private morality in a space which was reported in the papers as a semi-public institution of national, and even international, significance. Subject pictures, as deployed in Cantrill's catalogue, offered upper-class audiences an alternative and comforting vision of the "national" culture being constructed in the Cleveland House gallery through the frame of common life.

## Footnotes

- 1 *Press-cuttings, from English newspapers* . . . National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Shelfmark P.P.17.G), 578 (1790). The Orleans Collection (written without an accent in English) was a collection of old master paintings belonging to Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, which had been imported into Britain during the 1790s in the aftermath of the French Revolution and sold to British collectors. The best Italian and French pictures from the Orleans Collection were purchased by a group of collectors called the Bridgewater consortium, led by Francis Egerton, the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater. The Marquess of Stafford, the Duke's nephew, was invited to join the consortium along with his cousin, the Earl of Carlisle. The Duke of Bridgewater died in 1803 and left his portion of the Orleans pictures and Cleveland House to the Marquess of Stafford. A recent and invaluable article by Peter Humfrey elaborates upon the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater's collecting practice in areas like Dutch painting. Humfrey, "The 3rd Duke of Bridgewater as a Collector of Old Master Paintings", *Journal of the History of Collections* 27, no. 2 (2015): 211-25. For a detailed account of the Orleans Collection and its importation to England, see Nicholas Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. 2, *Venice, 1540-1600* (London: National Gallery, 2008), 461-70. Other important sources on the art market in this period include William Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting, with a Chronological History of the Importation of Pictures of the Great Masters into England since the French Revolution* (London: R. Ackermann, 1824); Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: The Rise and Fall of the Picture Market, 1760-1960* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 26-38; Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 22-29; Jordana Pomeroy, "The Orleans Collection: Its Impact on the British Art World", *Apollo* 145 (1997): 26-31; and Pomeroy, "Conversing with History: The Orléans Collection Arrives in Britain", in *British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response: Reflections Across the Pond*, ed. Inge Reist (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 47-60.
- 2 A recent article by Peter Humfrey details the Marquess of Stafford's practices as a collector and the relationship of his activities to the gallery at Cleveland House. Humfrey, "The Stafford Gallery at Cleveland House and the 2nd Marquess of Stafford as a Collector", *Journal of the History of Collections* 28, no. 1 (2016): 43-55.
- 3 Richard Rush, *Memoranda of a Residence at the Court of London* (Philadelphia: Key and Biddle, 1833), 155.
- 4 John Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures Belonging to the Most Honourable the Marquis of Stafford, in the Gallery of Cleveland House* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), and William Young Ottley, *Engravings of the Most Noble the Marquis of Stafford's Collection of Pictures in London, arranged according to Schools, and in Chronological Order, with Remarks on Each Picture* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818). Britton and Ottley were the two most widely circulated catalogues but there are several others. The earliest, *A Catalogue of Pictures at Cleveland-House* (London: J. Hays, 1806), is a simple picture list that was likely used as a guidebook for gallery visitors. In 1807 the architect George Perry published *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Collection of the Marquis of Stafford in London* (London: J. Walker, 1807), which departs from the pattern mentioned above by focusing on the British and Netherlandish pictures, but it appears to have enjoyed very limited circulation in contrast to Britton's and Ottley's efforts. Another picture list appeared in 1814 with the title *Catalogue of the Pictures belonging to the Marquis of Stafford, at Cleveland House* (London: M. Gummow, 1814). The last publication exclusively devoted to Cleveland House and its collection was John Young's *A Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures of the Most Noble The Marquess of Stafford at Cleveland House, London* (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1825).
- 5 Advertisement found in *Press-cuttings, from English newspapers* . . . National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Shelfmark P.P.17.G), 814. Probably because there were few who could afford such an expensive production, Ottley failed to achieve a return on his investment and went bankrupt.
- 6 On French catalogues in the eighteenth century, see Benedict Leca, "An Art Book and its Viewers: The 'Recueil Crozat' and the Uses of Reproductive Engraving", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 4 (2005): 623-49. For guidebooks to collections in later eighteenth-century English houses, see Jocelyn Anderson, "Remaking the Space: The Plan and the Route in Country-House Guidebooks from 1770 to 1815", *Architectural History* 54 (2011): 195-212.
- 7 Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, vii.
- 8 [W. Cantrill], *Etchings from Original Pictures in the Cleveland-House Gallery, drawn, etched, and dedicated to the Marchioness of Stafford*, by her Ladyship's Porter (London: Published by subscription, Price 12s., 1812). Many thanks to Charles Sebag-Montefiore for arranging access to the library of the Society of Antiquaries so that I could examine this book.

- 9 David Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-century Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 2. On the popularity of Netherlandish genre scenes amongst early nineteenth-century collectors, see also Harry Mount, "'Our British Teniers': David Wilkie and the Heritage of Netherlandish Art", in *David Wilkie: Painter of Everyday Life*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2002), 30–39, and Harry Mount, "The Reception of Dutch Genre Painting in England, 1695–1829" (D.Phil. diss, University of Cambridge, 1991).
- 10 Robert Southey, *Journal of a Tour in Scotland in 1819*, ed. C. H. Herford (London: John Murray, 1929), 136.
- 11 Marx described the clearances as the "transformation [of land] into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism". Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: Modern Library, 1906), 805.
- 12 John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963).
- 13 The historian Eric Richards's enormous body of writing on this topic provides an even-handed scholarly treatment, and has provided an important foundation for the discussion of agricultural policy found in this article. In general Richards argues that an unbiased interpretation of these events suggests that the actions of landlords were often heavy-handed, but that charges of racial animosity toward the Highlanders are overstated. See Eric Richards, *The Leviathan of Wealth: The Sutherland Fortune in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions, 1746–1886* (London: Croom Helm, 1982); Richards, *Patrick Sellar and the Highland Clearances: Homicide, Eviction and the Price of Progress* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999); and Richards, *The Highland Clearances: People, Landlords, and Rural Turmoil* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000).
- 14 Prebble was one of the few to draw any connection between these events. He alleges, for example, that the £3,000 Stafford spent on a picture by Rubens from the Doria Palace in Genoa, was a sum amounting to fully half of what he spent on poor relief during one typhus epidemic in the Highlands. He makes the point for its highly emotional impact on the reader, but presses the comparison no further. Prebble, *Highland Clearances*, 60.
- 15 Turner's *Dutch Boats in a Gale*, also known as "The Bridgewater Seapiece", was amongst those works the Marquess of Stafford inherited, and was displayed alongside other pictures from the English school at Cleveland House. Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), 12–13, cat. no. 14.
- 16 To date, Giles Waterfield has done the most extensive work on the London townhouse collection, and I am indebted to his work. See especially Waterfield, ed., *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790–1990* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991), and Waterfield, "The Town House as Gallery of Art", *London Journal* 20, no. 1 (1995): 47–66.
- 17 Quoted in William Thomas Whitley, *Art in England, 1800–1820*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 1:109.
- 18 "Monthly Retrospective of the Fine Arts", *Monthly Magazine and British Register* 21 (July 1806): 543–46.
- 19 "Funeral of the Duke of Sutherland. July 31st 1833", *Inverness Courier*, 7 Aug. 1833. In file of clippings on the death of the Duke of Sutherland. National Library of Scotland, Sutherland archive, Dep. 313 [798].
- 20 Southey, *Journal*, 136.
- 21 She also held the ancient title Great Lady of Sutherland—in Gaelic, *Ban mhorair Chataibh*. Prebble, *Highland Clearances*, 59. Elizabeth inherited the Sutherland estate and its associated benefits and responsibilities after her parents died in 1766 when she was not yet two years old. During her minority the estates were managed by a board of Tutors, but by her eighteenth birthday she had begun actively participating in their management.
- 22 The poverty of Sutherland also contrasted sharply with the modernity and prosperity associated with the Marquess of Stafford's properties in Staffordshire. The Leveson-Gower family's holdings in Staffordshire had increased significantly in value during the latter part of the eighteenth century due to the construction of the Duke of Bridgewater's canal network and from the related processes of industrialization. Richards writes that after the marriage of the Marquess and Marchioness of Stafford, "the most unmodernised remote corner of the British Isles became interlocked with the most dynamic sector of its most advanced region—Lancashire and the West Midlands." Richards, *Patrick Sellar*, 38.
- 23 See Anne Janowitz, "Land", in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. John Mee, Gillian Russell, and others (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 155.
- 24 B.G. [?], "On the Condition of the Highland Peasantry Before and Since the Rebellion of 1745", *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* 11, no. 66 (1 July 1819): 504–9.
- 25 Thomas Bakewell, *Remarks on a Publication by James Loch, Esq.* (London: Longman, 1820), 38.
- 26 This is the only painting from Cantrill's catalogue that is now in a public collection.
- 27 Porter is a term derived from French for a doorman, doorkeeper, or gatekeeper (see "porter, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2016). Some confusion may arise from the fact that there were two types of porters in London of this period, the type working as a doorkeeper in a private house and the more common type, who were unskilled labourers worked on the wharves and in other places around the city transporting cargo. While few scholars have investigated the role of the porter within the household specifically, Peter Earle's *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650–1750* (London: Methuen, 1994) provides valuable background information. A few scholars have addressed the cultural significance of doors and doorways in the London house, see for example Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009), 25–48.
- 28 Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, unpaginated; #xz "Regulations".
- 29 Monks is speaking specifically of the work of Van de Velde here, but her point holds more generally. Sarah Monks, "Turner Goes Dutch", in *Turner and the Masters*, ed. David Solkin (London: Tate, 2009), 74.

- 30 Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 120.
- 31 Identified in Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 138, as "A Dog chained".
- 32 First-hand accounts vividly describe the evictions undertaken by the Marquess and Marchioness's representatives although they must be treated with caution, since most were not recorded until many years later. This quote from Betsy Mackay refers to events that took place in 1814, but is itself undated, and is quoted in Prebble, *Highland Clearances*, 87.
- 33 In Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 135, this painting is identified as no. 200, "Dutchmen Playing at Nine-Pins".
- 34 Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary*, 40.
- 35 Wayne Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-century Genre Painting: Its Stylistic and Thematic Evolution* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 131. Small in size, such pictures originally sold for modest sums and would have been understood by Brekelenkam's clients as images of piety and the spiritual wisdom that was a positive benefit of old age. By the early nineteenth century, such images surely had lost much of the delicate web of meanings that attached to them in their original context. Franits, 74–75, 130–34.
- 36 Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 117.
- 37 Repton, in Britton, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 146.
- 38 Letter dated 23 June 1806. Augustus J. C. Hare, *The Life and Letters of Frances, Baroness Bunsen* (London: Daldy, Isbister and Co., 1879), 1:75.
- 39 Siddons herself could also become an object of scrutiny in the context of public exhibitions, in ways that enhanced her reputation as an actress but also called into question her claims to morally upstanding forms of femininity. See Gill Perry, "The Spectacle of the Muse: Exhibiting the Actress at the Royal Academy", in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 111–25.
- 40 On the use of contemporary painting based on Dutch genre scenes for an expression of concepts of charity, see Georgina Cole's "'A beautiful assemblage of an interesting nature': Gainsborough's *Charity Relieving Distress* and the Reconciliation of High and Low Art", *British Art Studies* 1 (Nov. 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/gcole>
- 41 For an account of the trial of Patrick Sellar, which took place in April 1816 in Inverness, see Richards, *Patrick Sellar*, 182–223.
- 42 Richards, *Patrick Sellar*, 45.
- 43 Quoted in Prebble, *Highland Clearances*, 112–13.
- 44 See D. A. Brunton, "Todd, Henry John", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).
- 45 See Philippa Simpson's recent work, which examines how the sensual content of many of the Italian masters was received. Simpson, "Titian in Post-Orleans London", in *The Reception of Titian in Britain: From Reynolds to Ruskin*, ed. Peter Humfrey (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 99–108.

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# Still Invisible?

Patricia de Montfort and Robyne Erica Calvert

## **Authors**

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Introduction by

**Patricia de Montfort**, Lecturer in History of Art, University of Glasgow

**Robyne Erica Calvert**, Mackintosh Research Fellow, Glasgow School of Art

## **Provocation**

In the inaugural “Conversation Piece” in *British Art Studies*, Issue 1, Richard Johns makes the observation that at the National Gallery, London, “British art” is represented by a selection of work by just ten artists—mostly English, all white, male, and born within eighty years of each other. Is it any wonder that British art can appear like an exclusive club with prohibitive requirements for entry? This exclusivity is particularly striking where British women artists are concerned, for the leading female artists in the collection—Rachel Ruysch, Rosalba Carriera, Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, and Rosa Bonheur—are all from Continental Europe. That these women were all painters is also a reminder of the extent to which gallery acquisitions have traditionally been dominated by painting, on occasion to the detriment of artists working in other media.

The issue for us is not necessarily about the lack of women’s work in British public collections, but rather, is it on display? Does it receive curatorial care and scholarly attention? And if or when it does not—when it lingers on the darkest racks of museums stores, collected for a posterity it will never achieve—how has this happened, and why? Or should we be especially concerned about the display of women’s work in public collections, in an age of digital images and online archives? As our recent seminar, *Overlooked Women Artists and Designers, 1851-1918*, at the University of Glasgow highlighted, an ever larger and more diverse body of women’s work continues to emerge through scholarship that may criss-cross boundaries between professionalism and amateurism or be produced in contexts not always readily associated with artistic and market value. Should scarce curatorial resources be devoted to the display and interpretation of this work?

Certainly, concerns remain about the policies of many public institutions towards collecting and preserving women’s work. In the United States, for example, an *Art News* article, “We’re Finally Infiltrating”, claimed that the year 2007 would be “the year of institutional consciousness-raising”, with a plethora of major events devoted to the past, present, and future of feminist art practice and historical scholarship due to take place at high profile museums: at MoMA, paradigmatic scholars of the 1970s and 80s including Lucy Lippard and Linda Nochlin were lined-up as speakers at a two-day symposium: The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts; the

LA Museum of Contemporary Art held an international retrospective of the work of 1970s feminist artists; and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, billed as the first dedicated museum space of its kind, opened at the Brooklyn Museum. Since then, the Brooklyn Museum has hosted the Feminist Art Base, a digital archive for feminist art since the 1960s, and it continues to run its longstanding Women in the Arts award honouring the contributions of American women. The National Museum for Women in the Arts, founded in 1987 in Washington, DC, continues to expand upon its original mission to exhibit, collect, and preserve the work of women artists of all periods and traditions, and to promote women's art educational programming and advocacy. However, feminist art collectives like the Guerrilla Girls, veterans of some thirty years of concerted attacks on art-world sexism, with slogans like "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?", claim that broader progress continues to be hindered by the ubiquitous presence on museum boards of wealthy art collectors with an ability to influence market trends and museum acquisitions. In its 2015 review of women in the art world, *Art News* noted that the percentage of female solo exhibitions during the period 2007-14 across five major museums (including MoMA) was less than half that of their male counterparts. Gender disparity remains deep-rooted at institutional level.

Where does that leave us in the United Kingdom? Digital scholarship and the efforts of charitable organizations like the Public Catalogue Foundation's Art UK have, in recent years, increased the visibility of paintings in collections across the UK, in particular by bringing to light works usually hidden in museum stores. A welcome by-product of this has been increased exposure of little-known work by women artists. Catalogue raisonné projects like de Montfort's Louise Jopling 1843-1933 are indicative of a broader upsurge in open-access publishing that offers promising pathways for future scholarship on women artists, especially in the area of provenance. The Jopling catalogue was launched online (with some apprehension) as a work-in-progress, but this move has proved to be richly productive in research terms, stimulating new discoveries and enabling numerous new works to be traced and sitters identified. Exhibition projects like The Rise of Women Artists at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2009-10) and the current Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965 at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, exemplify recent efforts among UK museums to commit serious curatorial attention and institutional resources to the work of women artists. Such projects can make complex and unusual demands upon the researcher and exhibition curator. For example, at the recent Women in Scottish Art Study Day, curator Alice Strang highlighted the difficulties involved in presenting the work of the forty-five women in the exhibition. She noted how, for the first time, she found it necessary to use text panels to explain how and why the names of the artists were selected, since many had two or more surnames attributed to them over the course of their careers—a problem not encountered among male artists. Moreover, for the viewer, such exhibitions

(however well-intentioned and underpinned by excellent scholarship) can provoke complex results: the effect of concentrated groupings of works by women artists showcasing new and worthwhile artistic discoveries, biographical facts, and visual connections, seems to us at once both gratifying and wearisomely familiar. It's also easy to feel discomforted by the display of "hidden" women's works separately from that of their male counterparts: arguably, this only highlights difference.

One way or another, access to women's work remains challenging in the twenty-first century: it tends to be widely dispersed across the UK, often singly, in increasingly hard-pressed regional and local collections. Other work survives only in family collections, hidden from public view and often inaccessible to scholars. Sometimes these collections emerge into the public spotlight for a time, only to disappear again. A recent exhibition of the work of "lost" war artist Evelyn Dunbar ([Evelyn Dunbar: The Lost Works](#)) who died in 1960 aged only fifty-three, drew on a family collection of some five-hundred paintings, drawings, and related studies previously unknown to scholars. However, such finds are unusual. More often, archival records of a woman's professional life and work are scant (or lost) and visual records depend on grainy black-and-white reproductions from period art magazines, making detailed comparisons between works and oeuvres (the art historian's traditional stock in trade) unrewarding.

For all feminism's attempts over the past few decades to expose cultural inequalities that have written women out of art history, it's difficult to imagine how a comprehensive picture of women's cultural production a hundred or more years ago might emerge when the surviving records are often fragmentary. But on a more cheering note, our recent [seminar](#) also reminded us of the breadth of women's artistic practice and economic activity in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art world. We were struck, for instance, by how botanical works by women artists came to serve a dual social and educational purpose at the Manchester Art Museum in Ancoats, a densely populated working-class district of Manchester. We were also surprised by the extent of women's presence in hitherto neglected contexts, such as evidence of over 2,000 female account holders in the archives of artists' colourman, Charles Roberson & Co.; of women not only joining archaeological expeditions to visually record and interpret found objects and materials, but also publishing the results, seemingly to their professional benefit. Above all, we were struck by the need to continually question scholarly assumptions about women's cultural agency: as one of our contributors, Sophie Hatchwell, asked in relation to women at the Fitzroy Street studio (whence sprang the Camden Town Group), were women artists always a secondary presence by contrast with their male peers?

We think that a broader and more dynamic mapping of women's art work, that pays particular heed to the geographical and disciplinary boundaries of their practice, would assist this quest. For scholars, this task requires us to remain vigilant—to avoid seizing upon surviving evidence of any one individual as “typical” of female practice in favour of a more strongly comparative and interdisciplinary approach. This may require us to ask difficult questions of material that may lie uncomfortably outside our own disciplinary boundaries, and to synthesize it in new ways. Therein, however, may lie possibilities for new kinds of visibility and, indeed, opportunities for institutional consciousness-raising.

After our initial three waves, released at two-week intervals, and themed around visibility, reputation and legacy; contexts and networks beyond the studio; and display and re-evaluation, respectively, our fourth wave of contributions will be based around the effective, profile-raising, and collaborative work of a number of recent projects to raise the visibility of female practitioners in the field of art and architecture. This includes a précis of the aims of the 2017 AA XX 100 project to celebrate the centenary of women at the Architectural Association by Yasmin Shariff; an introduction to the exhibition *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965* by the curator, Alice Strang; and pieces recording and analysing the results of [Art + Feminism wiki edit-a-thons](#) held in 2016 at YCBA and the ICA. The Glasgow School of Art and the Paul Mellon Centre are convening a “Still Invisible” edit-a-thon in Glasgow on 25 May 2016 at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), where many of the contributors to this conversation will gather to learn the skills involved in editing wikis, and to create new pages and update existing ones with information about overlooked women artists. In a [2011 survey](#), 90 percent of wiki editors identified as male (9 percent as female, and 1 percent as transsexual or transgender), which may go some way to explaining the current low coverage of women and the arts on Wikipedia. Through gathering for this event, which will incorporate training with Wikimedian, [Sara Thomas](#), we will encourage female editorship and ensure that this digital conversation continues.

Response by

**Joanna Meacock**, Curator of British Art, Glasgow Museums

### **A lesser known Glasgow Girl: the case of Maggie Hamilton**

Maggie Hamilton (1867–1952), a talented embroiderer and painter of flowers and still lifes, presents a fascinating case study of a woman artist at the turn of the century, who worked and exhibited prodigiously across the fine and decorative arts, and yet has now fallen into obscurity. The only painting by her in a UK public collection is *Alas, April the 30th* in Newport, Wales. The daughter of Mary Stevenson and James Hamilton, a prosperous Glasgow bobbin manufacturer, younger sister of Glasgow Boys painter James Whitelaw Hamilton, and wife of the prominent Glasgow architect Alexander Nisbet Paterson (younger brother of Glasgow Boy James Paterson), Hamilton is today eclipsed by her more famous male family members. Her plight was summed up in the summers of 1883–85 when she was asked to keep house for James Guthrie and the Glasgow Boys at Dunglass, near Cockburnspath, in order that they could immerse themselves as artists, Bastien-Lepage style, in rural life.

However, Hamilton was doggedly determined and made opportunities for herself, exploiting wherever possible her contact with the Boys: she managed to paint while she kept house at Cockburnspath; and on the back of their success in Munich in 1890, exhibited in Germany 1891–1901. As an artist, and later committee member of the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists (later Lady Artists' Club), she also exhibited fifty-one paintings at the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) from 1889 (aged 22). Although denied membership as a woman, she nevertheless exhibited almost every year until 1943, predominantly oils (underpriced at £5 to £45). She also exhibited an impressive ninety-two works at the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts from 1890, dedicatedly exhibiting every year, sometimes two or three works at a time (the most she was permitted as a woman non-member), until 1944 (when she was aged 77). The only exceptions to this were 1898, the year after her marriage, when Alexander made a tour of Italy and Hamilton may well have joined him, and the years 1906 and 1931 when she exhibited at the RSA; so they were by no means fallow years. She even exhibited in 1899 and 1900, the years her children Viola and Alistair were born. Many other women artists were forced to interrupt their careers as a result of marriage, children, and home commitments. However, coming from a fairly wealthy background Hamilton was freed up by a nanny and other live-in staff at The Long Croft (the family home designed by her husband, with whom she collaborated on the interior decoration).



**Figure 1.**

James Guthrie, Maggie Hamilton,  
1892-93, oil on canvas, 195.6 x  
87.6 cm Digital image courtesy of  
CSG CIC Glasgow Museums  
Collection) (2907)

In Guthrie's 1892-93 portrait of the artist in Glasgow Museums ([fig. 1](#)), Hamilton, wearing an elegant walking outfit, standing with hand on her hip, cane in hand (not a feminine parasol), cuts a fashionable and confident figure. This was the woman who continued to exhibit after her marriage in 1897 as "M. HAMILTON", although reviewers pointedly referred to her as Mrs A. N. Paterson. Frustratingly, when Guthrie's portrait was exhibited at the Society of Portrait Painters in London in May 1893, in the same room as Whistler's portrait of the famous violinist Pablo de Sarasate (1884; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA) , it was much admired by critics but—in contrast to the musician—no mention was made of the sitter as an artist in her own right. In 1935, Whistler's portrait of his artist wife Beatrice, *Harmony in Red: Lamplight* (1884-86), a painting to which Guthrie's makes visual homage, was given to the University of Glasgow as part of a substantial gift

from the artist's estate. Perhaps with this in mind, Hamilton pointedly presented Guthrie's portrait of her to Glasgow Museums in 1951, determined to have a legacy in the city. In 1952, the year Hamilton died, Anne Redpath became the first woman artist to be elected a member of the RSA. It is only now, more than sixty years on, that Hamilton's reputation is being re-established.

Hamilton's will (Paterson Collection, Special Collections, University of Glasgow), shows that she intended one of her still-life paintings and several of her embroideries to be gifted to Glasgow Museums, unless the family made prior claim: "My own embroidered pictures if not retained may be offered to Kelvingrove and a still life of mine." It appears that her works were valued by the family and kept, although few remain in family hands today. Hamilton's daughter, Viola, did gift the museum some textile items in 1882, including an unfinished embroidery (fig. 2) and fabulous hand-painted dress by her mother (fig. 3), but Glasgow Museums is now actively looking for further examples of her work to enhance its collection and display alongside works by Bessie MacNicol, Norah Neilson Gray, Stansmore Dean, and Jessie M. King, women who were collected by the museum as representing a generation of women artists who had studied at Glasgow School of Art, under the progressive leadership of Fra Newbery. However, Hamilton importantly represents an alternative ideal, as the *Art Journal* pointed out in 1907,<sup>1</sup> exemplifying those tenacious women artists and designers who for various reasons (usually lack of family support) didn't go to GSA, but were self-taught or received their education informally at private drawing academies, like that of the Misses Park and Ross in Craigendoran. These women deserve to be remembered, not only for their talent and individual flair, but for their sheer strength of will in continuing to design, paint, and exhibit against the odds.



**Figure 2.**

Maggie Hamilton, unfinished embroidery on stand, date unknown, 125 x 91.5 x 43 cm, Bequeathed by Viola Paterson, 1982 Digital image courtesy of CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, E.1982.2.13



**Figure 3.**

Maggie Hamilton, White satin bodice and skirt, label 'W.R. Grieve, Glasgow', 1880s, hand-painted, 1880s Digital image courtesy of CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection, E.1982.2.5

Response by

**Sophie Hatchwell**, University of Birmingham

**“In the absence of published criticism by women artists, it is our role as historians to uncover a sense of their critical agency by developing specially orientated research practices”**

I recently returned to a section of my PhD research that looked at Walter Sickert’s Fitzroy Street studio, which was set up in 1907 as an exhibition venue and subsequently gave birth to the London Group. My research began with the assumption that it was male dominated, a view confirmed by the historiography, by the studio’s output, and by eyewitness accounts.

Slowly, however, women artists did begin to appear: first Nan Hudson and Ethel Sands as correspondents, then the “wives” (Mrs Bevan), and then, emerging even more slowly, the shy and the diffident, like Sylvia Gosse and Jessie Etchells.

A historian investigating the role of women in a male-dominated Edwardian past is faced with two questions. Not *why* these women remain largely disregarded—decades of feminist studies have told us this—but *how* they have been disregarded, and how we can begin to rectify this and recover a sense of their critical agency. To address this is not to fall into the trap, recognized by Linda Nochlin (1971),<sup>2</sup> of reinforcing the general marginalization of women artists by simply rehabilitating individual reputations. It is to investigate the formation of critical agency as a whole, uncovering the networks (social, economic, and critical) that underpin the operations of the art world.



**Figure 4.**

Harold Gilman, Sylvia Gosse, circa 1912-13, oil on canvas, 67 x 49 cm Digital image courtesy of Southampton City Art Gallery

Sylvia Gosse provides a case in point. She is largely overlooked in art-historical studies—an entry in the Tate Camden Town Group study and the Ben Uri gallery show and book on the London Group (*Uproar!*, 2013) are notable exceptions.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fifty-four works held in public collections, readily available historical material on Gosse amounts to brief mentions in memoirs and published diaries. History has effectively silenced this woman; as indeed it has her contemporaries. Marjorie Lilly (1971) recalled that Gosse “might appear at Fitzroy Street on At Home days, but rarely; being very shy, she always chose the most inconspicuous corner she could find, looking harassed and haunted, and hardly spoke”.<sup>4</sup> Her Fitzroy Street colleague Harold Gilman’s portrait of her ([fig. 4](#)) confirms this view: rendered in the Post-Impressionist/ Neo-Realistic style common to the milieu, Gilman obscures Gosse’s face. Predominantly in shadow, her mouth disappears amongst the intersecting colour planes of her facial features; only the eyes

stand out. This sort of characterization is typical for women of the period. Grace Brockington (2013) has identified similar representations of Vanessa Bell, and similar anecdotal descriptions, with the artist termed “an emblem of reticence, ‘mute as a mackerel’”.<sup>5</sup> Bell herself assigned the same fate to Jessie Etchells: “a nice character . . . and very silent.”<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 5.**

Sylvia Gosse, Self-portrait, 1918, soft ground etching, 12.7 × 8.7 cm Digital image courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow

How can we recover a voice for these women, a sense of their critical agency? It is my contention that, in the case of women artists, this can be achieved successfully through the mining and close reading of archival material. In the case of Gosse, the London Group archive held at Tate, along with catalogues of the Group’s early shows, challenge her “diffident” characterization. Group committee minutes record her early election in 1914, and her participation in hanging committees in 1916 and 1919. They also provide more information about fellow artists Hudson and Sands, recording

their frequent presence at meetings and membership votes. It is impossible to conceive that these activities were conducted “silently”. While inclusion in exhibitions could be put down to artistic merit, to be elected to the Group in the first place suggests a degree of ability in professional networking. Equally, to participate in a hanging committee, Gosse would have to demonstrate critical judgment in selecting and in organizing work, and debating with colleagues. Her self-portrait etching of 1918 ([fig. 5](#)) supports this alternative characterization. In workmanlike painter’s clothes, cropped hair, and jauntily positioned hat, Gosse identifies herself first and foremost as an artist: professionally dressed, self-conscious, and expressive.

In the absence of any published criticism by the artist herself, and without her personal correspondence, we cannot reconstruct Gosse’s thoughts on art, or the conversations she would have had with fellow artists. But by careful attention to archival resources, we can uncover the role she and other women artists played in the commercial and social aspects of the art field. We can prove that she spoke.

Response by

**Hannah Williamson**, Curator, Fine Art, Manchester City Galleries

## **Women artists in the Manchester Art Museum: no longer invisible**

The Manchester Art Museum opened in Ancoats in 1886. Its founder was Thomas Coglean Horsfall (1844–1932), and his aim was to bring beauty into the lives of Manchester people. He employed pragmatic means: the museum was in the heart of a crowded working-class district and it opened until 10 o'clock at night and on Sundays.

This was not a millionaire's project, like Lord Leverhulme's Lady Lever Art Gallery at Port Sunlight. Instead, it was a subscription-funded, practical introduction to the joys of art and nature for beginners. So Horsfall and his committee needed affordable art. For higher status, often narrative paintings, they had to rely on networks of socially engaged artists donating works (George Frederick Watts, Ford Madox Brown, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti all contributed) or on obtaining reproductions, often photographic. Less well-known artists gave or sold watercolours of local views. The Art Museum's over 2,000 art objects, which we now refer to as "The Horsfall Collection", are now part of Manchester's municipal art collection. The Pre-Raphaelite gems are exhibited, and the rest almost never seen—often with good reason. Even in the *Art for All* exhibition which Manchester Art Gallery held to commemorate Horsfall and his Museum in 2013, a large quantity did not pass curatorial quality control. Other items—principally the photographs and prints categorized as "reproductions"—were disposed of without documentation at some point in the twentieth century.

When we came to curate the *Art for All* exhibition, a notable untapped resource—original and of high artistic merit—was a group of work by women artists, including exquisite watercolours by the almost unknown Elizabeth Redgrave (1806–1889).

Redgrave, the sister of the famous art educator and painter Richard Redgrave, was a governess to two privileged young ladies, Rachel and Dorothy Walpole. She remained with Dorothy until the latter married, before going to keep house for her brother Samuel Redgrave. She painted a series of "Surrey Wild Flowers", which Horsfall purchased for his own enjoyment and later bequeathed to his Art Museum. We have 151 of her watercolours in the collection at Manchester, and they have been so little respected over the years that they are catalogued as one item, although each sheet has now at least been photographed.

The other artist whose work we included in the 2013 exhibition in some quantity was Emily Gertrude Thomson (ca. 1850–1932)—also floral watercolours. They were displayed alongside Miss Redgrave’s works in the 1880s, and were perhaps valued more highly by the museum’s founder. We know this because we have Horsfall’s guidebook to the displays, in which he says, when describing the Trees and Flowers room:

The greater part of the West Wall and of the North Wall is covered with beautiful water-colour drawings of wild flowers, most of them drawn by Miss Elizabeth Redgrave. All the drawings are beautiful, but nothing could exceed the beauty of some of those on the West Wall, of the clover, the vetch, and the yarrow, for instance, which are by Miss E. Gertrude Thomson . . .

The higher value put on Thomson’s works in the Art Museum catalogue may have been due to Thomson’s relative fame. She was born in Glasgow, and trained at Manchester School of Art. More famous for her fairy paintings and illustrations than her floral watercolours, Thomson is well known now amongst Lewis Carroll scholars for being Carroll’s friend and correspondent. She was an active member of Manchester’s Victorian art scene.

We displayed a selection of Redgrave and Thomson’s work (figs. 6 and 7) in the *Art for All* exhibition in 2013 together with a few floral works by Helen Allingham and Edith Martineau, and introduced them with text referring to Bertha Hindshaw, the museum’s pioneering female curator. Horsfall’s aim with his museum had been to improve lives with both art and nature. Prints and photographic reproductions of famous works were used to teach “art” in the museum, and affordable watercolours by women artists were used as a colourful way of showing nature in the Trees and Flowers room. In the exhibition in 2013 the situation was partly reversed, with women’s watercolours taking pride of place, and what was left of Horsfall’s high art section—teaching aids and works created by less talented men—remaining in boxes in the stores.



**Figure 6.**  
Elizabeth Redgrave, White Goosefoot and Grayling  
butterfly, watercolour, part of the Surrey Wild Flowers  
series, probably late 1870s, 39.2 x 25.23 cm Digital  
image courtesy of Manchester City Galleries



**Figure 7.**

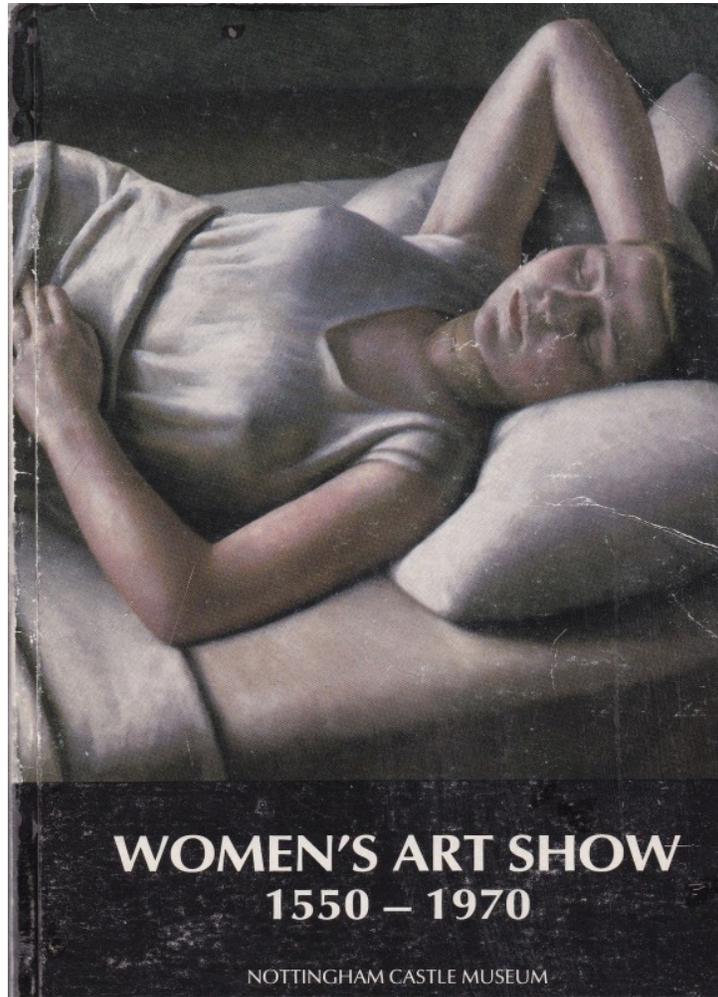
Emily Gertrude Thomson, Small Twig of Oak Leaves, watercolour, probably 1880s 26.2 × 18.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Manchester City Galleries

Response by

**Pamela Gerrish Nunn**, Independent Art Historian and Curator

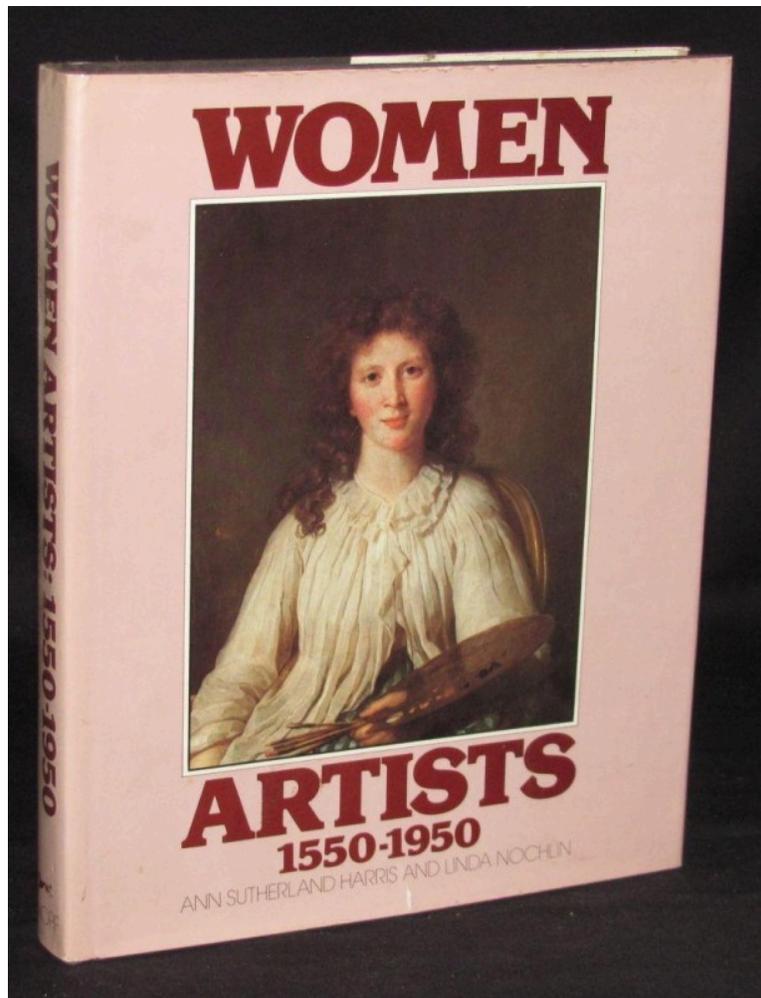
**A feminist art history is usually dated from the appearance of Linda Nochlin's essay "Why have there been no great women artists?"**

A feminist art history is usually dated from the appearance of Linda Nochlin's essay, "Why have there been no great women artists?", published first in *Art News* in January 1971, though written for the book *Women in Sexist Society*, edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran which came out in that same year (in which its title was, even more provocatively, "Why are there no great women artists?"). To summarize it in the simplest terms, this anglophone feminist art history drew attention to the habitual absence of female artists from received accounts of western fine art of the past, challenged the hierarchies by which the past art of the western world was valued and its makers celebrated, and drew critical attention to the social and political effects of subject matter which was allegedly of only aesthetic significance. As it grew, it encompassed a greater geographical territory and modified its focus on the western world.



**Figure 8.**

(Nottingham: Nottingham Castle Museum, 1982), Front cover of Women's Art Show, 1550-1970,



**Figure 9.**

(New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art/ Knopf, 1976),  
Front cover of Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin,  
Women Artists, 1550-1950,

This was a self-consciously revolutionary project which sought to enact the twin aims of the contemporary women's movement, the promotion of women's self-determination and the dismantling of male privilege. It generated a search for female artists whose absence or invisibility must henceforth be treated with suspicion. Their works and reputations recuperated, they could be revealed in the historical landscapes that had been ordered into territories (-isms) codifying a visual culture accorded the highest standing in western society but founded in the subjection of women as a class. Equally significant was the breaking down of fine art's dominant prestige, as agenda-setting binaries such as professional/amateur and art/craft were exposed as ideological mechanisms, and creativity in other media was lauded. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's influential book *Old Mistresses* (1981)<sup>7</sup> developed the issue of the absent female artist to the

more nuanced one of woman's vaunted creative inferiority serving to secure the normative male artist's authority over high-end visual culture: politicizing not only her absence, then, but the nature of her rare presences.

I believe the work of female artists of the past still needs our explicit attention. Though technology has transformed the search for information, exemplified by such projects as the former Your Paintings (now [Art UK](#)) website, which in its indiscriminate approach includes many women's works, the issue of the female artist's credibility remains fundamental. Although women have come to the fore in contemporary art, with regard to art of the past it seems still necessary to prove that art made by a woman matters, merits attention, and has something of value to say. Despite Roland Barthes's "death of the author", the name of the art-maker is assumed to be the attention-getting and therefore money-making factor determining exhibition, publication, acquisition, and scholarship (not in reality a disinterested activity). Current exhibitions, from *Modern Scottish Women* (National Galleries of Scotland) to *You Go Girl!* (Heckscher Museum of Art), show how the historic female artist is always being reasserted, leaving her on the eternal doorstep of fame just like the subjects of the very first feminist "women's-art-at-a-glance" exhibition, *Women Artists, 1550-1950* (1977, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, fig. 8) and its successors, such as *The Women's Art Show, 1550-1970* (1982, Nottingham Castle Museum, fig. 9).

So, I'd say that simple endeavour formulated in the 1970s to make the female artist visible is still necessary and useful. Feminists should demonstrate a belief that what women have done matters: admiring it where we can, regretting it where we must, but paying it attention ourselves and demanding the attention of others for it.

Response by

**Margaret F. MacDonald**, Professor Emerita, School of Culture and Creative Arts, University of Glasgow

### **Beatrice Philip/ Godwin/ Whistler: excavating an artist from obscurity**

Some years ago I proposed a book on Beatrice Philip (Mrs E. W. Godwin, Mrs J. McNeill Whistler) to an American publisher. He was completely astonished—“Whistler had a *Wife?!—*”—but, on consideration, would not accept a proposal because she was unknown. This was a common no-win situation, not just with publishers but with galleries, which would not consider exhibition proposals or even exhibit known works. A portrait in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, was on the wall until I pointed out that it was by Beatrice, not James, Whistler! There was an assumption that women could not draw because they were not “trained” or because of some innate inability. Cassatt? Kollwitz? “Exceptions!” Furthermore, since Whistler’s work has guaranteed economic value, collectors prefer that to the untested field of women’s work. Yet the work of Beatrice and her sister Constance Philip was exhibited and sold in its day: Beatrice was often known as “Trix”, “Trixie” or “Beatrix” and actually exhibited as “Rix Birnie”, but given her marriages, I have used her final name, “Beatrice Whistler”, hereafter.

Fortunately, Whistler and Rosalind Birnie Philip (Beatrice’s younger sister) thought highly of her work. A selection was given by Miss Philip to the University of Glasgow, and piles of unsorted material arrived with the Philip bequest in 1958. She painted portraits and domestic scenes, and designed jewellery, decorative tiles, and panels for furniture and buildings. We don’t know if the Glasgow collection is the tip, or the iceberg! Many personal letters were destroyed when Beatrice died prematurely of cancer in 1896, but Whistler’s letters to her and hers to collectors and art dealers survive, providing information on her activities.

My original objective was to find what distinguished her work from that of her two partners and others in the Whistler circle, including Walter Sickert and Philip May, which was tricky because they worked in the same studio on similar subjects and models. This required both archival research and connoisseurship. After cataloguing Whistler’s work, and distinguishing his technique from others, I looked closely at Edward Godwin’s before tackling that of Beatrice herself. Clues included notes by Harold Wright of Colnaghi on works in Whistler’s estate, and records by Professor McLaren Young, from the 1960s onwards. I listed the collection of Beatrice Whistler’s works and persuaded the Hunterian to put on an exhibition with a small catalogue in 1997.<sup>8</sup> It included, for instance, a sharply funny caricature of Oscar Wilde,

originally attributed to Whistler ([fig. 10](#)), designs for a memorial window in Orton, Cumbria, once attributed to John Dawson Watson ([fig. 11](#)), and life drawings ([fig. 12](#)).



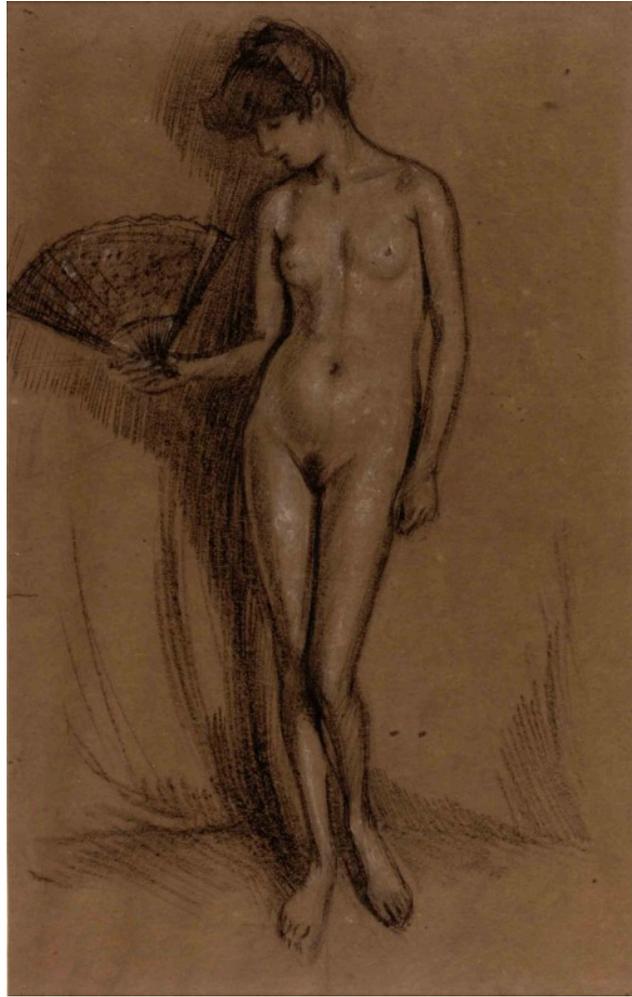
**Figure 10.**

Beatrice Whistler, *Sketches, Caricatures of Oscar Wilde in a top hat with a cane and head of a woman (recto); A woman holding a book, a design for an interior, and a row of terraced houses (verso)*, 1882/84, ink on paper, 22.9 × 36 cm Digital image courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA 46408



**Figure 11.**

Beatrice Whistler, Design for a memorial window to Jane Mary Wilson Holme, 1892, pencil and watercolour on paper, 29.7 x 22.4 cm Digital image courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA 46589



**Figure 12.**

Beatrice Whistler, Nude woman with an open fan, 1886/88, black and white chalk on brown paper, 56.5 x 36 cm Digital image courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, GLAHA 46542

In my catalogue raisonné of Whistler's works on paper (1995) I attributed several drawings to James *or* Beatrice Whistler, but I now realize most of these are by her.<sup>9</sup> Research on press-cuttings reveals that "A Portrait", an oil recorded in the Yale catalogue of Whistler's paintings (1980), was actually by Beatrice, and exhibited with the Society of Portrait Painters in 1893.<sup>10</sup> I am now working on an online catalogue raisonné of Whistler's work that will correct these mistakes. Meanwhile Dr Ailsa Boyd has continued the cataloguing process and added illustrated catalogue entries to the Hunterian website. Thus a very substantial body of work is accessible online, and a selection of her work has been on display in the Hunterian since 2003.

Because most of Beatrice Whistler's work is in the Hunterian (only a few works are owned by family, public, and private collections) it is difficult to stage a major exhibition, but in-focus and online exhibitions are possible. I still cherish plans to tell the story of the Whistlers' marriage!

Response by

**Nadia Hebson**, Artist and Lecturer, Newcastle University

## **Invisible/Visible**

Winifred Margaret Knights was a highly conspicuous artist when she was awarded a Rome Scholarship in 1921, celebrated for her distinct apparel and exquisite paintings in equal measure; the collision of artistic dress and a subtle British realism inflected with Continental modernism proved a sensational combination for the London press. An undisputed star amidst promising peers at the British School at Rome, Knights's work was exhibited at the Paris Exposition of 1925, an indication of her preeminence but also of others' expectations.

Visible, esteemed, and respected by the art establishment, it remains perplexing how a figure with such a distinct visual presence, both in person and manifest in her paintings, could disappear from sight. But the complexity and significance of the relationship between selfpresentation, a distilled visual language, and the articulation of feminine experience eluded Knights's contemporaries and subsequent art historians.

An artist considered to hold unparalleled promise, disappeared from view.

It is here we find the strictures and confines that dictate whether a legacy endures. If those around you are unable to comprehend the breadth of your activities or to even conceive of these as an art practice, the hope remains that new generations will assume the responsibility of comprehension for a legacy to reemerge. Art works endure precisely because we can reconceive them, their meanings mutable, contingent. Knights's practice encompasses her paintings, drawings, clothing, correspondence, and design—an expanded legacy—but few have been able to view all this as part of a greater, interconnected oeuvre, concentrating instead on the perceived lack of completed paintings. By all accounts legacy is contingent on quantity, quantity cementing significance. In contrast a diminutive and disparate output ostensibly too fractured, is impossible to comprehend.

What interests me most about art history and the art-historical canon is its exclusions; seemingly myopic, unable to recognize off format or prescient legacies, it presents an unstable model. As a woman artist (and an educator) it appears to me that what is most interesting happens in the margins, in obscurity, in parallel or disassociated from acknowledged lineages, and hidden from plain sight. Intractable and little scrutinized conventions make

no sense when comprehending this work. The need for alternate frames of reference and less considered perspectives leads to the emergence of new understanding and fresh insights.

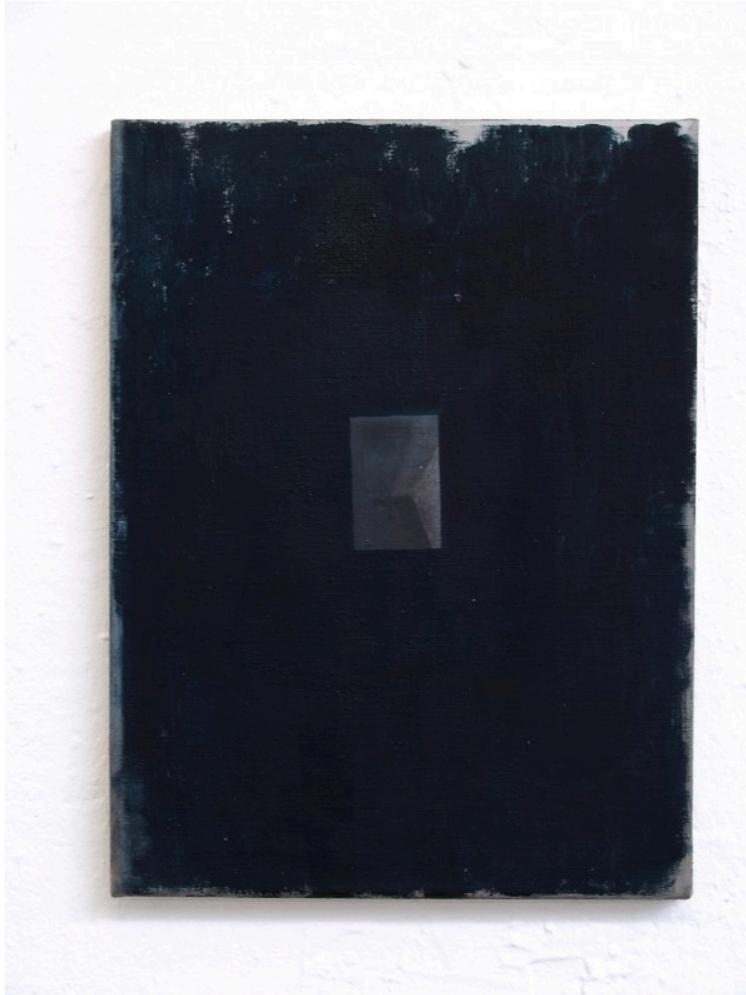
Both Winifred Knights's practice and her biography have an ongoing resonance for artists working today, and in comprehending the work of another woman artist the most pressing question has been, how do we find new models to undertake this work? Feminist literary precedents offer templates, where subjective enquiry enlivens, complicates, and enriches established, supposedly reasoned approaches. The writers Christa Wolf and Chris Kraus in *The Quest for Christa T* and *Aliens & Anorexia* respectively grapple with the complexities of others' biographies, legacies, personal history, as well as the insight a conscious subjective reading can offer in comprehending another.<sup>11</sup> Empathy becomes a radical act, and amongst the breadth of possibilities that follow, feminine volition is uncovered. By extension we in turn learn more about our historical moment, its confines and inadequacies and the ways we can re-inhabit less considered histories.

In attempting a "comprehension" of Winifred Knights I have employed painting, objects, clothing, text, and exhibitionmaking, realized through empathy, invention, speculation, and undoubtedly misunderstanding. At times she has assumed the role of dead mentor as well as historical subject. Within my work the boundaries between Knights's practice and biography have become blurred: what emerges is an oblique consideration of another's legacy through my own visual language (figs. 13-26). Where the consideration of persona, the significance of dress, the formal composition of her paintings, artist's block, autobiography thorough religious narrative, and the question of what actually counts as an artist's practice have in turn provisionally figured. There is a recondite relationship between these contrasting elements that speaks of the complexity of feminine experience and within the breadth of her expanded legacy Winifred Knights addressed this terrain.



**Figure 13.**

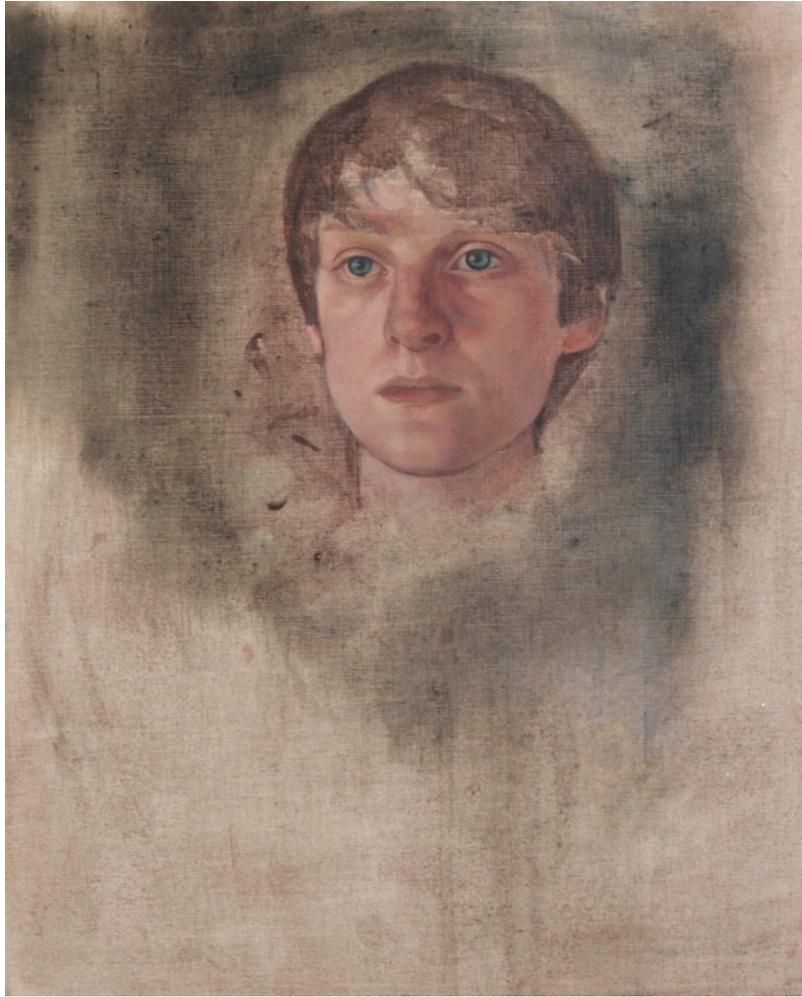
Nadia Hebson, 02 NH. collar/painting, digital print, 50 × 30 cm, 2013  
Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 14.**  
Nadia Hebson, 03 NH. You expected something, oil on linen,  
40 × 35 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 15.**  
Nadia Hebson, 05 NH., installation view, MODA WK, Lokaal 01, Antwerp,  
2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 16.**

Nadia Hebson, 09 NH. Portrait (FG), oil on linen, 60 × 40 cm, 2013  
Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 17.**

Nadia Hebson, 11 NH. corner, square, collar, dyed canvas, photocopy, lacquered paper, gouache, acrylic, 200 × 75 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 18.**

Nadia Hebson, 15 NH. Portrait (MG), oil on linen, perspex, acrylic, 60 × 45 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 19.**

Nadia Hebson, 18 NH. dip dyed dress, dress circa 1921, dye, 150 × 40 cm, 1921/2013, installation view, MODA WK, Lokaal 01, Antwerp 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 20.**

Nadia Hebson, 19 NH. Customized Acne tee, digital print, 45 × 35 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 21.**

Nadia Hebson, 20 NH. Two Winifred, Knights drawings., installation view, MODA WK, Lokaal 01, Antwerp 2013 Digital image courtesy of estate of Winifred Knights

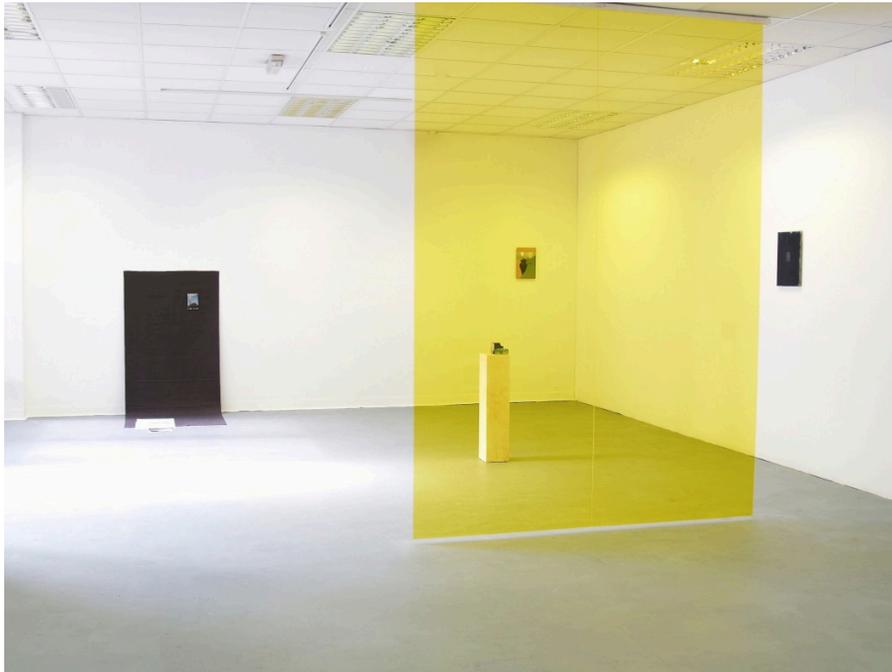


**Figure 22.**

Nadia Hebson, 26 NH. Portrait (FG) and Companion Painting, oil on linen, 40 x 30 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 23.**  
Nadia Hebson, 39 NH., installation view, MODA WK, Newcastle 2013,  
Nadia Hebson and Titania, Seidl Digital image courtesy of the artist

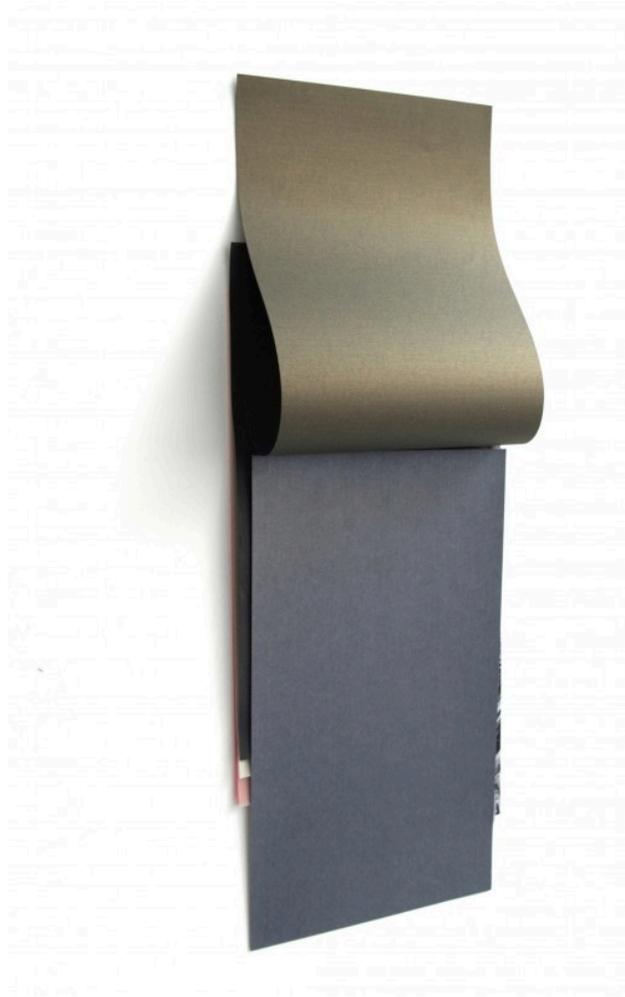


**Figure 24.**  
Nadia Hebson, 40 NH., installation view, MODA WK, Newcastle 2013,  
Nadia Hebson and Titania, Seidl Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 25.**

Nadia Hebson, 45 NH showing no, no, yes; obscured collage, gouache on foil paper, 30 × 50 cm, 2013; found paper, gouache, lacquered paper, marble 60 × 150 cm, 2013, installation view, MODA WK, Newcastle 2013  
Digital image courtesy of the artist



**Figure 26.**

Nadia Hebson, 51 NH. Fold, lacquered paper, 55 × 30 cm, 2013 Digital image courtesy of the artist

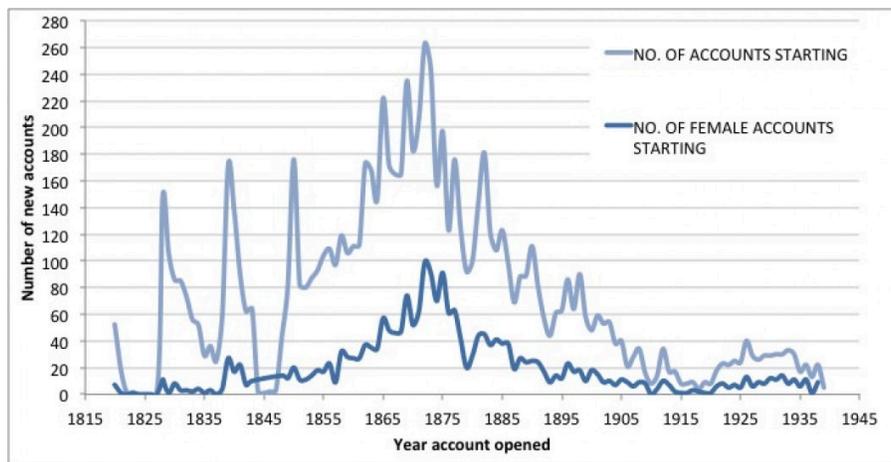
It is perhaps no coincidence that in recent years many women artists have sought to understand the work of their predecessors through a variety of forms of comprehension. Whether it be Silke Otto-Knapp exploring the legacies of Marianne North and Yvonne Rainer, Nairy Baghramian collaborating with Janette Laverrière, or Megan Frances Sullivan exploring the work of Jo Baer, Dorothea Rockburne, Lee Lozano, and Anne Truitt. The incomplete histories we have been handed are being re-examined from new perspectives. As artists we have the freedom to reconsider the constraints that measure the worth of artists' legacies and as such we make the previously invisible visible again.

Response by

**Sally Woodcock**, PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge

## **Balancing the account: women customers of an artists' colourman, 1820–1939**

Between 1820 and 1935 not a single woman was elected to the Royal Academy as a full Academician. During an almost identical period, 1820 to 1939, a quarter of the account holders of the London artists' colourman Charles Roberson were female, ranging from aristocratic amateurs to women artists of professional standing (fig. 27). The firm's archive provides evidence of the occupational diversity of women working professionally in this period, with the expected painters, sculptors, miniaturists, and illustrators being joined by early photographers, carvers and gilders, theatrical designers, colourmakers, writers, teachers, restorers, interior decorators, and printsellers. Clearly not all female art workers were painting fruit, flowers, their children, and each other.



**Figure 27.**

Diagram of new accounts opened with the artists' colourman Charles Roberson 1820–1939. The peaks in 1828, 1839 and 1850 are caused by missing account ledgers; the trough in 1879 is not explained by the source data and may reflect the effect of the 'Long Depression' that had started in 1873. Digital image courtesy of the author.

While the archive helps to redress the long-recognized economic invisibility of women in the nineteenth-century art world, it also provides evidence of how easily female economic activity could be hidden, with several prominent artists only being traceable through their fathers' or husbands' accounts. Over half the female accounts are in the names of unmarried women, with a

proportion no longer working as artists once married. Motherhood is often cited as cutting short women artists' careers, but marriage could be just as effective.

The number of new accounts opened by women follows the curve of the art market for contemporary British paintings. In 1872 there were ninety-nine new female accounts on Roberson's books with the number gradually dwindling to an understandable low point during the war years of 1914-18, when a total of only nine new accounts were opened.<sup>12</sup> This peak and decline is not confined to women artists. Data on picture prices indicates that after around twenty years of stability, prices for the works of living British artists started to rise around 1850 and peaked around 1870, slowly declining in the remaining years of the century.<sup>13</sup> Roberson's ledgers suggest that while female artists were able to capitalize on this rising market, they also suffered from its decline.

Future work on the Roberson archive will look at issues raised by the addresses women customers provided in order to understand the geography of women artists, both within and outside London.<sup>14</sup> Were women artists widely dispersed or did they cluster in specific areas like their male associates? Could an unmarried female artist afford to live independently? Do numerous changes of address over a short period have a correlation with debt? Does the low incidence of separate studios for women artists indicate that they had to combine their domestic and working spaces? How did this affect the number, type, and size of the works they produced?

A preliminary study of Charles Roberson's female account holders shows the colourman to be serving customers ranging from princesses who could paint to women who could not afford to pay for their materials. More extensive research into this resource will provide information on the volume and type of artistic output, social origins and mobility, economic circumstances and geographic spread of a wide spectrum of women artists, and will help to untangle the interrelated networks amongst which they worked, as they tried to make a living from making art in nineteenth-century London.

Response by

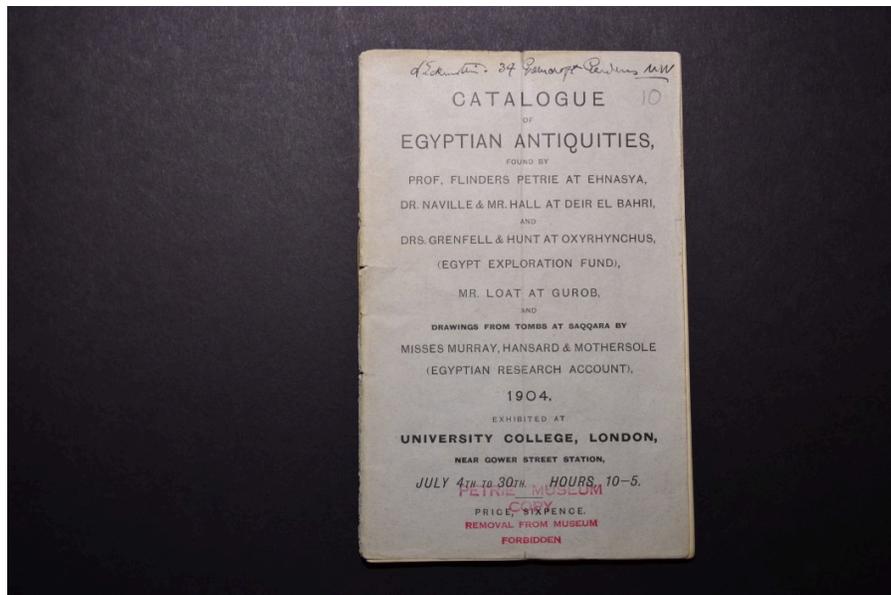
**Amara Thornton**, British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Institute of Archaeology, University College London

### **The digital makes visible the invisible**

The “digital revolution” has brought us opportunities to amass large-scale datasets on matters substantial and insubstantial, continuous and ephemeral. Even better, it allows us to make the insubstantial substantial, and the invisible visible once more. I have relied extensively on digital resources in researching the work of artist and archaeological author Jessie Mothersole (1874–1958) who—through digital means—I have discovered published four illustrated travelogues for England and Scotland that combined her interests in art and archaeology.

My first stop in tracing Mothersole’s oeuvre was the [Times Digital Archive](#), 1785–2010, where I found a fairly lengthy 1958 obituary, revealing her relative visibility during her lifetime. <sup>15</sup>

I knew from researching the history of [annual archaeological exhibitions](#), where British excavators working in Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, and Iraq in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would display artefacts discovered, plans, photographs, and drawings in London at the end of each excavation “season”, that Mothersole’s drawings of wall paintings in the tombs at the ancient Egyptian cemetery at Saqqara had been exhibited at University College London in 1904 as part of Professor of Egyptian Archaeology Flinders Petrie’s exhibition that year ([fig. 28](#)).



**Figure 28.**

Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities, found by Prof. Flinders Petrie at Ehnasya, Dr Naville & Mr Hall at Deir El Bahri, and Drs Grenfell & Hunt at Oxyrynchus (Egypt Exploration Fund), Mr Loat at Gurob, and Drawings from the Tombs at Saqqara by Misses Murray, Hansard & Mothersole (Egyptian Research Account), 1904, paper (printed), 12.8 x 20 cm Digital image courtesy of University College London

While these exhibitions were noteworthy occasions for those interested in archaeology to see recently excavated *artefacts*—the obvious focus of contemporary publicity and current scholarship on these exhibitions—the original *artwork* they incorporated has been overlooked. But thanks to the [British Newspaper Archive](#), I discovered that for one London *Daily News* reviewer, Mothersole and her two (female) colleagues' Saqqara drawings in 1904 were “highly interesting” and the display was “a place where the work of women as archaeologists is emphasised in a way it has never been before.” <sup>16</sup>

Mothersole's black-and-white illustrations for [Charles Stuttaford's translation](#) of the story of Cupid and Psyche, now digitized on Internet Archive, initially appeared in 1903, the year she went to Egypt to copy the Saqqara tombs. A chance reference in a digitized newspaper led me to an unknown publication which Mothersole penned about her Egyptian experience. <sup>17</sup> Entitled “Tomb Copying in Egypt”, the seven-page article was published in the Religious Tract Society's monthly magazine, *Sunday at Home*, in 1908, and is mainly illustrated with Mothersole's own photographs.

In 1910 the Religious Tract Society published Mothersole's first illustrated book, *The Isles of Scilly: their story, their folk and their flowers*. This book, too, is available online, and through digital searches I found that she exhibited "Scilly Isles" drawings in a joint "69 Club" Annual Exhibition at the Baillie Gallery on Bruton Street for a few weeks that November. <sup>18</sup>

Her first book-length illustrated archaeological travelogue, *Hadrian's Wall*, was published in 1922. It is the only one of her later works available digitally, but I was again able to find notices and reviews of her complementary exhibitions, arranged to showcase the full extent of her archaeologically inspired art. <sup>19</sup> In addition, my digital searches threw up a reference to

another unknown publication in the now-defunct journal *Empire Review*. <sup>20</sup> Mothersole's potted history of the Wall for the journal was based on her own experiences and her direct links to the archaeologists then excavating it. It is a timely commentary on the Wall's scheduling—ensuring its status as a protected ancient monument. Her words on this evocative "heritage" site sit alongside topical articles on politics, the economy, and culture.

These digital resources have immeasurably contributed to assessing Jessie Mothersole's artistic and archaeological visibility during her lifetime, providing evidence of public notices of her exhibitions and revealing two little-known publications. While much of her original artwork is still to be traced (and as such remains invisible), the digital versions of her words and pictures ensure at least a portion of her contributions to culture can be found, downloaded, searched—and appreciated.

Digital research cannot replace archival or collections research; scanning and optical character recognition (OCR) software are evolving technologies, and projects dating to the first adoption of these techniques are not without fault. <sup>21</sup> But used in conjunction, digital and archival research can bring scholars closer to a more nuanced and comprehensive vision of past practice, and past participants. In tracing Jessie Mothersole as an artist and author, I have found that digital research revealed relationships and events that enabled new discoveries in non-digital formats.

Response by

**Alice Strickland**, Curator for Imperial College Healthcare Charity

### **Beyond the studio: context and networks**

The centenary of the First World War continues to offers an important opportunity to increase the visibility of the lives and work of women war artists. The art-historical literature which records the opening decades of the twentieth century is currently dominated by the careers of male artists. The war art of Paul Nash, C. R. W. Nevinson and Stanley Spencer, to name but a handful, continues to occupy the central place within art history of this period.<sup>22</sup> The key issue in women artists' exclusion from these narratives is that established definitions of art-historical significance in the early twentieth century, demand a contribution to the development of modernism, which automatically debar serious consideration of artists whose styles were not especially avant-garde. Marsha Meskimmon reasons that since women successfully practised throughout the twentieth century, their poor visibility is in fact due not to a lack of impact, but to exclusionary historicizing methodologies: "The work exists and was successful in the period. They were professional artists and they examined the crucial debates of their time within their practice. If we cannot 'see' this work, this is the fault of our methods, our paradigms, and our theoretical dispositions."<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 29.**

Olive Edis, A member of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC), acetylene welding at a Royal Air Force engine repair shop at Pont de l'Arche, France, 1919, photograph Digital image courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London

Recently, there has been burgeoning interest in women war artists with the publication of Catherine Speck's *Beyond the Battlefield: Women Artists of the Two World Wars* (2014) and the recent display of Evelyn Dunbar's lost studio at Pallant House Gallery (October 2015–February 2016) including work from her War Artists Advisory Committee commission. The work of women photographers is beginning to find a popular platform. In Paris, the Musée de l'Orangerie looked at the first eighty years of photography in *Who's Afraid of Women Photographers? 1839–1945*. Julia Margaret Cameron, whose great-niece Virginia Woolf's name was substituted in the title of the exhibition, and the war photographer Olive Edis (1876–1955) were both displayed. Edis was commissioned to provide a record of the war work being undertaken by British women in France and Belgium. During her four-week tour in 1919, she was accompanied by Lady Norman and Agnes Conway of the Imperial War

Museum's Women's War Work Committee. Edis recorded both women and the ravaged landscape through which she travelled ([fig. 29](#)). Cromer Museum in Norfolk is currently digitizing the world's largest collection of her work. This will allow her war work to be placed within the wider context of her career.

Scholarship by art historians and curators that draws attention to the work of women artists must be encouraged and funded to allow a balanced picture to emerge. As shown by these exhibitions and the digital research undertaken by other "Still Invisible" contributors, this may be accomplished by both digital and physical means. There remain many unsung women artists of the twentieth century. Some won the admiration of their contemporaries only to be forgotten by subsequent generations, others produced too small a volume of work to gain a significant reputation. If we are to provide an accurate portrayal of the art world we must be willing to reassess individual artists who remain neglected, and look to place them within the context of the period using all of the means at our disposal.

Response by

**Meaghan Clarke**, Senior Lecturer in Art History, University of Sussex

## **Overlooked women artists and designers, 1851–1918**

For me, the question “Still Invisible?” directs our attention to women artists and designers working during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is true that in spite of considerable scholarship over the past two decades many of these women still remain largely unknown.<sup>24</sup>

A major problem with researching women artists during this period is that extensive archives in the form of diaries and correspondence are rare. Even extant works of art are unusual in national public collections. However, new digital projects and archives are providing facilities for alternative ways of mining the archive and using linked data to make it possible to track women artists and designers across the period in fascinating ways.<sup>25</sup> Attention has recently turned to the history of exhibition culture as a way of understanding the development of specific periods and the dissemination and circulation of works of art.

It is clear that women were extraordinarily active in exhibition culture, not only as artists and designers, but also as organizers and patrons. The *fin-de-siècle* offered exciting possibilities for women to exhibit fine and applied art. These opportunities ranged from large-scale events such as the women only Victorian Era Exhibition in 1897, to more specialized venues such as the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers and the Paris Women’s International Art Club. An exhibition of *Women’s Work* at Earl’s Court in 1900 was followed by the emergence of the Society of Tempera Painters in 1901. The competing goals of these various societies did not seem to prevent women from taking advantage of every chance to show their work, and many played an important role in the organization and structure of societies and events; for example, the Victorian Era Exhibition was organized by the artist Henrietta Rae and she exhibited seven works; she had also served on the Hanging Committee of the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition in 1893.



**Figure 30.**

Marianne Stokes, *Honesty*, from Harriet Ford, 'The Work of Mrs Adrian Stokes', *The Studio*, 85 (April 1900), 148. The original was exh. in the International Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers 1898 (72).

Marianne Stokes exemplified this strategy: she exhibited *Honesty* (fig. 30) at the International Society, acted on the *Women's Work* Exhibition Committee, and contributed to her own show at the Fine Art Society. Stokes's approach was not limited to scattergun exhibiting, and was substantiated by active press coverage. I have argued previously about the power of the Victorian and Edwardian press and the crucial role of women art writers in shaping contemporary cultural debates. Stokes managed to get her friends, Harriet Ford and Alice Meynell (and her husband), to write essays promoting her work. <sup>26</sup>

Catalogues read alongside the contemporary press reveal the extent of women's involvement in exhibition culture as well as their personal and professional networks. Spaces emerged where women artists could exhibit

their work in national and international collectives. There were also new societies where women were relatively well represented, such as the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers and the Tempera Society. The overlap in participation and membership indicates the diverse tactics deployed by women artists in a very dynamic period that posited a wealth of exhibitionary opportunities. Women artists and critics debated the merits of segregation. Not everyone would have been in agreement with Catherine Gasquoine Hartley's statement, in her review of the Paris Club in 1900, that "women are at last learning the lesson that 'Unity is Strength'." However, Gasquoine Hartley's advocacy of unified action would continue to resonate in the ensuing decade as the suffrage movement gained political momentum.<sup>27</sup>

There are also broader questions about the transformative effects of exhibitions and their impact on British art and culture. The Fine Art Society did offer a site for occasional solo exhibitions of women artists such as Helen Allingham, or the husband and wife show of Marianne and Adrian Stokes in 1900. Nonetheless, the focus in art history on the solo exhibition tends to exclude women, while group exhibitions offer a site for mapping more accurately the exhibiting patterns of women artists. At the turn of the century such events highlighted debates about professionalism, internationalism, and feminist politics. Networks were clearly crucial for women artists, then as now. Exhibition culture makes these connections "visible" at the *fin-de-siècle*.

Response by

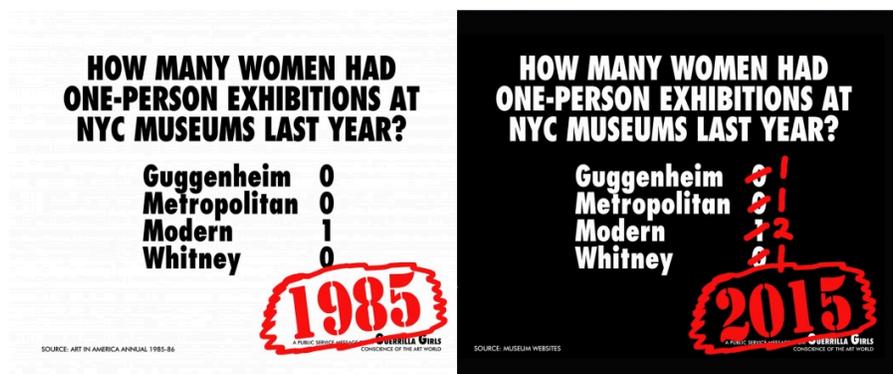
**Jenny Brownrigg**, Exhibitions Director, Glasgow School of Art

## **Women in Art**

Tate Modern has announced two new Artist Rooms by Phyllida Barlow and Louise Bourgeois “in a bid to inspire girls”; Saatchi Galleries has its first “all women” show, *Champagne Life*, to celebrate the gallery’s 30th anniversary; *Pussy Riot* announced plans to open a women-only museum in Montenegro, the “New Balkan Women’s Museum . . . in an effort to address long-spanning issues with gender equality in the art world, in a space referred to as, ‘for women, by women, about women’”. Karen Archey writes in a January 2016 e-flux conversation, “Are all-female exhibitions problematic?” Is there something in the water? Are there too many women artists visible in contemporary art, or is this part of a reaction to there being too few?

Guerrilla Girls formed in New York in 1985 to fight the inherent gender and racial inequality in the fine arts, by producing posters, billboards, and actions containing key messages and statistics about institutions and their track records on showing female artists. Taking a straw poll, here are the statistics for men and women artists represented by a sample of UK commercial contemporary galleries (as listed in January 2016 on their websites). In Scotland, Edinburgh’s Ingleby Gallery is 15% women artists (4 out of 26 artists on roster). This figure increases if “project artists” are included, to 22%. In Glasgow, the Modern Institute has 33% women (13 out of 43), whilst smaller commercial gallery Mary Mary has the highest number at 43% (6 out of 14). Whilst more in number, this is still under half. Workplace Gallery, Gateshead, is 38% (8 out of 21 artists); in London, Hollybush Gardens was an exception with 62% of their total being women (8 out of 13); whilst White Cube (London, Hong Kong, São Paulo, Miami) was 28% (17 out of 60) and Hauser & Wirth, with galleries in London, New York, and Somerset, at 31% (20 out of 64). Why are the numbers of women represented by commercial galleries consistently much lower than the number of male artists? Is this because fewer women study fine art so there are fewer female artists? The statistics of female graduates from the Glasgow School of Art would contradict this. In the academic year 2014/15, 75 female to 33 male students graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art with Honours, making the ratio 69% female graduates. In 2013/14, 63 women students versus 39 male students graduated from the same course. Each year back to 2010/11 the gender split is the same, with female students always the higher number of graduates from the undergraduate Fine Art course.

Sarah McCrory, Director of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art since 2013, and previously curator of Frieze Projects, makes the point that to alter these statistics, change can only occur through gallery programmers and, in terms of commercial galleries, the buyers, who ultimately are the market. In 2010 McCrory worked with Annika Ström for Frieze Projects. The artist's piece saw a group of "Ten Embarrassed Men" (2010) roam the tent, ashamed by the low number of women represented at the art fair. McCrory believes that rather than explicitly brand an exhibition as "all women", these types of curatorial decision should be implicit in programming.



**Figure 31.**

Guerrilla Girls, anniversary recount sticker showing numbers from 1985 and 2015,

Guerrilla Girls aim to stop their activism when the situation of visibility of women in contemporary art is balanced. They continue, with their show at Walker Arts Center running throughout 2016. The artist Amy Bessone wrote recently: "I've noticed galleries whose roster may consist of 20-30% female artists, bring a 90-100% male line-up to art fairs." <sup>28</sup> Clearly, we need to do more work.

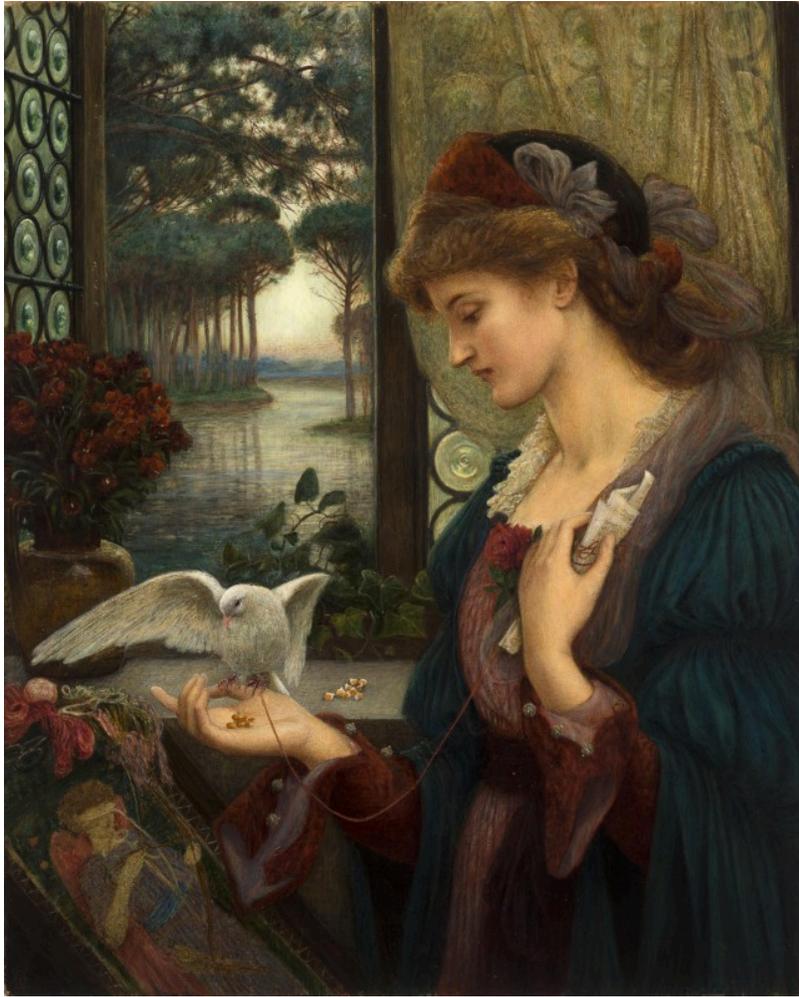
Response by

**Jan Marsh**, Researcher (Later Victorian Catalogue), National Portrait Gallery, London

## **Running Down her Own Work: Rescuing the reputation of Marie Spartali Stillman**

Many artists are “forgotten” or ignored by history, even some who were famous and successful in their lifetimes. Women artists are notoriously often lost to view, being typically less celebrated in life, often producing less, and on a smaller scale, with few works in public collections and even fewer solo shows or monographs (usually none). All of which militates against scholarly reevaluation, for if art works are scanty or invisible, how can their quality or significance be assessed?

The exhibiting career of British-born painter Marie Spartali Stillman (1844–1927) spanned nearly six decades, with over 150 recorded titles, all carefully executed gouache works in various genres from the so-called “Pre-Raphaelite” half-length figure so popular with patrons, through multi-figure historical scenes to portraiture and luminous landscapes. Yet by 1950 she was barely remembered. As Victorian art gradually returned to popular and scholarly attention, she featured as a nonentity, like so many women artists, sometimes even classified as an amateur, well below the critical horizon. At best, she was a feeble follower who validated the superior male painters.



**Figure 32.**

Marie Spartali Stillman, *Love's Messenger*, watercolor, tempera, and gold paint on paper mounted on wood, 1885 Digital image courtesy of Delaware Art Museum, Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial, 1935

But *Love's Messenger* (fig. 32), now in the Delaware Art Museum, is certainly up to any artistic standard associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers and their successors. So to collect a fair sample of Stillman's pictures was the first task of recovery, hindered by so many works being currently untraced. It's chickens and eggs: work can be evaluated only when seen, but if unvalued it won't come to light.

We began the showcasing process in 2015–16 with *Poetry in Beauty: the Pre-Raphaelite Art of Marie Spartali Stillman*, at Delaware Art Museum and the Watts Gallery, Surrey, curated by myself and Margaretta Frederick, DAM chief curator, by selecting a range of works, including many from family and private collections on both sides of the Atlantic. The next task was a catalogue, for today an exhibition without a publication does little to secure any artist's reputation. The challenge here was the lack of critical literature,

there having been hardly any previous exhibitions and only a scatter of reviews; to some extent, it was like writing about a contemporary artist whose place in history is yet to be determined.

And it is always hard to discount the artist's self-assessments, on specific works or on the whole oeuvre. Against Stillman's occasional laments, in sparse surviving correspondence, that she had sold little, or never seemed to please the critics, we set the remark by Charles Fairfax Murray, a fellow-artist, himself largely dismissed by posterity, that she had "ruined her reputation by running down her work". Those researching women artists are familiar with such diffidence, born from the age-old proscription on female ambition and boasting. But if an artist does not rate their own work, why should we?

In Stillman's case, I now believe that her self-abasement actually signified ambition—the aim being always higher than the perceived achievement—which is the mark of a serious artist, always striving for more, for better.

The judgments of posterity will vary. But at least her work is now available.

Response by

**Anna A. Liesching**, Assistant Art Curator, Ulster Museum

## **Female Artists from the Ulster Museum Collection**

An inventory of Ulster Museum's fine art catalogue would show a familiar 15 percent of work created by women, a slight figure that seems to be considered an acceptable norm throughout museum collections. However, over a course of study into the works, from 1700 to the present day, I found many interesting trends in the acquisition policy that led to the collection. Since the establishment of Belfast Museum and Art Gallery in 1929, one of the main collecting policies of the art collection has been to acquire a high standard of fine art pieces that reflect the progress of international and specifically Irish art. It has always been a policy of the keepers of art in the Ulster Museum to avoid presenting female artists on their own or to collect them because of their sex, but rather to include them as on an equal par with their male counterparts, making acquisition selections based on the quality of art. Though a smaller percentage than I expected to find, given that works by women are a major part of the interpretation of the art collection, this lack of discriminatory practice allows us to study the position of female artists within the fine art collection.

Notably, in the category of Irish art 25 percent of works are by female artists. In order to reflect the art practices of the first half of the twentieth century, the work of prominent and dynamic female artists had to be collected. At a time when male Irish artists looked toward the Irish countryside to establish a national identity, female artists looked towards Europe. Many of these women had a privileged upbringing which gave them the opportunity to travel, establishing careers in France and Belgium, and returning to Ireland with a fresh European outlook, the resultant works of which were hastily purchased by the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery. Artists such as Mainie Jellet and Evie Hone were credited with bringing Modernism to Ireland. Though the foundation of many of these careers was funded by family wealth, it is the independent careers that many of these women went on to have that should be credited. Many remained single and worked in collectives such as the Watercolour Society of Ireland with their fellow women artists. Their work is reflected across multiple disciplines within the art collection. Rosamond Praeger, for example, is represented by sculpture, bookplates, sketches, and stained-glass window designs.

The contrast between the careers of female artists before and after the Second World War, following the establishment of the welfare state and wider opportunity, is interesting to note. Female artists represented in the collection from the last thirty years communicate in voices from outside of

wealthy backgrounds and “classic” education, and their works tend to be more concentrated on the personal experience of being artists and women. This is reflected in the recently acquired works by Siobhán Hipaska, [Rita Duffy](#), and Alice Berger-Hammerschlag. In recent years around 40 percent of works added to the collection are by female artists.

We must exercise a degree of caution when avoiding the categorization of female artists purely by their sex, as this can lead to their narratives becoming further separated from the canon of art history. However, important exhibitions like the National Galleries of Scotland’s *Modern Scottish Women* prove that in order for there to be equal representation in the future there needs to be a degree of separation now. Using an artist’s sex as an interpretative tool sheds light on the successful careers of many female artists who have previously been overlooked, sparking further research into their work which may result in them being featured more frequently alongside their male counterparts, so extinguishing the need for “female” specific exhibitions in the future.

When reflecting on the presence of female artists in the Ulster Museum art collection, there is clearly a strong narrative of high quality and important fine art by women, both within the historic collection, among recent acquisitions, and in current exhibitions which feature prominent artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Mary Martin. I hope to explore and highlight these further, specifically the different trajectories between pre- and post-welfare state careers and through digitization of collections, taking care not to marginalize in the process of making visible.

For more information on the female artists within the Ulster Museum collection, please visit this [highlights tour](#).

Response by

**Peter Trippi**, Independent scholar and editor of *Fine Art Connoisseur* magazine, New York

## Sweet Industry

The life, art, and legacy of Laura Theresa Epps Alma-Tadema (1852–1909) constitute an intriguing case study, with some aspects similar to those of other nineteenth-century women artists, and others completely different.

One of the three artist-daughters of the homeopathic physician Dr George Napoleon Epps, Laura bore a surname familiar in Britain not only through her father's pioneering research, but also through her uncle James's business, Epps's Cocoa, a highly profitable rival to Cadbury. In 1869, seventeen-year-old Laura met the Friesian-born, Brussels-based artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema (recently widowed, and sixteen years older than her) at a party hosted by Ford Madox Brown. Already inclined to resettle in London, the Dutchman fell in love instantly, and although Laura's family was initially hesitant, the couple proceeded to marry in 1871 and to enjoy what was—by all accounts—an exceptionally happy marriage, lasting until her death thirty-eight years later.

I have recently been collaborating with Prof. Liz Prettejohn and the Fries Museum—located in Lawrence's hometown of Leeuwarden—on an exhibition that, among other objectives, reassesses the power dynamics within this couple's remarkable household.<sup>29</sup> In the Prestel publication accompanying our project, Liz Prettejohn notes that Laura "did not cease painting, as so many women of her generation did when they married (including her own sister Ellen, usually known as Nellie, who married the author Edmund Gosse in 1875)".<sup>30</sup> Previous scholarship has usually interpreted the marriage—its first decade at least—as that of an older man teaching a younger woman how to paint better. There may be truth in that, but our project reassesses two early iconic works—the huge *Epps Family Screen* (1870–71, V&A; [fig. 33](#)) and the self-portraits painted by the couple in 1871 (Fries Museum; [fig. 34](#))—as examples of partnership rather than tutelage. Ironically, it was Laura—rather than her Dutch husband—who focused her considerable talent on painting figures, usually women and children, attired in historic costumes and arranged in panelled interiors that evoke Holland's Golden Age. These idylls were generally posed and painted in Laura's Dutch-style studio, a defining feature of both of the famous houses the Alma-Tademas redesigned and redecorated together—Townshend House and 17 Grove End Road.



**Figure 33.**

Laura Theresa Epps (later Alma-Tadema) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Epps Family Screen*, 1870-1871 (unfinished), oil on canvas on wood frame, six hinged panels, each 182.9 × 78.7 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (W.20-1981). Digital image courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



**Figure 34.**

Laura Theresa Epps (Alma-Tadema) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Self-Portraits*, 1871, oil on panel, 27.5 × 37.5 cm, in frame 43 × 53.5 (closed) and 43 × 78 (open), Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Collection Royal Frisian Society Digital image courtesy of Fries Museum



**Figure 35.**

Anna Alma-Tadema, *Girl in a Bonnet with her Head on a Blue Pillow*, 1902, watercolour on paper, 36.6 × 26.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford



**Figure 36.**

Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema, Sweet Industry, Opus C, 904, oil on canvas, 36 x 35.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Manchester City Art Gallery



**Figure 37.**

Laura Theresa Alma-Tadema, *A Looking Out o' Window, Sunshine, Opus LXXXI*, 1900, oil on canvas, 62 x 40 cm, Private Collection Digital image courtesy of Sotheby's

Another of our publication's contributors is Carolyn Dixon, who is not only Laura's great-great niece, but also created the first catalogue raisonné for Laura as part of her 2006 MPhil at the University of Sussex. Carolyn Dixon writes that Laura

showed her paintings at the Royal Academy, Grosvenor Gallery, New Gallery, Paris Salon, the Paris Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900 and in Berlin. Her art was also widely exhibited throughout the United Kingdom, and in Belgium and America. In 1910, her memorial exhibition of 129 works was held at the Fine Art Society in London. She managed to achieve all of this while being responsible, as Lawrence's wife, for organising and acting

as hostess in the very full social life they enjoyed. Laura also became mother to his daughters, who were only two and four years old when they met her. <sup>31</sup>

The younger of the girls was Anna, who became a gifted watercolour painter; the older was Laurence, whose talents were literary rather than artistic. At the Ashmolean Museum last summer, Anna's recently acquired and previously unknown watercolour, *Girl in a Bonnet with her Head on a Blue Pillow* (fig. 35), earned substantial attention from visitors and was selected by several media outlets as the "face" of the museum's popular exhibition devoted to great British drawings. (Alas, this work will not be available for our project due to light restrictions.)

Like almost all Victorian paintings, Laura's had vanished from public view by the mid-1920s. But where can we normally see her work today? [Art UK](#) indicates that only four of them are held in public collections—at Bournemouth, Bury, Dover, and Manchester. The finest of these is *Sweet Industry* (fig. 36), on regular view in the Manchester Art Gallery, which will appear at all three of our touring exhibition's venues: the Fries Museum, Vienna's Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, and London's Leighton House Museum. <sup>32</sup> Scant attention is paid to Laura at the three other galleries.

Far more attention is paid to Laura, however, by private collectors. At least once every year an example of her art comes up at Christie's or Sotheby's in London or New York. This past December, for instance, a ravishing oil on canvas, *A Looking Out o' Window, Sunshine* (fig. 37), brought £229,250 at Sotheby's—a handsome price for most Victorian painters today, let alone a female one. To be clear, Laura's prices at auction are more often in the £25,000–75,000 range, but considering the depressed state of the Victorian pictures market, even these sums are respectable.

So why do private individuals pursue Laura while most curators and scholars ignore her? Although the fame of her married surname may initially draw attention, it is surely the quality and charm of her art that keep collectors looking. Clients in this sector "buy with their eyes rather than their ears", prioritizing their own visual pleasure over "brand" names because media attention is firmly focused elsewhere, particularly on contemporary art.

The upcoming exhibition will contain ten artworks painted solely by Laura, the screen and framed self-portraits she created with Lawrence, two paintings each by her sisters Ellen and Emily, and seven by her step-daughter Anna. They were all gifted painters whose work has fallen unfairly into oblivion, and now all will be represented alongside Lawrence. Our curatorial team members are delighted by this prospect, not only because it

underscores how the members of this extended family encouraged each other's artistry, but also because Laura's auction record tells us that visitors will enjoy her pictures on their own terms. Now we wonder: will their quality and diversity move the needle among curators and scholars? We look forward to learning the answer.

### **Daphne Haldin's Archive and the 'Dictionary of Women Artists'**

I am currently cataloguing the [Daphne Haldin Archive](#). This was deposited at the Paul Mellon Centre in the 1970s and relates almost entirely to her project to compile a dictionary of women artists born before the 1850s.

Apart from a memorable visit to the Centre by Germaine Greer, who viewed the material whilst researching her book *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work*, the collection has only been consulted by a couple of researchers.<sup>33</sup>

Not much has been established about Haldin or her project.<sup>34</sup> She began her research in the 1960s, and it appears she was not attempting to create a publication that provided new theory on the work of women artists or their place within art history. Rather her project was a conventional one that endeavoured to provide basic biographical and factual entries on predominantly European women artists up to the nineteenth century, in the same way that male artists had previously been accounted for in Thieme-Becker Künstler-Lexicon.

The editor of reference books at W. & R. Chambers wrote to Haldin: "I agree with you of course that a dictionary of women artists in English is better than none at all and if the selection is to be very comprehensive, as I infer from your description, then it will be a very useful work" (fig. 38).<sup>35</sup> Yet Haldin continued to come up against a flood of rejection: the archive contains a whole file dedicated to this subject.



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*Please return*

JOT/NW/E:

11th February 1964

Miss D. L. Haldin,  
1 Rossmore Court,  
Park Road,  
LONDON, N. W. 1.

Dear Miss Haldin,

Thank you for your letter of 4th February concerning your proposed Biographical Dictionary of Women Painters.

*D But he does not really know who the artists are (with a few exceptions)  
2 This I have done with many subjects*

It is indeed true that Thieme-Becker's KUNSTLER LEXIKON is the only comprehensive modern dictionary of painters and that the works of Bryan and Redgrave are inadequate and outdated. Can we be sure, however, that segregation of the sexes in dictionaries of this kind is desirable, and that the general enquirer is not more interested in schools and periods, irrespective of whether the artist is male or female?

From familiarity with the average proportions of names per letter in biographical reference works I can assure you that on the figures quoted by you the work will easily be contained in one volume without recourse either to India paper or to type smaller than seven point. *2* In this case it might be possible for you to incorporate a little more information in the entries (birthplaces, galleries where exhibited, bibliography, etc.). Also is 1850 really the best point to stop, cutting as it does through the middle of important 19th century movements? *4) Yes because all Victorian women painted here & on the Continent*

However, these points are purely academic, since we unfortunately have too many commitments in the reference book field at the moment to permit us to consider any additions to our list and we are therefore regretfully unable to accept your offer. Accordingly I return your specimen entries herewith.

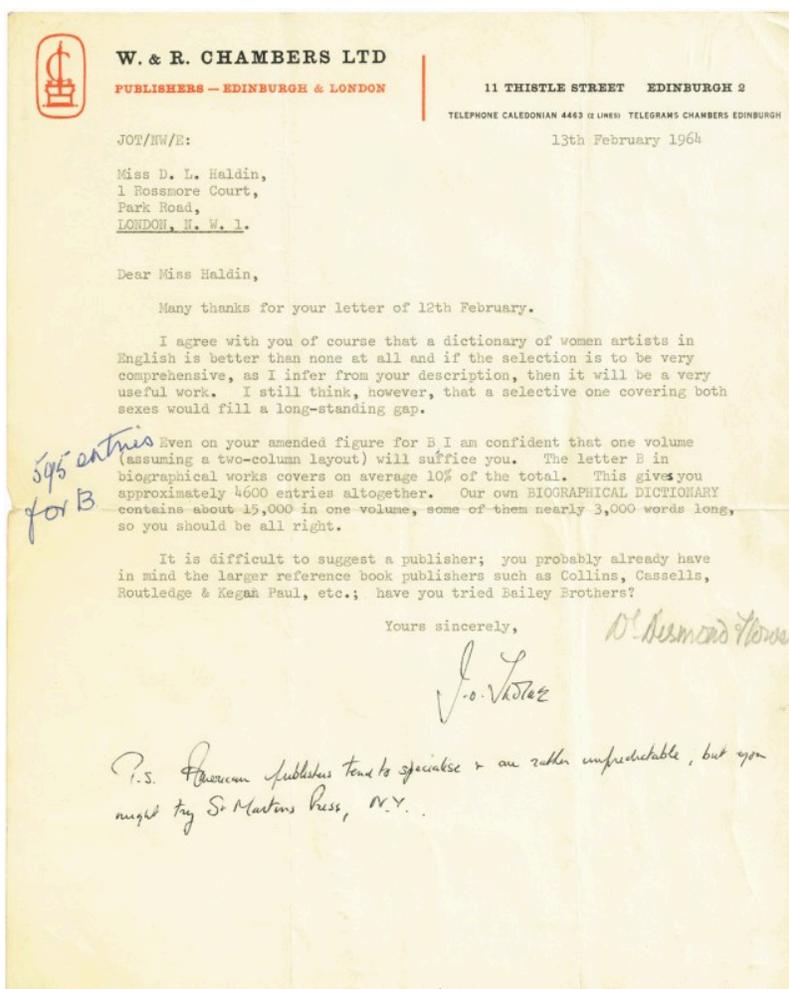
Yours sincerely,

Editor of Reference Books

*P.S. When approaching other publishers it might be as well to stick to the one-volume idea, since, if they don't bother to work out the budget, they might be scared off by the prospect of two vols. on expensive paper.*

Figure 38.

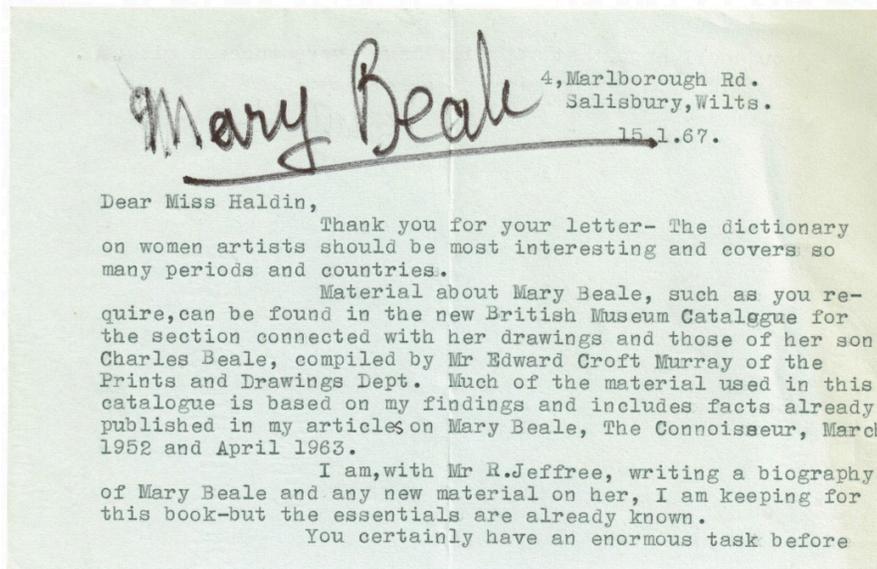
Daphne Haldin Archive, Letter from W&R Chambers Ltd to Daphne Haldin, dated 11 February 1964 Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre, London



### Figure 39.

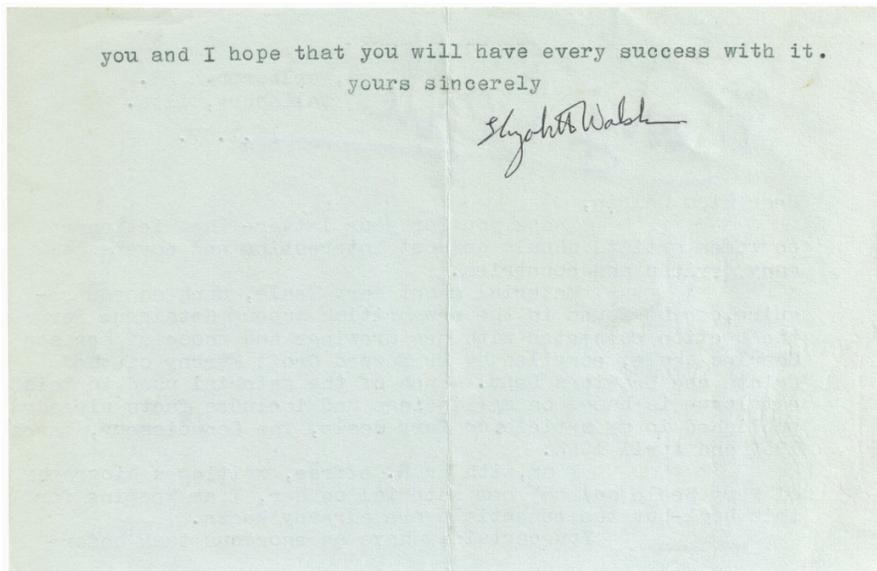
Daphne Haldin Archive, Letter from W&R Chambers Ltd to Daphne Haldin, dated 13 February 1964 Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre, London

One might question whether the problem with Haldin's project was that it really was not much use to anyone, but correspondence in the archive reveals there was a good deal of interest in her work. I would argue that the rejection she came up against was more likely due to the publishers she approached failing to recognize that such a reference book would address a gap in scholarship. Most publishers could not grasp why Haldin wanted to write a comprehensive dictionary of artists but not include both sexes. The editor at W. & R. Chambers asked Haldin: "Can we be sure, however, that segregation of the sexes in dictionaries of this kind is desirable, and that the general enquirer is not more interested in schools and periods, irrespective of whether the artist is male or female?" (fig. 40, 41).<sup>36</sup> This demonstrates that the objective of Haldin's project—to redress the balance between the sexes by devoting dictionary entries entirely to women artists—had been missed.



**Figure 40.**

Daphne Haldin Archive, Letter from Elizabeth Walsh, author of *The Excellent Mrs Mary Beale* to Daphne Haldin, recto, dated 15 January 1967  
Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre, London



**Figure 41.**

Daphne Haldin Archive, Letter from Elizabeth Walsh, author of *The Excellent Mrs Mary Beale* to Daphne Haldin, verso, dated 15 January 1967  
Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre, London

The project was ahead of its time and never published. It was not until the late eighties and nineties that several dictionaries of women artists did appear (albeit not on the same scale as Haldin had proposed).<sup>37</sup> The Daphne Haldin Archive remains at the Centre and shows just how vast the world of

women artists has always been, and yet it continues to be under-represented in reference texts. It also demonstrates how the perceived value of archive material may change over time: deposited primarily as a factual resource, the collection now adds to the debate on the role and visibility of women artists.

Response by

**British Art Studies Editorial Group,**

## **Continuing the Conversation: Community and Collaboration**

The idea for this feature came from a confluence of events on women artists in 2015–16. After a seeming lull in such concentrated scholarship, the digital realm is providing opportunities to create new resources, interventions and benchmarks of practice. This last wave of “Still Invisible?” focuses on projects that are designed to create solid foundations for continuing work on female practitioners, employing digital opportunities to extend their reach and impact. These endeavours are mapping and making women practitioners visible in broader ways than we might have imagined possible even two years ago. Crucially they are collaborative, iterative processes built on community efforts which are not necessarily perfectible, but rich, dynamic, and ongoing.

On Wednesday, 25 May, many of the contributors to the *British Art Studies* “Still Invisible?” Conversation Piece, together with a range of individuals interested in learning new skills and art history, gathered at the Glasgow Centre for Contemporary Art for an [Art+Feminism](#) Wikipedia Edit-a-thon. The aim of our event was to enable participants to continue to address issues of women’s exclusion from histories of art through learning Wikipedia editing skills that would allow us to contribute our expert knowledge to the encyclopedia by joining this dynamic community of online collaborators.

Museums Galleries Scotland Wikimedian [Sara Thomas](#) led two training sessions during the day and it soon became clear that although the process of editing using the visual editor tool provided by Wikipedia is relatively simple, the issues we would face were more complex.

First among these is the fact that “[Wikipedia has a huge diversity problem](#)”. The disparity between the estimated 91–84 percent of male to 9–16 percent of female editors has been [visualized](#) by Santiago Ortiz. This has resulted in fewer and less extensive articles about women, and about topics that are important to women. The reasons for sparse representation of female artists are further compounded by the relative dearth of published materials pertaining to women. The use of archival materials as supporting evidence is not necessarily encouraged, and even so these resources are often notably absent from major archives and repositories. As Alex Provo discusses in relation to the Edit-a-thon she convened at YCBA, Wikipedia’s [guidelines for notability](#) mean it can be difficult to argue for the relevance of figures who have been discriminated against at an institutional level, or whose careers have not followed a traditional trajectory.

Deploying the Wikipedia communities' current campaign slogan "Be Bold", Frankie Drummond Charig decided to test the limitations of this statute and establish a page for art historian Daphne Haldin. Haldin is a contentious figure because although her work is an important archival resource consulted by art historians, it remained unpublished because printing houses in the 1960s were unable to see the value of a dictionary of female artists. Charig referenced her "Still Invisible?" contribution in order to provide supporting evidence of Haldin's worthiness, and although initially challenged, the entry has now been granted full article status and Haldin recently referenced on a further Wikipedia page about Women Artists.

One of the most enlightening things we learned as a primarily scholarly community was about the highly evolved and involved processes of verification, strict criteria, and clearly defined guidelines that make Wikipedia a useful research tool. As the double blind peer review model comes under pressure from new models of research and scholarship, these kinds of communities and open source tools offer alternative models.

Together we created three new pages, added vital edits, information, and references to seventeen pages, and using the talk mechanism proposed a range of improvements, including a group-voted disambiguation between Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. We have monitored and published the progress we have made using the dedication Still Invisible? Edit-a-thon page. Each editor is able to track the afterlives of their interventions, and we hope that they will continue to report any significant developments via the Conversation Piece "comments" function.

We ran the event collaboratively and consecutively with the second meeting of British Women Artists Network 1750-1950, and many participants attended both days. The network will be another way in which the vital conversation about women artists continues onwards, and a means for finding further solutions to the "Still Invisible?" question.

Response by

**Alexandra Provo**, Kress Fellow in Art Librarianship at Yale University Library & Yale Center for British Art

## **Representing women artists in Wikipedia and beyond**

With 5,132,822 articles in English and counting, Wikipedia is the world's largest encyclopedia. It is free and crowd-sourced—meaning it is not written by a group of authors working with a publisher, as in traditional scholarship, but by anybody in the world who wants to contribute. This is both a huge benefit and a limitation, for it means that what is in Wikipedia very much depends on the interests of those who contribute to it.

On 4 March, Yale University's Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library hosted an Edit-a-thon to address gaps in coverage in Wikipedia. A collaboration with Yale's Digital Media Center for the Arts, the Yale School of Art, the Yale Center for British Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery, our event was aligned with the larger initiative coordinated by Art+Feminism. Their mission is to increase coverage of women and the arts on Wikipedia, and to encourage women and feminist allies to actively participate as editors. Yale's Art+Feminism Edit-a-thon focused on bringing attention to women artists associated with Yale or represented in Yale art collections, as well as other topics of interest to participants. Pages about British artists edited at our event include those for Catherine Yass and Tracey Emin.

The training session at our event provided an opportunity to reflect on Wikipedia's guidelines and principles, in particular how these affect the representation of women artists. As our event took place in the context of a university, we also sought to bring to light the ways in which authority is constructed and contextual, one of the frames outlined in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.

A core principle underlying several of Wikipedia's policies and guidelines for editors is that a reader should be able to verify that the content of an encyclopedia entry derives from reputable sources. This theme is expressed in policies like "No original research" and "Verifiability", and the guideline "Identifying reliable sources." An editor must consider the type, creator, and publisher of a source when determining its reliability. Typically, the list of reliable sources includes academic and peer-reviewed publications, university-level textbooks, books published by respected publishing houses, magazines, journals, and mainstream newspapers. Unpublished material (like archival collections) is discouraged.

The reliability of sources also plays into determining whether a topic deserves to be included in the encyclopedia in the first place. This is laid out in the “notability” guideline, as well as in more granular notability guidelines for people and other topics. The subsection in the people guideline about creative professionals contains the following criteria:

1. The person is regarded as an important figure or is widely cited by peers or successors.
2. The person is known for originating a significant new concept, theory, or technique.
3. The person has created or played a major role in co-creating a significant or well-known work or collective body of work. In addition, such work must have been the subject of an independent book or feature-length film or of multiple independent periodical articles or reviews.
4. The person's work (or works) either (a) has become a significant monument, (b) has been a substantial part of a significant exhibition, (c) has won significant critical attention, or (d) is represented within the permanent collections of several notable galleries or museums.

Art+Feminism asks, “What if notability guidelines reproduce structural sexism and racism?” For me, this question is directly tied to perceptions of what is considered a reliable source, both inside and outside of Wikipedia, and specifically in arts contexts.

At our event, we encouraged participants to ask themselves, “How does authority change depending on context?” and “What types of sources are considered authoritative in the arts?” With regard to women artists, their absence in “authoritative”, mainstream sources has real ramifications for their representation in Wikipedia: they simply cannot be included without them, either because they will not pass notability tests (for example, criteria 1-3 above) or because they will lack the sources needed for verifiable citation. The question in this issue’s provocation about whether women artists receive “curatorial care and scholarly attention” thus has significant consequences in the sphere of Wikipedia.

Calvert and de Montfort’s provocation asks: “should we be especially concerned about the display of women’s work in public collections, in an age of digital images and online archives?” In my opinion, emphatically yes: what we find in online sources like Wikipedia completely depends on what goes on in the wider world of publishing and exhibiting. The fourth notability test for creative professionals includes two provisions related specifically to museum display: (b) has been a substantial part of a significant exhibition and (d) is represented within the permanent collections of several notable galleries or museums. In this case, visibility in Wikipedia is directly tied to visibility in the museum.

The impact of an article in Wikipedia ripples outward, beyond the confines of the website itself—editing the site enables potentially seismic interventions in the digital, popular, and scholarly receptions and visibility of the subject of an entry. Not only is Wikipedia content at the top of Google search results and part of the Google Knowledge Graph, but Wikipedia is also the source for datasets like DBPedia—the largest droplet in the [Linked Open Data cloud](#). This means that Wikipedia is not only a standalone encyclopedia, but the source for other online spaces.

Happily, Wikipedia policies and guidelines are not hard rules—they are built with some degree of flexibility in mind. But flexing their boundaries requires engagement from people with knowledge of the sometimes little-known sources pertaining to women artists. We need to contribute to the debate on reconsidering the definition of authority for this context on Wikipedia, and we need to recognize how the work of publishing and exhibiting women shapes numerous (and sometimes ubiquitous) online resources.

Response by

**Alice Strang**, Senior Curator, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

### **The Work of a Woman Artist is “like a man’s only weaker and poorer”**

In 1885 Sir William Fettes Douglas, President of the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA), declared that the work of a woman artist was “like a man’s only weaker and poorer”.<sup>38</sup> In the same year, Fra Newbery was appointed Director of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and turned it into the most advanced institution of its kind in Britain, not least for the employment and participation of female staff and students. The death in 1965 of Anne Redpath (fig. 42), who in 1952 had been the first female painter to be elected a full member of the RSA, seventy-seven years after Douglas’s statement, was marked with a touring memorial exhibition organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain. The eighty years which lay between these events saw an unprecedented number of Scottish women train and practise as artists, a phenomenon examined in the current exhibition *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and Sculptors 1885-1965*, which runs at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Two in Edinburgh until 26 June 2016.



**Figure 42.**

Anne Redpath, *The Indian Rug (or Red Slippers)*, Oil on plywood, 73.9 × 96.1 cm, circa 1942, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, purchased 1965 Digital image courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library / Photo: Antonia Reeve

*Modern Scottish Women* is the first major exhibition of work by women artists to be mounted by the National Galleries of Scotland. It consists of some ninety works by forty-five artists, from Louise Annand to Doris Zinkeisen. The intention was to look at the impact of their gender on the experiences of the artists whilst training and practising, to combine that with art-historical concerns and to look afresh at otherwise familiar academic ground. For a variety of reasons—principally early deaths, short careers, and a lack of accessible works—there are not enough paintings or sculptures by many of the artists featured with which to mount a solo exhibition, and therefore the framework of a group show allows us to bring their achievements into the public domain. Many of the artists are little known, such as Margaret Campbell Macpherson, Otilie Maclaren Wallace, and Gwynneth Holt, while we hope to shed new light on those with more significant reputations, such as Phoebe Anna Traquair, Joan Eardley, and Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, by positioning them in this context.

We decided to concentrate on painters and sculptors (although the photographer Margaret Watkins was also included) partly to debunk the myth of women artists more readily excelling in the applied arts and also to challenge the traditional gendered hierarchy of the visual arts, in which, for example, sculpture was considered the most physical and therefore most masculine and least feminine form of artistic endeavour.

Forming a minority within their student bodies, and with late and limited access to the Life Class at a time when the skilful depiction of the human form was considered the bedrock of a professional career, modern female artists were vastly outnumbered by male exhibitors at the annual exhibitions held by institutions such as the RSA and the Royal Glasgow Institute. As a consequence of these inequalities, their work was often evaluated in terms of their gender by critics, most of whom were male. For example, Bessie MacNicol's work was praised in intrinsically gendered terms for possessing "a personal and feminine feeling for Nature which made most things she did interesting and charming".<sup>39</sup>

At the GSA, women were granted access to nude models by 1900, albeit in separate classes to their male peers and with chaperones. Female students at the Edinburgh College of Art were not permitted to a Life Class until 1910, when two new classrooms were built in order to maintain segregation.<sup>40</sup> However, official recognition of women as professional artists came much later for the majority of women, with the sculptor Phyllis Mary Bone (fig. 43) being elected the first full female Academician of the RSA in 1944, some 118 years after the academy had been founded. In 1933, Dorothy Carleton Smyth was appointed Director of GSA but died of a brain haemorrhage before she could take up the post. Women were not admitted to the Glasgow Arts Club (founded in 1867) nor the Scottish Arts Club (founded in 1872) until 1983

and 1982 respectively, but female initiatives such as the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists established in 1882, and the Scottish Society of Women Artists established in 1924, were set up and still exist, as the Glasgow Society of Women Artists and Visual Arts Scotland.



**Figure 43.**

Phyllis Mary Bone, Shere Khan, the Tiger, Bronze, 36.4 × 102.5 × 30 (inc integral base), 1930, Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture (Diploma Collection) 1945 Digital image courtesy of Royal Scottish Academy of Art and Architecture



**Figure 44.**

Dorothy Johnstone, Anne Finlay, 1920, oil on canvas, 145.3 x 100.5 cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections, with Alice Strang, Curator of *Modern Scottish Women* Digital image courtesy of TSL The Scotsman Publications / Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections

The majority of the works in *Modern Scottish Women* were lent from public collections throughout the UK, located mainly thanks to the efforts of the Public Catalogue Foundation and their website, recently relaunched as [Art UK](#). Fourteen further works were lent from private collections and two from private galleries. Whilst the more established artists' lives and careers are well documented in books, exhibition catalogues, and public archives, scant research material could be located within the public and private domains for most of the artists; very few wrote for publication, but were quoted where they had done so. Research was complicated by the fact that many women artists had multiple professional names, primarily maiden and then married surnames. The impact of personal, usually domestic, responsibilities on the artists' careers could not be ignored, though the exhibition interpretation

aimed to be “neutral but factual”—for example, stating without comment that on her marriage to her colleague D. M. Sutherland in 1924, Dorothy Johnstone had to resign from her post at Edinburgh College of Art due to the “Marriage Bar” legislation, which prevented married women from holding full-time teaching positions and which was not repealed in Scotland until 1945. We were delighted to be able to produce a 128-page publication to accompany the exhibition, which contains an introductory essay, entries on all of the artists, and a select bibliography. <sup>41</sup>



**Figure 45.**

Norah Neilson Gray, *Mother and Child*, circa 1920s, oil on canvas, 77.5 × 57cm Digital image courtesy of Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

During our research it became apparent that some of the artists in *Modern Scottish Women* were successful during their careers but are largely forgotten now, including Mary Cameron and Flora Macdonald Reid, whilst others are still to receive their professional due, such as Norah Neilson Gray

(fig. 45) and Bessie MacNicol, once further works are located. However, this can be applied to many male artists as well and is often tied up with cycles of taste combined with curatorial and academic activity.

No definable “feminine aesthetic” became apparent as the exhibition took shape. Portraiture is the most commonly represented genre, with several self-portraits showing the artists in the guise of their chosen profession; whilst landscape is the least represented, arguably because it requires a freedom from personal and professional responsibilities experienced by few of the artists featured. Indeed, subject matter ranges from still lifes to the religious and the abstract, with works relating to the two world wars also included.



**Figure 46.**

Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, *Glacier Chasm*, 1951, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 91.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

Fittingly, *Modern Scottish Women* was supported by The Barns-Graham Charitable Trust (four of Wilhelmina Barns-Graham’s paintings are in the exhibition (fig.46)) and a sorority of women throughout Scotland. The exhibition was opened on 6 November 2015 by Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland’s first female First Minister, and by 1 May 2016 had received over 21,000 visitors. It has received plentiful and mainly positive press coverage, including a review in *The Scotsman* which declared that it “successfully re-writes the story of modern Scottish art”.<sup>42</sup> A wide-ranging education

programme has been very well attended, not least a study day organized by the Scottish Society for Art History inspired by the exhibition, and continues until the end of the exhibition.<sup>43</sup> Thanks to two wiki-a-thons, all but one of the artists featured now have entries or updated entries on [Wikipedia](#).<sup>44</sup> Further research and works have come to light since the exhibition opened and attention is now turning to the legacy of the project, in terms of acquisitions for the national collection whether by gift, purchase, or bequest.



**Figure 47.**

Joan Eardley, *Sleeping Nude*, 1955, oil on canvas, 76 × 155.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Estate of Joan Eardley / DACS / Photo: Antonia Reeve

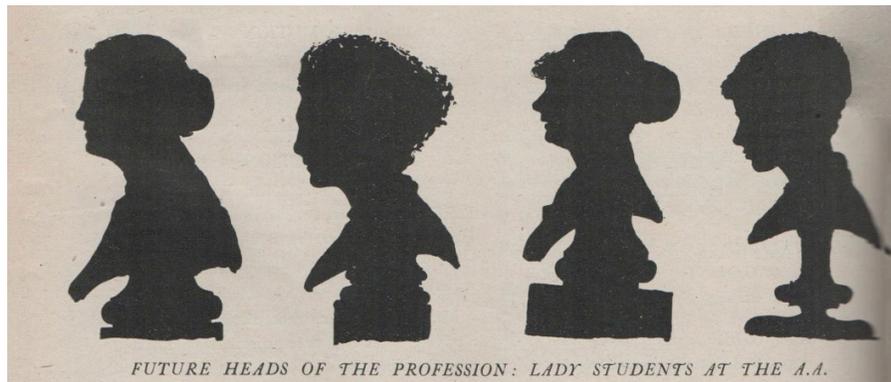
Overall, *Modern Scottish Women* has made the forty-five artists it features physically visible during its seven-month run, whilst the accompanying publication has a lifespan beyond the exhibition's ending on 26 June. The project as a whole has stimulated broad and on-going debate and scholarship in this rich field, within and outwith the National Galleries of Scotland, where, for example, work is culminating on an exhibition devoted to the work of Joan Eardley ([fig. 47](#)), which opens at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Two at the end of this year.<sup>45</sup> So have we disproved Sir William Fettes Douglas's declaration that the work of a woman artist is "like a man's only weaker and poorer"? I think we have made a start, but more remains to be done in making their achievements truly visible.

Response by

**Yasmin Shariff**, a principal of Dennis Sharp Architects and an elected AAA and RIBA Council member

## **AA XX 100: Centenary Celebrations of Women at the AA 1917-2017**

AA XX 100 aims to celebrate the contribution women at the Architectural Association (AA) have made over the past 100 years and to serve as a platform for a broader discussion of women in architecture. It is a multi-media research project bringing to life previously forgotten or underused material and attracting new contributions to the AA Collections (digital/ photographic, archive, and library). The project is encouraging public engagement and nurturing academic, professional, and social interactions. The highlight of the initiative is a celebration in October—November 2017 with an international exhibition and conference marking the centenary.



**Figure 48.**

Architectural Association, Silhouettes of the four first female AA students, published on page 108, in the Architectural Association Journal, March 1918. AA XX 100

The AA was founded in 1847 at a time when professional and educational opportunities for women were scarce. In 1898, Ethel Charles became the first woman to be admitted to the RIBA. In 1902, Charles addressed the AA in “A plea for women practicing architecture”. However, it was not until the suffragette Ruth Lowy applied to the Council in 1917 that women were finally allowed to be educated at the AA. This was the same year that the AA moved to Bedford Square and that the Electoral Reform Bill was passed in the Commons giving votes to certain women over the age of thirty.

The AA is located in Bloomsbury an area that was at the heart of the women’s rights movements. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, leader of the suffragists, lived just round the corner from the AA in 2 Gower Street; the

home of the Pankhurst family at 8 Russell Square provided a gathering place for the Women's Franchise Leagues and nearby in the Strand was the headquarters for the Women's Social and Political Union (the WSPU).

When the 2017 centenary of Women at the AA was discussed at AA Council in 2013, and having published an article on Women in Architecture in the *Architects' Journal* earlier that year, I felt very strongly that there was a need to raise the profile of women at the AA and agreed to take a lead. One of the questions asked in the provocation to this conversation is whether the work of women practitioners is on display and receiving curatorial care and scholarly attention. AA XX 100 provides a dedicated platform to address these issues and attract attention to, discussion of, and further research opportunities for the work of women in architecture.

My inspiration for the branding 'AA XX 100' comes from the biology that makes women different from men—the double XX chromosome. The idea of the logo was developed by Eva Alvarez (Polytechnic University of Valencia). A distinguished group of Patrons agreed to support the project including Inette Austin-Smith, Christina Smith, Su Rogers, Elsie Owusu, Julia Barfield, Susan Lasdun, Denise Scott-Brown, Eldred Evans, Patty Hopkins, Eva Jiricna, and Jean Symonds. Sadly one of our patrons, Zaha Hadid recently passed away.

As is the case for many of the female practitioners identified in this feature, there has been relatively little written on the contribution of women architects, and one of the first tasks AA XX 100 undertook was to go through the AA Registers and identify female students. The list includes Ann MacEwen, Nora Aiton, Kathryn Findlay, Diana Rowntree, Jane Drew, Judith Ledebor, Mary Crowley, Minnette de Silva, Elizabeth Chesterton, Carmen Dillon (who won an Oscar), and Elisabeth Scott, who won the competition for the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford. It quickly became obvious that there is such a large number of distinguished graduates that the focus of AA XX 100 should be to stimulate interest in the subject, encourage alumni to donate material to the archives, and attract researchers and scholars to work in this field and undertake interviews. Details of some of these interviews are now available on the [AA website](#). Valuable archive material has been donated to the AA Collections (Archive, Photo Library and Library) as a direct result of these interviews, and transcription workshops have generated considerable interest and enthusiasm within the student body.

Since its inception in 2013, AA XX 100 has mushroomed. The AA Archive, Library, and Public Programme now have a regular schedule of events every year and the bookshop has launched events and updates on new publications on women in architecture. Practising architects including Sharon Hicks, Sadie Morgan, Julia King, Julia Barfield, and Elsie Owusu have given talks in the AA XX 100 programme alongside critics and researchers such as Iain Jackson, Gillian Darley, Alice Rawsthorn, Patrick Zamarian, and Catherine

Burke. By the time we reach the 2017 centenary we will have significantly developed the discourse to celebrate the achievements of AA women meaningfully.

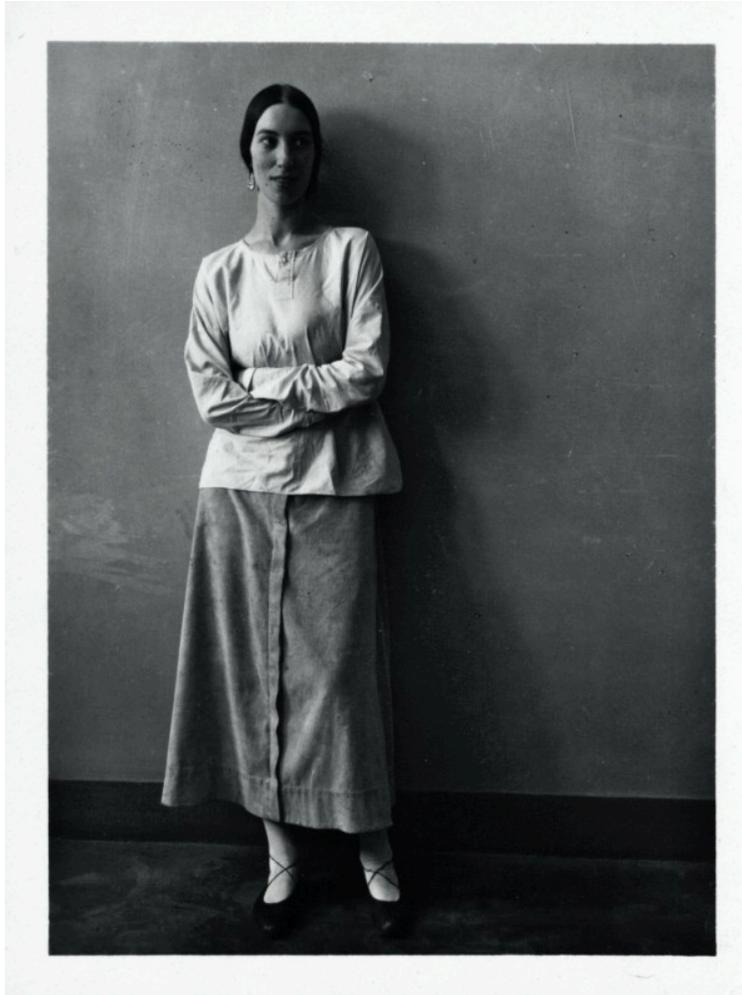
Response by

**Sacha Llewellyn**, Curator and Director of Liss Llewellyn Fine Art

## **The First Retrospective of (Re) Acclaimed Artist Winifred Knights (1899–1947)**

“The works [Winifred Knights] produced during and since her scholarship were few in number, but of exquisite quality, and the exceptional beauty of her drawings has placed her among the outstanding artists of her generation”.<sup>46</sup>

So wrote the Painting Faculty of the British School at Rome in 1949, two years after Knights' early death, aged 48, from a brain tumour. Knights received no obituary. In the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, her only appearance is as the first wife of Sir Thomas Monnington (1902–76), one-time president of the Royal Academy. Languishing in near-obscurity for almost 70-years, Knights' reputation has recently been re-established in her first-ever retrospective held at Dulwich Picture Gallery over the summer of 2016.



**Figure 49.**

David Evans (1894–1959), Photographic portrait of Winifred Knights at the British School at Rome, 1925, Private Collection Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate

Winifred Knights' biography refuses to fit within the template that is more generally associated with female artists of her period. The eldest daughter in a progressive family with socialist convictions, her artistic endeavours were encouraged from an early age. She gained access to one of the most prestigious teaching establishments of the time, the Slade School of Fine Art, where she outshone her contemporaries by winning numerous prizes (fig. 50), including the coveted Summer Composition Competition (fig. 51) and a Slade Scholarship (1919). In 1920, she became the first woman to win the Rome Scholarship in Decorative Painting with her epic *The Deluge* (fig. 52), heralded by critics as 'the work of a genius'.<sup>47</sup> During her years at the Slade (1915–17; 1918–20), Knights challenged the exclusivity of male claims to professionalism by abandoning the illustrative idiom of her early work in favour of Decorative Painting, an aesthetic philosophy that defined the whole of her artistic journey.

Knowledge of the artist's biography is essential to understanding her oeuvre, with her own struggle to succeed as a productive female artist forming the prevailing narrative. Presenting herself as the central protagonist, and including models from her inner circle, Knights consistently re-wrote fairy-tale and legend, Biblical narrative and Pagan mythology to create visual distillations of her own lived experiences. The conflict between female submission and self-empowerment was a recurrent theme, explored through women's relationships to the natural world, working communities, war, marriage, motherhood and bereavement.



**Figure 50.**

Winifred Knights, Full-length seated female nude, three-quarter view, 1917, pencil on paper. UCL Art Museum, University College London Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate



**Figure 51.**

Winifred Knights, *A Scene in a Village Street with Mill-hands Conversing*, 1919, tempera on canvas laid on board. UCL Art Museum, University College London Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate



**Figure 52.**

Winifred Knights, *The Deluge*, 1920, oil on canvas, Tate (purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery, 1989) Digital image courtesy of Tate, London, 2015 / The Artist's Estate



**Figure 53.**

Winifred Knights, Portrait of Anna Matilda Fryer, 1920, oil on canvas. UCL Art Museum, University College London Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate



**Figure 54.**

Winifred Knights, *The Marriage at Cana*, 1923, oil on canvas. Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate



**Figure 55.**

Winifred Knights, *Scenes from the Life of Saint Martin of Tours*, 1928-33, oil (or possibly tempera) on canvas with glazing. Milner Memorial Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral Digital image courtesy of The Dean and Chapter, Canterbury Cathedral / The Artist's Estate / Photo: Steve Gorton, 2015



**Figure 56.**

Winifred Knights, *The Santissima Trinita*, 1924-30, oil on canvas. Private Collection Digital image courtesy of The Artist's Estate

A dearth of information about Winifred Knights' life and career has obscured her extraordinary talent from re-emerging. At the Dulwich Picture Gallery retrospective, the majority of the paintings exhibited have never been seen in public. In the accompanying monograph, *Winifred Knights 1899-1947*, over ninety-five per cent of the pictures have never before been reproduced. Through the unpublished letters, notebooks, sketchbooks and diaries, retained by the artist's family, it has now been possible to establish for the first time an accurate account of Knights' life and career and to correctly identify her artworks. Only last year, *Portrait of Anna Matilda Fryer* (fig. 53) was presented as a portrait of an unknown woman in Tate Britain's exhibition, 'Spaces of Black Modernism: London 1919-39'.

During her lifetime, Knights' works were highly sought after. Artists, museum directors, socialites, diplomats and politicians comprised a network of contacts that provided patronage and support. However, although Knights was consistently committed to painting throughout her life, she worked slowly and meticulously – had she produced more she may be better known today. The deep trauma that she suffered as a result of living through two world-wars, the loss of a baby brother in 1915 and a stillborn son in 1928, meant that 'the calmness of mind' that Slade professor, Henry Tonks,

identified as essential for Knights' artistic output, proved elusive. After the birth of a son in 1934, she struggled to reconcile motherhood with her artistic career. However, the external context of the male-dominated art establishment to which she returned from Rome, also played its part in her increasing obscurity during the last twenty-years of her life; she was consistently excluded from numerous public mural commissions, awarded to other (and younger) male Rome Scholars.<sup>48</sup>

Working within the dictums of Decorative Painting in a realistic and figurative genre, Knights, like many Rome Scholars of her generation, has suffered neglect. Recently the careers of Thomas Monnington (RS 1922), Edward Halliday (RS 1925) and Alan Sorrell (RS 1928) have been partially revisited as art history has become more inclusive of artists working outside the canon of modernism.<sup>49</sup> The acquisition of *The Deluge* by Tate in 1989 marked the beginning of the process through which Knights' art is gradually being reassessed. This contrasts with the Tate's rejection of *The Marriage at Cana* as a free gift, just over thirty years earlier, in 1957, indicating how low esteem for Knights and the values she upheld had by then declined. In the Dulwich Picture Gallery retrospective, *The Marriage at Cana*, temporarily repatriated from the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, has been singled out by critics as Knights' *magnum opus*, echoing the esteem it inspired when it was first shown at the Imperial Gallery, London, in 1929.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> "Scottish Arts and Crafts II", *Art Journal* (1907): 311–20. The work of Maggie Hamilton and Mrs Ritchie is mentioned "as an example of another ideal of embroidery than that of the School of Art" (318).
- <sup>2</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why have there been no great women artists?" (1971), in *Art and Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*, ed. Thomas Hess and Elizabeth Baker (London and New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1973), 1–43 .
- <sup>3</sup> Sarah MacDougall and Rachel Dickson, eds., *Uproar! The First 50 Years of the London Group, 1913–63* (London: Lund Humphries, 2013); <http://benuri.org.uk/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/uproar-exhibition/> Nov 2013-March 2014; Nicola Moorby, "Sylvia Gosse 1881–1968", artist biography, April 2003, in Helena Bonett, Ysanne Holt, Jennifer Mundy, eds., *The Camden Town Group in Context*, Tate Research Publication, May 2012, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/sylvia-gosse-r1105359>, accessed 11 March 2016.
- <sup>4</sup> Marjorie Lilly, *Sickert: The Painter and His Circle* (London: Elek, 1971), 66.
- <sup>5</sup> Grace Brockington, "A 'Lavender Talent' or 'The Most Important Women Painter in Europe'? Reassessing Vanessa Bell", *Art History* 36, no. 1 (Feb. 2013), 136.
- <sup>6</sup> Vanessa Bell, 1912, in <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bell-frederick-and-jessie-etchells-painting-t01277> [accessed 11 March 2016]
- <sup>7</sup> Rozicka Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
- <sup>8</sup> Margaret F. MacDonald, *Beatrice Whistler: Artist & Designer* (Glasgow: Hunterian Art Gallery, 1997).
- <sup>9</sup> Margaret MacDonald, *James McNeill Whistler: Drawings, Pastels, and Watercolours: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), for example cat. nos. 1196, 1242r, 1316, 1325–6, 1336, 1338, 1345.
- <sup>10</sup> Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret MacDonald and others, *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), cat. no. 406.
- <sup>11</sup> Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T* (1968; London: Virago, 1982); Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2000).

- 12 While women opened 37 percent of Roberson's new accounts in 1872, less than 10 percent of the works on display at the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions were by female artists, and many of these are no longer in the public domain; part of the archive's importance as a research resource is its ability to identify artists of both genders whose works have not survived the twin filters of fashion and physical survival.
- 13 Thomas M. Bayer and John R. Page quantify this peak and decline in *The Development of the Art Market in England: Money as Muse, 1730-1900* (London, Pickering & Chatto, 2011).
- 14 The clustering of artists in London was mapped in the Museum of London's *Creative Quarters* exhibition in 2001, but almost no women were included. See Kit Wedd, Lucy Peltz and Cathy Ross, *Creative Quarters: The Art World in London, 1700-2000* (London: Merrell Publishers, 2001).
- 15 "Miss Jessie Mothersole. Exploring Ancient Britain", *The Times*, 24 April 1908 (Times Digital Archive).
- 16 "Women's Work", *Daily News*, 14 July 1904 (British Newspaper Archive).
- 17 "Magazines", *Sheffield Independent*, 24 Jan. 1908 (British Newspaper Archive).
- 18 "Advertisements and Notices", *The Times*, 12 Nov., 1910 (Times Digital Archive).
- 19 "Bookland", *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 7 Nov. 1922 (British Newspaper Archive).
- 20 "Magazines", *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 Jan. 1926 (British Newspaper Archive).
- 21 Katrina Navickas's work on nineteenth-century protest meetings draws on and enhances digitized newspaper sources. She has reflected critically on the value of digital resources in her own research. Further information on the project and her experiences combining digital and archive based research can be found on her website: <http://protesthistory.org.uk/>.
- 22 Paul Gough's seminal work, *A Terrible Beauty: British Artists in the First World War* (Bristol: Sansom & Co, 2009) makes only a fleeting reference to women war artists.
- 23 Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 3.
- 24 Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain, 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000); Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland, eds., *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Problem Pictures: Women and Men in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995); Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *A Pre-Raphaelite Journey: The Art of Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press: National Museums Liverpool, 2012); Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago, 1989); Rosie Broadley, *Laura Knight Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2013); Janice Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007); Janice Helland, *Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000).
- 25 *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland, 1851-1951*, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATI, online database 2011, <http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk>, accessed 30/01/2016; Exhibition Culture in London, 1878-1908 database, University of Glasgow, 2006, <http://www.exhibitionculture.arts.gla.ac.uk/>, accessed 30/01/2016.
- 26 Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain, 1880-1905* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
- 27 C. Gasquoine Hartley, "The Paris Club of International Women Artists", *Art Journal* (Sept. 1900), 284.
- 28 Amy Bessone, "Post Woman", *Kaleidoscope* 23 (Winter 2015), 82.
- 29 <http://www.friesmuseum.nl/exhibitions/alma-tadema-classical-charm?language=en&v=verwacht>
- 30 Elizabeth Prettejohn, "At Home in London, 1870-1885", in *Lawrence Alma-Tadema*, ed. Prettejohn and Peter Trippi (Munich: Prestel, forthcoming).
- 31 Carolyn Epps Dixon, "Laura Theresa Epps Alma-Tadema: Artist", in *Lawrence Alma-Tadema*, ed. Prettejohn and Trippi.
- 32 The Alma-Tadema exhibition will be at Leighton House Museum 7 July-29 October 2017.
- 33 Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979).
- 34 We do know that she studied at UCL for a time in the late thirties, and wrote an article for the *Connoisseur*: Daphne Haldin, "Mediaeval Memorial Brasses", *The Connoisseur* 88 (July 1931): 20.
- 35 Letter from W. & R. Chambers Ltd to Daphne Haldin, 13 Feb. 1964, DH Archive, Paul Mellon Centre, London.
- 36 Letter from W. & R. Chambers Ltd to Daphne Haldin, 11 Feb. 1964, DH Archive, Paul Mellon Centre, London.
- 37 Delia Gaze, ed., *Dictionary of Women Artists* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997); Chris Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists: An International Dictionary of Women Artists Born Before 1900* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985); For the letter "B" alone, Haldin notes that she compiled 595 entries.
- 38 Quoted in *The Scotsman*, 23 Jan. 1885, 7.
- 39 See Alice Strang, ed., *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and sculptors, 1885-1965* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2015), 16.
- 40 See Strang, ed., *Modern Scottish Women*, 12.

- 41 Alice Strang, ed., *Modern Scottish Women: Painters and sculptors, 1885-1965* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2015), 16. The catalogue is available by mail order via <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/shop/online-shop/product/modern-scottish-women-exhibition-catalogue>.
- 42 Duncan Macmillan, "Art Review: Modern Scottish Women, Edinburgh", *The Scotsman*, 14 Nov. 2015.
- 43 "Women in Scottish Art, 1885-1965", Scottish National Gallery, 23 Jan. 2016. The papers presented are to be published in the forthcoming issue of the society's journal, see <https://ssahistory.wordpress.com/>. See <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/education/introduction-528/> for further details.
- 44 With the exception of Ivy Gardner Proudfoot.
- 45 *Joan Eardley: A Sense of Place*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Two, Edinburgh, 3 Dec. 2016 - 21 May 2017. See <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/on-now-coming-soon/joan-eardley-23214>.
- 46 *Note 1949*, Painting Faculty, British School at Rome Historic Archive.
- 47 *Daily Graphic*, 8 February 1921
- 48 For example, the major Decorative cycle, 'The Building of Britain' at St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster (1924-7) employed 9 male artists who, except for Vivian Forbes, were all Rome Scholars or members of the Rome School Faculty.
- 49 Ann Compton, Edward Halliday; *Art for Life 1925-1939* (exh. Cat. University of Liverpool Art Gallery, 1997); *Drawings and Paintings by Sir Thomas Monnington PRA 1902-1976* (exh. Cat. Royal Academy of Arts, 1997); Sacha Llewellyn (ed) Alan Sorrell; *the Life and Works of an English Neo-Romantic Artist* (Bristol: Sansom & co., 2014).

# Canaletto's Colour: the inspiration and implications of changing grounds, pigments and paint application in the artist's English period

Roxane Sperber and Jens Stenger

## Abstract

*This article explores the English period of Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto) from a technical perspective. Six paintings by the artist, from the collection of the Yale Center for British Art, compose the focus of the study. Addressing the question of whether Canaletto's English paintings were different or, as has long been held, inferior to his Venetian works, this article details changes to the artist's grounds, painting technique, and palette when working in England.*

## Authors

Paintings Conservator

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Kowalczyk for her insights about the artist, and Verity Elson for providing special access to the Canaletto exhibition at Compton Verney House in 2015.

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The arrival of Giovanni Antonio Canal, the “Famous Painter of Views”, in England was ceremoniously recorded in the notebook of the meticulous chronicler of the eighteenth-century London art world, George Vertue.<sup>1</sup>

Canaletto came to England from Venice at the end of May 1746 and spent nine years there, with an eight-month trip back to Venice from 1750–51.<sup>2</sup>

There is no consensus on exactly what prompted Canaletto to come to England. It is widely believed that the reduction in travel to Venice by his English Grand Tour patron base, due to the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession, may have encouraged the artist to relocate.<sup>3</sup>

Vertue’s first mention of Canaletto praises him as “much esteemed” and proclaims that there is “no doubt but what Views and works He doth here [in England], will give the same satisfaction” as his Venetian views.<sup>4</sup> However, by 1749 Vertue’s enthusiasm had waned. “On the whole of him something is obscure or strange. He dos not produce works so well done as those of Venice or other parts of Italy, which are in Collections here, and done by him there.”<sup>5</sup>

Suspicion about the artist grew and a rumour circulated that he might be an imposter posing as the great Canaletto or that he had an unknown assistant painting his pictures in Venice.<sup>6</sup> Vertue later corrected the false accusation regarding the Venetian’s identity, explaining that the confusion was owing to Bernardo Bellotto, Canaletto’s nephew and former assistant, using the same name as his uncle.<sup>7</sup>

While it is true that Bellotto was using his uncle’s name, the motivation for the rumour may have been rather more sinister.<sup>8</sup> The perception among English artists like William Hogarth, that foreign talent threatened their livelihoods, led to a patriotic movement that in turn fuelled xenophobic attitudes. Such xenophobia encouraged hostility towards foreign artists like Canaletto.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, by the time Canaletto arrived in England many of his Venetian paintings were already in the hands of English patrons who had purchased the works on the Grand Tour.<sup>10</sup> There were also numerous Canaletto imitators who would have had personal reasons for wanting to damage the reputation of the Venetian master.<sup>11</sup>

Watercolourist Edward Dayes, writing at the turn of the nineteenth century, described the fervent attempts to discredit Canaletto:

the picture dealing tribe carried their assurance so far, as to deny that Canaletti was the person who painted his pictures at Venice, that is, on his arrival in London; and when, by provocation, he was tempted to sit down, and produce some, to convince the public, they still persisted that the pieces now produced were not in the same style; an assertion which materially injured him for a time, and made him almost frantic. By this scheme they hoped to drive him from the country, and thereby prevent him from detecting the copies they had made from his works, which were in great repute.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever the impetus for such rumours, the perception that Canaletto's painting declined from the time he left Venice has persisted in the art-historical cannon. In an essay from 1929, Giuseppe Fiocco wrote disparagingly that the artist's painting "became more china-like and his figures lost their living quality and came to be the merest signs, like bundles of coloured wool. . . . How and when can this change have come about? A change that is even to our impartial eyes an obvious and lamentable retrogression."<sup>13</sup> Even W. G. Constable, who compiled Canaletto's catalogue raisonné, expressed his disillusion with the artist's English works, stating that "the imaginative element that inspired his better work was almost consistently absent."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the long-standing perception that Canaletto's English paintings are of lesser quality than his Venetian views, the artist's technique was not in decline from the time he left Venice but continually changing throughout his career. Not only did he evolve and experiment, but he often returned to technical approaches used decades before. As such, it can be difficult to date his works based on style or to isolate the motivation for changes to his technique.<sup>15</sup> Yet, it is undeniable that there is a certain quality to Canaletto's English painting that does not exist in his work before or after this period.

This article will investigate Canaletto's English paintings from a technical point of view, with the aim of assessing the long-held belief that they are inferior in quality.<sup>16</sup> Concrete technical changes that occur during his English period will be identified and the inspiration and implication of these changes explored. Changes to the ground structure, paint application, and palette will be discussed using six paintings from the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA) collection (figs. [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#)).<sup>17</sup> These works span the artist's period in England from 1746 to 1755.



**Figure 1.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames, 1747, oil on canvas, 95.9 × 127.6 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.94)



**Figure 2.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Old Walton Bridge, 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86)



**Figure 3.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), St Paul's Cathedral, circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95)



**Figure 4.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Warwick Castle, 1748-49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2)



**Figure 5.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's, circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.6 x 72.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.96)



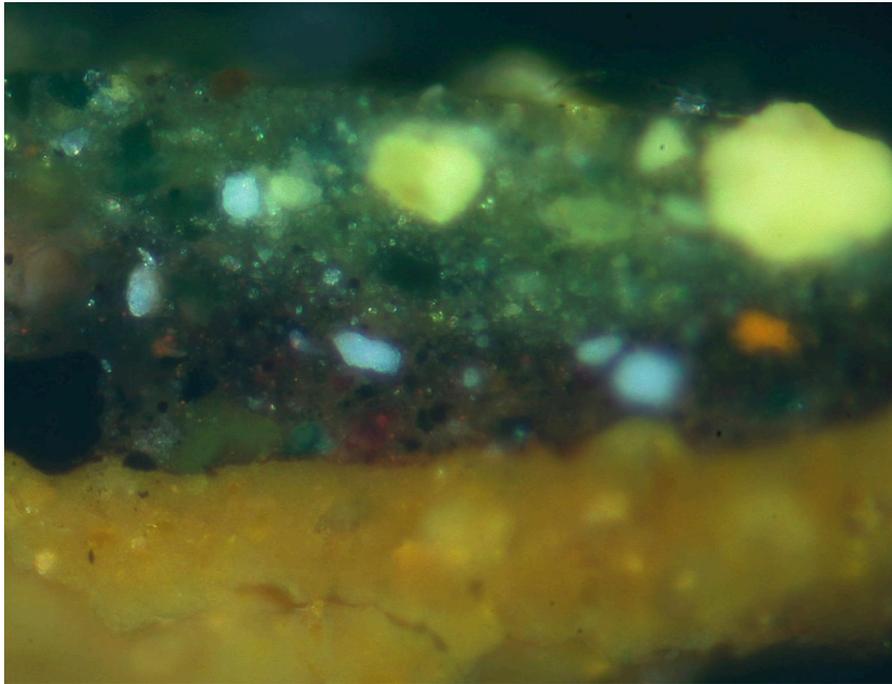
**Figure 6.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster, circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.7 x 71.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.97)

## Changing grounds

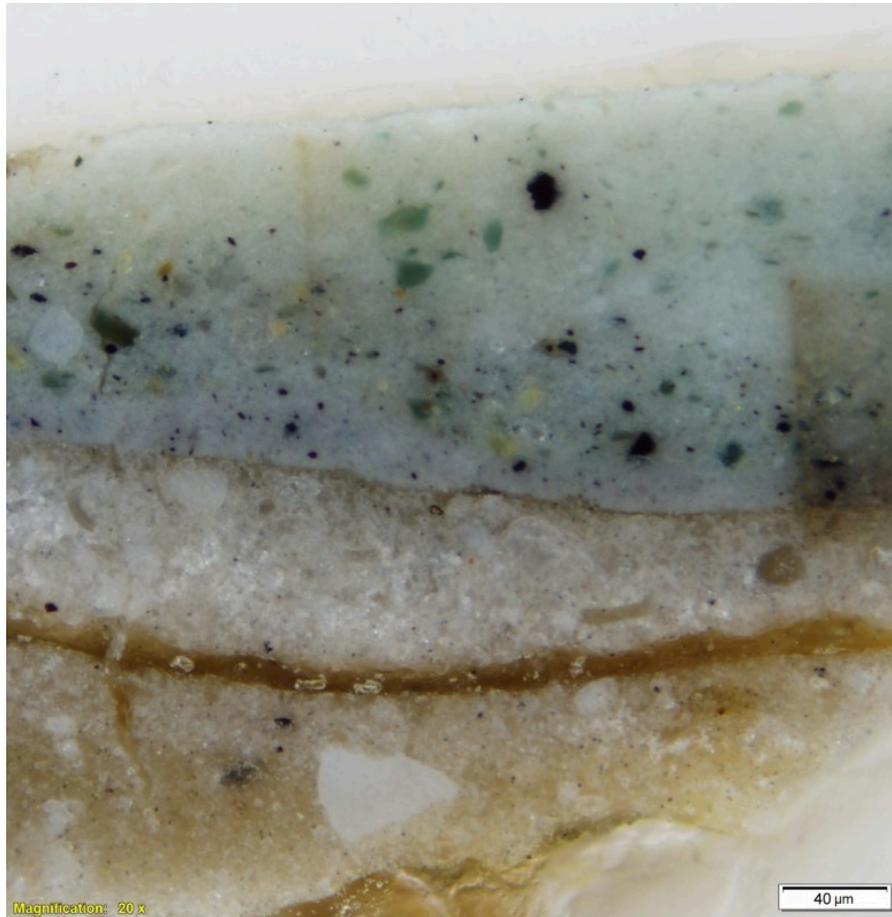
The most consistent change to Canaletto's technique while working in England was his choice of ground. The artist switched from a traditional Venetian ground, which was warm red or orange in colour (fig. 7), to a traditional English ground that was cool grey in colour (fig. 8).<sup>18</sup> The

impetus for this change was the result of several factors, perhaps the most obvious being that light-coloured grounds were commercially available in England.



**Figure 7.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from an area of green trees on the horizon, *Venice: the Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore* (fig. 20), circa 1724, oil on canvas, 173.0 × 134.3 cm Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



### Figure 8.

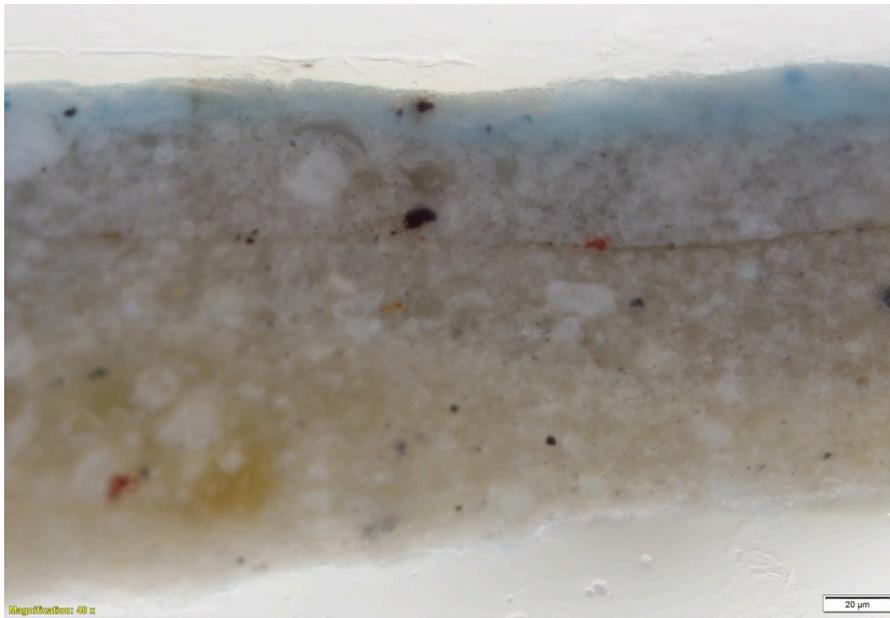
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from area of water with wave, *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (fig. 1), 1747, oil on canvas, 95.9 × 127.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.94) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

## Commercially prepared canvas

A survey of eighteenth-century English paintings at Tate found that painters used remarkably standard oil grounds composed of lead white, chalk, and varying amounts of black and earth pigments. Grounds were usually applied in two or more layers with a layer of glue size sometimes separating the grounds.<sup>19</sup> In *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy*, a treatise from 1756, Thomas Bardwell credits Godfrey Kneller with the invention of “cool grey-coloured Cloths” after breaking with the methods of Peter Lely.<sup>20</sup> By the 1730s through the mid-1750s most British painters were using grey grounds.<sup>21</sup>

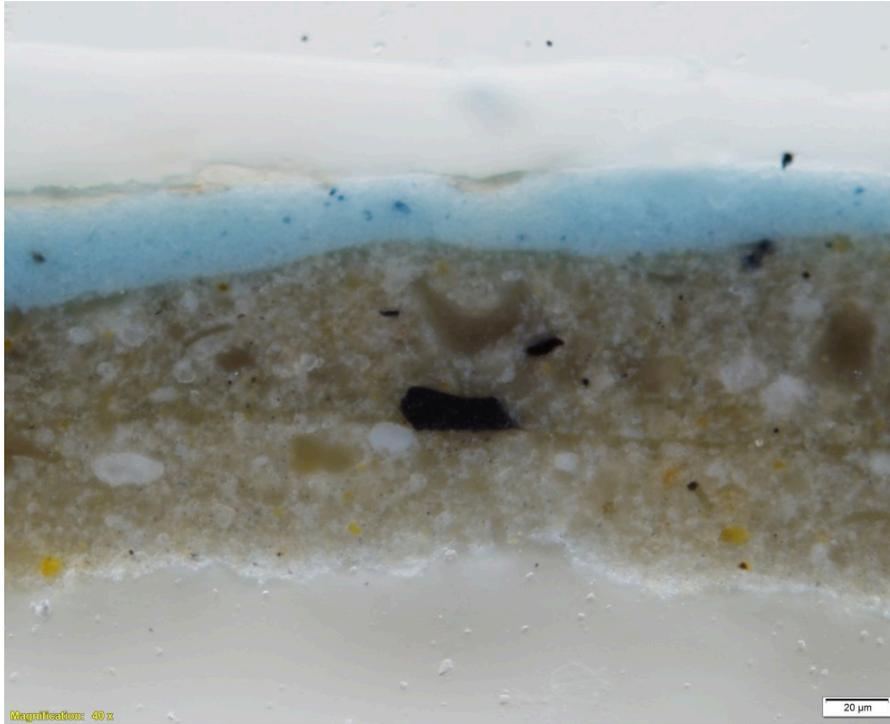
It is likely this consistency in ground structure is a result of eighteenth-century English artists purchasing commercially prepared canvases from colourmen.<sup>22</sup> Mention of commercially prepared grounds is found in late seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources. *The Excellency of the pen and pencil*, a treatise by an anonymous English author from 1668, advises readers to purchase “Cloth primed”, stating “I could teach you how to prime it, but it is moiling work, and besides, it may be bought ready primed cheaper and better than you can do your self. Few Painters (though all can do it) prime it themselves, but buy it ready done.”<sup>23</sup> Robert Dossie’s *Handmaid to the Arts* also describes “the pieces of canvas, prepared by proper primings” as “the most common grounds for oil painting”.<sup>24</sup>

The Canaletto paintings studied at the YCBA have grounds consistent with commercially prepared English grounds of the period.<sup>25</sup> All have a double-ground layer structure separated by a layer of glue size (figs. [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#)). The grounds vary slightly in tone and pigment composition, but are always light in colour.<sup>26</sup>



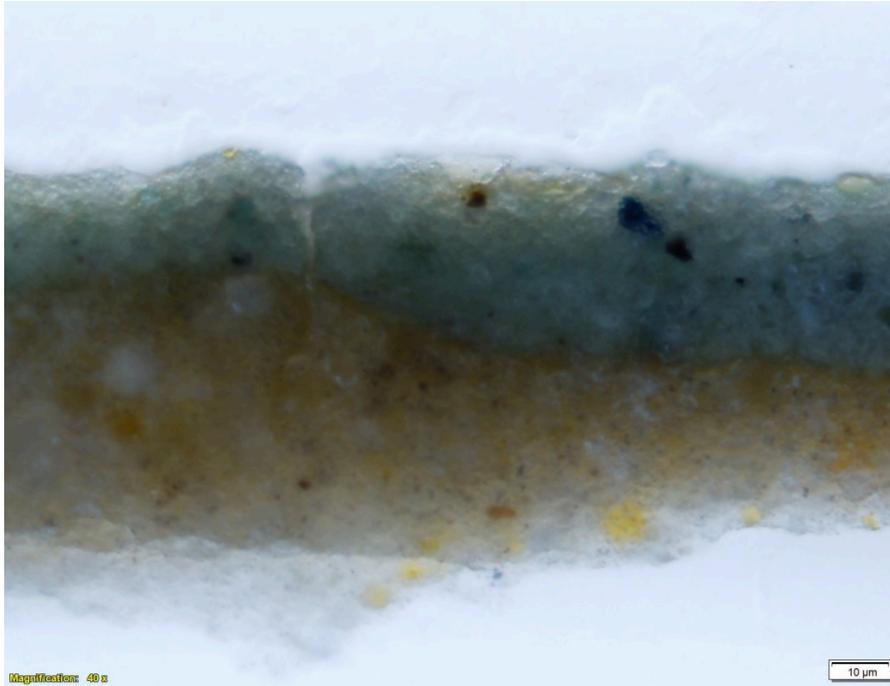
### Figure 9.

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from the sky, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 6), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.7 × 71.8 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.97) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 10.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from the sky, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's* (fig. 5), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.6 × 72.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.96) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



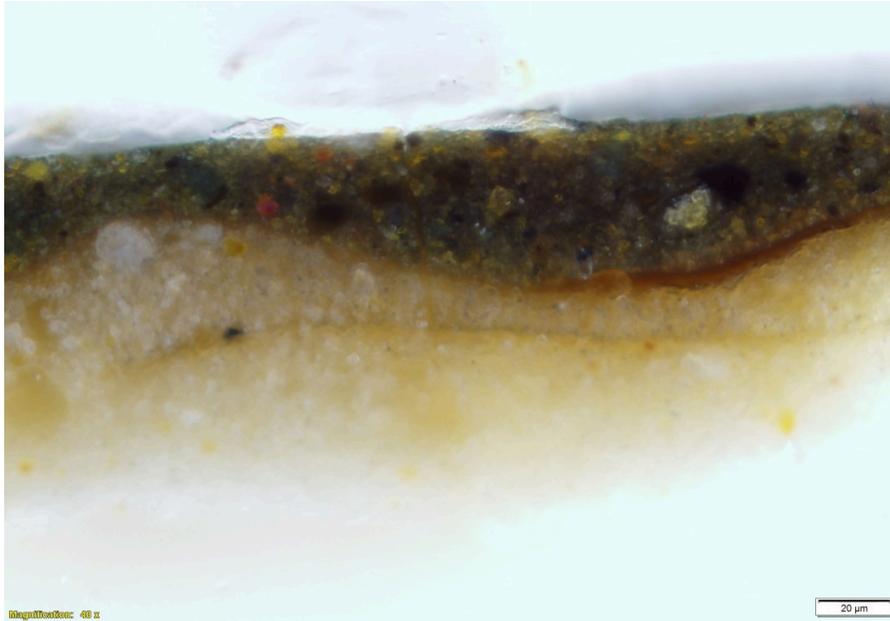
**Figure 11.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from area of water, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 12.**

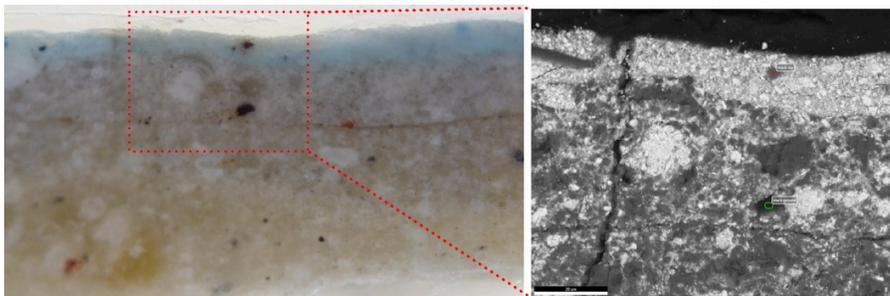
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from an area of grass, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4), 1748-49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 13.**

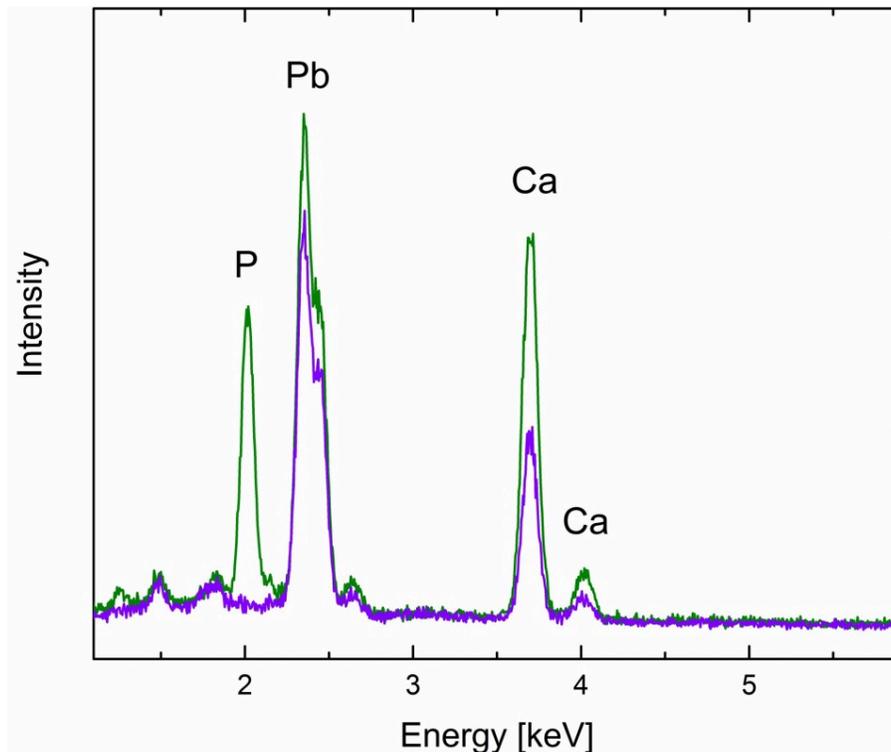
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from an area of grass, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

Additionally, elemental analysis of the black pigments in the ground and paint layer supports the suggestion that Canaletto was buying commercially prepared canvases. Black pigments found in the paint layer were found to consistently contain phosphorous while those in the grounds did not. This suggests that the black in Canaletto's palette was bone black, a different pigment than the carbon black identified in the ground (figs. 14, 15).



**Figure 14.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section detail of ground detail structure, visible light (left), detail of ground structure, *S, The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 6), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.7 × 71.8 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.97) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 15.**

Giovanni Antonio Canaletto, EDX spectra comparison of black particle in ground showing no peak for phosphorous (P) (purple line), *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 6), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.7 × 71.8 cm Digital image courtesy of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH)

The identification of commercially prepared grounds in Canaletto's English paintings is not surprising given that he appears to have purchased commercially primed canvas in Venice.<sup>27</sup> Technical studies have found that when working in Venice Canaletto used exclusively warm red and orange grounds, even when painting English subjects.

A comparison between two versions of the same pendant pair composition, a scene of the River Thames looking east and west from the Somerset House terrace, exemplifies the artist's use of different commercially prepared grounds when painting the same composition in England and Venice. The YCBA versions, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's* (fig. 5), and *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 6) were painted in London before 1750 and have typical eighteenth-century English grounds (figs. 9, 10).<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 16.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City, 1750–51, oil on canvas, 107.9 × 188 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, London, UK (RCIN 400504)

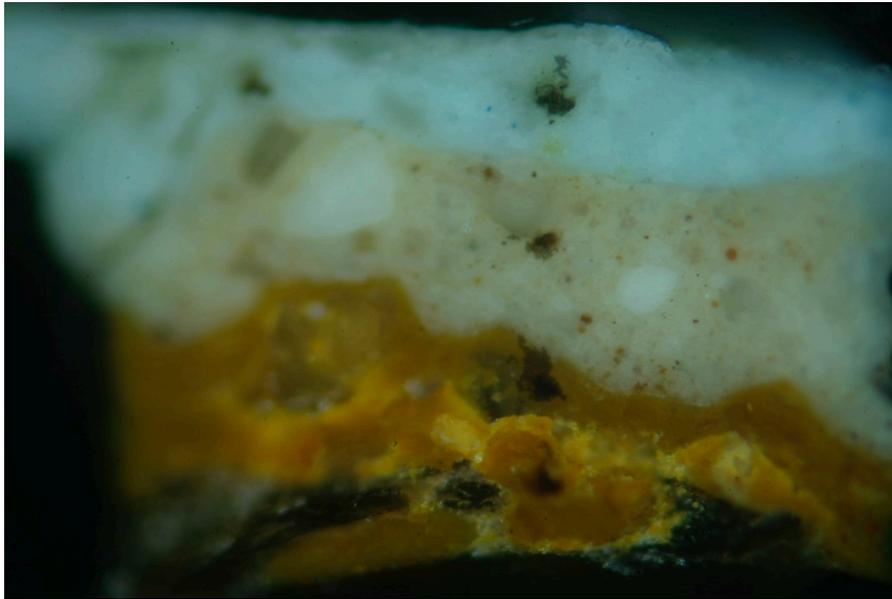


**Figure 17.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards Westminster, 1750–51, oil on canvas, 107.6 × 187.9 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, London, UK (RCIN 400506)

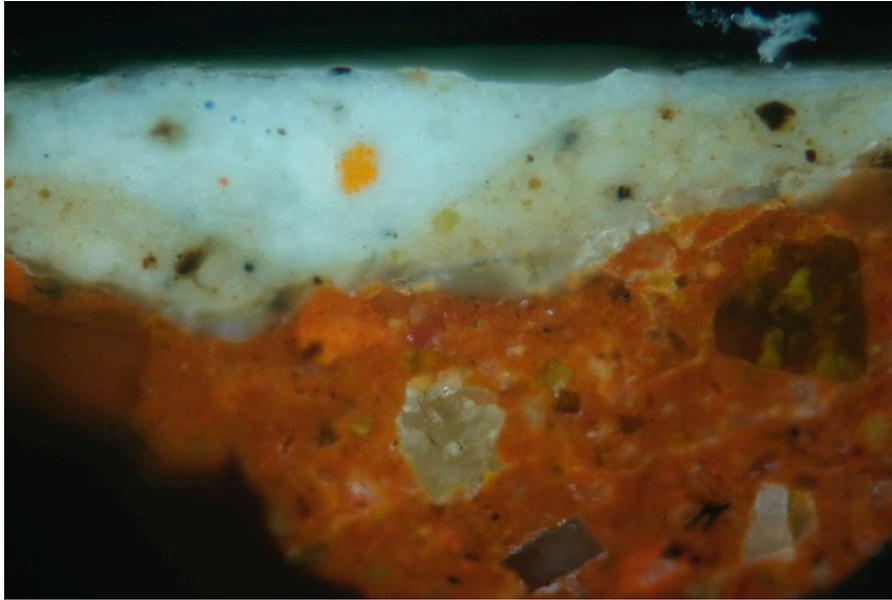
The Royal Collection pair, *London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City* (fig. 16) and *London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards Westminster* (fig. 17), were painted during the artist's eight-month return to Venice in 1750–51 and have rough grounds of red earth pigments (untested) followed by a light layer of artist-applied *imprimatura* (figs. 18, 19).<sup>29</sup> This comparison suggests that Canaletto acquired

commercially primed canvases in both countries and adjusted his Venetian canvas with a substantial layer of cool *imprimatura* to obtain a lighter surface that more closely matched the English canvas. <sup>30</sup>



**Figure 18.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from the sky, *London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City* (fig. 16), 1750--51, oil on canvas, 107.9 × 188 cm Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, London, UK (RCIN 400504)



**Figure 19.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Cross-section from the sky, *London: The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards Westminster* (fig. 17), 1750–51, oil on canvas, 107.6 × 187.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, London, UK (RCIN 400506)

Documentary sources support the physical evidence that Canaletto worked on commercially primed canvases in Venice. In a letter from Venetian engraver and art dealer Anton Maria Zanetti the elder to Arthur Pond, dated 5 March 1729, Zanetti outlines the costs shouldered by him for the supply of “tella, imprimatura” to Canaletto.<sup>31</sup> In light of this, it is unsurprising that the artist continued purchasing commercially prepared canvases upon arrival in England.

Of the English views at the YCBA, *The Thames . . . Looking toward St Paul’s*, *The Thames . . . Looking toward Westminster*, and *Warwick Castle* have areas of unpainted ground that extend onto original tacking margins.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that the canvas was primed before it was stretched. A source from 1808 lists pre-stretched canvases available to artists in standard sizes: Kit-cat (3 ft x 2 ft 4 in./ 91.5 x 71.1 cm), three-quarters (2 ft 6 in. x 2 ft 1 in./ 76.2 x 33 cm), half-length (4 ft 2 in. x 3 ft 4 in./ 127 x 101.6 cm), Bishops half-lengths (4 ft 8 in. x 3 ft 9 in./ 142.2 x 114.3 cm), and whole-lengths (7 ft 10 in. x 4 ft 10 in./ 238.76 x 147.32 cm).<sup>33</sup> These set canvas sizes were also available in the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

However, none of the dimensions of the YCBA paintings conform to set standards. This suggests that Canaletto was either ordering pre-stretched canvases of a specific size from a colourman or buying the commercially primed canvas and stretching it onto bespoke stretchers.

A list dating from 1763 of colourmen in London records the principal tradesmen who “prepare canvases of all sizes ready stretched on frames, which is quite foreign to the business of the ordinary colour shop”.<sup>35</sup>

Laughton Osborne’s compilation of European sources on artists’ painting and materials, from 1845, describes canvas as “kept, ready-primed, in rolls of various width, at the colourmen’s, who need but a few hours’ notice to cut it and distend it on the frames to any proportion that may be desired”.<sup>36</sup>

This source is, of course, from a century after that in which Canaletto was painting in England. However, the availability of commercially prepared canvas in eighteenth-century London, and the fact that some colourmen were stretching bespoke canvas by 1763, suggests that Canaletto may have purchased his primed and stretched canvases in much the way Osborne describes.

It would be easy for Canaletto to acquire his pigments, brushes, medium, and painting supports without travelling a great distance. He lived on Silver Street (today Beak Street) near Golden Square in Soho.<sup>37</sup> This location was within walking distance of many colourmen’s shops in and around Covent Garden, the heart of the eighteenth-century art world.<sup>38</sup> There were at least ten colourmen who sold painting supplies within an approximately twenty-minute walk from Canaletto’s studio.<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that proximity would have dictated where an artist as particular as Canaletto purchased his supplies, but it is likely that he developed a working relationship with at least one of the merchants in the locality.

Silver Street was an area intended for tradesmen and people of lower middle-class occupation. It was composed of inexpensively but well-constructed four-storey houses with rooftop garrets.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the Venetian painter Jacopo Amigoni also lived on Silver Street during his decade in London, leaving shortly before Canaletto’s arrival. This may suggest that there was a community of Italian artists living in the area.<sup>41</sup>

Eighteenth-century artists sometimes acquired stretchers directly from tradesmen. Arthur Pond bought his stretchers from a carpenter by the name of Mr Weston who also crated finished works.<sup>42</sup> Canaletto lodged with a cabinetmaker called Mr Wiggan.<sup>43</sup> It is tempting to think that he avoided the hassle of transporting large stretchers on foot, or the cost of hiring a porter, chairmen, or coach, by paying Mr Wiggan, or another local tradesman, to build the stretchers, and that he purchased commercially prepared canvas to stretch himself.

## Artistic evolution

In addition to the convenience of painting on a commercially prepared ground, Canaletto's decision to move to a light preparation layer was a natural stylistic progression. He began his career as a scene painter in his father's workshop, but by 1720 he had begun making his own easel paintings.<sup>44</sup> These early works do not demonstrate the even, measured tonality and meticulous detail of his later paintings. Rather, they have "exuberant and highly textured brushwork, dramatic contrasts of deep shadow and radiant sunlight".<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 20.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Venice: the Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore, circa 1724, oil on canvas, 173.0 x 134.3 cm Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace, London, UK (RCIN 401036)

Canaletto's paintings up to 1727 are marked by the contrasts of light and shadow. Highlights are applied directly to the dark red ground allowing the artist to capture dramatic light and construct architectural form.<sup>46</sup> A set of six views of the Piazza San Marco in Venice exemplifies this technique.<sup>47</sup> These paintings may have been Canaletto's earliest commission from his enthusiastic patron and art dealer Joseph Smith.<sup>48</sup> Cross-section samples from *Venice: the Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore* (fig. 20), taken at the Hamilton Kerr Institute (HKI), illustrate the application of paint directly over the ground (fig. 7).<sup>49</sup>

This aspect of the artist's early technique was phased out by 1730 when Canaletto began applying a cool grey or beige *imprimatura* over the commercially prepared Venetian ground (see figs. 18, 19).<sup>50</sup> David Bomford and Gabriele Finaldi attribute the introduction of this unified underlayer to the "dramatic change between the hot, dark tones of the early paintings and the blond, cool light in the paintings that followed".<sup>51</sup> They rightly suggest that this change accounts for the move from a "fitful, glittering sun" to the "steady silver light" that was desired by the Grand Tourists.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 21.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of applied shadow over midtone imprimatura, *Venice: The Grand Canal from the Carità towards the Bacino*, circa 1727-28, oil on canvas, 48.0 × 80.0 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey, Surrey, UK (RCIN 400523)

Canaletto's application of a light *imprimatura* reflects his preference for painting applied shadows. Rather than leaving the dark red ground exposed or glazing over it to create shadows, the artist preferred to mix the colour of shadows and apply them in distinct shapes (fig. 21).<sup>53</sup> The light *imprimatura* over the warm red Venetian ground created a midtone surface that allowed Canaletto to paint in this way.

By his arrival in England in 1746, Canaletto's preference for painting on a lighter preparation layer was well established. He would have found it advantageous that he could purchase canvases with commercially prepared light grounds from London colourmen. This allowed him to avoid the step of modifying the dark grounds with a light *imprimatura*, as he was accustomed to doing in Venice. If this were not the case, he could have easily applied a

warm, red *imprimatura* to the commercially available English canvases; but in no example that has been observed during this study or other published studies did he do this.

### **Capturing diffuse glow**

A light ground was appropriate for the effect Canaletto wished to achieve in his English paintings. Following the inclination to create “steady silver light”, Canaletto’s English paintings have a diffuse light that surpasses that of his Venetian works. This distinct tonality is created by the light ground in his English paintings.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to the bright, southern sun of Venice, the artist captures the even, dappled light of England.

Waldemar Januszczak observed the impossible sunlight that bathes Canaletto’s English scenes and notes that “while it’s fair to doubt he really encountered all that good weather while he was over here, it’s also true that he captures perfectly the feel of an English summer’s day as it exists in most of our imaginations.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Canaletto’s English works in many ways mirror his capriccios, where he painted an imagined scene. The use of a light ground allowed the artist to move always from the dusty, sharp shadows of Venice to the even sun of the most glorious English summer’s day.

### **Changing application of paint**

One of the greatest misconceptions about Canaletto’s technique is that he was a fastidious, rigid painter. His early works are painted with energetic, painterly brushstrokes and his post-England views have confident, calligraphic paint handling. At the height of his production of Venetian views, from the 1730s through the early 1740s, the artist developed a style that was highly refined and meticulous to the point of looking somewhat mechanical.<sup>56</sup> But in England, his application of paint became abbreviated and painterly once again. Nevertheless, his English views maintain the illusion of realism that gained him fame in Venice.

### **The question of underdrawing**

How the artist transferred his compositions to canvas remains unanswered. Despite the fact that Canaletto was a prolific draftsman, infrared reflectography has not identified any carbon-containing underdrawing in media such as graphite, ink, or black chalk.<sup>57</sup> It is of course possible that the artist used a non-carbon-containing media like red chalk or iron gall ink to transfer his compositions, but microscopy has also been unsuccessful in identifying areas of underdrawing seen through the paint layers.<sup>58</sup>

A study by Elise Effmann of the *View of the Molo* (1725), found that the artist constructed architectural forms directly over the preparation layer “with broad brushstrokes of thick paint, quickly establishing the basic planes of the composition”.<sup>59</sup> Only after the architecture was in place did he paint the sky and water.<sup>60</sup> This suggests that from the early part of his career Canaletto was accustomed to sketching his compositions in paint.

Similarly, in the English paintings examined for this study, Canaletto’s blocking-in layer appears to be the first step in his painting process. The artist was clean and deliberate in his application of paint and would likely have avoided smears of messy underdrawing in chalk or charcoal by opting to block in his forms in paint.<sup>61</sup> Rather, he may have used highly finished drawings, of which many exist, as a guide when painting his compositions.<sup>62</sup>

### **Order of painting**

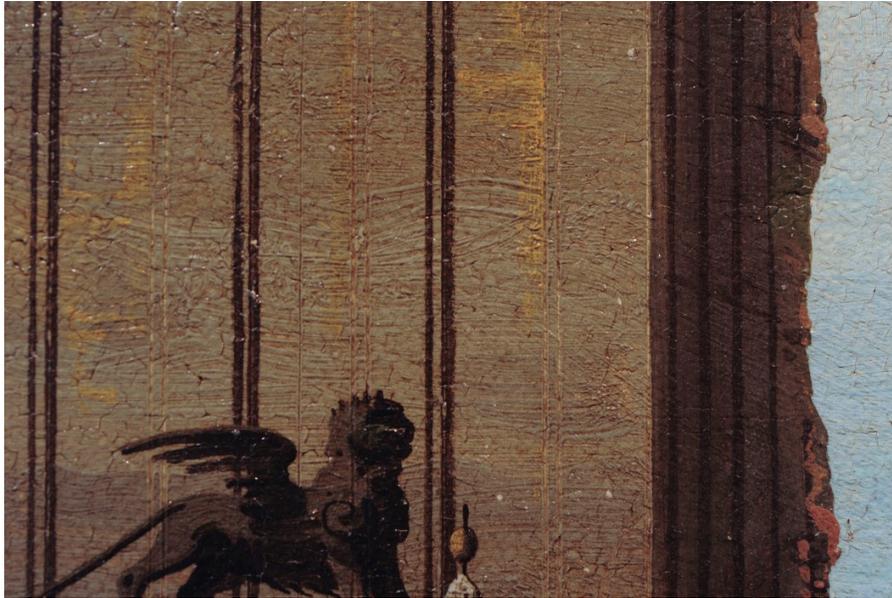
Canaletto established a sequence for his application of paint by the beginning of his mature period in 1730.<sup>63</sup> Broadly speaking, the artist worked from loose areas of blocked-in colour to a refined, detailed surface. After applying the layer of light *imprimatura*, in the case of his Venetian paintings, the artist blocked in the sky, leaving a rough reserve for the prominent forms in the foreground. The artist then established the compositional forms in the middle ground and finally the foreground.

The forms of the buildings were established during the blocking-out stage through the application of shadows in one colour and highlights in another. Architectural details often extend over the paint onto the sky to create crisp edges to the buildings ([fig. 22](#)). Over the blocking-out layer a second layer of paint in thick brush strokes was applied to create surface texture on the buildings and pavement as well as the brushy clouds in the sky ([fig. 23](#)).



**Figure 22.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of arch of building extending over sky and outlining on receding buildings, *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day, with the Bucintoro* (fig. 24), circa 1745, oil on canvas, 114.9 × 162.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (E1924-3-48)



**Figure 23.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of surface texture and incision lines, *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day, with the Bucintoro* (fig. 24), circa 1745, oil on canvas, 114.9 × 162.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (E1924-3-48)

The refining process of incising and outlining transformed the rough blocks of colour into elaborately designed architectural spaces. Edges of forms and details of the architecture were established using incision lines that were scratched into the blocking-in layer while the paint was still wet (fig. 23). Outlining in black paint, often following a straight edge, was applied to emphasize architectural details. Incision lines provided a guide for the outlining of circles and arches, and decorative details were even scratched freehand into the paint. Sometimes, a softer grey paint was used in the distance to articulate receding space (fig. 22). The contrasting use of black and grey outlining can be seen in a detail from *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day, with the Bucintoro* (fig. 24), now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



**Figure 24.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day, with the Bucintoro*, circa 1745, oil on canvas, 114.9 × 162.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (E1924-3-48)

Boats and figures were painted in last over a completed backdrop. This addition of “characters” at a late stage in the process may relate to the artist’s early experience with scene-painting. <sup>64</sup>

**Simplification of paint application**

Upon arrival in England, Canaletto maintained the same general sequence of building up his paintings but made the process more immediate. This is especially clear in the refining stages of the painting. Except for using a compass to incise the shapes for arches and domes (figs. 25, 26, 27), the artist abandoned the use of incision lines to guide the outlining, articulate perspective, and create three-dimensionality in buildings.



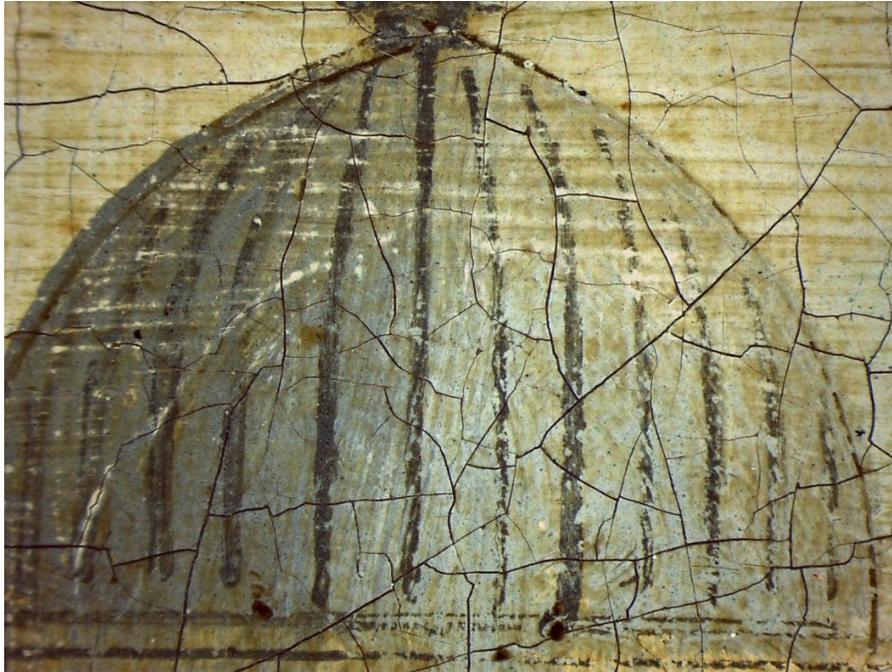
**Figure 25.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail showing compass incision lines on arch of Westminster Bridge, *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (fig. 1), 1747, oil on canvas, 95.9 × 127.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.94) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 26.**

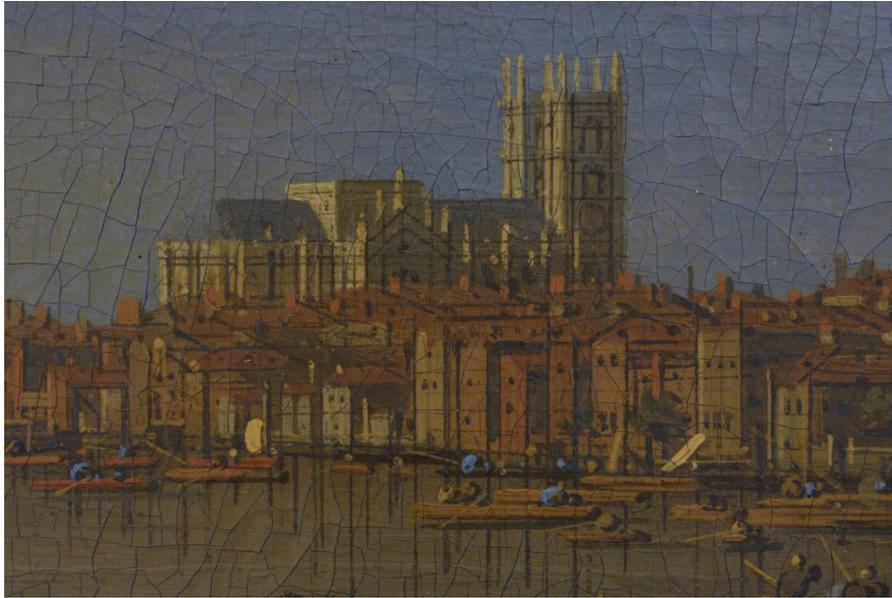
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail showing compass incision lines on Westminster Bridge, *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (fig. 1), 1747, oil on canvas, 95.9 × 127.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.94) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 27.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail showing compass incision lines on dome of St Paul's Cathedral, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's* (fig. 5), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.6 × 72.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.96) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

This stylistic change is illustrated by the way buildings along the Thames are painted in the YCBA's *The Thames . . . Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 28) in comparison to the buildings along the canal in *A Regatta on the Grand Canal* (fig. 29) from the National Gallery, London. Despite being a large painting (122.1 x 182.8 cm) that requires the viewer to stand back to view the work, the buildings that recede into the distance in *A Regatta on the Grand Canal* are painted with extraordinary attention to detail. Incision lines establish the perspective of the buildings, marking the top and bottom boundaries of the windows and the slopes of the roofs.



**Figure 28.**

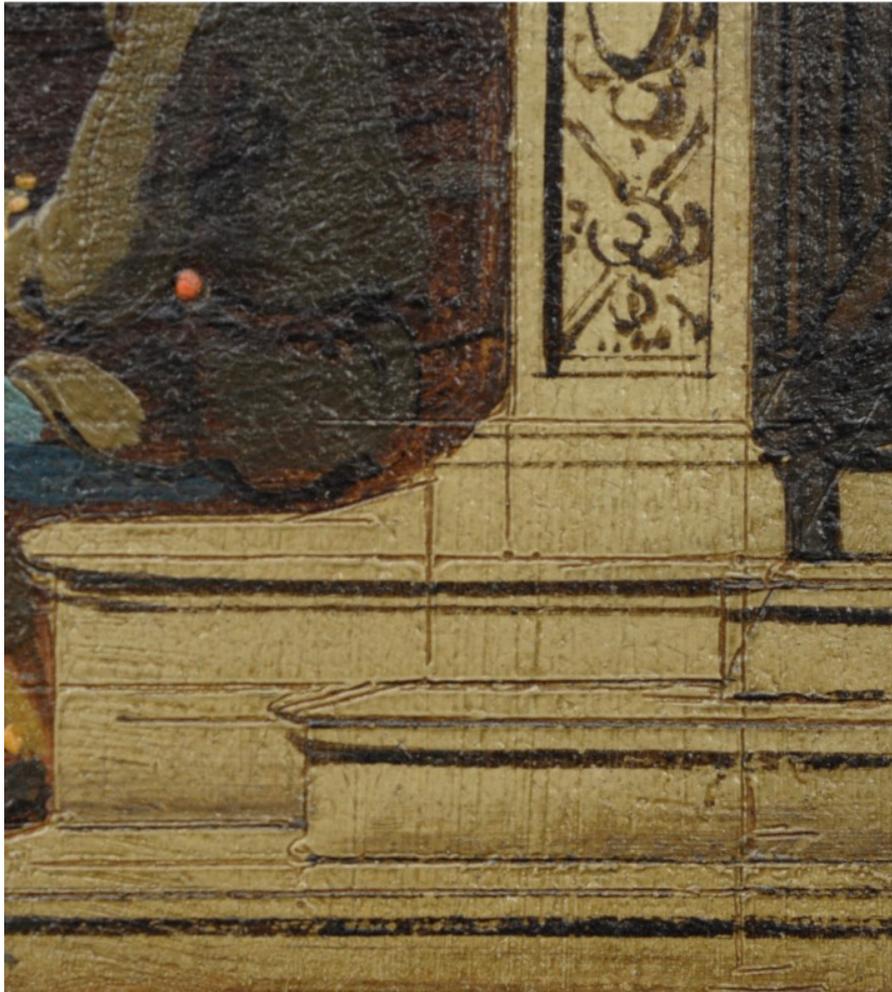
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of buildings in the distance along the River Thames, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (fig. 6), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.7 × 71.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.97)



**Figure 29.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of buildings in the distance along the canal, *A Regatta on the Grand Canal*, circa 1740, oil on canvas, 122.1 × 182.8 cm Digital image courtesy of National Gallery, London, UK (NG4454)

In contrast, the buildings in the distance in *The Thames . . . Looking toward Westminster* are abbreviated despite the small size of the canvas (38.7 x 71.8 cm), which invites the viewer to take an intimate viewing distance. There are no incision lines visible in the paint layer in this area and the outlining in a light grey tone is done with a comparatively large brush for such a small painting.



**Figure 30.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of incision lines on stairs, *Venice: Caprice View of the Courtyard of the Doges' Palace with the Scala dei Giganti*, circa 1744, oil on canvas, 108.2 x 129.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, London, UK. (RCIN 406012)

This example illustrates the efficiency of the painting process during Canaletto's English period. He makes what was a two-step process of incising and outlining into a single step. The abrupt abandoning of incision lines in his English works is especially apparent when compared to the paintings from his last commission in Venice, a series of overdoors for Joseph Smith. In the overdoor series the artist used incision lines extensively to establish the

forms of everything from stairs to architectural details (fig. 30). In his earliest English paintings, approximately two years later, this practice all but disappeared.

A comparison of two views of Greenwich Hospital provides another example of this change. The first view was painted from an engraving by Jean-Baptiste Rigaud shortly before Canaletto came to England (fig. 31).<sup>65</sup> The second, in the National Maritime Museum, was painted during the artist's stay in England, probably before 1750 (fig. 32).<sup>66</sup> The painting from Venice shows the artist's extensive use of incising into the paint layer to establish the perspective and architectural forms of the hospital building (fig. 33). The painting from England has no such incising lines and achieves a similar effect by replacing incising and outlining with black outlining alone (fig. 34).



**Figure 31.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), A View of Greenwich from the River, before 1746, oil on canvas, 59.1 × 94.0 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (L01926)



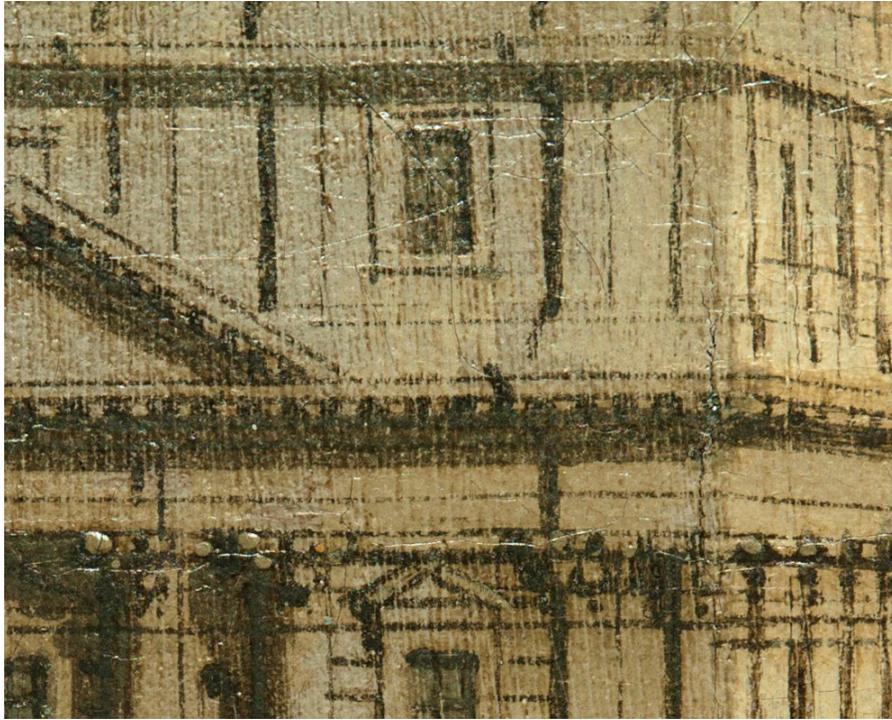
**Figure 32.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames, circa 1750–52, oil on canvas, 68.6 × 106.7 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK (BHC1827)



**Figure 33.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of incision lines on hospital building, *A View of Greenwich from the River* (fig. 31), before 1746, oil on canvas, 59.1 × 94.0 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (L01926)



**Figure 34.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of outlining on hospital building, *Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames* (fig. 32), circa 1750–52, oil on canvas, 68.6 × 106.7 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK (BHC1827)

The impetus for this technical change on paintings quite close in date is difficult to determine with certainty. One possible explanation is that the artist was working without a workshop in England, or perhaps with just one or two assistants, and therefore wanted to make the painting process more immediate. Little is known about Canaletto's workshop in either Venice or England. He had the assistance of his talented nephew Bernardo Bellotto from the mid-1730s until his departure for England, when Bellotto began painting in northern Europe.<sup>67</sup> The master maintained strict control of the output of his workshop and it is therefore very difficult to identify the hand of assistants on the surface of his works.

However, the highly refined detailing of the paintings from the mid-1730s to the first half of the 1740s suggests that he did run a small workshop in Venice where assistants would have been involved in the preparation of canvas and the meticulous repetition of the refining process.<sup>68</sup> The incision lines in *A Regatta on the Grand Canal*, which outline the boundaries of windows, may have functioned to indicate where an assistant could meticulously paint each window.

Further, the earliest paintings, from before Bellotto and other assistants entered the studio, do not have the same extensive incision lines. A painting from Hampton Court, *Venice: the Grand Canal looking North from the Rialto*, was initially painted as part of a series for Joseph Smith in 1726–27 and shows little evidence of this process. However, Smith’s home, which is pictured in the scene, was remodelled in 1751 and Smith asked the artist to rework this area of the painting.<sup>69</sup> This area alone uses incision lines to model the form of the building, suggesting that it was a process he developed while he was painting with assistants (fig. 35).



**Figure 35.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of Consul Smith’s home showing extensive incising, *Venice: the Grand Canal Looking North from the Rialto*, circa 1726–27, oil on canvas, 47.9 × 80.0 cm Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection, Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey, Surrey, UK (RCIN 406017)

Canaletto’s absence from nearly all English eighteenth-century primary sources suggests he was not well integrated into the artistic community in London. He seems to have led a rather isolated existence and was unlikely to have had a large studio. A book by Edward Edwards from 1808 claims that William James “had been a pupil or assistant to Canaletti, while he was in London”.<sup>70</sup> It is unclear what James’s role was in Canaletto’s studio, if indeed he worked closely with the Venetian. He may have been employed to help with such laborious tasks as stretching canvases and grinding pigments, but was probably less involved with the painting. Canaletto’s limited use of assistants while working in England may explain the more immediate painting process that the artist adopted during this period.

## Compositional changes

The confident, free brushwork of Canaletto's English paintings is striking. There is a sense of looseness and experimentation as he approached a new landscape. The pentimenti in these paintings are more visible than in his pre-England works. Such changes are evidence that he felt free to rework his composition as he painted and provide further evidence that the artist was working alone.

Notable changes to the composition during the blocking-out phase are visible in *St Paul's Cathedral*, where the perspective is altered through the lowering of a roof, and the dome and towers of the cathedral are moved slightly to the right (figs. 36, 37, 38). Similar adjustments are visible in the infrared image of *Old Walton Bridge* where the pitch of the bridge is lowered and the house in the foreground is made larger (figs. 39, 40, 41). In *Warwick Castle* changes are made to the direction of the footbridge (figs. 42, 43, 44) and to the church and houses in the background village (figs. 45, 46, 47). Smaller changes are visible on *Westminster Bridge* where the domes of the bridge are adjusted to achieve the desired perspective.



**Figure 36.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes during the blocking-out phase, infrared image, *St Paul's Cathedral* (fig. 3), circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 37.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), St Paul's Cathedral, circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95)

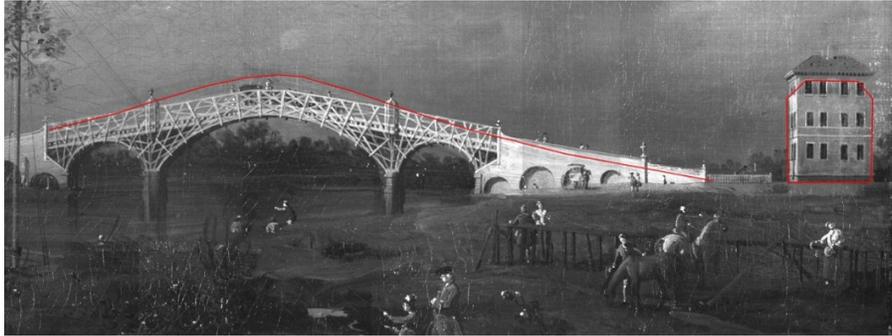


**Figure 38b.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), St Paul's Cathedral, circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95)

**Figure 38a.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes during the blocking-out phase, infrared image, *St Paul's Cathedral* (fig. 3), circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 39.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes during the blocking out phase, infrared image, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 40.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of bridge, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86)



**Figure 41a.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes during the blocking out phase, infrared image, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86)  
Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

**Figure 41b.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of bridge, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86)



**Figure 42.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes to footbridge, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748–49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 43.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of footbridge, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748–49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2)



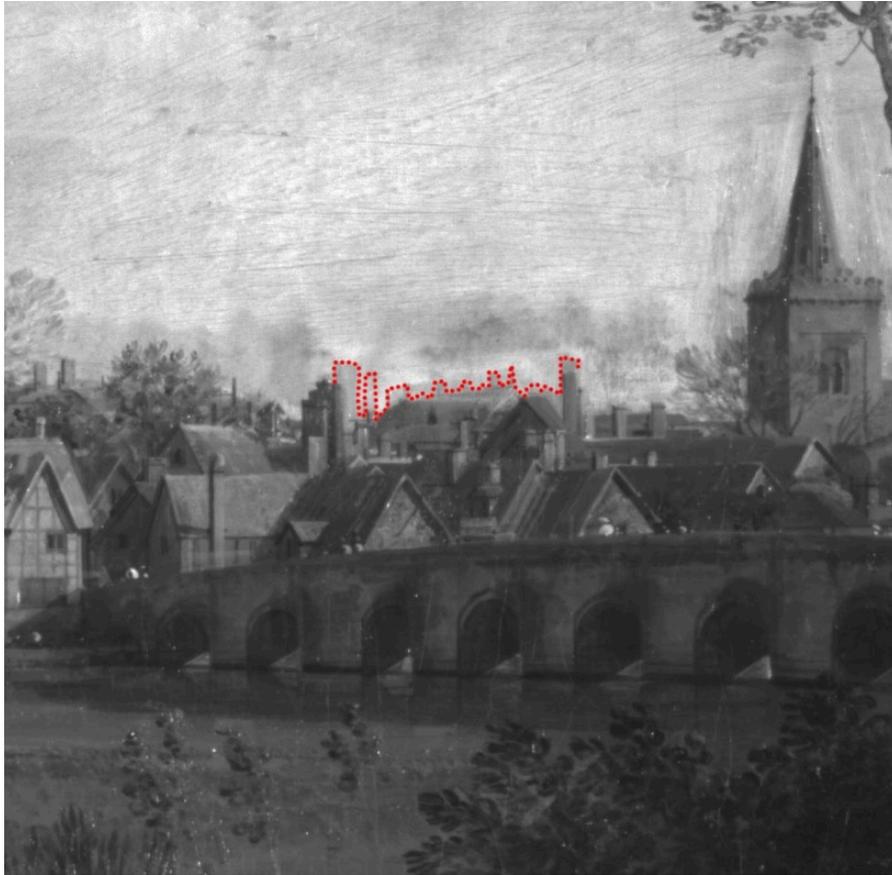
**Figure 44a.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes to footbridge, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748-49, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 119.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 44b.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of footbridge, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748-49, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 119.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2)



**Figure 45.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes to village buildings, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4), 1748-49, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 119.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 46.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Details of village buildings, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748–49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2)



**Figure 47a.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Diagram of changes to village buildings, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4), 1748–49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

**Figure 47b.**

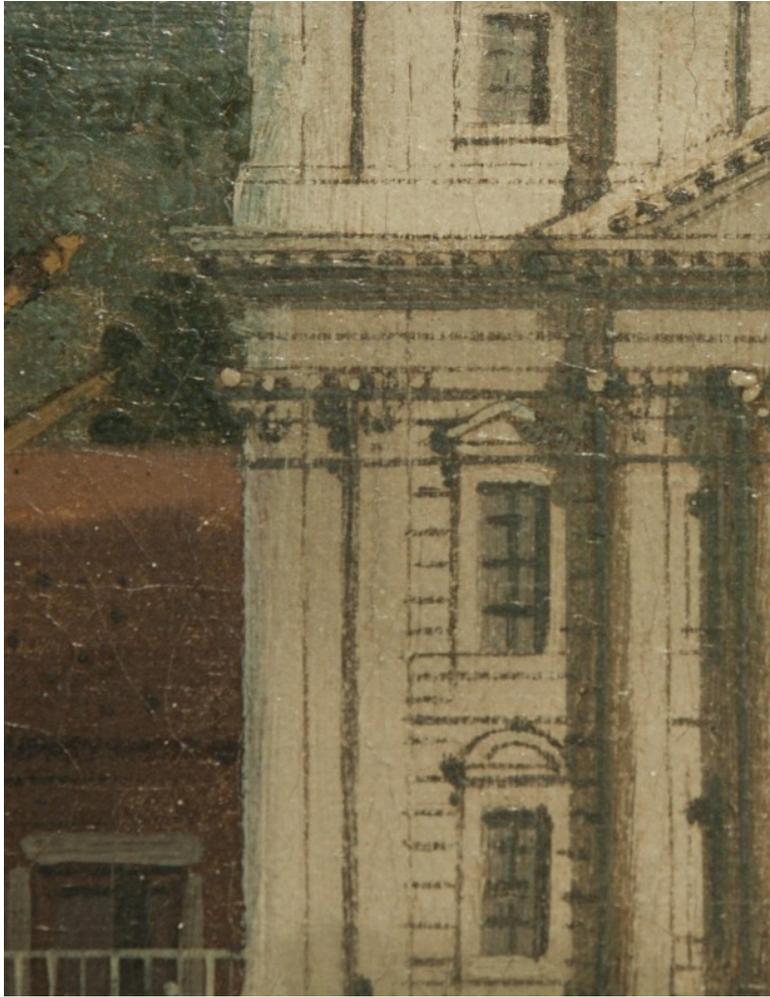
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Details of village buildings, infrared image, *Warwick Castle* (fig. 4) 1748–49, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 119.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1994.18.2)

Additionally, the artist frequently adjusted the edges of buildings, moving them slightly in one direction or another. Much like in his Venetian works, he would first block in the sky, leaving a reserve for the prominent elements of the composition. However, after blocking in the buildings, foreground, and water, it seems he would sometimes then go back and extend the edges of the buildings to create crisp forms. This type of reworking is visible on *St Paul's Cathedral* (fig. 48) and *Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames* (fig. 49), and shows the artist was freely moving around the canvas as he worked, assessing and reassessing the compositional arrangement.



**Figure 48.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of adjustment of edge of building, *St Paul's Cathedral* (fig. 3), circa 1754, oil on canvas, 52.1 × 61.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.95)



**Figure 49.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of adjustment of edge of building, *Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames* (fig. 34), circa 1750–52, oil on canvas, 68.6 × 106.7 cm  
Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK (BHC1827)

## **A changing palette**

### **Application of colour**

Canaletto's palette is often described as typical of the eighteenth century. Technical studies of the artist's Venetian palette have identified a consistent range of pigments including Prussian blue, lead white, charcoal black, bone black, Naples yellow, ochre and umber earth pigments, vermilion, red lead, <sup>71</sup> red lake, and green earth. <sup>72</sup> However, the way the artist mixed and applied his colour was very specific and his manipulation of materials exquisitely precise.

Canaletto is known to be an early adopter of Prussian blue.<sup>73</sup> In a letter from 1725, Alessandro Marchesini wrote to Stefano Conti to explain why Canaletto was delayed in finishing Conti's commission, and cites the inability to procure large quantities of that artist's preferred blue pigment due to its high cost.<sup>74</sup> This has been construed as procrastination on the part of the artist or a ploy to demand more money. However, as Bomford and Finaldi argue, it is very possible that in 1725 obtaining large quantities of Prussian blue would have been difficult.<sup>75</sup> What is more, Canaletto's willingness to delay a commission in order to obtain his choice material illustrates the artist's specificity in his pigment selection.



**Figure 50.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of figure with yellow buttons, *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's* (fig. 5), circa 1750, oil on canvas, 38.6 × 72.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1976.7.96)

Canaletto's deliberate application of yellow further exemplifies this precision. In *The Thames . . . Looking toward St Paul's*, the golden yellow vest of a man standing on the terrace is painted with yellow ochre, but the sparkling highlights on his buttons are articulated with the addition of the Naples yellow, a brighter, more vibrant yellow pigment (fig. 50). Rather than simply adding white to the yellow ochre to create a highlight, the Naples yellow

functions to imitate gold buttons. A splash of yellow in the distance, on the top of the dome of St Paul's, also contains a high proportion of Naples yellow and draws the eye to this feature in the distance.<sup>76</sup>

Bomford and Roy observed a similar use of Naples yellow and yellow ochre in the *Stone Mason's Yard*, from about 1725, and *The Feast Day of S. Roch*, from about 1735.<sup>77</sup> Pure Naples yellow was found to be used unmixed for the touches of colour on clothing and highlights on buildings.<sup>78</sup> In *San Simone Piccolo*, the mid-yellow drape in the window of a building was identified as pure Naples yellow, while the decoration on the barge was painted in a mix of yellow ochre and Naples yellow.<sup>79</sup> In her technical study, Pamela England identified the deliberate use of "all the readily available red pigments, sometimes mixed together in varying proportions or used along with white".<sup>80</sup>

### **The implications of changing pigments**

Canaletto's use of colour is one the most engaging aspects of his paintings. His Venetian views are easily recognized by their wide-open expanses of blue sky and sparkling blue-green water separated by carefully articulated dusty buildings. The series of Venetian views commissioned by Lord John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford, on his Grand Tour to Venice in 1731, exemplifies the consistent colour mixtures of Canaletto's pre-England period.<sup>81</sup> Twenty-one of the twenty-four paintings, in the collection of the current Duke of Bedford, hang in the dining room at Woburn Abbey. While stunning, observing so many of the artist's canvases in a domestic space emphasizes their tonal repetition.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the artist's system of colour mixing was so well established by the late 1720s that the colour combinations in the paintings from the following decade appear somewhat formulaic.<sup>83</sup>

When he came to England, Canaletto was faced with a different landscape. The lush green hillsides illuminated by diffuse light stood in sharp contrast to the bright sun and dusty streets of Venice. Changes to the artist's palette are apparent in the mixtures of colour, particularly in his approaches to painting water and foliage. Perhaps the most significant change is the introduction of the copper-containing blue verditer as a replacement for the vibrant green earth pigments that were not readily available in England.

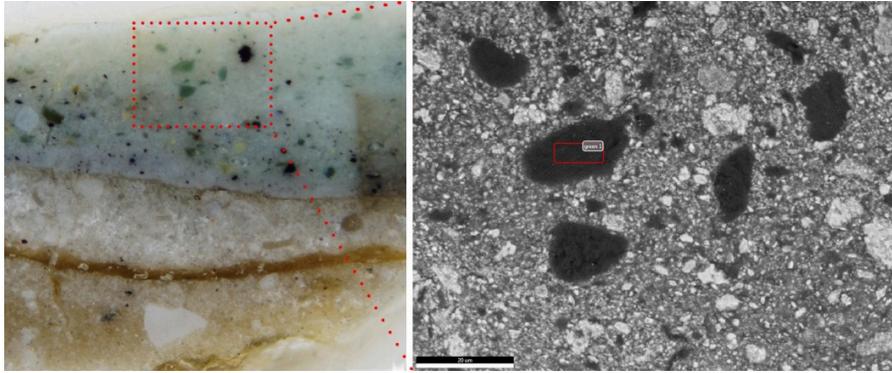
It is generally held that upon arrival in England Canaletto did not have commissions secured and thus he went about attempting to procure work.<sup>84</sup> The completion of *Westminster Bridge* (fig. 1) is cited as one of the reasons for Canaletto's travel to England.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Vertue tells us that the artist

was persuaded to go to London by Jacopo Amigoni, who had recently returned to Venice.<sup>86</sup> Amigoni enticed Canaletto by telling him “of the prospects he might make of Views of the Thames”.<sup>87</sup>

Charles Beddington has argued that the provenance of *Westminster Bridge*, sold by John Carpenter Garnier from the collection of Rookesbury Park in 1895, suggests that the painting had been housed in the Garnier family collection since the time of George Garnier (1703–1763) and was likely commissioned by him.<sup>88</sup> George Garnier probably ordered three Venetian views from Canaletto while in Venice during the first half of the 1740s.<sup>89</sup> In 1745–46, shortly before his departure to England, Canaletto painted the final painting in the Garnier commission, *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day, with the Bucintoro* (fig. 24).<sup>90</sup> Beddington suggests that Canaletto may have also had a request from Garnier to paint the new *Westminster Bridge* and that it was this commission that brought the artist to England.<sup>91</sup>

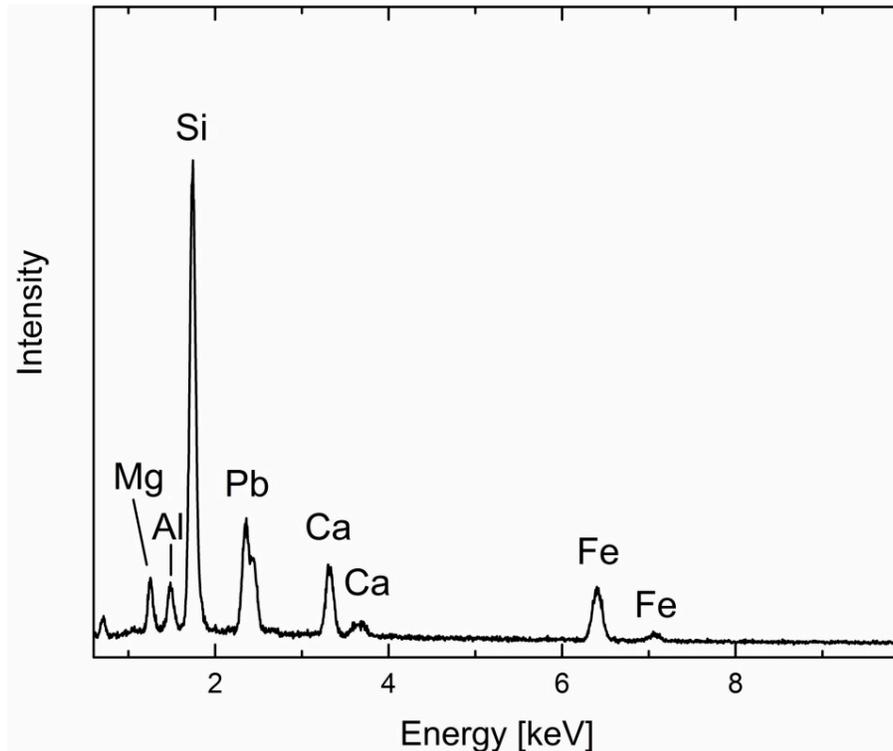
Technical study of *Westminster Bridge* has revealed supporting evidence for this theory. When compared to Canaletto’s other English paintings, *Westminster Bridge* stands apart. Indeed, the work has long been criticized for its decorative qualities and regarded as a product of Canaletto’s tendency to paint England like Venice.<sup>92</sup> While the paint handling does not closely relate to the artist’s Venetian style, the colour combinations do.

X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) analysis of the pigments in the blue-green water from the Venetian scene, *The Molo from the Bacino di San Marco on Ascension Day*, identified the presence of iron and the absence of copper.<sup>93</sup> This suggests that the vibrant blue-green water was achieved through a mixture of predominantly blue-green earth pigments. The same combination has been found in other studies of Canaletto’s Venetian painting.<sup>94</sup>



**Figure 51.**

Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of cross-section showing blue-green particle, visual light (left), SEM backscattered image (r, *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (fig. 1), 1747, oil on canvas, 95.9 × 127.6 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. (B1976.7.94) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber

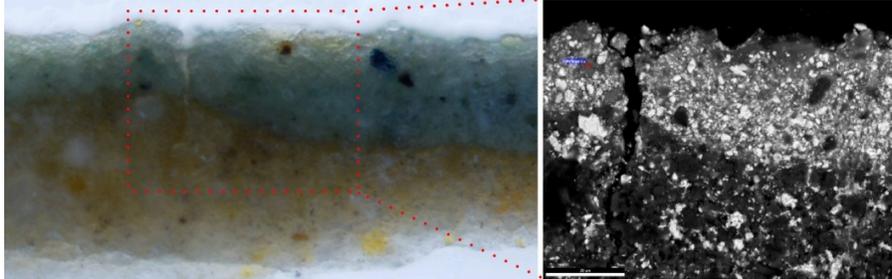


**Figure 52.**

EDX spectrum of blue-green particle 1, showing peaks for iron (Fe), silicon (Si), aluminium (Al), magnesium (Mg), and potassium (K) but no copper (Cu) Digital image courtesy of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH)

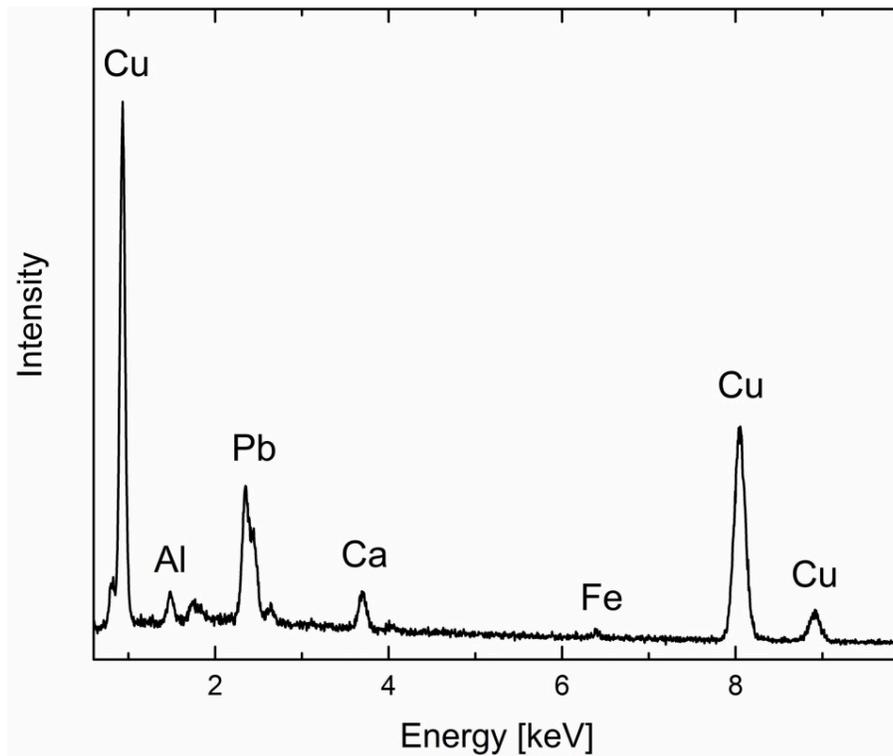
Cross-section samples in combination with XRF analysis of *Westminster Bridge* found the blues and greens of the water, foliage, and boats to be consistent with the pigment combinations of Canaletto's Venetian palette. <sup>95</sup>

Unlike the other works in the YCBA collection, *Westminster Bridge* contains no copper blue pigments. Rather, much like the artist's Venetian paintings, the water in *Westminster Bridge* is composed of blue-green earth particles, lead white, bone black, and Naples yellow (figs. 51, 52). It is also possible that some Prussian blue was added, but this could not be confirmed using Energy Dispersive X-ray (EDX) or XRF analysis.<sup>96</sup>



**Figure 53.**

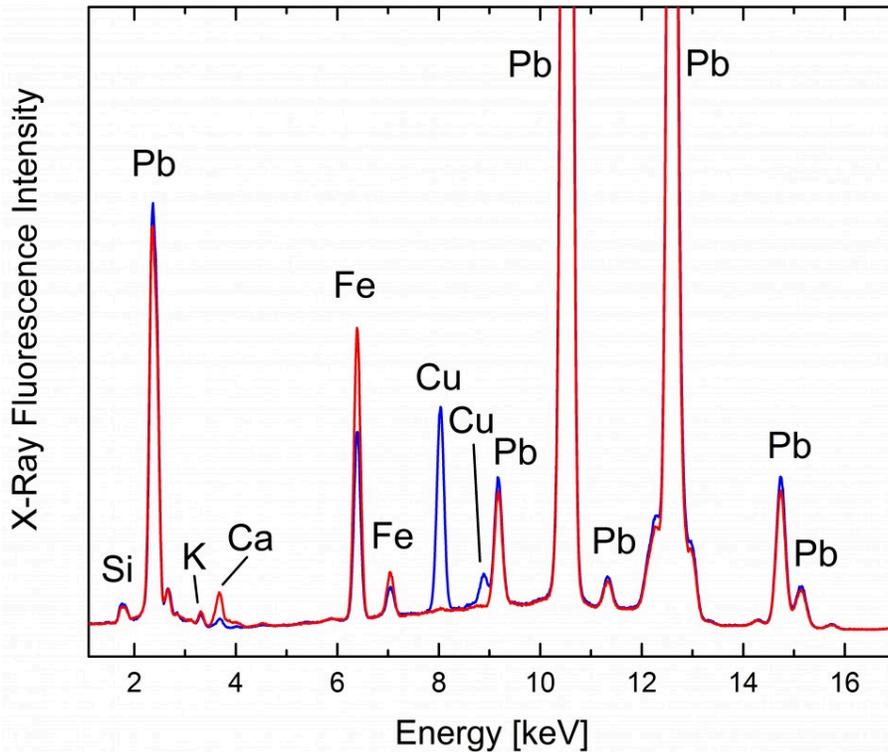
Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), Detail of cross-section showing light blue particle, visual light (l), SEM backscattered image (r), *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), 1755, oil on canvas, 46 × 122.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (B1981.25.86) Digital image courtesy of Roxane Sperber



**Figure 54.**

EDX spectrum of blue-green particle 1, showing peaks for copper Cu  
Digital image courtesy of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH)

Contrastingly, a cross-section of the water in Canaletto's last English painting, *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 2), is composed primarily of blue verditer and lead white with a small amount of bone black (figs. 53, 54). The visual effect of this change of pigments is not that dramatic. Canaletto succeeds in achieving his signature blue-green water, but does so using very different pigments (see fig. 55 for comparison of XRF spectra).



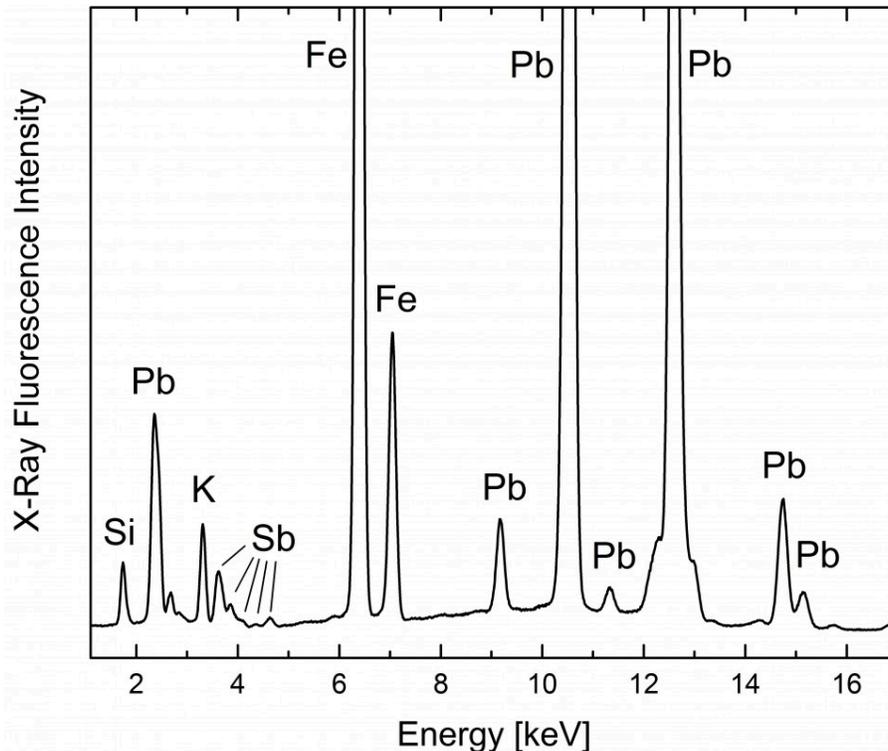
**Figure 55.**

Comparison of X-ray fluorescence spectra of water passages in *Westminster Bridge* (blue line), The spectra are very similar and dominated by the lead (Pb) peaks generated by the presence of lead white (basic lead carbonate). Other elements detected in both measurements are iron (Fe), calcium (Ca), potassium (K), and silicon (Si). Copper (Cu) only appears in *Old Walton Bridge* suggesting the presence of a copper-based blue such as verditer. Westminster Bridge contains more iron in the measured locations which is consistent with additional iron-based pigment such as green earth. Digital image courtesy of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH)

Given the consistency with which Canaletto used blue-green earth pigments to paint the canals of Venice, and that he uses the same pigment in his first London view, it is unlikely that the artist would willingly abandon this pigment. Rather, Canaletto probably came to England with the pigments required to paint his first commission, Garnier's depiction of Westminster Bridge, but soon ran out of his precious blue-green earth.

Eighteenth-century customs records reveal that green earth pigments were not widely available in England at this time, although the pigment was growing in popularity.<sup>97</sup> What was available was described by Dossie as blue-green in colour, but not very bright, and semi-transparent in oil.<sup>98</sup>

Without access to the vibrant blue-green earths from Venice, Canaletto would have felt it necessary to supplement his pigment box. The addition of blue verditer can thus be explained as an effort to supplement and enrich his range of colours.



**Figure 56.**

X-ray fluorescence spectrum of foliage in *Westminster Bridge*. The presence of lead (Pb), iron (Fe), silicon (Si), potassium (K), and antimony (Sb) suggests a pigment combination of lead white (basic lead carbonate), earths, and Naples yellow (lead antimonite). Digital image courtesy of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (IPCH)

Consistency in the pigment combination with Canaletto's Venetian paintings can also be found in the areas of foliage in *Westminster Bridge*. No other cross-sections were taken, but XRF analysis revealed peaks for lead, iron, antimony, potassium, and silicon (see [fig. 56](#) for XRF spectra). Although it is impossible to say for certain without a cross-section, this suggests that the foliage was painted using a combination of lead white, green earth, and Naples yellow.

A sample from an area of green grass in the *Stone Mason's Yard* found this same combination of pigments. Similarly, this combination was found in a swag over the church door in *The Feast Day of S. Roch.*<sup>99</sup> Although not confirmed by elemental analysis, a visually similar example of this pigment combination can be found in a cross-section sample (fig. 7) from *Venice: the Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore* (fig. 20). In fact, studies from the artist's Venetian palette found the only green pigment present in paintings to be a vibrant green earth composed of the mineral glauconite.<sup>100</sup>

Even in comparison to green earth of the early Italian period, the green earth found in Canaletto's Venetian painting was extremely powerful in tone.<sup>101</sup>

This vibrant pigment seems to be a feature of Italian paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leading Bomford and Roy to conclude that improved supplies would have been available to Italian artists by the seventeenth century.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, the most famous historical source for this pigment is near Verona.<sup>103</sup>

The extensive mining practices of this region, as well as the many colour varieties of rock, are discussed in an article from 1820 by Giovanni de Brignoli de Brunnhoff.<sup>104</sup> Brignoli de Brunnhoff argues that the earliest mention of the substance was from 1574, when Mercati describes the substance called *creta verdis, acris, lapidosa, ex agro Veronensi* in the Vatican catalogue.<sup>105</sup> Brignoli de Brunnhoff's assertion that Veronese mines were in existence by 1574 would explain why the green earth pigments of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian painting are more vibrant than those of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian works.

Regardless, the pigments used to create passages of green in Canaletto's Venetian period sharply contrast with the pigments found in green areas of his English paintings. Cross-section samples from the grass in *Warwick Castle* (fig. 12) and *Old Walton Bridge* (fig. 13) revealed complicated mixtures of green earth, copper-containing blue verditer, iron-earth ochres which are yellow and orange in colour, black, lead white, and vermilion.

The green earth pigments in these mixtures are duller in colour than the green earths in the Venetian paintings. Canaletto's addition of yellow earths and blue verditer was probably an effort to enrich the appearance of the dull green earth pigments. The addition of vermilion to mixtures of green would have allowed the artist to achieve varying tones of greenish-brown. Such variety would have been necessary for painting the English landscape with its wide variety of green hues.

## **Conclusion**

From a technical point of view, the changes to Canaletto's painting technique while working in England can be seen as a reaction to a range of influences. He likely regarded the availability of commercially prepared canvas with a light ground as a convenience in his new city, and immediately began to use this material. Meanwhile, the dearth of a wide range of green earth pigments was an obstacle he remedied through the introduction of a new blue pigment.

Technical changes were also made as a reaction to painting in a new environment with different commercial demands and a smaller studio. He appears to have simplified his paint application process, taking on a more immediate approach, and was apt to alter and change his composition during the painting process, probably as a reaction to painting without the aid of assistants.

This geographical relocation, and the implications that came with it, led to a changing aesthetic that was not always well received. While technical changes to the artist's ground, palette, and painting process result in a different aesthetic from his much-beloved Venetian views, this period was one of experimentation and evolution for the well-established Canaletto.

Freed from the overwhelming market pressures of tourists to Venice, he was able to explore a new landscape. Canaletto's English paintings provide us with a fascinating glimpse into the essence of the artist's method and his continued willingness to adapt and change. To view these works as of lesser quality is to miss the most appealing aspect of their nature, the immediacy and confidence of an artist with great technical skill and a penchant for experimentation.

## **Appendix**

### **X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF)**

X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy is a nondestructive analytical technique for elemental analysis. The fluorescence is excited by X-rays and the X-ray emission spectrum is characteristic for the chemical elements present.

A Bruker Artax XRF spectrometer equipped with a rhodium X-ray tube was used. The area of examination was flushed with helium gas to improve the detection efficiency of lighter elements. The measurements were run at 45 kV, 300  $\mu$ A, for 120 seconds.

## **Scanning electron microscopy—energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM/EDX)**

Scanning electron microscopy uses a focused electron beam to interact with a sample and has a higher resolving power compared to optical microscopy. A backscatter image is generated by recording electrons scattered off the surface. The contrast is based on the interactions with different chemical elements. Heavy, high atomic number elements, for example lead, scatter more and appear lighter in the image; low atomic number elements appear darker. The interaction of the electron beam with the sample also generates fluorescence X-rays which are characteristic for the chemical elements present, similar to XRF.

A Zeiss EVO MA 15 variable-pressure SEM equipped with a tungsten filament emission system was used for imaging at chamber pressures between 40 and 60 Pa, achieved by bleeding nitrogen gas into the chamber. Backscattered electron images were acquired with four quadrants of a lens-mounted five-channel diode-based detector. Elemental analysis was performed using an EDAX energy-dispersive X-ray spectrometer with an Octane silicon drift detector. The analysis was carried out at an 8.5 mm working distance, using 20 or 22 kV accelerating potential.

## **Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR)**

Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy is an analytical technique that is used to identify a variety of materials including binding media, pigments, and fillers in paint. It detects vibrations of atomic groups in molecules. The set of vibrations are characteristic for a specific compound.

Samples were flattened on a diamond window and measured in transmission using a Thermo Continuum infrared microscope coupled to a Nicolet 6700 bench-top spectrometer. A liquid nitrogen-cooled mercury cadmium telluride detector recorded the spectrum between 4000 and 650  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  at 4  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  resolution. Results were examined and compared to spectral reference libraries.

## **Raman spectroscopy**

Raman spectroscopy records the wavelength and intensity of light that is inelastically scattered from a sample. The wavelength shifts between the laser excitation and the scattered light corresponds to the energies of Raman active vibrations of molecular compounds present which serve as a signature in their identification.

A Bruker Senterra Raman spectrometer was used to acquire spectra with excitations at 532 nm, 633 nm, and 785 nm at 2 mW nominal laser power. Spectra were examined and compared with reference data.

## Footnotes

- 1 George Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books: Volume III", *The Walpole Society* 22 (1933-34): 130.
- 2 The exact date that Canaletto left England is uncertain, but he was back in Venice by 12 Dec. 1755. Charles Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England: A Venetian Artist Abroad, 1746-1755* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), 9-10.
- 3 M. J. H. Liversidge, "Canaletto and England", in *Canaletto & England*, ed. Michael Liversidge and Jane Farrington (London: Merrell Holberton in association with Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1993), 9.
- 4 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 130.
- 5 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 149.
- 6 This rumour was reported by Vertue in 1749. Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 149.
- 7 Vertue writes: "young stripling by degrees came on forward in his profession being taken notice of for his improvements he was calld Canaletti- the young, but in time getting some degree of merit. he being puffd up disoblighd his Uncle who turnd him adrift, but well Imitating his uncles manner of painting became reputed and the name of Canaletti was in-differently used by both uncle and nephew." Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 151.
- 8 For full discussion of this, see Hilda F. Finberg, "Canaletto in England", *The Walpole Society* 9 (1920-21): 33.
- 9 Liversidge, "Canaletto and England", 10, and Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 21. Jacopo Amigoni faced similar resentment from English artists who attempted to publicly discredit him. Leslie Griffin Hennessey, "Friends Serving Itinerant Muses: Jacopo Amigoni and Farinelli in Europe", in *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Shearer West (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 38.
- 10 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 9.
- 11 Brian Allen, "The London Art World of the Mid-Eighteenth Century", in *Canaletto in England: A Venetian Artist Abroad, 1746-1755*, ed. Charles Beddington (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), 32.
- 12 E. W. Bradley, *The work of the Late Edward Dayes . . .* (London: T. Maiden, 1805), 322.
- 13 Giuseppe Fiocco, *Venetian Painting of the Seicento and Settecento* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 65.
- 14 W. G. Constable, revised by J. G. Links, *Canaletto: Giovanni Antonio Canal*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 1:139.
- 15 Viola Pemberton-Pigott has conducted the most thorough technical examination of Canaletto's painting over his career. Viola Pemberton-Pigott, "The Development of Canaletto's Painting Technique", in *Canaletto*, ed. Katharine Baetjer and J. G. Links (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 53-64. For information on Canaletto's Venetian technique, see David Bomford and Gabriele Finaldi, "Technique and Style of Canaletto Paintings", in *Venice through Canaletto's Eyes* (London: National Gallery, 1998).
- 16 No technical studies have hitherto focused on Canaletto's English period. For technical literature on his Venetian painting, with cursory study of his English period, see Pamela England, "An Account of Canaletto's Painting Technique", in *Canaletto Paintings and Drawings in the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 1980-81* (London, 1980), 27-28; David Bomford and Ashok Roy, "Canaletto's 'Venice: The Feastday of S. Roch'", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 6 (1982): 40-43; Ludovico Mucchi and Alberto Bertuzzi, *Nella Profondita' dei Dipinti: La Radiografia nell'Indagine Pittorica* (Milan: Electa, 1983); Keith Laing, "Canaletto: *Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo*", in *The First Ten Years: The Examination and Conservation of Paintings, 1977 to 1987*, *Bulletin of the Hamilton Kerr Institute* 1 (1988): 96-98; Pemberton-Pigott, "Development of Canaletto's Painting Technique", 53-64; David Bomford and Ashok Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 14 (1993): 34-41; Bomford and Finaldi, *Venice through Canaletto's Eyes*, 54-61; Viola Pemberton-Pigott, "Canaletto 'prima maniera': Tradizione e innovazione nelle tecniche pittoriche degli esordi di Canaletto", in *Canaletto Prima Maniera*, ed. Anna Kowalczyk Bożena (Milan: Electa, 2001), 207-17; and Elise Effmann, "View of the *Molo*: A Canaletto Attribution Reinstated", in *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, ed. New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, Conservation Center (London: Archetype, 2006), 189-95.
- 17 The YCBA paintings studied were: *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (B1976.7.94), *Old Walton Bridge* (B1981.25.86), *St Paul's Cathedral* (B1976.7.95), *Warwick Castle* (B1994.18.2), *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's* (B1976.7.96), and *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (B1976.7.97).
- 18 Pemberton-Pigott, "Development of Canaletto's Painting", 63.
- 19 Rica Jones, "The Artist's Training and Techniques", in *Manners & Morals: Hogarth and British Painting, 1700-1760*, ed. Elizabeth Einberg (London: Tate Gallery, 1988), 24.
- 20 Thomas Bardwell, *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy . . .* (London: S. Richardson, 1756), 5-6, <http://archive.org/details/practiceofpainti00bard>.

- 21 Rica Jones, "Gainsborough's Materials and Methods: A 'Remarkable Ability to Make Paint Sparkle'", *Apollo* 146 (1997): 19.
- 22 Rica Jones, "Thomas Gainsborough: The Rev. John Chafy Playing the Violoncello in a Landscape, c. 1750-2", in *Paint and Purpose: A Study of Technique in British Art*, ed. Stephen Hackney, Rica Jones, and Joyce Townsend (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), 48.
- 23 *The Excellency of the pen and pencil . . .* (London: Thomas Ratcliff and Thomas Daniel for Dorman Newman and Richard Jones, 1668), 92, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/gri.ark:/13960/t3cz46h2c>.
- 24 Robert Dossie, *The Handmaid to the Arts*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: Printed for J. Nourse, 1764), 217, <http://archive.org/details/handmaidtoarts01doss>.
- 25 EDX analysis of cross-sections from *The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward St Paul's, Old Walton Bridge*, and *Warwick Castle* found elements to suggest the ground was composed primarily of lead white and calcium carbonate (chalk) with small amounts of iron earth pigments (yellow and red in colour) and carbon black. *Warwick Castle* also contained small amounts of manganese suggesting the inclusion of an umber pigment. *Westminster Bridge, with the Lord Mayor's Procession on the Thames* (B1976.7.94) was composed of lead white and calcium carbonate (chalk) with small amounts of carbon black but no earth pigments. *St Paul's Cathedral and The Thames from the Terrace of Somerset House, Looking toward Westminster* (B1976.7.97) were not analysed using EDX, but are visually consistent with the other paintings.
- 26 This study examined the six painting from the YCBA collection as well as *Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames* from the National Maritime Museum, London. The *Interior of the Rotunda, Ranelagh* from the National Gallery, London, is also described in the conservation file as having a "light ground". Pemberton-Pigott has found that *London: Westminster Abbey with a Procession of Knights of the Order of the Bath*, in the collection of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, also has a grey ground. Pemberton-Pigott, "Development of Canaletto's Painting", 63, note 12.
- 27 Pemberton-Pigott, "Canaletto 'prima maniera'", 209.
- 28 Engravings after the YCBA paintings were made by Edward Rooker and Johann Sebastian Müller and published on 20 Aug. 1750. Both are inscribed "Canaletto Pinx<sup>t</sup> in the Collection of M<sup>r</sup>. Tho<sup>s</sup> West". Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 62-63.
- 29 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 67.
- 30 I will use the term *imprimatura* to refer to a paint layer that was applied over the commercially prepared ground by the artist.
- 31 Pemberton-Pigott, "Canaletto 'prima maniera'", 217, note 8.
- 32 The other three paintings had their tacking margins removed during the lining process.
- 33 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), 447.
- 34 Jones, "Artist's Training and Techniques", 24.
- 35 Quoted in William T. Whitley, *Artists and their Friends in England, 1700-1799*, 2 vols. (London: Medici Society, 1928), 1:332.
- 36 Laughton Osborne, *Handbook of Young Artists and Amateurs in Oil Painting* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1876), 114.
- 37 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 151. There is a blue plaque marking the home of Canaletto at 41 Beak Street.
- 38 Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 15.
- 39 Jacob Simon's encyclopedic directory of British arts suppliers lists ten colourmen in operation in London during Canaletto's ten-year stay. Matthew Bateman, David Bellis, William De La Cour, William Dicker, Nathan Drake, Alexander Emerton & Co, Robert Keating, Edward Powell Jr., James Regnier, and Lawrence Smith were located within walking distance of Silver Street. Walking times are estimated using a map of current day London and Google walking directions. Jacob Simon, "British Artists' Suppliers, 1650-1950", National Portrait Gallery website last updated March 2016: <http://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/directory-of-suppliers.php>.
- 40 Martina Manfredi, "Jacopo Amigoni: A Venetian Painter in Georgian London", *The Burlington Magazine* 147 (2005): 677.
- 41 Manfredi, "Jacopo Amigoni", 677.
- 42 Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London*, 92.
- 43 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 151.
- 44 Bożena Anna Kowalczyk, *Canaletto: Rome, Londres, Venise: Le triumphe de la Lumière* (Brussels: Fonds Mercator, 2015), 50-55.
- 45 Effmann, "View of the Molo", 190.
- 46 Cross-section samples show that during this early period Canaletto occasionally applied a light *imprimatura* over the dark red ground to selected areas of the sky, buildings, or water. England, "Canaletto's Painting Technique", 27.

- 47 These paintings must date from before 1726–28 when the crowning element of the campanile was altered from conical to onion shape. See “Venice: The Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore”, The Royal Collection Trust: <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/401036/venice-the-piazzetta-towards-s-giorgio-maggiore>.
- 48 Joseph Smith was named the British Consul in Venice from 1744. “Venice: The Piazzetta towards S. Giorgio Maggiore”, The Royal Collection Trust: <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/401036/venice-the-piazzetta-towards-s-giorgio-maggiore>.
- 49 Claire Chorley, paintings conservator at the Royal Collection, first brought this technical aspect of this painting to the authors’ attention.
- 50 Pemberton-Pigott, “Development of Canaletto’s Painting”, 63.
- 51 Bomford and Finaldi, *Venice through Canaletto’s Eyes*, 55.
- 52 Bomford and Finaldi, *Venice through Canaletto’s Eyes*, 55.
- 53 The Canaletto paintings from the Royal Collection that are housed at Hampton Court display many of his earliest techniques, but also exhibit technical elements he would develop as he progressed.
- 54 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 18.
- 55 Waldemar Januszczak, “Forget Venice. London brought the best out of Canaletto”, *The Sunday Times*, 28 Jan. 2007.
- 56 J. G. Links, *Canaletto and his Patrons* (London: Paul Elek, 1977), 45–46.
- 57 This was the case with the paintings studied at the YCBA. See also Pemberton-Pigott, “Canaletto ‘prima maniera’”, 215.
- 58 It should be noted that several studies of Bernardo Bellotto’s painting have found evidence of underdrawing and squaring up. For this, see Bettina Schwabe, “Vanishing Point and Grid of Threads: *Nymphenburg Palace from the Park*—The Construction of the Picture”, and Bożena Anna Kowalczyk, “Bernardo Bellotto as Landscape Painter”, both in *Canaletto: Bernardo Bellotto Paints Europe*, ed. Andreas Schumacher (Munich: Hirmer, 2014), 334–43 and 72–95 respectively. Because Bellotto was trained by Canaletto, and uses many of his pictorial techniques, it is Kowalczyk’s belief that Canaletto also used underdrawing. Personal communication with Bożena Anna Kowalczyk, April 2015.
- 59 Effmann, “*View of the Molo*”, 190. *View of the Molo* is in the Colombia Museum of Art (CMA 1954.44).
- 60 Effmann, “*View of the Molo*”, 190.
- 61 It was Claire Chorley who first pointed out this aspect of the artist’s work and suggested this possibility.
- 62 Canaletto’s drawings from his notebooks are very loose and sketchy and were probably made on site. It seems that these sketches were then used to make more finished drawings complete with shading. Finished drawings appear to have been used to show clients. Hilda Finberg argues that Thomas Hollis chose the subject of six paintings he commissioned, including *St Paul’s Cathedral*, from the artist’s drawings. Finberg, “Canaletto in England”, 41. Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi, writing in 1753, also notes that Canaletto brought finished sketches of views of London when he returned to Venice in 1750–51, in order to translate the drawings onto canvas. Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi, *Abecedario pittorico del M.R.P.* (Venezia: Apresso Giambatista Pasquali, 1753), 76, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/gri.ark:/13960/t5s78556z>. Another example of a finished work that was probably used as a reference for a painting is *Old Somerset House from the River Thames* from the YCBA collection (B1977.14.6111). Beddington argues that refinements in the painting demonstrate that the artist was working from the drawing. See Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 75. Other finished drawings were made after paintings and then used by an engraver. The drawing *Old Walton Bridge*, from the YCBA collection (B1981.25.2409), was made after the painting by the same title (fig. 2). An inscription on the drawing by Canaletto reads: “Disegnato da me Antonio Canal detto il Canaletto appresso il mio Quadro Dipinto in Londra 1755”, which makes clear the fact that the drawing was made after the painting. An engraving by Anthony Walker, also in the YCBA collection, was published in 1750.
- 63 For studies by other authors regarding order of painting, see England, “Canaletto’s Painting Technique”, 27; Pemberton-Pigott, “Development of Canaletto’s Painting”, 63; and Laing, “Canaletto: *Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo*”, 96.
- 64 James Taylor, *Marine Painting: Images of Sail, Sea and Shore* (London: Studio Editions, 1995), 52.
- 65 Jane Dacey, “A Note on Canaletto’s Views of Greenwich”, *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981): 486.
- 66 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 50.
- 67 Constable and Links, *Canaletto*, 1:117.
- 68 Mucchi and Kowalczyk suggest that Canaletto was using a larger workshop than just Bellotto when working in Venice. Mucchi and Bertuzzi, *Nella Profondita’ dei Dipinti*, 63, and Bożena Anna Kowalczyk, “Canaletto e Bellotto: l’arte della veduta”, in *Canaletto e Bellotto L’arte della veduta*, ed. Bożena Anna Kowalczyk (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2008), 13. *Pentimenti* in Canaletto’s earliest works has led Elise Effmann to conclude that he did not use a workshop at that point in his career. Effmann, “*View of the Molo*”, 193–94.
- 69 Martin Clayton, *Canaletto in Venice* (London: Royal Collection, 2005), 44.
- 70 Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters who Have Resided or Been Born in England* (London: Leigh and Sotheby, 1808), 27, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4422792>. Although Edwards is vague about James’s role in Canaletto’s studio, this early primary source suggests it may indeed be true. Charles Beddington supports the suggestion that there was a single assistant in London who helped Canaletto complete his considerable workload. Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 20. J. G. Links, however, expresses doubt that Canaletto employed assistants in Venice. Links, *Canaletto and his Patrons*, 78.

- 71 England is the only author to identify red lead. The current research did not confirm this pigment in the English paintings.
- 72 See England, "Canaletto's Painting Technique", 27-28; Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Venice: The Feastday of S. Roch'", 40-43; Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 34-41; and Pemberton-Pigott, "Development of Canaletto's Painting", 62-63.
- 73 Pemberton-Pigott, "Development of Canaletto's Painting", 62-63. Prussian blue was identified on the YCBA paintings using FTIR analysis. See Appendix for further information on FTIR device and settings used.
- 74 Francis Haskell, "Stefano Conti, Patron of Canaletto and Others", *The Burlington Magazine* 98 (1956): 298.
- 75 Bomford and Finaldi, *Venice through Canaletto's Eyes*, 55
- 76 Identification of the yellow pigments was carried out using X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) analysis. See Appendix for further information on XRF device and settings used.
- 77 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'". 40.
- 78 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'". 40.
- 79 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'". 40.
- 80 England, "Canaletto's Painting Technique", 28.
- 81 Constable and Links, *Canaletto*, 1:111.
- 82 Eglin describes these works as "outstanding examples of the prettified picture postcards from which [Canaletto] is so often derided". John Eglin, "Venice on the Thames: Venetian *Vedutisti* and the London View in the Eighteenth Century", in *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Shearer West (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 104.
- 83 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 40.
- 84 Links, *Canaletto and his Patrons*, 64-65.
- 85 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 9.
- 86 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 132.
- 87 Vertue, "Vertue's Note Books", 132.
- 88 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 102.
- 89 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 162.
- 90 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 162.
- 91 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 102.
- 92 Beddington, ed., *Canaletto in England*, 102.
- 93 We are sincerely grateful to Conservator of Paintings Teresa Lignelli and Senior Scientist Beth Price at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for carrying out this analysis at our request.
- 94 See, for example, England, "Canaletto's Painting Technique", 28, and Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 40.
- 95 See Appendix for further information on XRF device and settings used.
- 96 See Appendix for further information on SEM/EDX device and settings used.
- 97 R. D. Harley, *Artists' Pigments, c. 1600-1835: A Study in English Documentary Sources* (London: Butterworths, 1970), 70.
- 98 Dossie, *Handmaid to the Arts*, 118, <http://archive.org/details/handmaidtoarts01doss>.
- 99 For images of these cross-sections, see Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Venice: The Feastday of S. Roch'", 43 plate 7c, and Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 39 plate 7.
- 100 England, "Canaletto's Painting Technique", 28; Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Venice: The Feastday of S. Roch'", 42; Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 40; Pemberton-Pigott, "The Development of Canaletto's Painting", 63.
- 101 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 40.
- 102 Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 40. Similar pigments have been found in paintings by Salvator Rosa, Bartolo de Sassoferrato, and Bernardo Cavallino at the National Gallery, London. Bomford and Roy, "Canaletto's 'Stone Mason's Yard' and 'San Simeone Piccolo'", 41 note 20.
- 103 Carol A. Grissom, "Green Earth", in *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of their History and Characteristics*, ed. Robert L. Feller (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 143.
- 104 Giovanni de Brignoli de Brunnhoff, "Dissertation sur la chlorite ou terre verte de Vérone", *Journal de physique de chimie et d'histoire* 90 (1820), 355-61, 423-42.
- 105 de Brignoli de Brunnhoff, "Dissertation sur la chlorite ou terre verte de Vérone", 356.

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# High Art and High Stakes: The 3rd Duke of Dorset's Gamble on Reynolds

John Chu

## Abstract

*This article explores the art-collecting practices of John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset (1745–1799), focusing on his remarkable investment in the experimental paintings of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). In the 1770s and 80s, Sackville sunk significant funds into works by Reynolds that were of mixed critical standing, of unpredictable future value, and notoriously susceptible to rapid physical deterioration. What motivated such risky, idiosyncratic purchases? This article argues that Sackville's patronage can usefully be characterized as a form of high-stakes gamble with the potential to advance his social, cultural, and political circumstances and agendas. It is argued that such a "Reynoldsian lottery" was as much about interior competition in the uppermost reaches of eighteenth-century society as it was about an outward-looking desire to be distinguished from the ranks below. As well as shedding light on an important instance of British art patronage therefore, the article also seeks to expose the tactical advantage of devil-may-care forms of luxury consumption for those born to rank, fortune, and influence in this period.*

## Authors

Assistant Curator of Pictures and Sculpture at the National Trust

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The bold experimentalism of Joshua Reynolds's painting practice has sprung vibrantly back to life in recent years. Conservation of several key holdings of works, scholarly publications, and an important exhibition have, collectively, returned the tireless technical and aesthetic curiosity of this eighteenth-century artist to both specialist and public attention.<sup>1</sup> Reynolds the quintessential innovator has been restored to view: a painter who, at the top of his profession, continually questioned the foundations of his technical training—the stuff of pigments, oils, varnishes, and glazes—but who also worked to quiz and energize the compositional and generic conventions of his age. Thanks in particular to the Wallace Collection exhibition *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* in 2015, we now have a stronger sense than ever of how exciting his unfolding body of works must have appeared to contemporary eyes. In this display we saw how Reynolds returned repeatedly to his most charismatic sitters, restlessly trying out poses, scenarios, and formats to probe the facets of an individual character, all the while putting the excellence of his own artistry—and the potential of the medium itself—to the test. Infrared and X-radiographic imagery placed alongside original works of art allowed us to glimpse how, over several campaigns on a single canvas, old ideas would inspire (and were as often as not obliterated by) fresh schemes in a concentrated flow of invention and innovation.

But if all this scholarly and curatorial activity has allowed us to step once more into the daring moment of Reynoldsian creation, it has also brought back into focus the considerable cost that this risky approach could exact on the works of art themselves. While some pictures have responded well to technical treatment (and revealed that Reynolds's experimentalism often had no part to play in a painting's diminished appearance) in other pictures, fugitive colours, overworked paint layers, and stews of incompatible media have indeed been to blame for their degradation. If Reynolds the quintessential innovator has been restored to us, it seems that the old spectre of the reprobate technician is nonetheless very much here to stay—and quite rightly so, if we are to see this artist's achievement through eighteenth-century eyes. After all, even at the height of his success, for every commentator who marvelled at Reynolds's glamorous, painterly effects, there was always another to bemoan their all-too-frequent evanescence. "If Sir Joshua is satisfied with his own departed pictures," Horace Walpole wryly observed, "it is more than the possessors or posterity will be. I think he ought to be paid in annuities for so long as his pictures last."<sup>2</sup>

This article addresses the pressing but rarely considered question of patronage which this risk-taking experimentalism raises. For did not the material burden of risk ultimately lie with the "possessors" of such volatile and expensive luxuries? There can be no doubt, after all, that Reynolds's patrons were aware at an early stage of the questionable longevity of their

acquisitions. Yet surprisingly, prior to the nineteenth-century biographies, little or no documentation has survived to tell us how the buyers of these painting conceived of their risk in these transactions, or why they overcame such scruples as must surely have arisen.<sup>3</sup> In the face of this general silence, recent scholarship has nonetheless begun to speculate intriguingly, if fleetingly, on what may have motivated this risk-taking behaviour. The most interesting of these hunches involves the idea of patronage as a kind of gamble. In 1999, economic historian Neil De Marchi and art historian Hans J. Van Miegroet suggested that these purchases took place in a wider context of increasingly calculated capital risks, observing that even “if only 10 or 20 percent of Reynolds’s pictures cracked badly, lost paint or faded . . . would-be buyers were necessarily entering into a wager when purchasing a picture by him.”<sup>4</sup> Although the term “wager” seems to be used loosely here to indicate an ambitious but ultimately “rational” investment, Matthew Hunter has carried this idea further to suggest that, analogously with high-stakes gambles, the obvious risk inherent in a Reynolds purchase may itself have been attractive. With distinctly social motivations in mind, Hunter suggests that a wealthy patron with a faded Reynolds was distinguished “from a patron of the ascendant ‘middling sort’ by his or her willingness to take a chance on greatness”.<sup>5</sup>

What follows is an attempt to develop Hunter’s hypothesis into a roundly argued case for a connection between the often substantial risk embraced by Reynolds’s patrons and the class imperatives of cultural distinction. To achieve this aim, this article focuses on a case study where the “stakes” can be said to have been at their highest: the collection of John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset. In addition to that fact that Sackville amassed one of the period’s most extensive and famous holdings of Reynolds’s works, numbering at least twenty by the end of his life, it can also be observed that eight of the earliest of these acquisitions were examples of the rare and innovative narrative works and fanciful character studies (today known collectively as subject pictures) for which the artist charged a significant premium.<sup>6</sup> Essentially a new development of the 1770s, the subject pictures owned by Sackville are the main focus here, since, for various reasons explored below, they represented an additional aesthetic and critical gamble in a way that even the most materially unstable portrait did not.

When Sir Joshua Reynolds’s name is linked with that of the Duke of Dorset, the image of the ancestral family seat of Knole may well come to mind in the first instance, and in particular the Reynolds Room that stands at the heart of the house’s ancient state apartments.<sup>7</sup> Although several of the Sackville Reynoldses had indeed come to rest in that chamber by the Duke’s death in 1799, this article concentrates on the 1770s when these pictures, as fresh creations and purchases, were in a far more mobile physical and critical

state, and just as likely to be recorded as hanging in his voguishly appointed townhouse in Grosvenor Square at the heart of fashionable London life. By taking a close look at the physical, economic, and thematic constitution of the collection, and by situating the acquisition within the 3rd Duke's high-living, cosmopolitan, and extremely powerful milieu—known throughout the eighteenth century as the “beau monde”—it is hoped that a richer and more detailed social profile of the participants in this Reynoldsian lottery will be attained, as well as a more informed point of view on what, besides the beauties of this or that work of art, was to be won and lost in this extravagant, risky, and highly performative game.

## **The Sackville Reynoldses**

Notwithstanding some very bold purchases over the course of the 1770s, the 3rd Duke of Dorset's patronage of Reynolds commenced and, in certain respects, continued within patterns set by the conventions of his class and by the traditions of his family. The stately full-length portrait which he commissioned from the artist in 1769, for example, heralded his entry into the apex of the aristocratic hierarchy in an entirely conventional form ([fig. 1](#)).<sup>8</sup> Painted soon after Sackville's inheritance of the dukedom, the portrait was on a format that Reynolds had coined for the ceremonial depiction of the greatest noblemen over a decade previously. Typically, the picture is achieved with the colouristic and tonal drama of a *seicento* altarpiece, posing its twenty-four-year-old subject in full ducal robes amidst rich drapery and classical architecture.<sup>9</sup> At this time, a state portrait by Reynolds, like a resignation from the Commons and a comprehensive Grand Tour, was just one part of a standard rite of passage into the peerage, and the work soon hung in the Knole Ballroom side by side with the most imposing of the earlier Sackville portraits.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1.**

Joshua Reynolds, John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset, 1769, oil on canvas, 244.5 × 153 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Knole, National Trust

The brooding grandeur of this image is entirely apt to the extraordinary power and consequence of an eighteenth-century English duke. Such men were not simply wealthy aristocrats but second only to royalty in the social hierarchy. The Sackvilles had been one of the very few families to enjoy this supreme rank in the peerage since their elevation in 1720, although previous generations of the family had made themselves extremely useful to successive Tudor and Stuart monarchs, resulting in titles, honours, and vast additions to the estate in agricultural land, great houses, and other kinds of property.<sup>11</sup> As was customary to their rank, the Sackvilles had kept their titles and assets together over the centuries by passing them down to the eldest male heir. Remarkably, given the profuse spending which is the one of the main themes of this study, the first phase of the 3rd Duke's succession was a period of retrenchment for the estate after its severe mismanagement by John Frederick's uncle, Charles, the 2nd Duke of Dorset, which only serves

to emphasize the sheer depth of resources available to such ducal dynasties.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the presence in the Reynolds portrait of large and important-looking tomes at John Frederick's side, so reminiscent of venerable estate documentation, may be something of a visual manifesto of his intention (which was ultimately fulfilled) to restore the substance and standing of the family to its full might.

As his first decade as duke unfolded, the 3rd Duke soon found other ways to take his place amongst his illustrious ancestors through the acquisition of art. Having filled up the old house with the spoils of his Continental travels—primarily in the form of canonical Italian and Netherlandish old masters—he now began to collect new pictures for display in the ground-floor Dining Parlour.<sup>13</sup> There, in a move that served to update and rival the collection of great seventeenth-century literati portraits begun by the rake-poet Charles Sackville, 6th Earl of Dorset, he hung likenesses of the day's celebrated talents.<sup>14</sup> Heading up this fresh influx of great men were Reynolds's self-portrait in doctoral robes along with his depictions of Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, and the composer Antonio Sacchini.<sup>15</sup> The 3rd Duke's irreverent spin on this family tradition was his bevy of portraits of charismatic women of the contemporary stage who seem, as often as not, to have doubled as his mistresses. With his famous dark good-looks, athleticism, and courtly bearing, Sackville was, at this time, cutting a swathe through the beauties of his own rank (Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, singled him out as "the most dangerous of men") although it was the likenesses of his "demi-rep" intimates that he seems most to have preferred.<sup>16</sup> Notable among these was a full-length Reynolds of the comedienne Frances Abington (which the sitter presented as a gift to the Duke) and an intimate portrait *en bacchante* of the opera dancer Giovanna Baccelli, who bore him a son and who lived for several years with Sackville at Knole.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 2.**

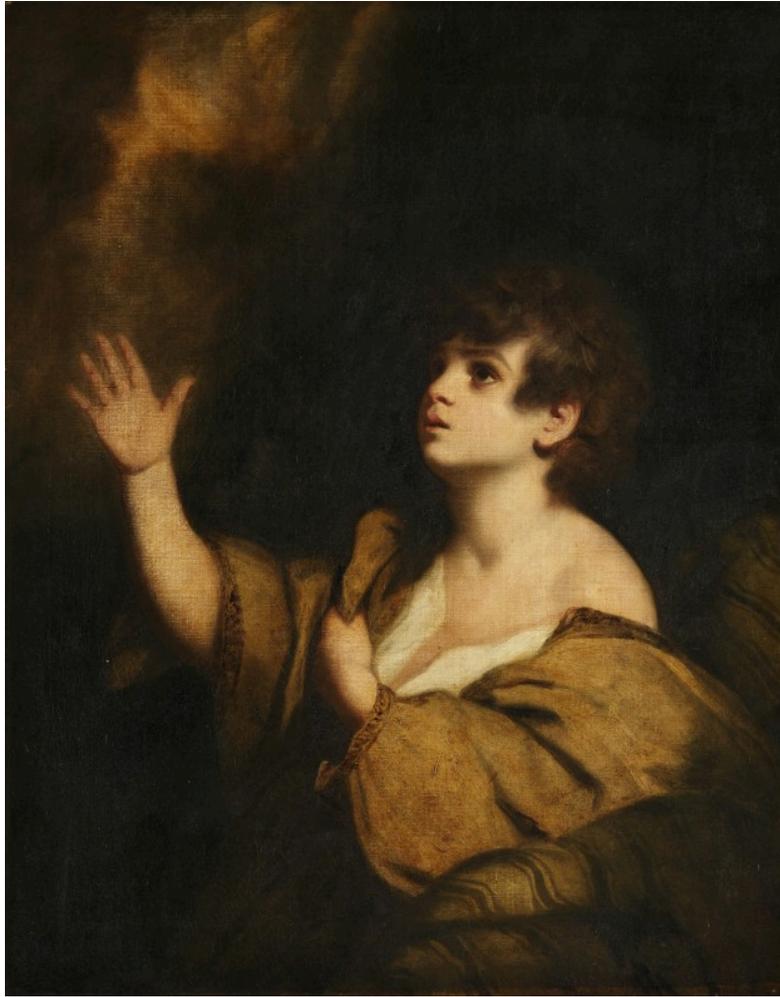
Joshua Reynolds, *Count Ugolino and his Sons in the Dungeon*, circa 1770-73, oil on canvas, 125.7 × 176.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Knole, National Trust

It was in the midst of these, in some ways rather predictable, forms of portrait-collecting that Sackville's bold move into the uncharted field of the Reynoldsian subject picture took place. With one exception, all eight of these paintings seem to have been acquired in a single burst of enthusiasm between about 1774 and 1778. As Reynolds's first major attempt at serious historical composition—and therefore his biggest technical and intellectual challenge to date—the best known of these purchases was *Count Ugolino and his Sons in the Dungeon*, which had been shown at the Royal Academy in 1773 (fig. 2).<sup>18</sup> Comparable in size and compositional complexity to this major work was *A Fortune Teller* (fig. 3). A kind of witty imitation of the famous Caravaggio (which then formed part of the collection of Louis XVI), this exhibit of 1777 marked a moment of revival for this kind of large and light-hearted narrative work, which had fallen out of fashion in Britain some thirty or forty years earlier.<sup>19</sup> The remaining six subject pictures were demi-figure depictions of children, mostly boys, in a variety of guises.<sup>20</sup> Some of these, as in *The Calling of Samuel*, depict a named character from a textual source, and others, like *A Beggar Boy and his Sister* or *A Boy with a Drawing in his Hand*, take for their subject anonymous little figures, and were known as fancy pictures (figs. 4, 5, 6). Halfway between the literary subjects and fancy pictures were a highly distinctive pair of mythological “travesties”, wherein the iconography of the gods Cupid and Mercury are bawdily applied to the forms of young beggar boys to startling effect (figs. 7, 8).



**Figure 3.**

Joshua Reynolds, *A Fortune Teller*, 1777, oil on canvas, 145 × 123.2 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Waddesdon Manor, National Trust



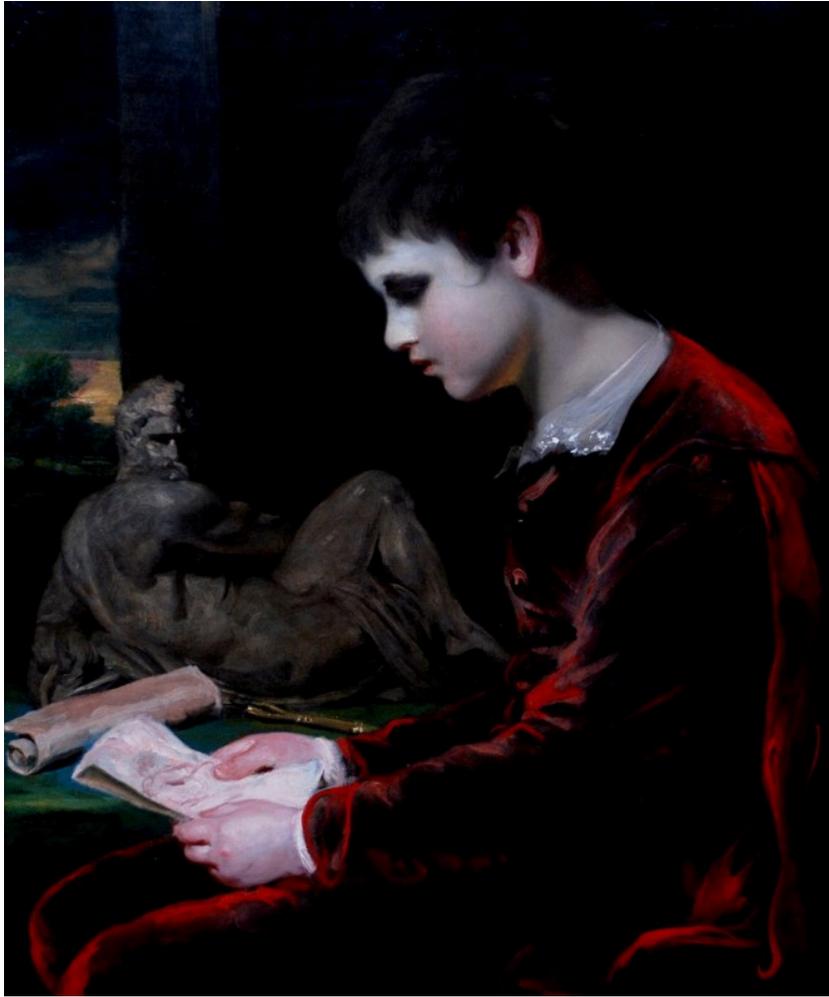
**Figure 4.**

Joshua Reynolds, *The Calling of Samuel*, circa 1770-1776, oil on canvas, 36.0 × 29.0 cm, National Trust Collections, Knole, Kent  
Digital image courtesy of National Trust Images



**Figure 5.**

Joshua Reynolds, A Beggar Boy and his Sister, circa 1774, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 62.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park



**Figure 6.**

Joshua Reynolds, A Boy with a Drawing in his Hand, circa 1776, oil on canvas, 73.7 × 61 cm Digital image courtesy of Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan



**Figure 7.**

Joshua Reynolds, Cupid as a Linkboy, 1774, oil on canvas, 76 × 63.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY



**Figure 8.**

Joshua Reynolds, *Cupid as a Linkboy*, 1774, oil on canvas, 76 × 63.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Evident enough from this run-through of the Sackville subject pictures is the prominence granted to children within these works. In both *Ugolino* and *A Fortune Teller*, they are seen reacting to a striking adult presence. In the former piece, the subject of which is derived from Dante's *Inferno*, the treacherous Italian nobleman of the title, having been double-crossed by a rival for despotic control of medieval Pisa, is shown being sealed into his prison cell with his children. Captured in the moment of ghastly realization, the father is frozen in terror, unable to respond as his sons perish, despair, and beg for a comforting word. In *A Fortune Teller*, by contrast, an archly smiling gypsy is seen reading a young girl's palm as she turns gleefully to the viewer and collapses into the lap of an outraged, lunging boy. The single-figure compositions, lacking the same range of dynamic possibilities, rely more on faces and delicate childish body language to engage the interest, either through the description of some exalting or contemplative expression,

as in *The Calling of Samuel* or *Boy with a Drawing in his Hand*, or by fixing the attention with a direct, enigmatic gaze, as in the *Mercury as a Cutpurse* (fig. 7) or the *Beggar Boy and his Sister*.

While some themes, such as spirituality in *The Calling of Samuel* and education in *Boy with a Drawing in his Hand*, appear in one-off instances, other themes flow through this corpus of works with some consistency, often played out through a contrast of high and low social status. Thus a sentimental interest in the plight of the street urchin is engaged by the modest, tender form of the *Beggar Boy and his Sister*. Fear and suspicion about the machinations of the poor, by contrast, are raised by the aggressive reaction of the richly dressed young boy to the smirking gypsy in *A Fortune Teller*. *Mercury as a Cutpurse*, meanwhile, has designs on the gold in your pocket.

In several of the Sackville subject pictures, the grown-up themes of sex, love, and flirtation are performed through the representation of the childish body. One contemporary account of *A Fortune Teller*, for example, described the piece as a narrative of courtship with the principle figure of the girl as a foolish ingénue: thus, the “Gipsey is telling a young Girl who is sitting on her Lover’s knees, her Fortune, and seems to be saying to her that she will soon be married to him, at which she laughs, and is pleased, without well knowing what it means.”<sup>21</sup> Strikingly, in *Cupid as a Linkboy* (fig. 8) the young god, in the guise of a beggar boy, is rendered darkly brooding, his pretty feathers replaced by bats’ wings, and his golden torch replaced by an unmistakably phallic “link”, or torch, of a type used to guide nocturnal revellers through the streets.<sup>22</sup>

It is uncertain whether the kaleidoscopic, sometimes odd and arresting, field of vision presented by this collection of subject pictures—wherein one gets a sense of tastes and interests developing capriciously, dropping off and being modified in the process of acquisition—came about primarily through a process of commission or through the uptake of speculative productions. On the one hand, it is very likely that the Duke had a hand in the *Cupid* and *Mercury* pendants. Though there are, broadly speaking, precedents in eighteenth-century comic art for such elisions of high mythology and low genre, innocence and sexual knowledge, it must be more than a coincidence that the idiosyncratic iconography of *Cupid as a Linkboy* closely mirrors verses penned by the 3rd Duke’s great-grandfather in the previous century. For the purposes of a “politely vicious” barb aimed at the mistress of James II, Catherine Sedley, Countess of Dorchester, the 6th Earl of Dorset had conjured exactly this figure of an “obscene” and “violent anti-Eros”:<sup>23</sup>

DORINDA's sparkling wit and eyes,  
United, cast too fierce a light,  
Which blazes high, but quickly dies,  
Pains not the heart, but hurts the sight.

Love is a calmer, gentler joy,  
Smooth are his looks, and soft his pace,  
Her Cupid is a blackguard boy,  
That rubs his link full in your face. <sup>24</sup>

But if the *Cupid* strongly suggests the influence of a commissioning patron, we also know that other works, notably the *Ugolino*, were completed several years before they came into Sackville's hands. <sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the fancy pictures form a continuum with the rest of Reynolds's output in that field, which we know had a substantial speculative element. Indeed, the dark-haired boy who appears in no less than half of the Sackville subject pictures—*A Fortune Teller*, *A Beggar Boy and his Sister*, *A Boy with a Drawing in his Hand*, *The Calling of Samuel*—was one of the artist's favourite models and featured in several more fancies in a further range of guises. <sup>26</sup>

The mixed evidence concerning the commissioning or otherwise of the Sackville subject pictures may ultimately reflect the exceptional way in which Reynolds claimed to generate and dispose of his non-portrait output. "When I paint any picture of invention", he told the Liverpoolian *amateur* Daniel Daulby in 1777, "it is allways [*sic*] engaged before it is half finished." <sup>27</sup> By this account, even speculatively conceived pieces had the potential to be shaped by the desires of a farsighted patron, snapped up as they were (or so we are led to believe) in the exhilarating moment of creation. Neither quite the product of commission nor of speculation, the combination of thematic eclecticism and coherence that runs through the more daring and original end of the 3rd Duke's collection may not have been fully attributable either to master or patron, but to a dynamic association of the two. Of course, one of the most striking things about the letter to Daulby (notwithstanding its hint at the opportunity for patronal influence) is the implication of yet another layer of risk for the purchaser. If the only way to secure a "picture of invention" was to commit to specimens before they were even half-complete, we must assume that this kind of collecting must have involved a large degree of good faith in the quality of the end product. Amassing the Sackville collection of Reynolds subject pictures, in other words, must have involved a good deal of investment in what remained only partially realized figments of the imagination.

## Financial hazards and critical risks

It will be useful at this stage to detail the sheer financial expenditure that the acquisition of the Sackville subject pictures entailed, within what was a rather brief span of time. In total, these works represent the considerable outlay of 1,045 guineas for the Duke, or a little under £1,100.<sup>28</sup> The earliest relevant entry in Reynolds's account books dates to 1772, recording a lump sum of 120 guineas for the *Cupid and Mercury* pendants and *A Beggar Boy and his Sister*. This is followed by an entry of 400 guineas received for *Ugolino* in 1775, 100 guineas for *A Boy with a Drawing* and *The Calling of Samuel* in 1776, and 350 guineas for *A Fortune Teller* in 1778.<sup>29</sup> The next entry of 75 guineas dates to 1786 for a fancy picture of a girl playing with a bird.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the *Ugolino* cost Sackville 350 guineas more than his ducal portrait is an indication of the substantial premium commanded by the subject pictures. Similarly, the *Beggar Boy and his Sister* was bought for 50 guineas, as opposed to the 35 guineas spent on each of the identically proportioned portraits of Johnson, Goldsmith, and Sacchini.<sup>31</sup> Reynolds's portraits themselves were highly expensive commodities, but the sums paid for the "pictures of invention" pushed them well into the upper end of luxury consumption, even in a ducal household.<sup>32</sup> As items within a collection, in fact, they are most comparable in price to the diamond sets on which, of all signs of conspicuous consumption, aristocratic society set especial store. Thus, £1,054 was the price to be paid in the eighteenth century for a diamond ring, a gem-encrusted belt-buckle and two pairs of earrings from London's finest jeweller.<sup>33</sup>

Sackville kept careful tabs on his expenditure on art, maintaining separate lists of acquisitions and prices including a slim octavo volume entitled *An Account of the Number and Value of the Pictures, Busts, &c. Purchased by His Grace, John Frederick Sackville, Duke of Dorset*.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, if he did consult this document prior to the purchase of the *Ugolino* in 1775, he would have seen that only one picture had ever cost him more—a "Capital" depiction of Lucretia by Guido Reni bought for £735—and that the next most costly painting in his collection up to that point had been a Madonna and Child costing £300 by (but presumably after) Raphael.

But if the 3rd Duke was aware of the growing costliness of his Reynolds collection, he must have been no less conscious of the precariousness of its physical condition and value. Not only was the dubious longevity of Sir Joshua's productions generally known by this stage—in 1771 James Northcote observed his master's paintings cracking as they left the studio-

—evidence of decay in the Sackville holdings was clear for all to see.<sup>35</sup> Thus, when Horace Walpole visited Knole in the summer of 1780, he noted admiringly that the ducal portrait was “extremely like” its handsome sitter but also, with regret, that “the colouring [was] much gone already.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the preponderance of fancy pictures in the Sackville collection, which an intimate of the studio such the Duke would have known to have been the subject of particularly intense technical experimentation, was something of a ticking bomb. Indeed, an entry on *A Beggar Boy and his Sister* is to be found amongst the notes which Reynolds recorded on his particularly bold painterly trials. Typically adopting a learned melange of English, Latin, and Italian, he recorded the picture’s elaborate constitution of pigments and glazes in the spirit of scientific consistency and observation: “White. Asphaltum. Verm. Minio principal e Giallo di Napoli ni nero ni turchino . . . Glaze con Asphaltum & Lacca”.<sup>37</sup> Particularly notable here is the reference to a glaze of “Asphaltum & Lacca”, which combines a medium known for its immediately observable tendency to wrinkle and crack (bitumen) with a delicate pigment (red lake) which, as Reynolds was beginning to understand by this time, rapidly and inexorably fades upon exposure to light.<sup>38</sup>

Quite aside from the concern caused by a collection that, even as it expanded, threatened its own destruction, these pictures posed a risk to the capital that had been invested in them. As players on the international art scene like Sackville were increasingly aware, a long-term trend towards growth in the eighteenth-century market for paintings meant that the works of famous masters presented an excellent opportunity for capital gains. Thus, whether “one buys from taste or speculation”, according to the patter of the contemporary dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, “it is comforting to know that during one’s lifetime the pleasures of ownership will not be troubled by the fear of losing money [for the] proprietor has the advantage always desired by a responsible man, of enjoying his wealth and seeing it increase.”<sup>39</sup> Certainly, Sackville seems to have been particularly proud of the leap in market value which *Ugolino* enjoyed after his purchase of the picture; the fact was duly listed in a description of the picture found in the Knole guidebook of 1793: “the Story of Count Ugolino and his Sons, starving in a prison . . . for which the Duke gave 400l and his since refused 1000l.”<sup>40</sup> Taking a chance on a family portrait with little or no resale value was one thing, but the potential deterioration of an even more expensive subject picture with damaging consequences for its status on the secondary market, was quite another. Although comparable to precious jewellery in their costliness, the Sackville Reynoldses, quite unlike diamonds, were all too liable to lose their lustre and could hardly be relied upon to constitute a long-term dynastic asset, or even the temporary capital of an art-loving collector.

In addition to the high financial stakes involved in this area of the Duke's collection, it is worth stressing again that the subject pictures were essentially a new phenomenon of the 1770s. Although Reynolds had very briefly tried his hand at demi-figure genre painting at the commencement of his career, the large output of fancies which was generated at this later stage of his practice was entirely new in its pace and variety. Similarly, while imaginary personages had occasionally featured in the grander portraits of previous years, full-blown narrative works like *Ugolino* were still very much a fresh addition to Reynolds's art. The implications of this for the potential collector were twofold. One issue was the fact that, in the absence of an established market rate for such works, any price arrived at between painter and patron was essentially a shot in the dark. The other consideration was that, in contemporary critical appraisal, the jury on these "pictures of invention" was still very much out.

The problem of ambiguous artistic merit was particularly acute in the case of *Ugolino and A Fortune Teller*, the large scale of which ensured a good deal of attention for both canvases when they were exhibited at the Royal Academy. Despite Reynolds's concerted campaign to gather support for *Ugolino*, the journalistic responses to this first attempt at a serious narrative picture on the artist's part were, at best, lukewarm. "Count Hugolino and his Children in the Dungeon is, I suppose, the most capital of the History Pieces of this Master", was the somewhat grudging appraisal of *The Public Advertiser*, which, while it affirmed that "this is a good Picture" also suggested that "if the same Excellence had been employed on a pleasing Subject, it would have enchanted, as it may now terrify, the Public." <sup>41</sup> Scenting blood, *The Morning Chronicle* published an open letter to Reynolds, seeking to take the painter down a peg or two, and fiercely exploiting the vulnerability of a prominent figure casting off in an ambitious new direction:

If you are wise in some parts of conduct as you are in others, let me advise you to keep to your Portrait painting . . . the painting of history is new and strange to you, as appears but too evidently from your unfledged picture last of *Venus and Cupid casting up accounts*, and the *Ugolino and his family* now in the present exhibition. Why, Sir, if these pictures were shown even in France and Italy, where you may be ever so little known, everybody would, at first glance, judge them to be the rude disorderly abortions of an unstudied mind, of a portrait painter, who quitting the confined track where he was calculated to move in safety, had ridiculously bewildered himself in unknown regions, unfurnished with either chart or compass . . . Ask some history painter (we have four or five of them) or even some travelled man who has knowledge of those matters, depend upon it; that if he

does not flatter you . . . he will inform you that your figures are *shockingly out of drawing*, and finished in a slobbering-herum-skerum, unartist-like way; that from the first concoction of them, they smell rankly of the portrait, and are totally wide of all true historical character. <sup>42</sup>

Here, in blow after blow, the very newness of Reynolds's subject pictures is turned against the artist. The paintings are characterized not as an exciting novelty, but as a grotesquely premature imposition on the public eye. Perplexity followed consternation when *A Fortune Teller* went on public show in 1777, wrong-footing critics thanks to its sumptuously grand treatment of such a light-hearted subject. As conflicting press articles emerged, a squabble broke out regarding the pictorial genre to which it most properly belonged, with *The London Chronicle* taking exception to casual contemporary references to the piece as Sir Joshua's latest history painting:

A Fortune Teller is said by some to be an historical piece, but with what propriety I cannot conceive. An historical piece I always understood to be a representation of some particular feat in ancient or modern, real or fabulous, sacred or profane history. But this is a representation of no such fact, and therefore cannot be called an historical piece any more than a picture of Jonas shuffling the cards would be. <sup>43</sup>

The key underlying point here is that Sackville was going "all in" on pictures that enjoyed no certain critical standing in the wider public realm. In contrast to the universal acknowledgement of Reynolds's supremacy as a portraitist, or the blue-chip reputations of the "capital" old masters, these new subject pictures were met with considerable interest, but also with an unmistakable note of caution, bafflement, and even distaste.

The 3rd Duke was thus yoking a prominent part of his formative reputation as a patron and collector to works of no settled merit. When it came to the subject pictures, it seems, Reynolds's name—though it guaranteed critical attention—was by no means an insurance against critical disapproval; and with at least three of the Sackville subject pictures being exhibited over the course of the 1770s and a further four being published as prints, any perceived failure of style or judgement on Reynolds's part had the potential to backfire on the young nobleman as an imputation of gullibility, or simple bad taste. <sup>44</sup>

All of this, I would suggest, indicates a situation of mounting and diversifying risk. Year on year, the 3rd Duke was filling his properties with large numbers of paintings which threatened (or had already entered) a process of premature and ruinous decay; not only this, he was also channelling a considerable portion of the Sackville family capital into highly unstable and untried commodities, when much safer alternatives were available. The boldness of the 3rd Duke's preference for this new dimension of Reynolds's art, when considered in relation to a climate of general critical ambivalence and sometimes outright ridicule for such pictures, seems remarkable, and encourages us to think anew about the particular motivations, and the historically specific forms of aristocratic performance, that might have underpinned this distinctive model of patronage and consumption.

### **Experiments in patronage**

Since the earliest years of the eighteenth century and before, patriotic hopes for an imaginative and profound English School of painting (capable of more than importing talents and commissioning portraits) had been laid at the door of aristocratic families like the Sackvilles.<sup>45</sup> According to specialist advocates like Jonathan Richardson, by failing to build collections of modern works of art the ranks of the "Nobility and Gentry" were missing an opportunity to perform an estimable public good. Thus, in words that reverberated well into the second half of the century, Richardson's *Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage of the Science of a Connoisseur* of 1719 implored the most privileged in society to consider how beneficial the patronage of contemporary painting could be "to the Publick in the Reformation of our Manner, Improvement of our People, and Increase of our Wealth, all which would bring a proportionable Addition of Honour, and Power to this Brave Nation".<sup>46</sup>

Yet for all the vaunted importance placed on aristocratic encouragement for the establishment of an ambitious English School, the 3rd Duke of Dorset's generous and public enthusiasm for Reynolds's subject pictures in the 1770s remained an extremely rare occurrence. Indeed, even amongst the handful of other pioneering noblemen beginning to forge reputations as patrons of original and inventive subject pictures at that time, Sackville remained highly distinctive. The other lovers of Reynoldsian fancy pictures, for example, were content with just one or two specimens for their collections.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, the contemporary generation of Grand Tourists who, from the late 1750s into the 1770s, tended to patronize British proponents of classical history painting in Rome with large-scale one-off commissions, presented a quite different face to the public.<sup>48</sup> It was presumably this brand of high-minded young peer—the Earl of Northampton, Viscount Palmerston, the Duke of

Hamilton, and so on—whom Joshua Reynolds, newly installed as the Royal Academy's first President, had in mind when he delivered these words at the Academy's inaugural celebration in 1769:

There are, at this time, a greater number of excellent Artists than were ever known before at one period in this nation; there is a greater desire among our Nobility to be distinguished as lovers and judges of the Arts; there is a greater superfluity of wealth among the people to reward the professors; and, above all, we are patronised by a Monarch, who, knowing the value of science and of elegance, thinks every Art worthy of his notice, that tends to soften and humanise the mind. <sup>49</sup>

Yet the modern pictures that the Duke of Dorset was amassing over the course of the subsequent decade bore little resemblance to the clear and exemplary Grand Manner compositions which the Academy made central to its civilizing mission throughout the 1770s. Far from dutifully performing the designated role of patron-aristocrat in this patriotic vision of an art-loving state—encouraging the production of elevating and morally instructive works through judicious acquisition—Sackville amassed modern subject pictures in a way that signalled a particular and private taste, seemingly pleased on the whole to follow the meandering fancy of an equally idiosyncratic maker. As I have argued elsewhere, rather than embodying Reynolds's academic injunctions, his sentimental, comic, and sometimes rather odd fancy pictures instead appear to have been produced mischievously to flout them, and to counteract a public persona veering towards a dull and off-putting pomposity. <sup>50</sup> Even the unmistakably serious and ambitious *Ugolino* is far too sumptuous in its manner, too un-classical in its compositional organization, and too gothic in its pettily political backstory to be presented as an unambiguous instance of Grand Manner patronage. Indeed, though the passage of *Inferno* from which the picture draws its subject was well known at the time within a certain circle of connoisseurs, aristocrats, and literary men, its wider obscurity caused it to fail as a piece of public art, leading one journal to answer general perplexity with the publication of an extracted English translation of Dante's text. <sup>51</sup>

The particular character of the modern Sackville pictures of the 1770s suggests that the 3rd Duke was experimenting instead with a model of collecting then taking shape among the French nobility, as recently chronicled by Colin B. Bailey. Pioneered in the 1750s and 1760s by the wealthy courtier Ange-Laurent de La Live de Jully (whose lauded *cabinet françois* was auctioned off in Paris just as Sackville was entering the international art market), this form of patronage was associated with the

creation of self-consciously patriotic galleries of modern paintings that were designed to contribute simultaneously to the personal pleasure of the aristocratic collector and to the good of the nation.<sup>52</sup> As the *introduceur des ambassadeurs* at the court of Versailles, La Live de Jully had been well-placed to promote his collection's public function on just these terms, outlining in a widely circulated catalogue publication his intention to embolden contemporary talent to new imaginative feats and to bring the modern French school "to the attention of foreign visitors, who have never truly appreciated its merits".<sup>53</sup>

Notable is the extent to which the 3rd Duke's growing collection of works by Reynolds mirrored the preference of the "goût patriotique" for works whose manageable proportions and amusing subjects—quite distinct from the overwhelming "machinery" of classical history painting—also made them suitable for display in a private domestic setting (La Live de Jully's gallery, for example, drew visitors from all over Europe, including Britain, but was housed in his compact *hôtel particulier* on the rue de Richlieu). Key to this formal and thematic link is the importance of fancy pictures of children both to Sackville and to his French counterparts. No patriotic French collector of the third quarter of the eighteenth-century, it seems, could pass muster without works of this kind, preferably including one or more examples by Jean-Baptiste Greuze (whose fancies were, in turn, an important model for Reynolds).<sup>54</sup> In the same way that the sentimental *Beggar Boy and his Sister* and the other fancy pictures formed the diverting cornerstone of the Sackville subject pictures, so Greuze's *Sleeping Boy* (fig. 9) held a central place in the collection of La Live de Jully, as did the same artist's widely celebrated *Girl with a Dog* (private collection) in the *cabinet françois* of Louis-Gabriel, Marquis de Véri on the fashionable rue des Saints-Pères.<sup>55</sup> Like the 3rd Duke, the state notary Charles-Nicolas Duclos-Dufresnoy showed a predilection for amassing fancies accomplished by a single hand, displaying multiple examples by Greuze at his modern gallery on the rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière, including *Boy with a Dog*, *Innocence* (both London, Wallace Collection), and *The Little Orphans* (Aberdeenshire, Fyvie Castle).<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 9.**

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Sleeping Boy*, 1755, oil on canvas, 65 × 54.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Musée Fabre, Montpellier

Sackville's collecting activity subsequent to the 1770s suggests that he regarded the experiments in patronage that he had embarked upon in that decade—which might be described as an Englishing of the aristocratic “goût patriotique”—as something of a success. In the last two decades of the century, his holdings of the subject pictures generated by his own nation's school of painting came to parallel the depth and representativeness of the collections amassed by his Parisian equivalents. Thus, as the 1770s gave way to the 80s and 90s, the expanding number of Reynolds's canvases in the Duke's possession came to be joined, *inter alia*, by a George Stubbs horse and groom composition, a grand tragedy by Nathaniel Dance genre pieces by Ozias Humphry and James Northcote and, most notably, examples of Thomas Gainsborough's landscape and fancy picture output. <sup>57</sup>

However, before venturing upon any further analysis of the longer-term character of the 3rd Duke's experiments in aristocratic collecting, I want to keep a focus for a while longer on the formative stages of this behaviour in the 1770s. If we now have a sense of the 3rd Duke formulating a highly individual response to long-standing calls for men of his class to patronize more boldly, we need to take a broader perspective on what, besides a sense of patriotic duty, may have motivated him to take up the mantle in this peculiar form at this particular stage of his life. What was it about the world in which the Duke operated that might have encouraged the collecting of Reynolds's expensive, physically unstable, and critically doubtful art works, on such a conspicuous scale? Who were such risky and extravagant acquisitive practices designed to impress? And how could they advance the interests of one already so manifestly blessed in fortune and influence?

### **The art of the "beau monde"**

The manuscript *Account of the Number and Value of the Pictures, Busts, &c. Purchased by His Grace, John Frederick Sackville, Duke of Dorset* informs us that in 1778, six of the Sackville Reynoldses—of which five were subject pictures—hung in the 3rd Duke's London house at 33 (now 38) Grosvenor Square, in the expensive residential enclave of Mayfair. These pictures were *A Fortune Teller*, *Cupid as a Linkboy*, *Mercury as a Cutpurse*, *The Calling of Samuel*, *A Boy with a Drawing in his Hand* and a bust-length portrait of the soprano Catherine Schindlerin dressed in the very pink of the fashion.<sup>58</sup> The house had been fitted up especially for the Duke, probably in 1776, and, with its elaborately plastered ceilings, shining mahogany furniture, and gilded decoration, must have provided a lavish and modish setting for this important cache of Reynolds's subject pictures (the grand stone and iron-work staircase, for example, was carpeted with an eye-catching green and white stripe).<sup>59</sup> Unlike the remaining Sackville Reynoldses, which were mixed in with the 3rd Duke's old master collection at Knole, and which were available to be looked at not only by friends and family, but by the many tourists who visited the Duke's seat, the audience for the works which hung in Mayfair would have, consisted almost exclusively of his private guests.

As the townhouse of a rich, handsome, and popular young duke, 33 Grosvenor Square was a central site of convergence for that supremely powerful social, political, and cultural entity known variously in the eighteenth century as the "great world", "haute ton", and most frequently, "beau monde".<sup>60</sup> As visible as it was highly exclusive, this phenomenon was made up of just a few hundred families at any one time, drawn together in the capital city by the shared interests of wealth, rank, and, above all, influence in matters of state. Undisguisedly political in character, this "beau monde" had at its core the major landowning peers amongst whom the great

places of the royal court, including the governing Cabinet and Treasury, were typically divided. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the fashionable London “season” took place during the annual sittings of the Houses of Parliament, during which time great peers like the Duke of Dorset held sway in the Upper Chamber by hereditary right, and in the Lower Chamber through the liberal distribution of cash and patronage. Defining itself as a body decidedly aloof from the mercantile commerce of the City, and demonstrably independent of the Crown in its magnificence, the metropolitan habitat of the English aristocracy became the rapidly expanding complex of squares, boulevards, and crescents in the north-western quarter of the city, where the best new houses and fashionable places of entertainment were to be found.

As Hannah Greig has recently demonstrated, in a small, socially exclusive world in which spending power was a direct indicator of one’s ability to exert national influence, leisure activities and the consumption of luxury goods rapidly grew in conspicuousness and political significance in the precincts of the “beau monde”. In her monograph on this subject, Greig has suggested that the primary role of art and culture in these circles was to exclude and consolidate. Members of this society spent at a rate which few, if any, could emulate and in ways that worked to reinforce internal networks. Thus, those who set the fashionable “ton” (the anglophone application of the French for “tone”) would gift and lend each other diamond garnitures and other valuable and glamorous appurtenances whose compressed provenances read as veritable “maps of marriages promised, political allegiances made, and new relationships emerging”.<sup>61</sup>

In locating the physically volatile and potentially evanescent Sackville Reynoldses within this theatre of conspicuous consumption, it is tempting to attempt an analogy between the mass burning of costly beeswax candles at the balls and assemblies of the metropolitan aristocracy (so often the subject of the admiring letters and journals) and the slow, self-consuming beauty of Reynolds’s expensive experiments in paint.<sup>62</sup> But I want, instead, to emphasize the importance of intense *competition* in this “brilliant vortex” for understanding the particular kind of spending represented by the Duke’s patronage of the artist. Rather than thinking of the Duke of Dorset’s investment in risky subject pictures as a potlatch-like demonstration of status through the destruction of rare goods—in the glow of which the “great world” could bask in the warmth of self-recognition—I would like to return to Hunter’s idea of Reynoldsian patronage as a high-stakes wager, and situate it more firmly at this uppermost apex of the social hierarchy, where close competition for the highest and rarest of positions could sometimes be settled only by a bold throw of the dice. For while great privilege and a whole raft of prestigious “places” came with the inheritance of a peerage—Sackville became Lord-Lieutenant of Kent and Colonel of the West Kent Militia as a matter of course—men in this rank were keen to win more personal honours.

<sup>63</sup> The big positions at court, which showed the special favour of the King and his First Minister, were easily outnumbered by the totality of major peerages; consequently, the 3rd Duke had to beat considerable competition to become Captain of the Yeomen of the Guard and Master of the Horse. <sup>64</sup> Indeed, his correspondence with William Pitt reveals that admission into the Order of the Garter (the personal gift of the monarch) was an ambition cherished by the 3rd Duke with particular ardour. <sup>65</sup>

Despite the fact that the “beau monde” was a new and highly specific development of eighteenth-century Britain, as a social grouping where hereditary rank was an important qualification to entry, it also shared many of the values and behaviours of earlier court cultures, and of the aristocratic milieus of absolutist Europe. High-stakes gambling—particularly for large sums of money—was one such area of common ground between the British and Continental aristocracies, for whom such practices, as Thomas Kavanagh has explained, constituted nothing less than a performance of noble quality. <sup>66</sup> For a well-born man to raise the stakes on a wager with a nonchalant air was to demonstrate a disdain for money (and the low business of money-making) in a way that reinforced a landowning, seigneurial identity. Moreover, the steely nerve that such an enactment required betrayed the inner valour of a primeval warrior caste to which each aristocratic elite harked back as a justification for present privileges. Indeed, the inherent competitiveness of an eye-watering wager allowed the tranquillity with which such odds were faced down to distinguish like from like amongst the illustrious in birth and fortune. There can be no doubt that Sackville cultivated just this image of great bravura in the face of high-stakes gambles in the high-living 1770s, especially in his capacity as an active, first-rate cricketer. Like horseracing, cricket in these early years of the game was a sport intimately bound up with wagers, and never more so than when noblemen clashed. Thus, for example, in the high summer of 1777, big news was made when it was announced that the County of Hampshire, led by Sackville, was to meet All England, led by the other great cricketing peer, Charles Bennet, 4th Earl of Tankerville, at Chertsey for a wager of 1,000 guineas. <sup>67</sup>

The underlying point revealed by these observations is that even if Sackville did not necessarily conceptualize his large-scale acquisition of Reynoldses as a form of gambling, this conspicuous and highly original behaviour certainly took place in a world that rewarded courageous risk-taking with real social and political advancement. Indeed, in the earliest days of his dukedom, Sackville would have had to look no further than his own famous uncle, Lord George, to see the real fruits of a glorious aleatory gesture. Having lost his reputation during a bungled action in the Seven Years’ War, Lord George laboured under the ignominious epithet the “Coward of Minden”, and it was

only after a display of exceptional composure during a 1770 Hyde Park pistol duel that he regained his honour.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, such was the extent of his rehabilitation that the key imperial post of Secretary of State for the American Department was soon forthcoming from the Government. If, therefore, the Sackville collection of Reynoldsian subject pictures was bold and risky in its metropolitanism, conspicuousness, and expense, it nonetheless embodied those qualities on terms that were culturally recognizable to an intensely competitive and status-conscious “beau monde”.

As the young Duke began to make his mark on the various Sackville properties in his twenties and early thirties therefore, I want to suggest that his large-scale investment in new works by the art world’s riskiest and most expensive purveyor had a strongly performative dimension. After all, at this early stage, he had not only posterity and the family assets to consider, but his reputation as a leading peer, charged with cutting a bold, fine figure that set him apart not only from the common crowd, but from men of comparably plentiful means and lofty standing. Just as his highly successful career as a seducer identified in him those highly desirable qualities in a courtier—“softness and persuasion”—so his high-stakes exploits as a gambling sportsman, but also—as I have argued—as a gambling patron, fed into an equally important seigneurial reputation for valour and insouciance in the face of potentially massive losses.<sup>69</sup> A pricey and growing holding of Reynoldses might very easily crack and fade, its critical fortunes rise or diminish, its value soar or plummet; precisely because of this, this form of collecting gave young Sackville a prominent platform on which to stand tall within the aristocratic “beau monde” as he dashingly faced down the odds.

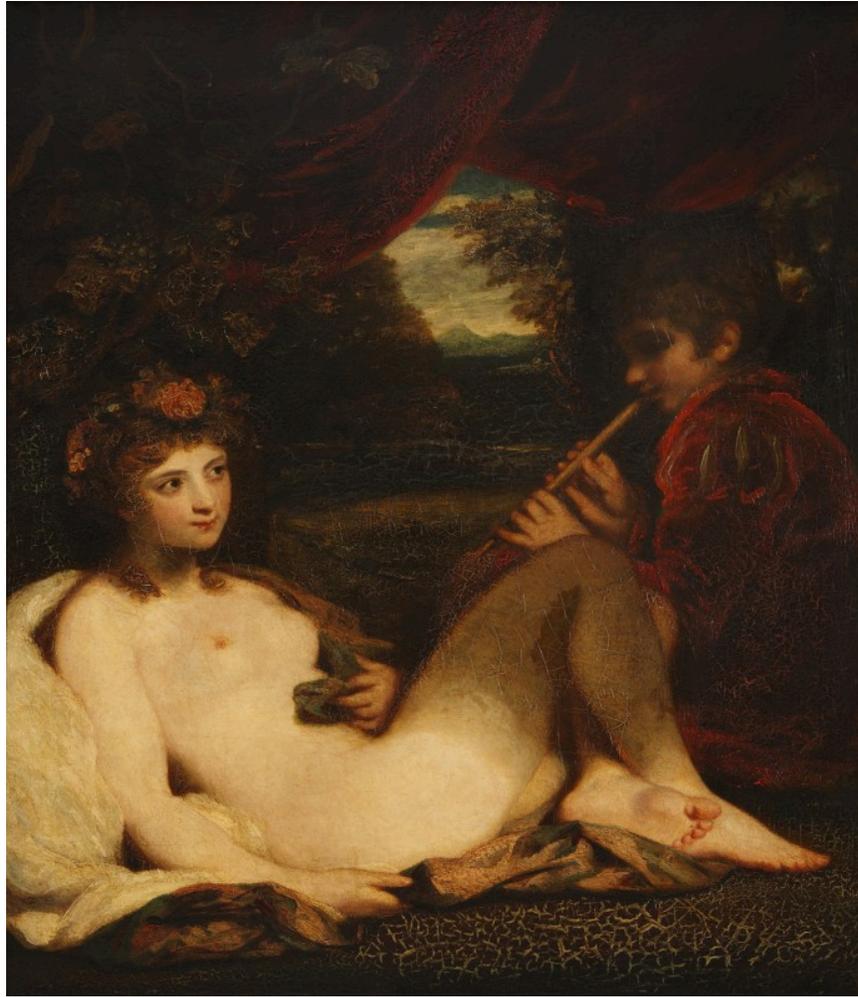
## **Conclusion**

This article has sought to substantiate the link proposed by Matthew Hunter between the riskiness involved in buying a Reynolds and the motivations of social distinction. But it has also suggested that the aristocracy’s evermore perilous “willingness to take a chance on greatness” was generated less by a desire to distance itself, en bloc, from an ascendant but uncomprehending “middling sort” than it was by processes of internal competition. As the Reynolds likeness became increasingly entrenched and familiar as a marker of eighteenth-century aristocracy, so the immensely powerful leaders of metropolitan fashion began to look to the artist’s far rarer and even more experimental subject pictures to test and demonstrate their financial and critical mettle.

More than any other of these oligarchic patrons, the 3rd Duke of Dorset underwrote these experiments in paint, and in so doing, launched his very own experiment in patronage. As we have seen, the Reynoldses that

Sackville acquired in the 1770s formed the kernel of a collection of modern British subject pictures that came, ironically, to resemble the self-consciously patriotic cabinet collections of the progressive French elite. Looking forward to the later stages of the eighteenth century and even the first decades of the nineteenth, it is remarkable to observe how profoundly the 3rd Duke's translation of the "goût patriotique" seems to have influenced the subsequent generation of aristocratic patrons of the British School. Largely displacing the high-minded brand of noble patronage handed down in academic theory, the vivacious eclecticism of the 3rd Duke's collection and its inventive responsiveness to the fashion and fancy of the day's established talents can be seen being duplicated, on an even grander scale, in the collections of George O'Brien Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont at Petworth House in Sussex and of John Leicester, 1st Baron de Tabley at Hill Street in Berkeley Square and Tabley House in Cheshire.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, putting further paid to the longed-for union of noble virtue and modern *virtù*, these men, like Sackville, also lived for long stretches of their unmarried lives surrounded by substantial holdings of British art and by their favourite mistresses.

But if Sackville's gamble on Reynolds substantially contributed to a highly influential formula for British collecting, to what extent did this conspicuous acquisition of volatile art works play into his own hands? Though we need to bear in mind the fact that this gambit, at least when it began, may have been rather speculative and open-ended in character, it is nonetheless noteworthy that the 3rd Duke's single most significant victory in the "beau monde" competition for places and honours should be foreshadowed in so many ways by his gutsy spin in the 1770s of the Reynoldsian roulette. Surely it must be more than a coincidence, after all, that a nobleman whose collection most resembled the famed patriotic gallery of the French *introducteur des ambassadeurs*, whose holding of fancy pictures were inspired by the famous French master Greuze, who owned a picture modelled directly on a king of France's Caravaggio, and whose risky acquisitions allowed him to stand tall in a "beau monde" that borrowed its fashions, manners, and linguistic idioms from the Parisian elite, should be appointed George III's Ambassador to the Court of Versailles in the early 1780s.



**Figure 10.**

Joshua Reynolds, *Venus and the Piping Boy*, oil on canvas, 127 × 104.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Polesden Lacey, National Trust

Even if it is unlikely that Sackville anticipated a single outcome from this artistic throw of the dice, the distinctive mixture of metropolitanism, cosmopolitanism, and patriotism which this behaviour bestowed upon him must surely have provided a strong recommendation to place-makers in need of a smooth, aristocratic presence at the post-American war French court: the one seat of European power that rivalled London's "beau monde" in gallant aristocratic extravagance.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, far from ending with the establishment of the embassy, the 3rd Duke's gamble on Reynolds, if anything, gained a whole new lease of life in this new phase of Sackville's career. Thus on 13 July 1786, Reynolds was compelled to turn down an offer from Charles Manners, 3rd Duke of Rutland, to buy a version of *Venus and the Piping Boy*, because "the Duke of Dorset is to have it" for 400 guineas, "not for himself but for a French Marquis whose name I have forgot". Five months later, furthermore, *The Morning Herald* reported that Sackville was

buying the piece for no lesser collector than Louis XVI (fig. 10).<sup>72</sup> If there was an apogee to the 3rd Duke's dashing gamble on Reynolds therefore, it was surely on the production of a king in his winning hand. Encapsulating the dilettantish, devil-may-care persona that had carried him to even greater eminence than his considerable birthright could provide, *The World* wrote of this acquisition:

Sir Joshua's delicious Venus—is gone the way of all flesh—she is sold—and gone to Paris ... None of *Sir Joshua's* women ever made themselves *cheap*—though this was such as to be *cheap at any price*. The *Duke* had her for four hundred—Others he has had, lost him infinitely *more*.<sup>73</sup>

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The hub of recent activity around this subject was the Reynolds Research Project launched by the Wallace Collection in collaboration with the National Gallery, London, with funding from the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The exhibition *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* at the Wallace Collection (12 March–7 June 2015) was staged to present and consider conservation work on the Reynoldses in the Wallace Collection, the National Gallery, and the Yale Center for British Art. See Lucy Davis and Mark Hallett, eds., *Joshua Reynolds: Experiments in Paint* (London: The Wallace Collection, 2015) and the *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, vol. 35: *Joshua Reynolds in the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection* (London: National Gallery, 2015). See also Matthew Hunter, "Joshua Reynolds's 'Nice Chymistry': Action and Accident in the 1770s", *The Art Bulletin* 97, no. 1 (2015): 58–76.
- <sup>2</sup> Horace Walpole to the Countess of Upper Ossory, 6 Sept. 1787, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1937–83), 34:572.
- <sup>3</sup> The often-quoted anecdote recounting Sir George Beaumont's advice to Oldfield Bowles to have his daughter painted by Reynolds because "even a faded picture from Reynolds will be the finest thing you have", is first documented in Charles Robert Leslie and Tom Taylor, *The Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1865), 2:134.
- <sup>4</sup> Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Ingenuity, Preference, and the Pricing of Paintings: The Smith-Reynolds Connection", *History of Political Economy* 31 (1999): 401.
- <sup>5</sup> Hunter, "Nice Chymistry", 69.
- <sup>6</sup> Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 94, 95, 98.
- <sup>7</sup> John Coleman, "Reynolds at Knole", *Apollo* 143, no. 410 (1996): 24–30.
- <sup>8</sup> David Mannings and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 1:403, no. 1568.
- <sup>9</sup> For Reynolds's coinage of this patrician imagery and an explanation of its success, see David H. Solkin, "Great Pictures or Great Men? Reynolds, Male Portraiture, and the Power of Art", *Oxford Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1986): 42–49.
- <sup>10</sup> The painting was in the Ballroom at Knole by 1771. Other large Sackville portraits hanging there in the 1770s included *Edward, 4th Earl of Dorset* by Anthony van Dyke and *Charles, 6th Earl of Dorset* and *Lionel, 1st Duke of Dorset* by Godfrey Kneller. R. A. Onely, *General Account of Tunbridge Wells and its Environs* (London, 1771), 47, and J. Sprange, *The Tunbridge Wells Guide* (Tunbridge Wells: J. Sprange, 1780), vi. In the 1780 guide, the pictures are listed in an appendix inserted between pp. 98 and 99 and paginated with Roman numerals.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert Sackville-West, *Inheritance: The Story of Knole and the Sackvilles* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 1–126.
- <sup>12</sup> Sackville-West, *Inheritance*, 125.
- <sup>13</sup> For details of Sackville's old master acquisitions, mostly acquired through specialist agents in Rome and Venice, see Ann Bramley, "A Duke on the Grand Tour: John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset", *British Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (2006): 75–81.
- <sup>14</sup> Sprange, *Tunbridge Wells*, ix.
- <sup>15</sup> Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:280, 281, no. 1012; 1:220, no. 736; 1:211, no. 705; 1:401, no. 1563.

- 16 Quoted in Brian Masters, *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Hamilton, 1981), 136. The Duke's good looks excited the jealousy of Christian VII of Denmark during his visit to London in 1768. "He is jealous of Sackville," recorded Horace Walpole, "and says, *ce gros noir n'est pas beau*: which implies that he thinks his own whiteness and pertness charming." Walpole to Henrietta Seymour Conway, 25 Aug. 1768, in *Walpole's Correspondence*, 39:108, 109.
- 17 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:55, no. 28; 1:68. no. 90.
- 18 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:568-70, no. 2172.
- 19 John Chu, "Joshua Reynolds and Fancy Painting in the 1770s", in *Experiments in Paint*, ed. Davis and Hallett, 94.
- 20 In addition to the five listed below, Sackville also bought a demi-figure of a girl in white drapery with a bird titled *Lesbia*; Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*: 1:543, no. 2101.
- 21 *St James's Chronicle*, 17-19 April 1777.
- 22 For the history of linkboys and the deceptions of eighteenth-century street urchins, see Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-century London* (London: Hambledon, 2004), 60, 98, 117.
- 23 James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 249.
- 24 Samuel Johnson, *The Works of the English Poets with Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, Volume the Eleventh* (London: E. Cox, 1779), 208, 209.
- 25 The *Ugolino* picture was begun five years before the first record of sale to Sackville and exhibited two years before; see Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:569.
- 26 For Reynolds's use of this model, see Postle, *Subject Pictures*, 95-98.
- 27 Joshua Reynolds to Daniel Daulby, 9 Sept. 1777, in *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 69, 70.
- 28 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:524, no. 2060; 1:544, no. 2104; 1:510, no. 2016.
- 29 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:569, no. 2172; 1:513, no. 2027; 1:560, no. 2150; 1:529, no. 2069.
- 30 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:543, no. 2101.
- 31 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:220, no. 736; 1:281, no. 1012; 1:410, no. 1563.
- 32 For the price of commodities necessary for genteel living, see Woodruff D. Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 25-62.
- 33 Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 53, 54.
- 34 Sackville Archive, Kent History and Library Centre, MSS U269 E416, unpaginated.
- 35 James Northcote to Samuel Northcote, 23 Aug. 1771, Royal Academy of Arts Archive, NOR/4.
- 36 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:403, 1568.
- 37 Quoted in Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:510, no. 2016. For the parallels between contemporary empirical experimentation and Reynolds's studio practices and documentation, see Matthew Hunter, "Reynolds's Science of Experiment in Practice and Theory", in *Experiments in Paint*, ed. Davis and Hallett, 100-111.
- 38 Alexandra Gent, "Reynolds, Paint and Painting: A Technical Analysis", in *Experiments in Paint*, ed. Davis and Hallett, 48, 49.
- 39 Quoted and translated in Colin B. Bailey, *Patriotic Taste: Collecting Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 17.
- 40 *Ambulator; or, A Pocket Companion in a Tour Round London* (London: Jane Bew, 1793), 159.
- 41 *The Public Advertiser*, 28 April 1773.
- 42 *The Morning Chronicle*, 30 April 1773.
- 43 *The London Chronicle*, 29 April-1 May 1777.
- 44 The Sackville subject pictures exhibited at the Royal Academy were *Ugolino* (1773), *Beggar Boy and his Sister* (1775), and *A Fortune Teller* (1777). A version of *Calling of Samuel* was exhibited in 1776 although it may not have been the Sackville picture. The pictures engraved in the 1770s were *Ugolino* (1774), *Cupid as a Linkboy* (1777), *Mercury as a Cutpurse* (1777), and *Boy with a Drawing in his Hand* (1777).
- 45 See the dedications in William Aglionby, *Painting Illustrated in Three Dialogues* (London, 1685) and Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting . . . Essay towards an English School*, trans. Bainbrigg Buckeridge (London, 1706).
- 46 Jonathan Richardson, *A Discourse on the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure and Advantage of the Science of a Connoisseur* (London: W. Churchill, 1719), 62.
- 47 Chu, "Fancy Painting", 88.
- 48 Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750-1810* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), 55.
- 49 Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1959), 14.

- 50 Chu, "Fancy Painting", 97, 98.
- 51 *The Annual Register*, Dec. 1773, 194. For the currency of Dante and the Ugolino episode in elite circles, see Postle, *Subject Pictures*, 148–50.
- 52 The sale of the La Live de July collection was held in 1770; see Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 60. The 3rd Duke's presence in Paris prior to his 1784–89 embassy has yet to be fully charted although he was certainly there in 1777/8, as attested to by tailors' bills and paperwork for other luxury purchases deposited in the Kent History and Library Centre; U269 A243/8.
- 53 Quoted and translated in Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 57.
- 54 Chu, "Fancy Painting", 91, 92.
- 55 Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 101–30.
- 56 Bailey, *Patriotic Taste*, 142, 143.
- 57 *Account of the Number and Value of the Pictures*.
- 58 Mannings and Postle, *Reynolds*, 1:40, no. 1578.
- 59 For the houses and historic residents of Grosvenor Square, see F. H. W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London*, vol. 40, *The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 2 (The Buildings)* (London: London County Council, 1980), 117–66.
- 60 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 243–58.
- 61 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 62.
- 62 Greig, *Beau Monde*, 42, 43.
- 63 Gerald M. D. Howat, "Sackville, John Frederick, third duke of Dorset (1745–1799)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); online ed., Jan. 2008: doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/24445.
- 64 Howat, "Sackville".
- 65 The National Archives, PRO 30/8.
- 66 Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), 29–66. In histories of gambling in the eighteenth-century English context the emphasis has tended to be placed on the universality of the practice; see, for example, Jessica Anne Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-century British Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Distinctly aristocratic forms of gaming were nonetheless widely recognized and commented upon in the later part of the period; see Gillian Russell, "'Faro's Daughters': Female Gamesters, Politics, and the Discourse of Finance in 1790s Britain", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 4 (2000): 481–504.
- 67 *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 4 July 1777.
- 68 Sackville-West, *Inheritance*, 122–24.
- 69 Masters, *Georgiana*, 136.
- 70 For the collection at Petworth see Christopher Rowell, Ian Warrell, and David Blayney Brown, *Turner at Petworth* (London: Tate Britain, 2002). For Baron de Tabley's collections in Berkeley Square and Tabley, see Dongho Chun, "Public Display, Private Glory: Sir John Fleming Leicester's Gallery of British Art in Early Nineteenth-century England", *Journal of the History of Collections* 13, no. 2 (2001): 175–89.
- 71 For an example of how a gamble on a new and unusual form of cultural patronage could pay dividends at the French court in a way analogous to the argument proposed in the present article, see Katie Scott, "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de La Muette", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 231–44.
- 72 Quoted in Postle, *Subject Pictures*, 203, 205.
- 73 *The World*, 3 Feb. 1787.

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# Looking for “the Longitude”

Katy Barrett

## **Authors**

## **Cite as**

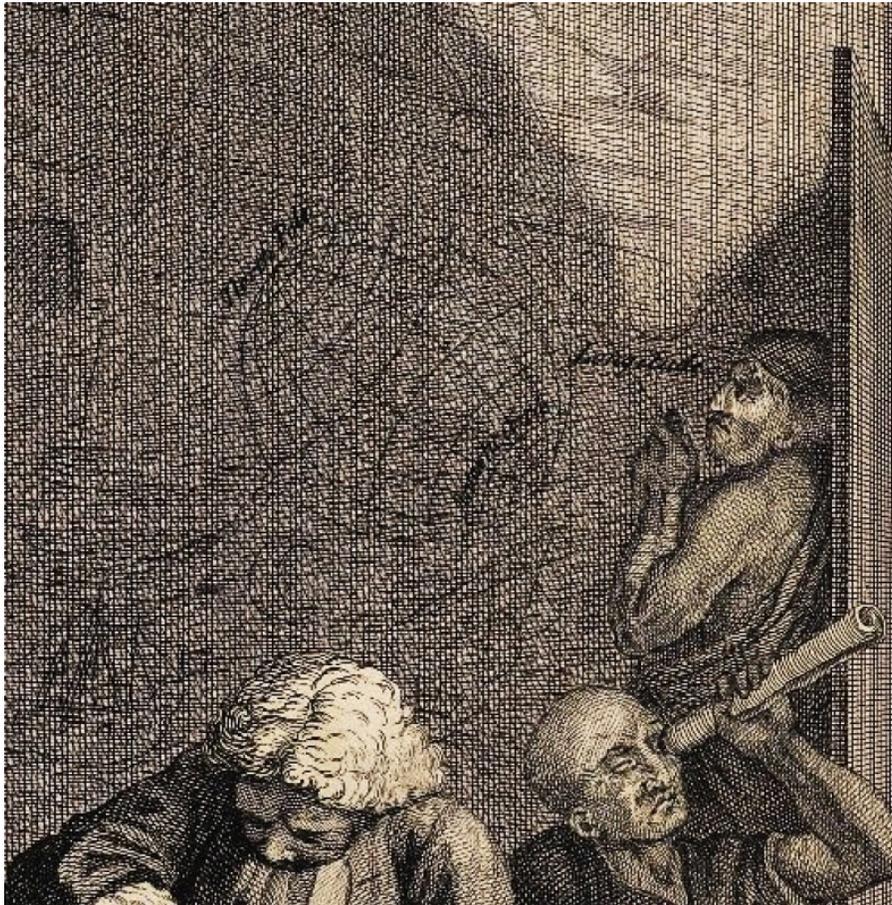
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**The “Look First” feature is pre-eminently visual, encouraging viewers to engage with art objects in new ways through BAS’s digital platform.**

**"Looking for the Longitude" will be published as a sequence over 12 days to coincide with the anniversary of the Hogarth Act, culminating on 25 June. Looking for “the Longitude” takes us on an interactive exploration of the ‘Longitude Problem’, drawing in contributions from experts in the field as it grows. Locating a detail from the final plate of Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress* as its starting point, the article will unfold over subsequent weeks to include a range of connected images and objects, including a Twitter tour of associated places and sites.**

Introduction by

**Katy Barrett**, Curator of Art pre-1800, Royal Museums Greenwich



**Figure 1.**

after William Hogarth, *The Rake's Progress*, 'The Madhouse' (detail), engraving

This “Look First” feature begins with one small detail from a print made in 1735: the depiction of an inmate of Bedlam, found in the final plate of William Hogarth’s famous satirical series *A Rake’s Progress*. In the shadows at the back of the notorious madhouse, a man looks intently at a drawing on the wall—a drawing that alludes to a particular scientific question. What he is considering is how to find a means of accurately measuring longitude at sea: a problem of central importance for Hogarth’s contemporaries, but one that has rarely troubled historians of his work. <sup>1</sup>

From this detail, we will pan out to twelve associated images, in order to look at how the “longitude problem”, as both an intellectual and a scientific endeavour, came to be embedded within Georgian visual culture and the law concerning copyright. Here, “Look First” looks over the shoulder of Hogarth’s

figure, and uses this particular detail from the artist's work to think anew about the act of detailed looking itself, and about how we might learn to see an image within its social and historical context. For this inmate's concern was not only that of how to solve the "longitude problem", but also of how to communicate the details of his solution such that others might see it as he did.

The "so much wanted and desired" measurement of longitude at sea had been of increasing interest to sailors and natural philosophers throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> While latitude could be established relatively easily from the height of the sun, longitude required extremely accurate technology, together with complicated observations and calculations of the moon and stars. Yet, these two lines—latitude and longitude—were needed to fix your point on the Earth, and more particularly to establish one's location on a featureless sea. It was in the eighteenth century that the problem of establishing longitude became particularly acute, as both British trade and naval power expanded. In 1714 the British government passed an Act to encourage proposals to find longitude accurately at sea.<sup>3</sup> At the time, a number of potential solutions to the problem were thought to be "true in the Theory, but difficult to execute", as Sir Isaac Newton reported to Parliament.<sup>4</sup> The "Longitude Act" therefore sought to encourage new proposals, and established a board of commissioners to judge these, rewarding graded amounts of money proportionate to a submission's success.

The ten, fifteen, or twenty thousand pounds on offer was a remarkable amount of money. It was equivalent to the top prizes in the popular lotteries of the period. Winning would make someone's fortune. "The longitude", as it simply became known, instantly attracted hundreds of proposals from genuine, deluded, and disingenuous inventors alike. Poor John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal and therefore an *ex officio* Commissioner of Longitude, complained of the "Swarme of hopefull Authors" who tried to contact him.<sup>5</sup> Both manuscript and published proposals were sent to the Commissioners and advertised to the public in broadsheets and newspapers alongside offers of public demonstrations. Longitude became part of the burgeoning public culture of science, discussed and demonstrated in coffeehouses, inns, and drawing rooms.

Simultaneously, the project to discover longitude became emblematic of the spectre of "projecting" that threatened entrepreneurial society. Though it is particularly associated with the notorious financial project of 1720-21 known as the South Sea Bubble, "projecting" was an idea applied to every walk of life, from politics and religion to natural philosophy. A "project" was a naive, foolish, or even malicious scheme that preyed on public gullibility and that generated financial investments that never brought a return. With its

encouragement of proposals that sought financial backing, longitude became the ultimate example of such a project. It was compared by satirical and serious commentators alike to everything from the Hanoverian succession to the philosopher's stone. "Projectors", as one satirical poet observed,

thus lay mighty Schemes,  
And Chymists live in golden Dreams;  
Beggar'd by Hope, in Folly old;  
They starve 'midst fancy'd Pow'r and Gold. <sup>6</sup>

The public attitudes that Hogarth makes visible on the wall of Bedlam are twofold and cyclical: not only that only the mad would seek to solve longitude, but also that the attempt to find a solution would eventually drive any sane person mad. Over twenty years after the passing of the Longitude Act, Hogarth encapsulates "the longitude" that circulated and "bubbled" in print, from scientific pamphlets to engraved images, from poems to religious tracts, and from plays to bawdy jokes. The "great variety of papers and pamphlets" of which Flamsteed complained had, by 1735, made longitude into much more than a niche problem within the science of navigation. <sup>7</sup> It had become a cultural symbol of social concerns around the instability of knowledge and the dangers of speculation in society, and a symbol that any viewer would recognize. Appearing around the time that the Commissioners of Longitude eventually deemed it necessary to meet for the first time, Hogarth's image encapsulated the wider public discourse that framed the Commissioners' dealings with their most famous applicant, the clockmaker John Harrison. <sup>8</sup>

A shadowy group of Hogarth's fellow engravers followed his lead in making this discourse visible. For it was this clutch of hack artists who recognized, picked up, and adapted his longitude reference when they were sent by rival printsellers to view and memorize his *Rake's Progress* paintings surreptitiously at his studio in Leicester Square. Their job was to produce cheap versions of the *Progress* for hack publishers before Hogarth's own, original version became protected by a new copyright act, known colloquially as "Hogarth's Act". <sup>9</sup> These men operated within the graphic culture which generated the myriad visual and textual representations to which Hogarth responded. Their pirate versions show us how these engravers read, understood, and remembered Hogarth's original picture, complete with its longitude "lunatic". They clearly comprehended his reference within the wider symbolism of the longitude debate, but also added, perhaps inadvertently, signs that compounded or expanded Hogarth's original. By looking at the original and hack engravings side by side, combined with the print and manuscript materials that had been circulating in London, we can

see how an engraver producing Hogarth's painting from memory might build up a subtly different version of the original out of a shared network of references. We can develop a "period eye" nuanced by the social, scientific, and cultural world of eighteenth-century London. We can begin, perhaps, to see how others saw Hogarth's image.

The "Hogarth Act" passed into law on 25 June 1734. It was in this precious window between the reading of the Act in Parliament on 4 March and its enactment nearly four months later that pirate engravers had their chance to memorize and interpret Hogarth's detailed scenes. This "Look First" is published to coincide with this period of frantic activity on the part of those long-forgotten pirate engravers. From a first look at Hogarth's painting, the extra images that we will publish will build up day by day, allowing the final pirate version to appear, in the nick of time, on 25 June this year.

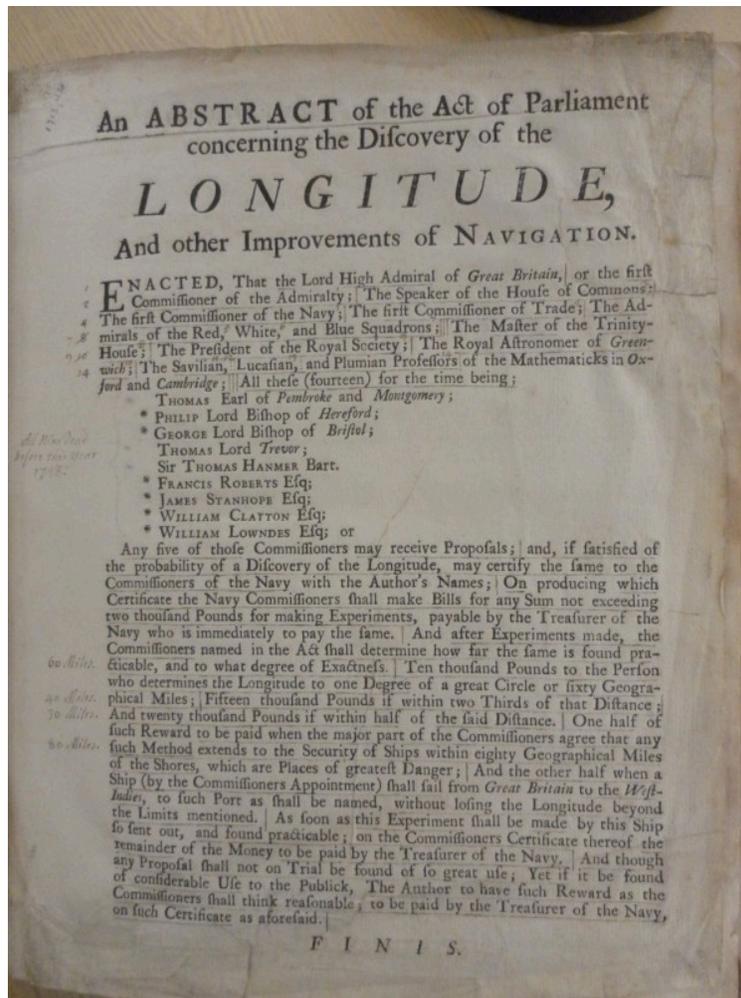
It also seems fitting that these images are appearing digitally, in the context of *British Art Studies's* commitment to the judicious use of Fair Dealing Law as it applies to the reproduction of images, and as online access to collections and databases makes the graphic milieu of Hogarth's work all the more accessible. The images and texts that might have informed Hogarth's copyists were tied to specific urban locations. It was not just what you saw or read but where you saw and read it that mattered. An associated map and Twitter tour will therefore further elucidate the metropolitan landscape which, nearly three hundred years ago, shaped the visual and cultural understanding of those rogue artists.



**Figure 2.**

William Hogarth, The Rake's Progress, 'The Madhouse', 1733-34, oil on canvas , 62.2 x 74.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Sir John Soane's Museum





**Figure 4.** Unknown, An Abstract of the Act of Parliament concerning the Discovery of the Longitude, *and other improvements in Navigation*, 1714, engraving, 23.8 × 18 cm Digital image courtesy of Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

11 June 1714 — 13<sup>th</sup> of L. Anne

Sir Isaac Newton attending the Committee, said  
 that for determining the Longitude at Sea, there have  
 been several projects, true in the Theory, but difficult  
 to execute.

One is by a Watch, to keep time exactly, but  
 by reason of the motion of a Ship, the variation of  
 heat & cold, wet and dry, and the difference of gravity  
 in different Latitudes, such a Watch hath not yet  
 been made.

Another is by the Eclipses of Jupiter's  
 Satellites: but <sup>by reason of the length of Telescopes</sup>  
 requires to observe them, and the motion of a Ship  
 at sea, these Eclipses cannot yet be there observed.

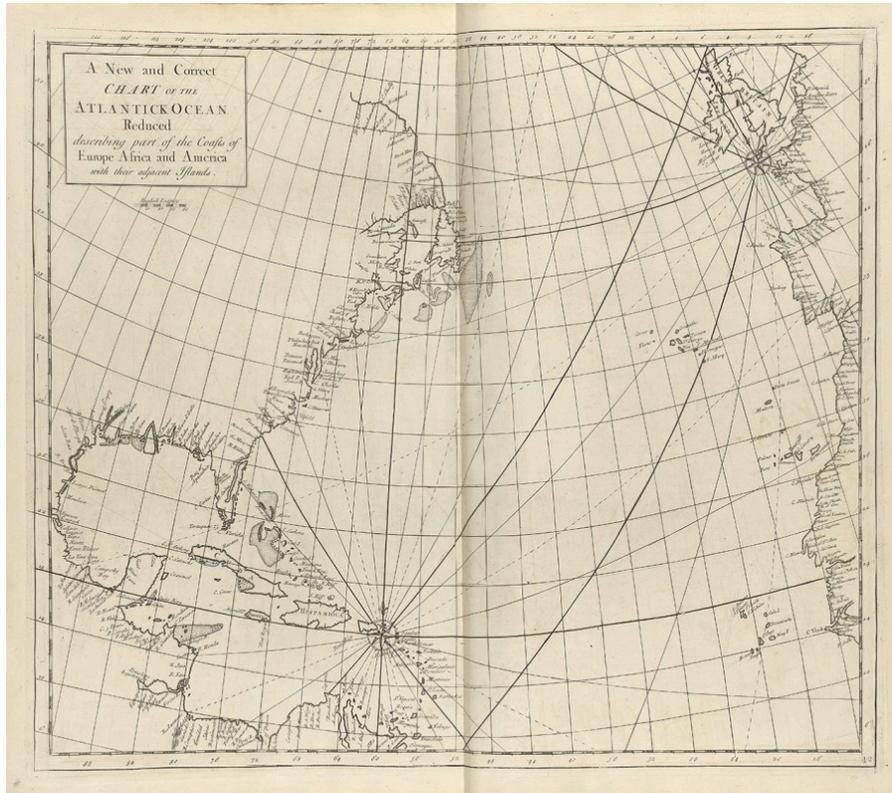
A third is by the place of the Moon;  
 but her Theory is not yet exact enough for this  
 purpose: it is exact enough to determine her  
 Longitude, within two or three degrees, but not  
 within a degree.

16<sup>th</sup> January 1714/2

If Clocks or Watches could be made to keep time  
 exactly on Ship board, 'tis allowed on by all hands,  
 they would be the best means for determining the  
 Longitude at Sea.

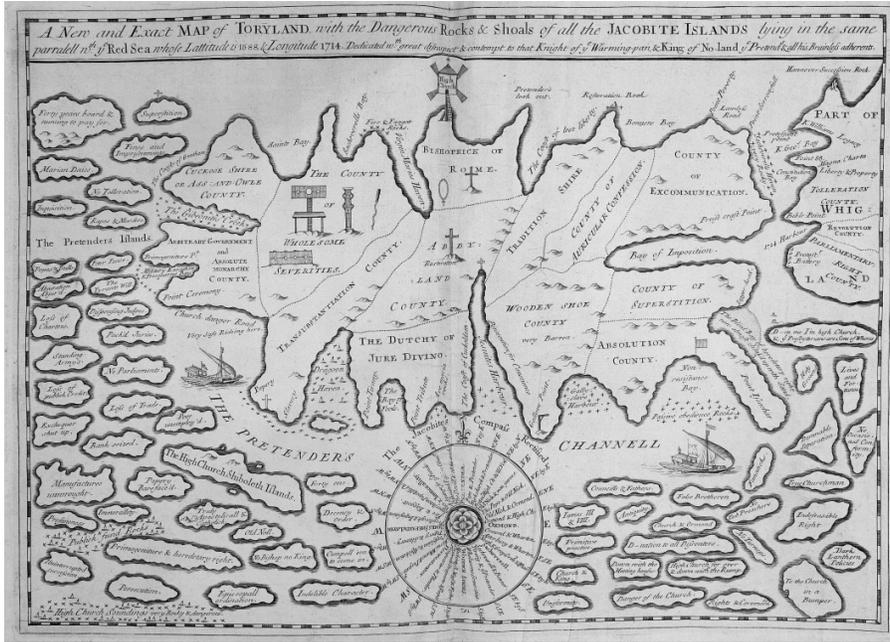
M. Fother, P.R.S. Robert Smith, M.A. & P. Comd. James Bradley, M.A. & P. Comd. J. Gordon, P. Comd. George Spateman Edmund Halley, M.A. & P. Comd.	Wm. Jones Marcibignish James Swinn Chas. Savinich A. De Moivre John Hadley.
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**Figure 5.**  
 William Wildman Barrington, Sir Isaac Newton's  
 Opinion given in 1714, Manuscript copy collated by  
 William Wildman Barrington, 1764, pen and ink, 32.0  
 x 20.3 cm Digital image courtesy of National  
 Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich

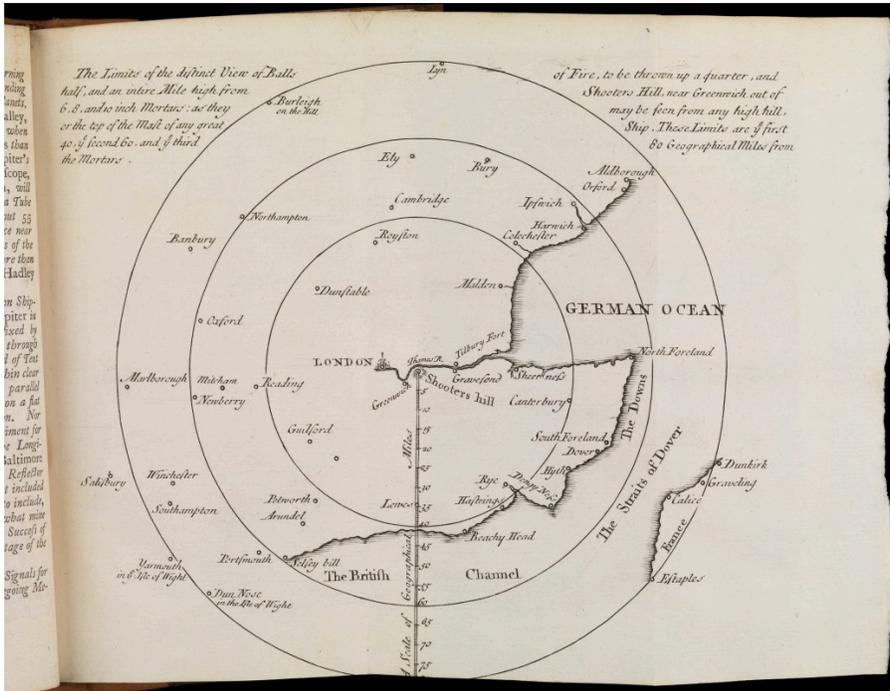


**Figure 6.**

Unknown, 'A New and Correct Chart of the Atlantick Ocean, *reduced* describing part of the Coasts of Africa and America with their adjacent islands' from *Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis*, 1724, engraving, 51 x 59 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich



**Figure 7.** Unknown, A New and Exact Map of Toryland, with the dangerous Rocks and Shoals of all the Jacobite Islands lying in the same Parallel nth ye Red Sea whose Latitude is 1688, and Longitude 1714, 1729, engraving, 56.5 x 57.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Bodleian Library, University of Oxford



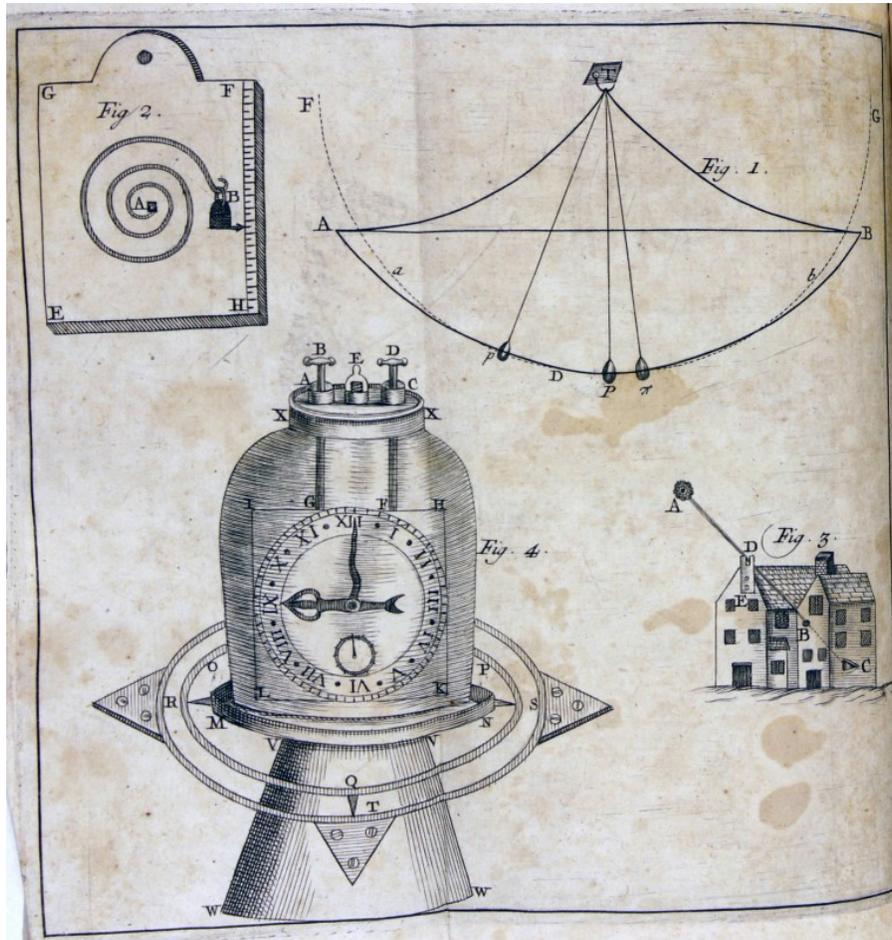
**Figure 8.** Unknown, Plate from William Whiston, The longitude discovered, 1738, engraving, 19.4 x 25.5 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich





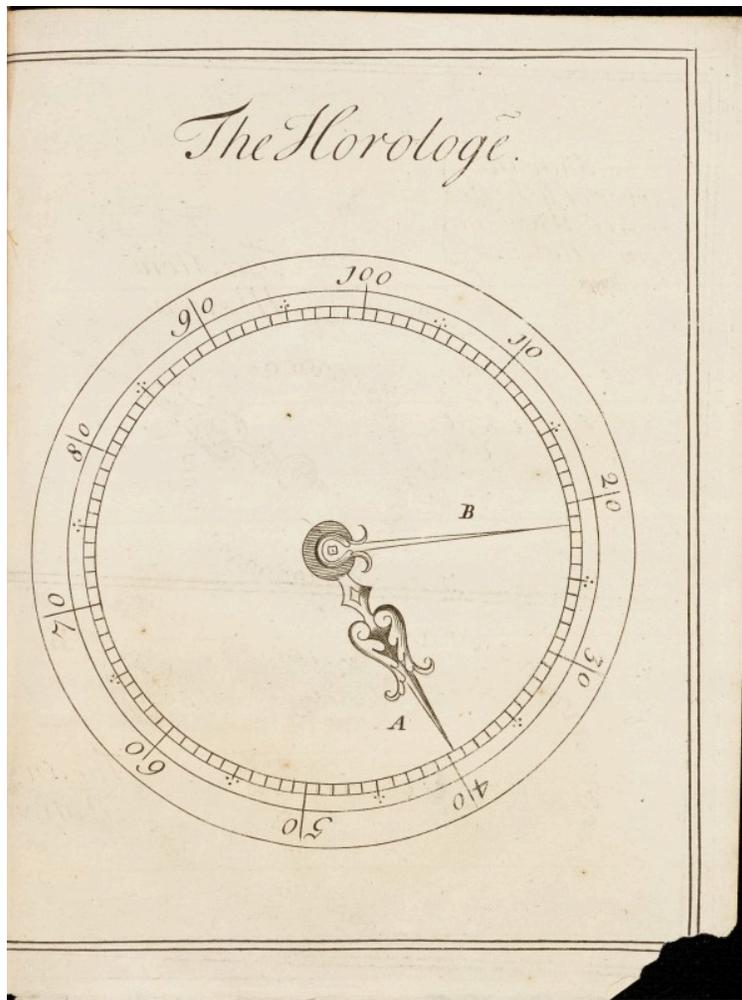
**Figure 10.**

Unknown, Frontispiece to William Hunt, *The projectors. A comedy. As it was intended to be acted at one of the theatres, 1737*, engraving, 19.3 × 11.8 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich



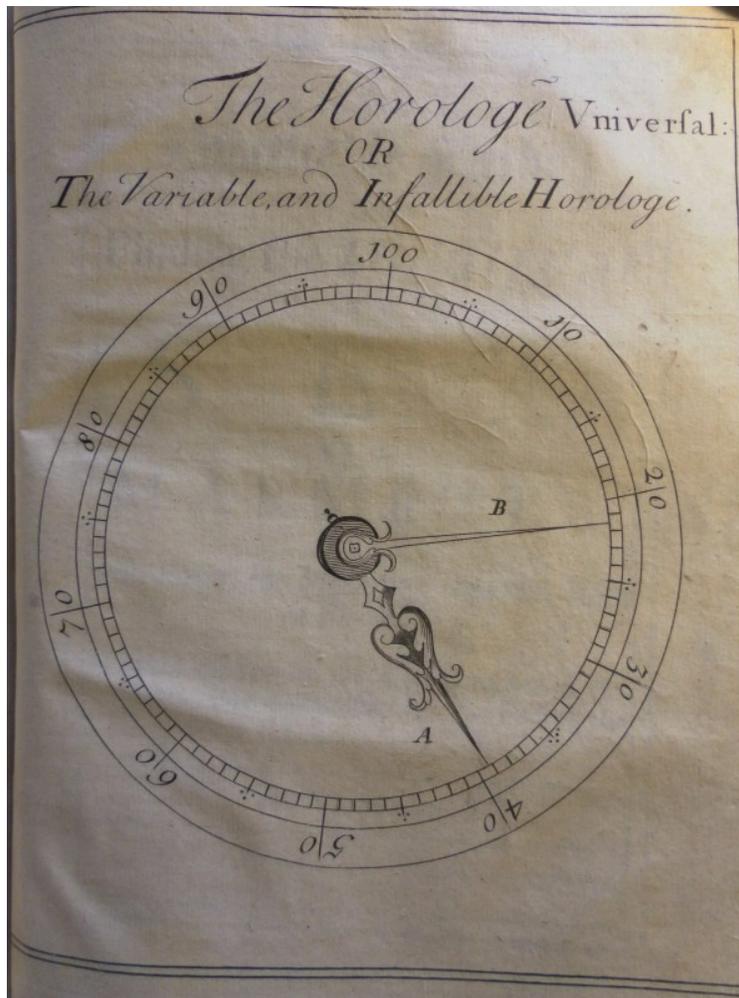
**Figure 11.**

Unknown, Plate from Jeremy Thacker, *The longitudes examin'd*, 1714, engraving, 19.3 × 16.4 cm Digital image courtesy of St John's College, University of Cambridge



**Figure 12.**

Unknown, Plate II 'The Horologe', from William Hobbs, *A new discovery for finding the longitude*, 1714, engraving, 21.5 x 16.1 cm Digital image courtesy of Cambridge University Library



**Figure 13.**

Unknown, Plate II 'The Horologe Universal', from William Hobbs, *A new discovery for finding the longitude*, 1716, engraving, 21.0 × 15.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Magdalen College, University of Oxford



**Figure 14.** Unknown, after William Hogarth, He is chained raving mad in Bedlam, 1735, engraving, 27 x 32.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Response by

**Katy Barrett**, Curator of Art pre-1800, Royal Museums Greenwich

### **Day 1: Response to figures 2 and 3**

Hogarth's "modern moral" print series brim with references to specific London locations. He uses these urban spaces, rich in meaning to a contemporary audience, to place his protagonists not only spatially, but also socially, morally, economically, and politically, in terms of the cultural geography of the city. These were geographies that informed how Londoners lived their lives, and how they understood the print and manuscript materials that circulated in the city. They were crucial to how different protagonists engaged with the "longitude problem", whether as commissioners, natural philosophers, instrument makers, publishers, mapmakers, artists, satirists, or the frequenters of coffee houses

Over the next ten days, a group of experts will consider the significance of different locations in eighteenth-century London. Each is connected to a different image in the longitude story and each contributes to build a picture of how Hogarth's hack copyists would have understood his image. Follow our experts in a trail across London through a Twitter tour and interactive map.





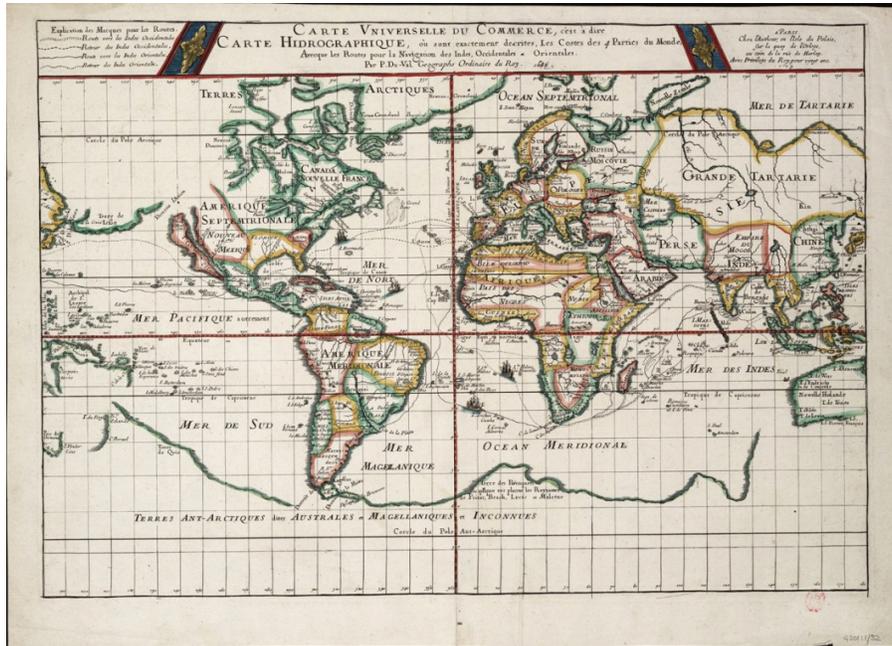
Response by

**Richard Dunn**, Senior Curator for the History of Science at Royal Museums Greenwich

## **Day 2: Response to figure 4**

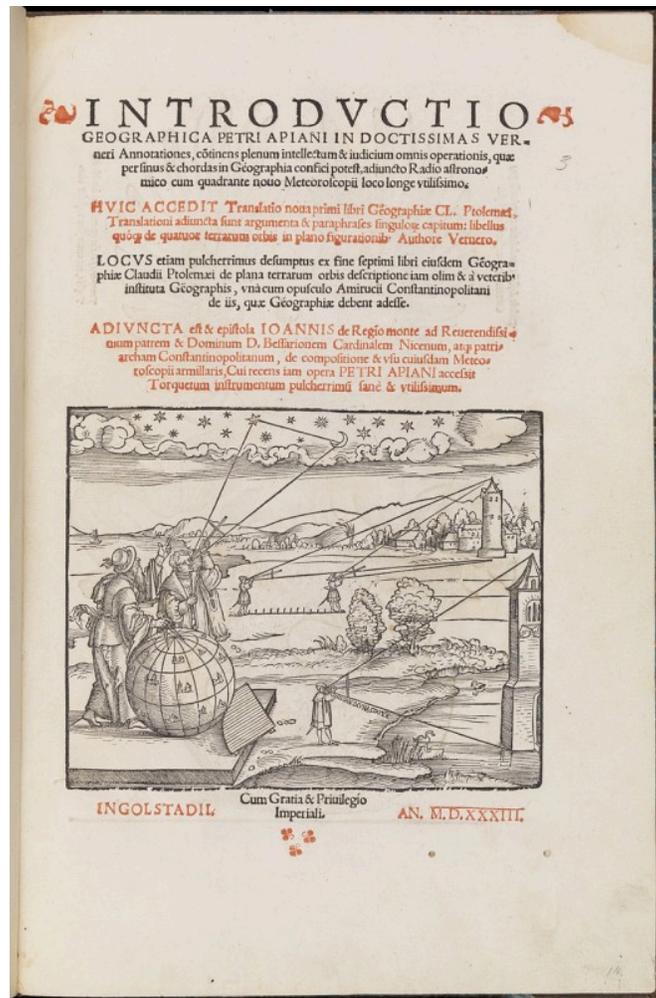
Queen Anne came to the House of Lords for the last time on 9 July 1714. On that day she gave her royal assent to twenty-nine Acts of Parliament, including at number six, “An Act for providing a Public Reward for such Person or Persons as shall discover the Longitude at Sea”. Though promulgated in Westminster, the Act had a wider geographical history and its supporters hoped it would have an impact across the globe.

The Act was meant to tackle a single, long-standing seafaring problem: how to measure a ship’s longitude (east-west position) when out of sight of land, in order to combine it with the more easily measurable latitude (north-south position) to pinpoint one’s position. The challenge, however, was not one of theory—mathematicians and philosophers had long understood the principles and perhaps felt they might soon sort the practicalities too. The German mathematician and printer Peter Apian, for instance, even illustrated one of the known longitude-finding methods on the title page of his *Introductio Geographica* (Ingolstadt, 1533), showing an observer measuring the distance between the moon and a fixed star.



**Figure 16.**

Pierre Du Val, Carte universelle du commerce, 1686, engraving coloured in outline, 42 × 58.5 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich



**Figure 17.**  
 Peter Apian, title page *Introductio Geographica*  
 (Ingolstadt, 1533), 30.7 × 20.5 cm Digital image  
 courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal  
 Museums Greenwich

But theory ran into trouble at sea: ships made unsteady observing platforms; long voyages took in all sorts of climates; the weather might be hostile. That said, ships were successfully trading across the globe long before 1714: Pierre Du Val's 1686 world-map showing French and Spanish routes makes this abundantly clear. Nevertheless, the desire to find a way to fix longitude at sea endured, 'for the Safety and Quickness of Voyages, the Preservation of ships, and the Lives of Men', as the Act noted. Attempts to encourage workable solutions had a long history too: as different nations came to dominate the high seas, it seems, so thoughts turned to the longitude. Spain offered rewards in 1567 and again in 1598; the Dutch from 1600. England then France joined the party in the eighteenth century. But theory ran into trouble at sea: ships made unsteady observing platforms; long voyages took in all sorts of climates; the weather might be hostile. That said, ships were

successfully trading across the globe long before 1714: Pierre Du Val's 1686 world map showing French and Spanish routes makes this abundantly clear. Nevertheless, the desire to find a way to fix longitude at sea endured, "for the Safety and Quickness of Voyages, the Preservation of ships, and the Lives of Men", as the Act noted. Attempts to encourage workable solutions had a long history too: as different nations came to dominate the high seas, it seems, so thoughts turned to the longitude problem. Spain offered rewards in 1567 and again in 1598; the Dutch from 1600. England, then France, joined the party in the eighteenth century.

Once Britain made its play, hundreds of abstracts of the 1714 Act must have been printed to spread the news beyond Westminster. They set out the essentials of the Act: the Commissioners nominated to judge proposals; the sea-trials by which promising solutions would be assessed; the rewards of up to £20,000. Most of the flyers have disappeared. This copy, annotated by mathematician and inventor Nicolas Fatio de Duillier (a man with hopes of a reward) and pasted into his copy of Newton's *Principia*, is a rare survival of the attempt to spread the word from Parliament to the people.

Response by

**Rebekah Higgitt**, Lecturer in history of science, University of Kent

### **Day 3: Response to figure 5**

The Longitude Act of 1714 appointed Commissioners to decide whether proposed methods of finding longitude should be tried and rewarded. What it did not do was set up a standing body, or “Board” of Longitude, or any kind of procedure for submitting methods and machines. Those who wished to be considered under the terms of the Act were left to address the Commissioners or the Admiralty in published pamphlets, in newspapers, by letter, or in person. The Astronomer Royal, John Flamsteed, was one of the Commissioners, and as early as August 1714 was writing to his former assistant Abraham Sharp about the letters, pamphlets, and “pretenders” reaching him at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. It “will make you laugh abundantly”, he told Sharp, to hear of the two men who travelled 150 miles (over 80 kilometres) to tell him about their vacuum-based timing device.

In the 1720s Newton continued to be consulted by the Lords of the Admiralty. He reiterated his general advice (he was right that astronomy was the only means by which longitude could be *found* if it had been lost: clocks would only *keep* longitude; [fig. 18](#)) and commented as required on specific proposals. These included Jacob Rowe’s hour glasses, made with tin “sand”, which he considered “a very good piece of art”.

To the R<sup>ts</sup> Hon<sup>ble</sup> the Lords Commissioners  
of his Maj<sup>ties</sup> Admiralty.

May it please your Lordships

The Longitude will scarce be found at sea without pursuing those  
methods by which it may be found at land. And these methods are hitherto only  
two: one by the motion of the Moon the other by that of the innermost Satellite  
of Jupiter. The first method hath been long practis'd by Geographers, & Geography  
hath been settled thereby: but the Motion of the Moon is not yet exact enough for  
the sea. It hath lately been made exact enough for finding the Longitude at sea  
without error above three Degrees, & if it were exact enough for finding it  
without error above one Degree it would be very useful, if without being above 60  
minutes it would be more usefull, & if without error above half a Degree it would  
scarce be improv'd any further, as I told the Committee of Parliament in writing  
when this matter was refer'd to them. And thereupon the Parliament pass'd the  
Act to reward him or them who should find it to 2 Degrees or to 40 Minutes or to half  
a Degree. But nothing hath been done since for making it more exact than it was at  
that time. Dr Halley hath been observing the Moon the three last years, & finds her  
Theory as exact as I affirm'd: but to make it exact enough for sea affairs is a  
work of time. His errors sometimes amount to six minutes. When it shall be made  
a little exacter so as never to err above three or four minutes, it may be time to  
begin to apply it to sea affairs.

The other method of finding the Longitude is by observing the eclipses of the  
innermost Satellite of Jupiter. This is the easiest & exactest method at land, & hath much  
corrected Geography. But Telescopes of a sufficient length for seeing those Eclipses  
are not manageable at sea. And what may be done by short reflecting Telescopes will  
take in much light & magnify but little, hath not yet been try'd.

A good sweet-water kept from the air in a proper case, & examin'd every four  
mornings & four evenings of the rising & setting Sun, & kept in an even heat, may be  
sufficient for knowing the time of an observation at sea till either methods can be  
found out. Or some such pendulum clock may be used as the Quaker try'd in going  
from hence to Portugal. Or such a clock as M<sup>r</sup> Cass. Billingsley propos'd to be  
try'd. But these clocks will be affected by the variation of gravity in varying the  
Latitude: & the quantity of that variation is not yet sufficiently known.

The four glasses of M<sup>r</sup> Rouse made with sand of sea are a very good piece of  
art, the sands being globular & small & of an equal size. These glasses in very smooth  
sea sailing by the log may with advantage be used instead of the vulgar lead glasses  
made with common sand, if these that are well made can be had at a moderate price. For  
the vulgar glasses are not exact enough for this purpose, for they have not yet been  
found that differ not in running the feet or the inches, & even a small motion  
of the sand will alter the motion of a ship with respect  
to the sea water at the depth of some fathoms below the surface, provided that near  
at the surface may add to the improvement of sailing by the log, provided that these new  
methods will not be too troublesome to be cheaply used by the seamen. But this device  
to be further consider'd for the motions of the sea arising from winds seem to depend  
mainly at the surface, & reach not very far, but those of lasting currents seem to depend  
& so do those arising from the cause of tides. <sup>It is therefore more especially</sup>  
M<sup>r</sup> Rouse's instruments for taking altitudes <sup>of the sun</sup> may be  
also well contriv'd, & deserves to be try'd at sea for finding the Latitude. They may be  
try'd

### Figure 18.

Sir Isaac Newton, Draft of a letter to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, about potential methods of determining longitude at sea, circa 1697-circa 1725, pen and ink on paper Digital image courtesy of Cambridge University Library



**Figure 19.**

after Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Charles Pugin, Board Room of the Admiralty, Plate 3 of *Ackermann's Microcosm of London*, 1808, coloured aquatint, 27.6 × 33 cm Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Royal Museums Greenwich

Careful lobbying and alliance building were used to gain the attention of Commissioners. Schemes were described or demonstrated at a range of sites, and testimonials could boost their plausibility. The Royal Society, the Admiralty, the workshops of established instrument makers, and London's coffee houses were all places in which longitude projects were discussed and might gain traction. These pathways were well trodden before the Commissioners of Longitude ever found reason to meet as a group and transact business. It required the interest and approval of experimental philosophers and instrument makers before John Harrison's sea timekeeper was first considered for reward in 1737. It was the on-going relationship with Harrison above all that caused the Commissioners to meet regularly over the next few decades, although there were other methods and pieces of work to consider, to commission, and to reward. By the 1760s, when formal trials took place of variations on three of the methods Newton had highlighted in 1714, the Commissioners had begun to refer to themselves as a Board. Meetings at the Admiralty were regular, there was business to attend to, a secretary to keep minutes, and still plenty of correspondence to tackle (fig. 19).

Response by

**Katherine Parker**, PhD Research Fellow, Hakluyt Society

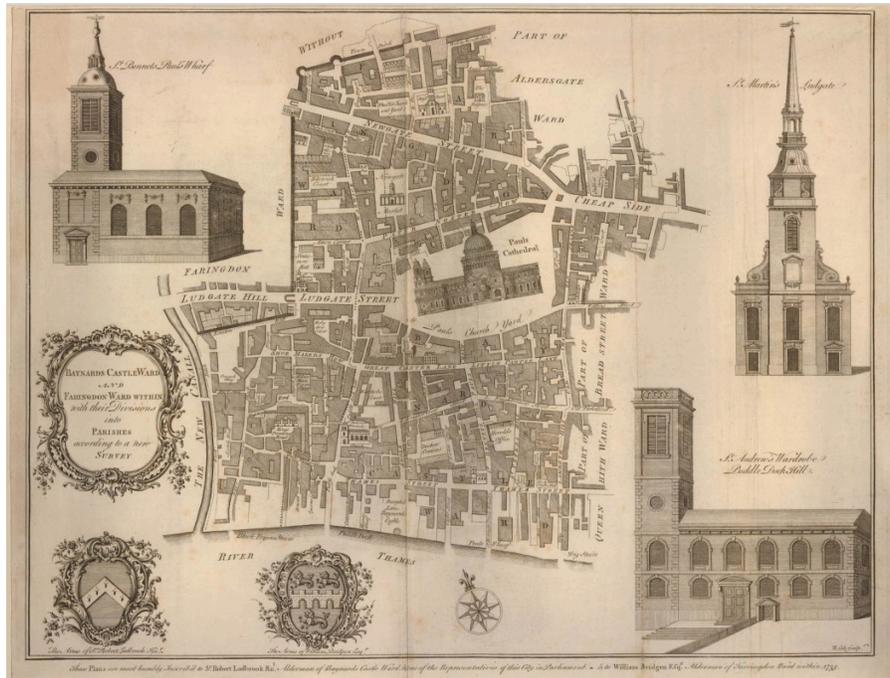
#### **Day 4: Response to figure 6**

In the eighteenth-century, as now, maps could be used for a variety of purposes and appealed to a broad audience. Schoolboys learned to read globes in school, merchants relied on maps to plan trade, sailors used charts to navigate, and women read gender-targeted ladies' geographies—cartography, like the longitude, was part of the literate, polite consumer society of eighteenth-century London. A prominent group interested in maps were the Fellows of the Royal Society, founded in 1660, which met at Crane Court from 1710 to 1780 ([fig. 20](#)). In an attempt to construct a comprehensive understanding of the world, the Royal Society served as a repository for maps, books, and artefacts brought to it from abroad. The Fellows did not, for the most part, make their own maps, however. To buy or commission a map, Fellows would have had to walk down Fleet Street to St Paul's Churchyard, the centre of the print industry in eighteenth-century London ([fig. 21](#)).



**Figure 20.**

Charles John Smith, House occupied by the Royal Society Crane Court Fleet Street, 1837-1840, etching, 17.4 × 11.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum



**Figure 21.**

Benjamin Cole, Baynards Castle Ward and Faringdon Ward within with their Divisions into Parishes, *according to a new Survey*, 1756, engraving, 36.8 × 47.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

Britain did not have a notable domestic map-making industry until after the Restoration and the Great Fire of 1666, when French Huguenots and Dutch immigrants moved to London, particularly the Soho area, and installed themselves in the print industry. British map-makers tended to be engravers, while their Continental counterparts would create manuscript maps that would be sent to guild artisans for engraving. To make a new map, the geographer would consult sources old and new, develop a sketch map, and then engrave the draft on copper plate. However, since copper plates were expensive, map-makers often recycled or altered old plates to cut down on production costs. The use of old sources and the reuse of plates is how certain geographic features, like the great Southern Continent, were perpetuated, even if some scholars doubted their existence. Geographic chimeras were not so much fanciful creations of the likes of Lemuel Gulliver; rather they were, at least in part, the result of the industry practices of map-makers themselves.

Response by

**Sheila O'Connell**, Former Curator of British Prints, British Museum

### Day 5: Response to figure 7

*A New and Exact Map of Toryland* (fig. 7) was published in March 1729 as a warning against the combined threats of Jacobitism and Roman Catholicism. Although there was real concern at the time about the danger of a renewed European war, references are to recent domestic issues, notably the so-called Atterbury Plot of 1722 to restore the Stuart monarchy. The immediate motive of the designer of the *Map* may have been to boost support for Robert Walpole's Whig government, and to counter opposition within his own party by generating anxiety about sedition.



**Figure 22.**

William Hogarth, Simon Lord Lovat, 1746, etching on paper, 35.8 × 23.1 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

By the early eighteenth century, visual satire was well established in the propaganda arsenal, and blossomed at times of crisis. One of Hogarth's earliest forays into satire was a response to the South Sea Bubble financial scandal of 1720. In his print of 1721, priced at one shilling—twice the price of the *Map of Toryland*—Hogarth was already aiming at an audience that would appreciate the quality of his artistic talent as well as his skill as a story-teller. He tended to avoid overtly political subjects and his great “Progresses” were based on traditional themes—the girl who goes to the bad, the spendthrift youth, unequal marriage—treated with a new attention to the naturalistic depiction of urban life. He did, however, sometimes venture into politics, on one occasion with a Jacobite subject: his enormously successful print of Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, the veteran supporter of the Young Pretender in the 1745 Rebellion. Hogarth's print of Lovat, “Drawn from the Life” ([fig. 22](#)), is a more sophisticated version of the cheap portraits of notorious criminals that found a wide market at the time.

Many of those who took part in the '45 were executed in London, but Lovat's case drew particular attention, and numerous prints were made of his trial in Westminster Hall and his beheading on Tower Hill, as well as a number of fictional incidents. One anonymous publisher cashed in by using an old woodblock of the execution of Charles I to illustrate a small broadside recounting Lovat's execution and the collapse of one of the stands erected for spectators, which resulted in the death of several of those watching the grisly event ([fig. 23](#)).

The whole Execution and Behaviour,  
Of Simon Lord Lovat,



Who was beheaded on Tower-Hill, on Thursday last for High Treason.

L O N D O N, April 9  
**T**HIS Morning between Seven and Eight o'Clock a Detachment of about Three hundred Horse, and about One Thousand Foot Soldiers, marched through the City from the Strand to Tower Hill, to attend the Execution of Lord Lovat: And the Sheriff of this City, with the Officers, and the Executioner, went from the Marsh Tavern in Finchurch-lane to the House hired by them on Tower Hill for the said Lord Lovat, being the same that was made Use of for the late Earl of Kilmarnock and Lord Balmerino.  
 At Ten o'Clock the Block was fixed on the Stage, and covered with black Cloth, and Three Sacks of Saw Duff were brought up to fire on the Stage.  
 His Coffin was likewise brought and set on the Stage, which was covered with black Cloth, with Brass Nails, Coronets, &c. and on the Lid was the following Inscription, *Simon Dominus Frater de Lovat, decollat. April 9, 1747. Aetatis 56.*  
 At half an Hour after Ten the Sheriff went to the Tower, and after locking some Time at the Gate they were admitted, and the Prisoner, on their giving a Receipt was deliver'd to them.  
 The Sheriff walked with his Lordship to the House provided for him, the Black Pallor and Buffage of the said House, the Rails enclosing a Way from thence to the Scaffold, and the Rails round the Scaffold, being all hung with Black at the Sheriff's Expense. And about Twelve o'Clock his Lordship came upon the Scaffold, and in a quarter of an Hour he with some Composure, laid his Head on the Block, which the Executioner took off at one Blow.  
 Just before Lord Lovat came from the Tower the Scaffold at the Ship Alderside, near Barking-Ally, which was built from that House in many Sorts, and composed to have on it near 1000 Persons, fell entirely down; by which most shocking and unluckily Accident, we saw, eight or ten People were killed of the Spect, and many had their Arms and Legs broke, &c.  
 Such are the miseries, Vices of the Proprietors of these Scaffolds, who built them without the least regard to the Safety of their Fellow-Creatures, whose misfired Curiosity may incline them considerably to venture their Lives on such Occasions.  
 Among the Number of the unhappy Persons killed is Mr. Goldsby, an eminent Woollen Draper in Black-Friars.  
 On Lord LOVAT'S Execution.  
**D**ITTYD by gentle Wind; KILMARNOCK doth  
 The Brave, BALMERINO, were on thy Side;  
 RABCLIFFE, unhappy in his Crimes of Years,  
 Steady in what he did, no back for Truth,  
 Rebel'd his Deat' to destiny assign'd,  
 The Soft lamented, and the Brave oppos'd;  
 But LOVAT'S End indiff'rently we view;  
 True to no King, to no Religion true;  
 No Fair forgives the Fate he was doom'd;  
 No Child laments the Tyrant at his Sins;  
 No Tery pines, thinking what he was;  
 No King compassions, for he left the Cause;  
 The Brave regret not, for he was not brave;  
 The Good mourn not, knowing him a Knave.  
 R. 10.

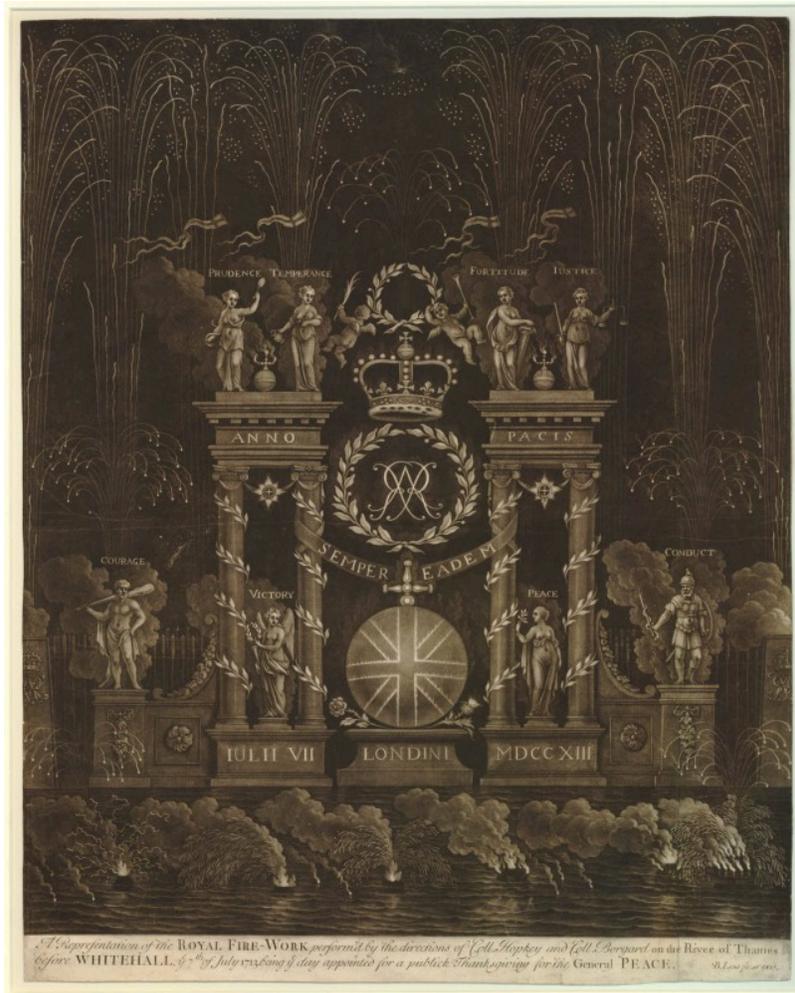
**Figure 23.** Anonymous, The Whole Execution and Behaviour of Simon Lord Lovat, 1747, woodcut in broadside newspaper, 10.4 x 13.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

Response by

**Simon Werrett**, Senior Lecturer in History and Philosophy of Science,  
University College London

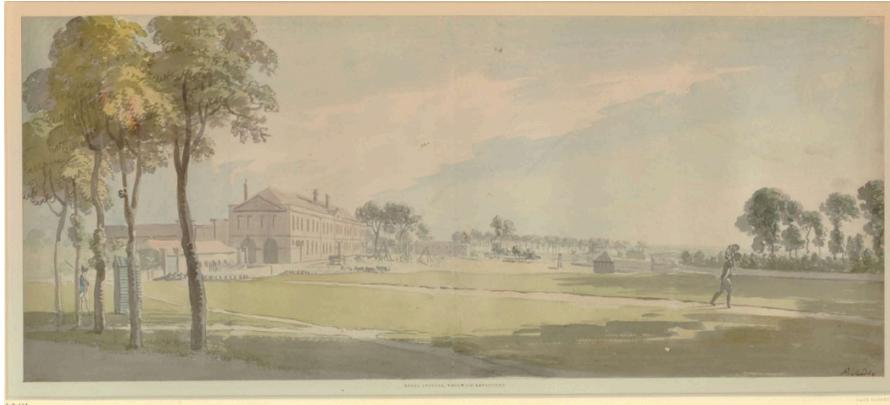
### **Day 6: Response to figure 8**

William Whiston's map ([fig. 8](#)) shows locations where a person would be able to see a ball of fire in the sky shot up from a mortar on Shooter's Hill, then a countryside location east of London. The map is a very unusual way to depict "balls of fire" in the eighteenth century, which were normally represented as shot in battle or as rockets traversing the sky in images of triumphal royal fireworks displays. One such display on the River Thames in July 1713 helped to inspire Whiston's longitude scheme, along with experiments to determine the speed of sound by timing the interval between the flash and bang of distant gunfire. A mezzotint of the 1713 display by Bernard Lens II shows the fireworks "machine", decorated with laurels, statues, and mottoes, surrounded by exploding rockets in the sky ([fig. 24](#)). It is typical of pyrotechnic images of the period.



**Figure 24.**

Bernard Lens, A representation of the Royal Fire-work, *perform'd by the directions of Coll. Hopkey and Coll. Borgard on the River of Thames before Whitehall, the 7th of July 1713, being the day appointed for a publick Thanksgiving for the General Peace, 1713*, Mezzotint, 52.4 × 41.7 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum



**Figure 25.**

Paul Sandby, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich Repository, from the Green in front of the Cadet Barracks, 1968-1796, watercolour on paper Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

Whiston's map, in contrast, divests the scene of any actual fireballs, replacing them with a geometry imagined from above. Whiston's capacity to reimagine fireworks in an abstract geometry is arguably what lay at the root of his longitude scheme, which used heights, times, and distances derived from pyrotechnic signals to allow determinations of position. The notion of abstracting fireworks from royal spectacle and applying them to other uses was highly original, and became a hallmark of English pyrotechnics after Whiston. <sup>10</sup>

Shooter's Hill, the epicentre of Whiston's map, offered an enticing mix of altitude, empty, leafy countryside, and proximity to vital resources to serve Whiston and other natural philosophers' experimental schemes. The same pastoral environment that made places like Woolwich, Greenwich, and Shooter's Hill sites of interest to eighteenth-century painters, also offered the quiet, open, and observable space that experimenters needed to make determinations of such phenomena as the speed of sound, the speed of the propagation of electricity, and the height to which "balls of fire" could be made to ascend. <sup>11</sup>

A more naturalistic picture of Shooter's Hill would reveal its more complicated textures. Daniel Defoe, in his *Tour thro' the whole Island of Great Britain* (revised 1738), noted how the hill was overgrown with coppiced woods, harvested as "Ostrey-Wood" to be used for faggots with which to light the tavern fires of London. <sup>12</sup> Artillerymen, stationed from 1716 at the nearby Woolwich Warren (later the Royal Arsenal; [fig. 25](#)), fired guns on the hill, occasionally assisting in experiments like those performed by Whiston. Another complication of the site was the notorious presence of highwaymen on the hill: "I never was so rob'd in all my Life", claimed one victim. <sup>13</sup> These

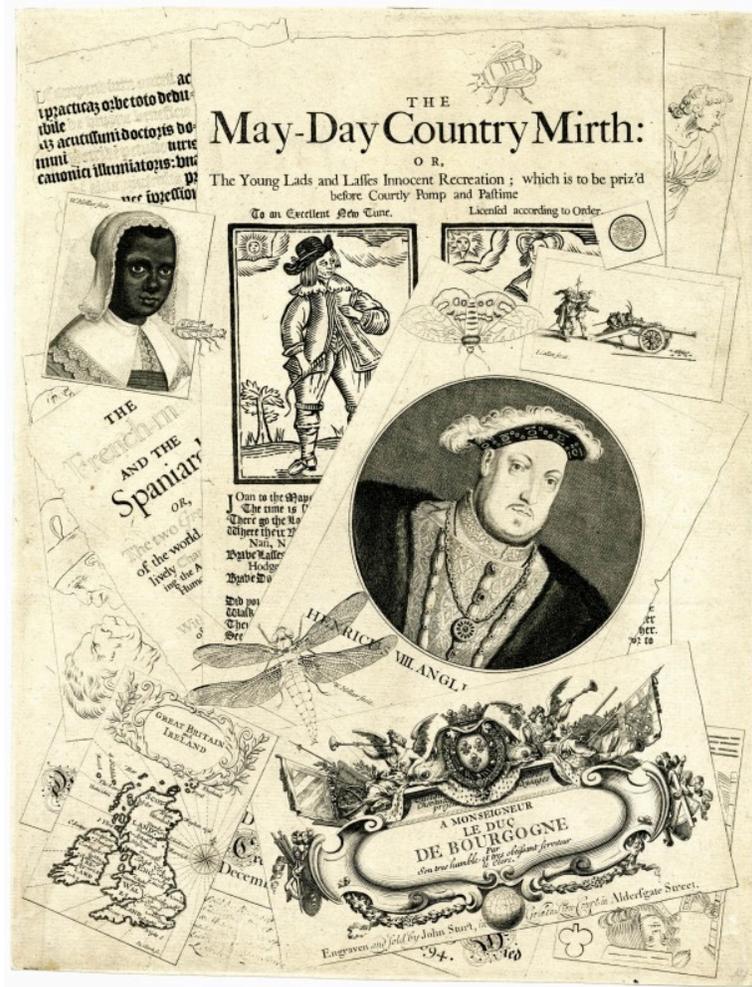
few details make apparent the pitfalls as well as the potential of Shooter's Hill as a site for experiment and for finding longitude; albeit that these problems disappear in Whiston's distanced viewpoint.

Response by

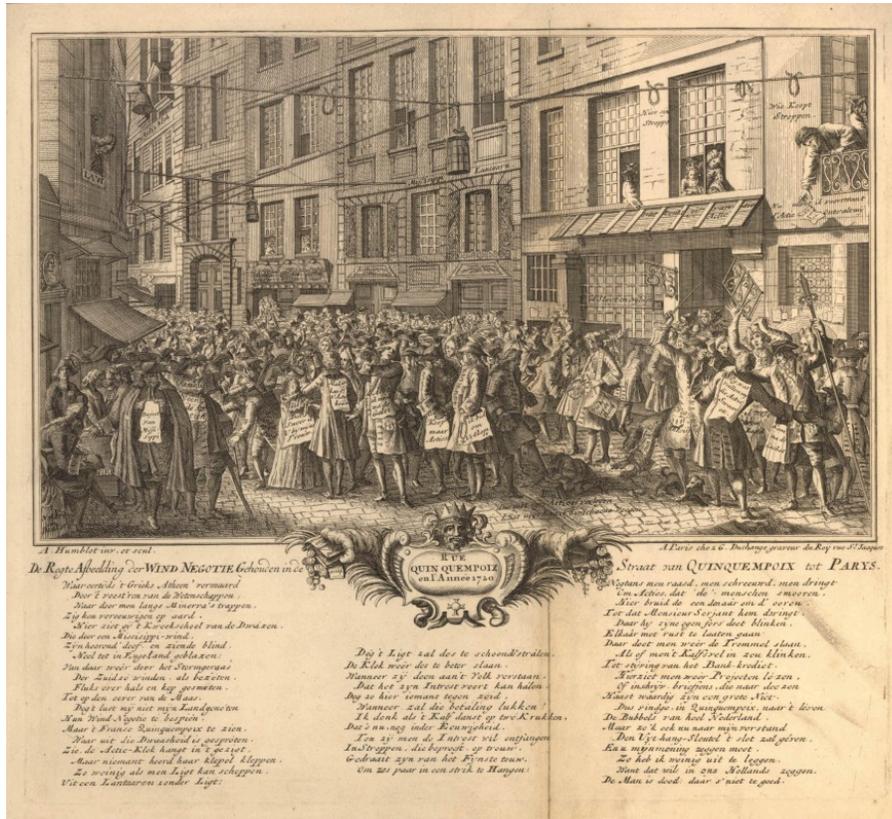
**Mark Hallett**, Märit Rausing Director

### **Day 7: Response to figure 9**

Medley prints such as *The Bubblers Medley* (fig. 9), which enjoyed a modest vogue in the early decades of the eighteenth century, functioned as playful forms of graphic masquerade. They pretended to be haphazard assortments of printed materials—engravings, newspapers, maps, title pages, playing cards, sheets of music—lying one on top of the other. Though their visual deceptions were always cheerfully transparent in character, designed to be recognized and enjoyed in an instant, medley prints provided a variety of supplementary and longer-lasting attractions for their contemporary makers and purchasers. At times, as in the case of John Sturt's *May Day Country Mirth* (fig. 26), they could serve as displays of artistic accomplishment and ingenuity, flaunting the skills of the versatile "Penman" and asking to be appreciated as elaborate kinds of graphic puzzle. They could also be deployed as a means of advertisement, offering an indication of the range of products that were on offer at an individual print-seller's premises. At other times, as in the case of *The Bubblers Medley*, they acted as the vehicles of visual and literary satire, and offered viewers a multi-layered commentary on the political and social issues of the day.



**Figure 26.**  
 John Sturt, *The May-Day Country Mirth*, 1706, etching, 33.8 × 26.1 cm  
 Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum



**Figure 27.** Antoine Humblot, *De Regte Afbeelding der Wind Negotie Gehouden in de Straat van Quinquempoix tot Parys, 1720*, etching, 33.2 x 36.8 cm Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum

Like the publications that disseminated the debates on longitude, objects such as *The Bubblers Medley* need to be imagined being circulated across a variety of spaces, both public and private. Medleys were open to being scrutinized, discussed, and passed between companions in both the intimate environments of the home and the more expansive arenas of the city—they were as much the creatures of the coffee house as of the study. In the instance of *The Bubblers Medley*, this mobile and topical pictorial genre is exploited to lampoon the deluded forms of speculation associated with the great economic crash that has come to be known as the South Sea Bubble, and that wreaked havoc across Europe’s financial markets in 1720. In Britain, thousands of investors, having poured their fortunes into a succession of ever-more outlandish stock schemes sponsored by the South Sea Company, found themselves ruined when the price of stock came crashing down in the autumn of that year. In the aftermath of the crash, public credit was undermined and political debate violently polarized. The various images and texts in *The Bubblers Medley*—some of which reproduce Continental engravings produced in the period (fig. 27), and others of which seem to have been invented by the anonymous engraver of the print—chart the local, British topography of this financial collapse, while simultaneously invoking

the broader, European crisis of which the South Sea Bubble was a part. In *The Bubbles Medley* we are given a glimpse of the chaotic centre of commercial speculation in Paris, Rue Quinquempoix, and a depiction of “Dutch Bubbles” wandering despairingly through the streets of Amsterdam. Closer to home, the medley pictures the crowded financial district of London’s “Change Alley”, which was a warren of streets and lanes lying near the Royal Exchange, the traditional centre of mercantile activity in the city. The area became the symbolic focus of the extended post-mortem on the Bubble, and was relentlessly castigated by commentators as a dangerous environment of delusion and fantasy, even of madness.

If the contents of the various objects on show in *The Bubbles Medley* serve to offer a dense satirical response to the crisis, so too do other aspects of the print, if in more subtle ways. The engraving’s unstable layout, in which certain images are tilted and sent gently spiralling across the picture plane, provides a nice metaphor for the chaotic, unstructured dynamics of the crash itself. Similarly, the print’s exploitation of the power of deception in its very workings—and the transparency of that deception—places *The Bubbles Medley* in ironic alignment with the flimsy forms of illusion that were seen to have been central to the workings of the Bubble and to environments such as Exchange Alley. Finally, the medley’s collage-like approximation of a series of paper commodities serves to dramatize its relationship to the wider paper culture associated with the Bubble. This culture included the realms of satire and newsprint that are gestured to in the print’s contents, but it also included the slew of printed proposals that had driven the mania to invest in the first place, of the type that can be seen brandished by deluded subscribers within the print’s overlapping images. *The Bubbles Medley*, in its own internal fabric as much as in its more explicit narratives, thus offers a memorial both to the events of the “year 1720”, and to the dizzying and deceptive mass of ephemeral paper products through which that same year had been shaped and described.

Response by

**Koji Yamamoto**, Assistant Professor in Business History, University of Tokyo

### **Day 8: Response to figure 10**

The frontispiece to William Hunt's *The Projectors: A Comedy* (fig. 10) sets the scene inside a stately building in Georgian London. The high ceiling is accentuated by two magnificent columns that surround a tall window overlooking another large building. This architectural elegance serves to highlight the human confusion unfolding at the centre. Seven men and a woman are in the middle of busy conversations or transactions, many carrying in their hands and arms parchments or papers about their favourite "projects"—the most visible of them being a scheme for discovering longitude at sea. "Are the Lords sitting?", cries one projector, urging the doorkeeper to present his paper "immediately". He captures the hyperbole typical of the project proposal at this time: "Ay, it is a Matter of general Benefit to the Nation that I have to offer; and therefore it is not fit that I should wait." <sup>14</sup>

By the time the play was published in 1737, such scenes of hurly-burly had become something of a commonplace. Already in 1697, Daniel Defoe described projectors as modern thieves worse than highwaymen:

A meer Projector then is a Contemptible thing, driven by his own desperate Fortune to such a Streight, that he must be deliver'd by a Miracle, or Starve; and when he has beat his Brains for some such Miracle in vain, he finds no remedy but to paint up some Bauble or other, as *Players make Puppets talk big*, to show like a strange thing, and then cry it up for a New Invention. <sup>15</sup>

The play dramatizes precisely this image of the projector as miserably incompetent, amusingly desperate. As the plot unfolds, the gullible Sir Solomon Saphead only narrowly escapes the projectors' snares: he nearly ruins his family dynasty by marrying a daughter to the arch-projector Drainwell and by liquidating his land to invest in alchemical experiments and other schemes of dubious credibility. The frontispiece thus nicely epitomizes the moralizing message that had been repeated over and over again in the early eighteenth century: the discovery of longitude could be as dubious and dangerous as the discovery of the philosopher's stone; poverty-stricken projectors could bring ruin even to ancient families like the fictional Sapheads.



**Figure 28.**  
 after Bernard Picart, A monument dedicated to posterity in commemoration of the incredible folly transacted in the year 1, circa 1720, engraving and etching, 29.5 x 38.5 cm Digital image courtesy of American Antiquarian Society

Such enlightening tales played an important role in the popularization of science. Natural philosophers who offered scientific demonstrations at coffee houses like Marine’s could hope to enhance their credibility by disproving the dubious projector. One such promoter of science, John Theophilus Desaguliers, declared that “Projectors contrive new Machines (new to them, tho’ perhaps describ’d in old Books, formerly practised and then difus’d and forgot)”, and thereby “draw in Persons more ignorant than themselves to contribute towards this (suppos’d advantageous) Undertaking.”<sup>16</sup> Promoters of scientific learning thus tried to position themselves like viewers of Hunt’s frontispiece: standing outside the scene of disorder, where at best they were capable of discriminating unreliable knowledge-claims from more reliable ones.

Yet we now know well enough about actual practices of public science to qualify our perspective. Even humble projectors had some serious hands-on experience with inventions and technologies; even respectable natural philosophers who publicly despised “projectors” were not immune from wrong conjectures and experimental failure. Crucially, natural philosophers like Desaguliers spoke the same language of public service that projectors in

the play such as *Drainwell* and *Shirtless* do. The promise of serving the public and the empire was in fact shared across men of varying technical expertise, theoretical sophistication, disposable income, and access to social networks and institutional membership. Few escaped damaging laughter or the satirical gaze.<sup>17</sup> In reality, therefore, the distinction between the unreliable projector and the purveyors of reliable science was worryingly slight. The frontispiece obscures this inconvenient truth about public science in the age of Hogarth, inviting us instead to accept the comforting clarity between the desperate projector and the diligent, reliable, natural philosopher.

Response by

**Greg Lynall**, Reader in English, University of Liverpool

### **Day 9: Response to figure 11**

The Longitude Act established a competitive environment which gave licence to a war of words between rival entrepreneurs who recognized, especially, the unique cultural power of laughter. Irony, lampoon, and caricature were not off-limits rhetorically within longitude proposals, and the satiric scrutiny subjected to competing schemes challenges our twenty-first-century sense of appropriate discourse in scientific/technical writing.<sup>18</sup> *The Longitudes Examin'd* by Jeremy Thacker (1714; [fig. 11](#)), however, took such ironic deprecation to another level, seeking to expose not only the inadequacy of recent proposals, but also—by brazenly declaring its own mercenary interest—the fake modesty of other projectors. Whilst Thacker's technical achievements have been lauded by some horologists, a case has been made for the parodic intention of the work as a whole, with its authorship attributed to the group of writers now known as the Scriblerians, and particularly Dr John Arbuthnot, physician, mathematician, and Fellow of the Royal Society ([fig. 29](#)).<sup>19</sup> Certainly, Arbuthnot's letters attest that he had been indulging his mathematical ability and comic imagination whimsically in the design of impractical, but technically astute longitude solutions, such as a signalling network of light-houses, not dissimilar to an anonymous proposal put forward (apparently seriously) later that year.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 29.**

Unknown artist, John Arbuthnot, physician and man of letters, 18th century, oil on Canvas, 91.5 × 71 cm Digital image courtesy of Wellcome Library London

As Physician-in-Ordinary to Queen Anne, Arbuthnot lived in apartments at St James's Palace, and there hosted meetings with his fellow wits, including Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and John Gay, in which they laid plans for their collaborative *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* (published 1741), a mock-biography of a buffooning natural philosopher, antiquarian, and projector, whose parodic schemes include several longitude methods.<sup>21</sup> Upon the Queen's death in August 1714, Arbuthnot moved to Dover Street in Piccadilly, where he continued to generate scientifically inspired mirth both individually and collaboratively, in works such as *The Humble Petition of the Colliers* (1716). Swift, meanwhile, returned to Ireland, where his experience of the longitude endeavour took on a more tragic colouring, as he tended to the needs of his friend Joseph Beaumont, an amateur mathematician whose mental illness (and eventual suicide in late 1726) was attributed to an obsession with solving the longitude problem. The psychological frailties of

the projectors in the fictional Academy of Lagado (witnessed by Swift's most famous literary creation, Lemuel Gulliver) perhaps owe something to Beaumont, whom Swift had attempted to commit to Bedlam in 1722.<sup>22</sup> Swift's friend, who died nearly a decade prior to the appearance of *A Rake's Progress*, therefore seemed to confirm that longitude lunacy was more than just a satirical trope, and that the Longitude Act had human, as well as economic, costs.

Response by

**Jim Bennett**, Keeper Emeritus, Science Museum

### **Day 10: Response to figures 12 and 13**

William Hobbs offered to demonstrate his timekeeper by displaying it in a London coffee house. This would have been a demonstration in at least two ways: the clock would be on display and, hopefully, admired for its craft and quality, but presumably it would also be going, and so would prove its success in keeping time. Public demonstration of experimental philosophy as a form of rational entertainment became common in eighteenth-century London, and makers were at the forefront of what, for them, was a new way of advertising their services and developing their market. As well as demonstrating instruments to individual customers in their shops, they adopted more formal media by writing textbooks and giving series of subscription lectures illustrated by experiments. Visitors to London were astonished to see that natural philosophy had become a part of public commerce. Lecturers independent from makers might offer sessions in coffee houses, while one of the centres for the makers' shops was Fleet Street.



**Figure 30.**

Plaque on George Graham's house in Fleet Street, Digital image courtesy of Jim Bennett

John Harrison became part of this public culture as he sought to promote the reputation of his early timekeepers. In 1736, when his first machine was sent for trial on a voyage to Lisbon, the First Lord of the Admiralty told the ship's captain that "The Instrument which is put on Board your Ship, has been approved by all the Mathematicians in Town that have seen it, (and few have not)." <sup>23</sup> The astronomer John Bevis saw it at the workshop of the watch, clock, and instrument maker George Graham in Fleet Street the previous year (fig. 30), and the antiquarian William Stukeley also records seeing it there. After he moved to London, Harrison had a special viewing room in his house where his timekeepers could be seen working; Benjamin Franklin paid to view them in 1757, while Harrison's friend James Short reported that the first timekeeper "was seen by every curious and ingenious person, who were pleased to go to his house". <sup>24</sup>

Thus Harrison and his sea-clocks joined the London fashion for experimental display. The contrast between the mechanical elegance of the clocks and the provincial manner and speech of their maker must have impressed his visitors; his explanations, even when he was prepared to offer any, were far from lucid, and this disparity was no doubt part of the spectacle. Harrison came to be seen as someone who had a very special and individual rapport with the mechanical world, while his lack of education meant that this had not been destroyed through schooling or learning. This was all very well early on in his career: visitors were intrigued by the conceit of “nature’s mechanic”. But it became a handicap later, when however successful his fourth timekeeper had been in trials at sea, for a solution to the longitude problem it became imperative to show that examples could be readily made by artisans of a more common “genius”.

Response by

**Hannah Williams**, Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow, School of History, Queen Mary, University of London

### **Day 11: Response to figure 14**

Hogarth's London studio, which he occupied in the early 1730s, was situated in a tall terraced house on Leicester Square, third from the end in the south-east corner. Outside his house, to advertise his trade, Hogarth hung a shop sign—a portrait bust of Anthony van Dyck—supposedly fashioned from gilded cork by Hogarth himself.<sup>25</sup> Despite such anecdotal details, Hogarth's Leicester Square studio is a difficult space to access now, particularly since its demolition in the nineteenth century. In this it forms a contrast with his other London residence—his country house at Chiswick— which is today part of London's historical tourism trail. Hogarth bought his country retreat in 1749 and lived there until his death in 1764, painting in a studio at the bottom of his garden, where he could escape the hectic life of the city. As Hogarth's two different painting rooms attest, artists' studios in the eighteenth century were not homogeneous spaces; their characters were determined by their locations, by their use, and, above all, by the persons who inhabited them. Studios were working spaces, commercial spaces, social spaces, educational spaces, and domestic spaces.<sup>26</sup> But interestingly enough, they were not yet the aestheticized spaces they would become in the following century. Not until the Romantic period did the artist's studio become a common subject of representation, which makes the images of eighteenth-century studios that do exist all the more intriguing.

One unusual articulation of a London studio was painted by the young, and otherwise little-known American painter Matthew Pratt, whose *The American School* (fig. 31) depicts the London studio of Benjamin West. As its title suggests, Pratt's work is something of a celebratory statement about "the coming of age of American art", localized in the space of this great American master's studio.<sup>27</sup> But rather than as a site of superlative artistic production, Pratt presents West's studio first and foremost as a space of learning. Standing on the left, West instructs his students and imparts his wisdom as they move progressively through the stages of artistic training; from the youngest at the back copying a plaster cast, to the two youths engaged with drawing apparatus and, finally, to the young painter (presumably Pratt himself) starting to transform a blank canvas under the eye of his teacher. Three years before the founding of the Royal Academy, private studios still served as key sites for academic pedagogy. As a depiction of the studio, however, with its full-length figures occupying the majority of the picture's surface, Pratt's painting is really more a group portrait or conversation piece

than a representation of the studio space. Perhaps suggestive of his abiding sense of the studio as a space of sociability, Pratt is concerned with the denizens of the studio and the activities that took place there, but very little with the nature of the place itself.



**Figure 31.**

Matthew Pratt, *The American School*, 1765. oil on canvas, 91.4 × 127.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



**Figure 32.**

Emily Calmady, *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Studio, 65 Russell Square, London*, 1824, 1824, graphite and white gouache on medium, moderately textured, beige, wove paper, 22.9 × 43.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, B2006.6

In complete contrast is Emily Calmady's pencil drawing of *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Studio* (fig. 32) of 1824, preoccupied almost entirely with this space as a space. At first glance, there does not seem to be a person in sight in this image of the portrait painter's studio at 65 Russell Square, other than the sketchy figures on the canvases propped up around the room. But on closer inspection we find seated by the fireplace the tiny figure of one of Calmady's daughters, and then just a glimpse of Lawrence himself, reflected in the large mirror at the right, holding his palette at his easel while painting the little girl's sister for his celebrated painting of *The Calmady Children*.<sup>28</sup> An amateur artist, Calmady presumably depicted the studio during her daughters' sittings, but the scene is as remarkable for capturing the setting as it is the moment. The room is filled with the furniture and clutter of a working studio, all depicted in exquisite detail, from the subjects on the stacked canvases at the left, to the table of brushes in the middle, and the drawers and bench on the right housing pigments, a muller, bottles of oil, rags, and other paraphernalia for the messy business of mixing paint. Yet despite the details recording Lawrence's studio as a lived environment, the vast empty space dominating the foreground of Calmady's scene gestures to something else. Evoking the emerging Romantic visual topos of the studio as an interior space that exteriorizes the interiority of its creative inhabitant, Calmady's drawing of Lawrence's studio seems not only to grant access to his private domestic realm, but to go one step further, offering an intimate encounter with the man himself.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The basic iconography of the print is outlined by Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works* (Print Room: London, 1989), 98.
- <sup>2</sup> As described in the Longitude Act (12 Anne c.15). RGO 14/1:11r, Papers of the Board of Longitude, Cambridge University Library. Accessible through Cambridge Digital Library <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/longitude>
- <sup>3</sup> For discussions of the broader history of the longitude problem and the Board of Longitude, see William J. H. Andrewes, ed., *The Quest for Longitude: The Proceedings of the Longitude Symposium, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 4-6 1993* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), and Richard Dunn and Rebekah Higgitt, *Finding Longitude: How Clocks and Stars Helped Solve the Longitude Problem* (London: Collins, 2014).
- <sup>4</sup> "Sir Isaac Newton's Opinion", BGN/1, Barrington Papers, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
- <sup>5</sup> John Flamsteed, *The Correspondence of John Flamsteed, The First Astronomer Royal, vol. 3, 1703-1719*, ed. Eric G. Forbes (Bristol: CRC Press, 2001), 712, Letter 1366.
- <sup>6</sup> *The longitude discover'd; A tale. By the Author of the Deluge, and Bottomless tub* (London: J. Roberts, 1726), 12.
- <sup>7</sup> Flamsteed, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, 715, Letter 1368.
- <sup>8</sup> The story of Harrison's interactions with the Board of Longitude has been made famous by Dava Sobel's *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of his Time* (London: Walker, 1995). Some of the more exaggerated elements of her story have been redressed by Dunn and Higgitt, *Finding Longitude*. Despite his complaints, it seems that Harrison was the first to present a proposal serious enough for the Commissioners to meet.
- <sup>9</sup> This was petitioned for by Hogarth and six other artists to vest copyright in engraved images for the first time. Act 8 Geo.2 c.13, Parliamentary Statutes online.
- <sup>10</sup> Simon Werrett, *Fireworks: Pyrotechnic Arts and Sciences in European History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 96-99.
- <sup>11</sup> William Derham, "Experimenta & Observationes de Soni Motu, Aliisque ad id Attinentibus, Factae a Reverendo D. W. Derham Ecclesiae Upminsteriensis Rectore, & Societatis Regalis Londinensis Socio", *Philosophical Transactions* 26 (1708-9): 2-35; William Watson, *An account of the experiments made by some gentlemen of the Royal Society, in order to discover whether the electrical power would be sensible at great distances* (London, 1749), 48.

- 12 Daniel Defoe, *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain, divided into circuits or journies*, rev. edn (London, 1738), 143.
- 13 William Shakespeare, "The History of Sir John Oldcastle", in *The works of Mr. William Shakespear . . . Adorn'd with cutts*, ed. N. Rowe, 8 vols. (London, 1714), 8: 181-249 (194).
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# *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* and the process of painting

Rebecca Hellen and Elaine Kilmurray

## **Authors**

Research Director of the Sargent catalogue raisonné and co-author (with Richard Ormond) of nine volumes of the published catalogue raisonné (Yale University Press, 1998–2016).

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**“One Object” is a British Art Studies series that uses an object from a collection as a starting point for collaborative research. Rebecca Hellen and Elaine Kilmurray have co-authored this essay based on their recent analysis of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885–86) by John Singer Sargent**

### **Introduction: a sequence of moments**

“Never for any picture did he do so many studies and sketches.”



**Figure 1.**

John Singer Sargent, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

This “One Object” article on John Singer Sargent’s *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885–86) brings together recent technical examination of the painting with the “patchwork” of moments, ideas, and themes that inform the history of its

making. A variety of observations were recorded by artists and writers who were staying in or visiting Broadway in Worcestershire when Sargent was making his “big picture” there over the late summers and early autumns of 1885 and 1886. By connecting the research carried out in the conservation studio with research from the archive, we present new information about Sargent’s working methods. In considering technical information in tandem with Sargent’s preparatory work, this article explores the evolution of one of Sargent’s best-known paintings.

*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (fig. 1) was included in the exhibition *Sargent: Portraits of Artists and Friends* at the National Portrait Gallery, London, in 2015. The painting was not immediately rehung at Tate Britain when the exhibition closed. Instead, it was brought to the conservation department, where it remained for several months, giving us the opportunity to consider it, unframed and unglazed, under varying conditions of light, and to interrogate it physically.<sup>1</sup> Having direct and prolonged access to a work of art which is usually distanced from us by its framing and public display brought about a rich array of discussion and suggested new routes of enquiry about how the work had been developed by the artist. The wide range of material and information generated by this research project is assembled here, and it reveals that *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* is not so much a single “big picture” or “one object”, but is the outcome of a sequence of different materials, processes, and creative moments coming together.

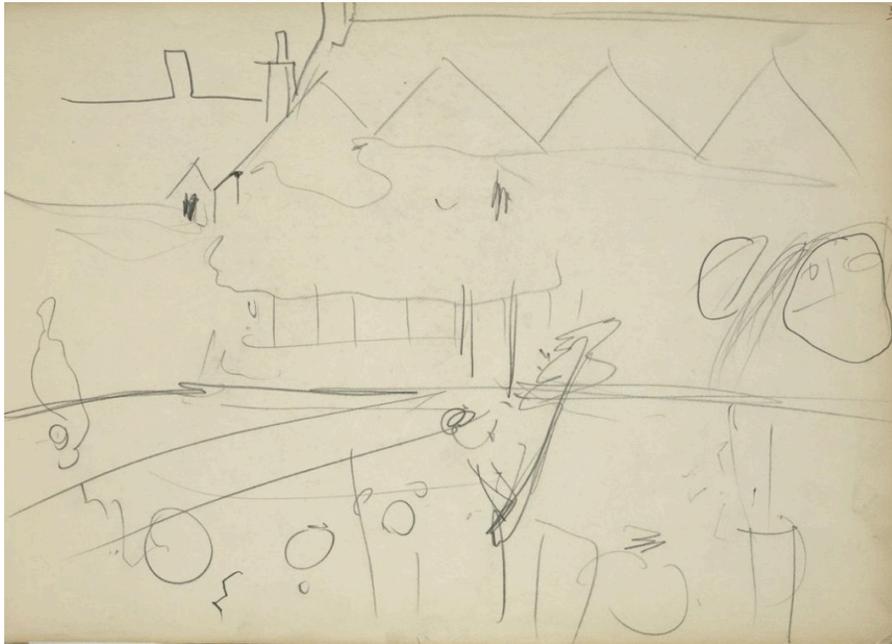
## Sketchy beginnings

It is August 1885. During a boating holiday on the River Thames with the American artist Edwin Austin Abbey, Sargent is captivated by a scene at the village of Pangbourne in Berkshire of two little girls lighting lanterns at dusk in a country garden. The holiday was curtailed when Sargent gashed his head at Pangbourne Weir, but the vision for a large-scale work had taken hold. Abbey took Sargent to stay with another American artist, Frank Millet, and his family at Broadway in Worcestershire to aid his recovery.

The two artists arrived at Broadway on 17 August and, almost immediately, Sargent began expressing his ideas. The garden of Farnham House, the house the Millets were renting, faced the village green and became the initial setting for the painting Sargent later titled *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. The back of the house is visible in an early drawing of the garden, with a roughly indicated rosebush and some pots and lanterns (figs. 2, 3). Millet’s sister, Lucia, wrote to her parents on 24 August that Sargent was “painting in our garden and putting Kate [the Millets’ five-year-old daughter] in as the figure”.

<sup>2</sup> Four faint sketches on a single sheet in a sketchbook (fig. 4) indicate a

single figure in a garden with Farnham House visible in the background. The picture began as a single-figure composition with a realistic setting, but over time it would develop into something more complex, ambitious, and allusive.



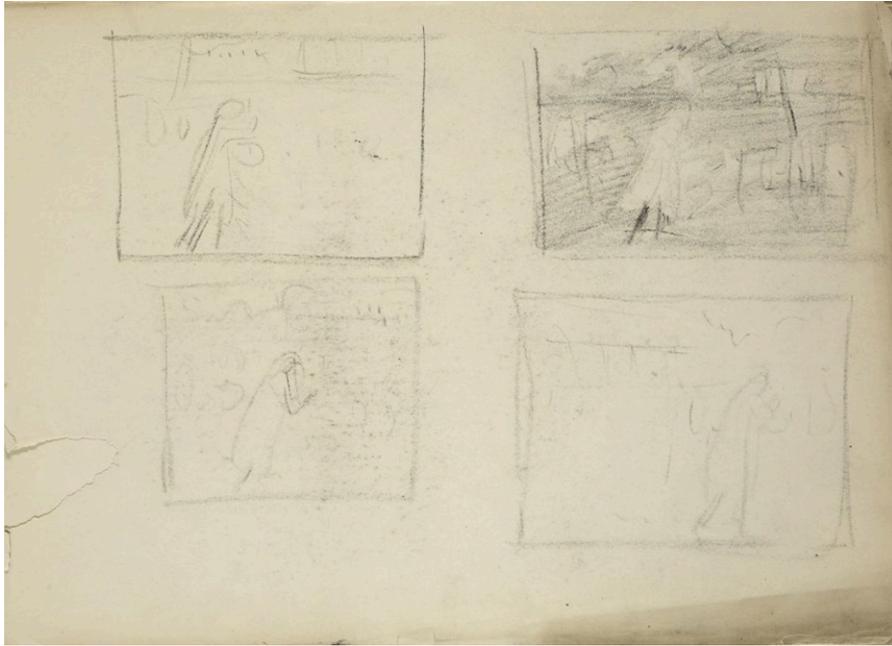
**Figure 2.**

John Singer Sargent, Study for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, graphite on paper, 24.7 × 34.6 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Mrs Francis Ormond (1937.7.21.5) Digital image courtesy of Elaine Kilmurray



**Figure 3.**

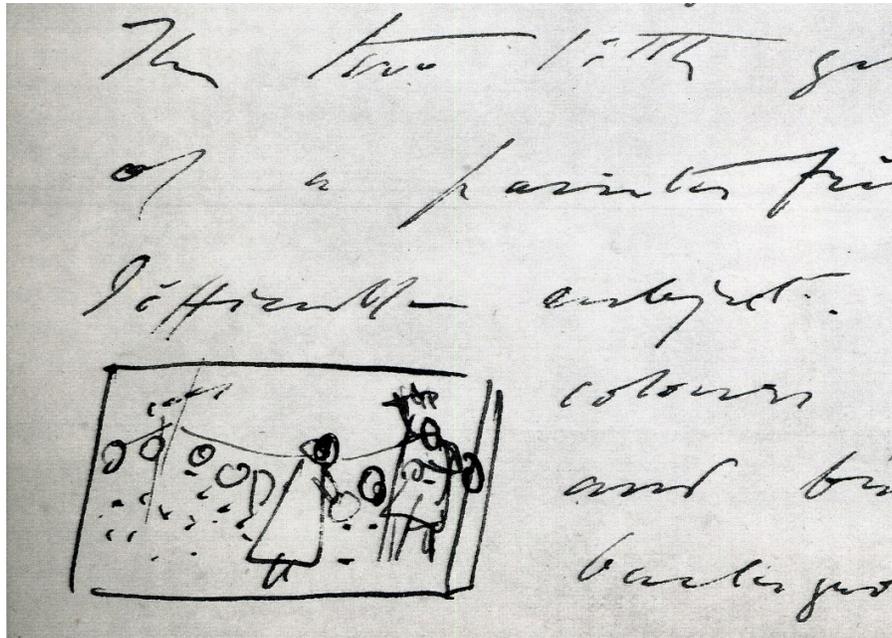
View of the back of Farnham House, Broadway, taken from the garden, 2015 Digital image courtesy of Christopher Calnan



**Figure 4.**

John Singer Sargent, Four sketches for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, charcoal on paper, 24.7 × 34.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Mrs Francis Ormond (1937.7.21. 12)

**Paints not bright enough**

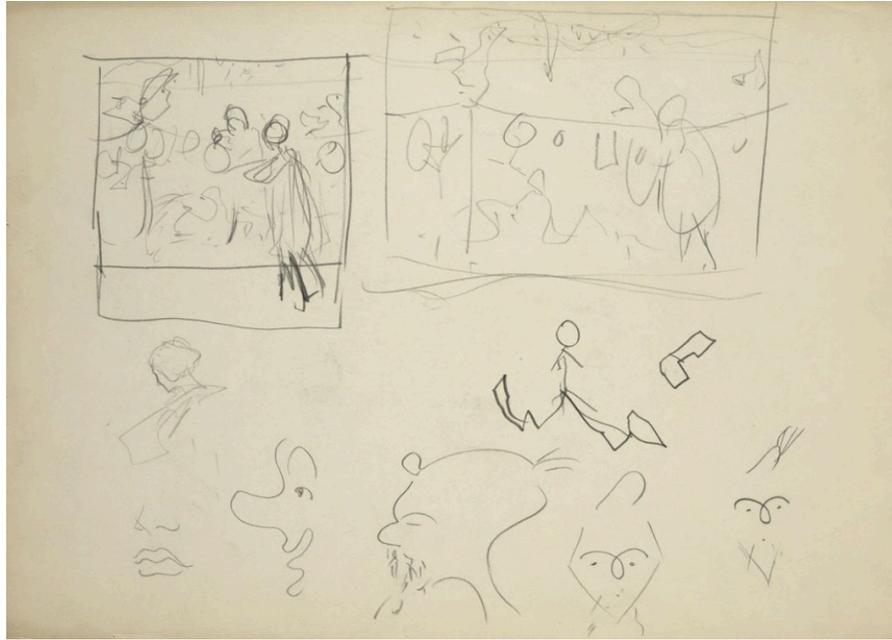


**Figure 5.**

John Singer Sargent, Letter to Emily Sargent with compositional sketch for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, pen and ink on paper, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The John Singer Sargent Archive, Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond (SC.Sargent Archive.16) Digital image courtesy of Elaine Kilmurray

By 6 September Sargent was using two models, the daughters of the illustrator Frederick Barnard; Dorothy (Dolly), aged eleven, and Marion Alice (Polly), aged seven. Lucia recorded the change: "Mr Sargent one of the artists here is painting the Barnard children and Mrs Barnard, her sister Mrs Faraday and I have been making them some white dresses."<sup>3</sup> Having changed from one model to two, the artist experimented with two key elements of his composition in a number of studies in pencil and oil: how the girls should be posed in relation to each other, and in what format his canvas should be set. One thumbnail sketch represents a horizontal design, where the figures face each other and their relationship closely approximates to those in the finished work (fig. 5), but others show different options.

Several pencil studies illustrate ideas for a rectangular format, such as the sketch at the upper right in fig. 6 and three of the four sketches in fig. 4. The pose of the sisters changes repeatedly as Sargent develops the idea for the painting. The chronology of the studies in oil and pencil is difficult to establish, but these drawings suggest that work on the position of the figures preceded the decision to compress the picture space, rendering it portrait in format, but almost square.



**Figure 6.**

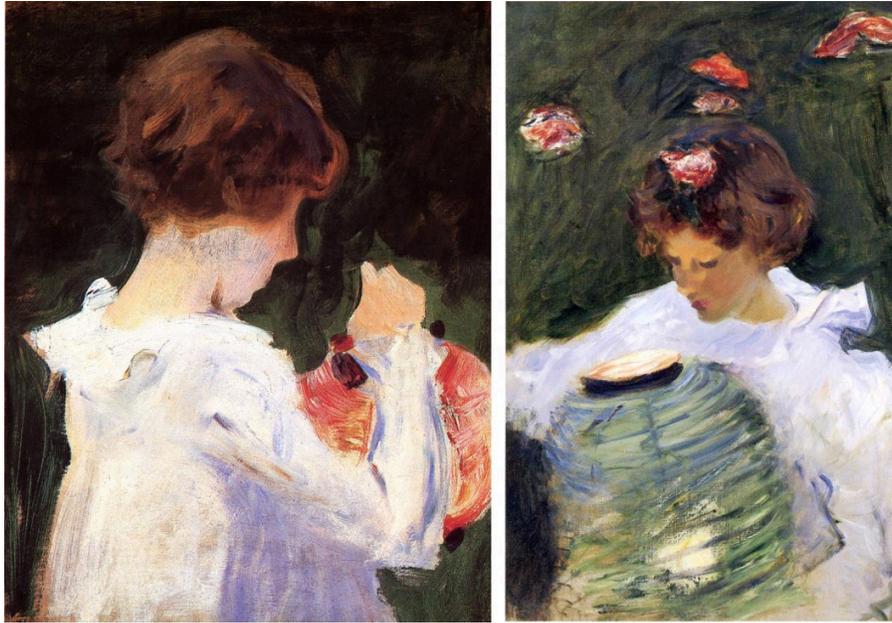
John Singer Sargent, Studies for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"; Comic Heads, 1885, graphite on paper, 24.7 × 34.6 cm Digital image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Mrs Francis Ormond, (1937.7.21.5.11)

Two pencil studies by Sargent on one ([fig. 6](#)) sheet show further deliberation. The sheet contains one almost-square and one rectangular composition, and in both the girls are posed facing in the same direction towards the left. One oil study ([fig. 7](#)), the only image showing the girls with their backs to each other, probably represents a relatively early idea for the composition. Two further oil studies, one of Dolly and one of Polly ([fig. 8](#)), show the figures in poses close to those in the finished picture, while another of Polly ([fig. 9](#)) shows her in a similar pose to that in the finished picture, with lilies, lanterns, and a forked rosebush. Sargent is circling around his subject and its motifs, building up image after image and recording them in different media.



**Figure 7.**

John Singer Sargent, Study for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, oil on canvas, 59.7 x 49.5 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection (Yale 872)



**Figure 8.**

John Singer Sargent, Two images: John Singer Sargent Sketch for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, oil on canvas, 50.2 x 37.8 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection (Yale 874)



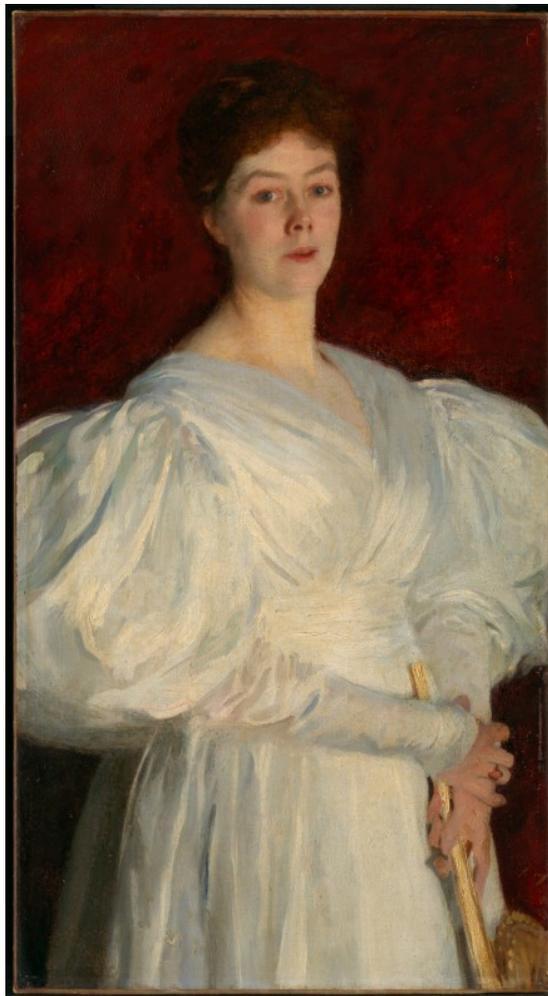
**Figure 9.**  
John Singer Sargent, Study for “Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose”, 1885, oil on canvas, 72.4 × 49.5 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection (Yale 875)

Correspondence confirms that Sargent was determined to paint *en plein air* as daylight faded, but found the reality of it a struggle. He wrote to his sister Emily of the challenges of capturing the colours he was determined to convey at twilight: “I am still here and likely to be for some time, for I am launched into my garden picture . . . Fearful difficult subject. Impossible brilliant colours of flowers and lamps and brightest green lawn background. Paints are not bright enough, & then the effect only lasts ten minutes.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Portrait or landscape?**

Interpretation of X-radiographic evidence from a portrait painted at Broadway reveals new and more detailed information about a preliminary study for *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* in a horizontal format. Although

*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* was Sargent's principal preoccupation during his two seasons at Broadway in 1885 and 1886, he also painted a small group of landscape, flower, and figure studies and several portraits which are significant in their relation to the "big picture". Among the latter were two portraits of Alice Barnard, the mother of his two models. One portrait is in the collection of the Tate, London (fig. 10), and the second is in a private collection (fig. 11). X-radiographic examination of the latter (fig. 12) shows the preliminary study for *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* in a horizontal format. The underlying image is difficult to read, as it is obscured by the concentration of lead white pigment used to depict Mrs Barnard (her dress in particular); but outlines of the figures at centre and upper right, facing each other with a line of lanterns snaking around them, are discernible, and the similarity to the thumbnail sketch represented in fig. 5 is strong. <sup>5</sup>



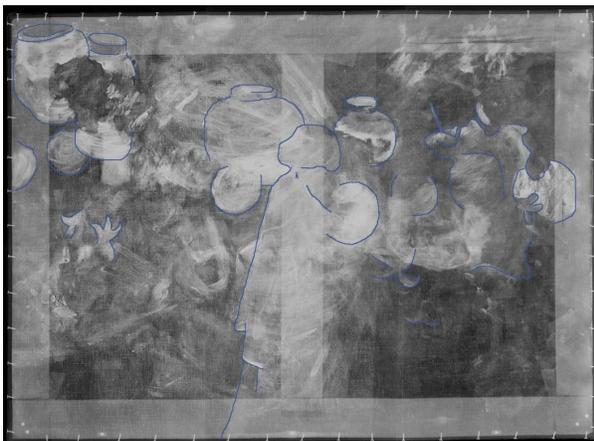
**Figure 10.**

John Singer Sargent, Mrs Frederick Barnard, 1885, oil on canvas, 104.1 × 57.1 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N05901)



**Figure 11.**

John Singer Sargent, Mrs Frederick Barnard, 1885, oil on canvas, 98.1 x 71.1 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection, USA (Yale 160)



**Figure 12a.**

Conservation Department, North Carolina Museum of Arts, USA, Sketch outline in an X-radiograph of the portrait of “Mrs Frederick Barnard” (fig. 11), Digital image courtesy of private collection, USA

**Figure 12b.**

John Singer Sargent, Mrs Frederick Barnard, 1885, oil on canvas, 98.1 × 71.1 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection, USA (Yale 160)

has not been possible to establish a linear chronology for this intense period of the working out of compositional ideas. Nonetheless, it is clear that in early September 1885 Sargent experimented with a horizontal composition in pencil sketches and in the oil sketch, subsequently painted over (figs. 11, 12), but that when orienting the large canvas to make his start on the “big picture”, he began his work in “portrait” format. The physical evidence we have revealed is at the tacking edges: there is very little paint on the left and right and where there is, the composition tails off (fig. 13); at top and bottom we see more paint including floral motifs lapped around the back of the stretcher. This is where the majority of the unwanted image was truncated and lost when Sargent almost squared the canvas.

**Figure 13.**

John Singer Sargent, Detail of left edge, “Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose”, 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

Written evidence for the above also exists in the form of a letter from Abbey of 28 September, in which he notes the size of the canvas, suggesting a portrait format, and describes the pictorial elements of the composition and the challenges of fugitive light:

Sargent has been painting a great big picture in the garden of Barnard's two little girls in white lighting Chinese lanterns hung among rose trees and lilies. It is seven feet by five [it is likely that Abbey is estimating the size of the canvas with height coming before width], and as the effect only lasts about twenty minutes a day—just after sunset—the picture does not get on very fast. <sup>6</sup>

The near-square format of the finished work, the placement of the figures (though they are closer together in the finished work) and the line of lanterns are also recorded in a small pen-and-ink sketch (fig. 14). The steps that led to its final size of five feet, seven inches by five (1.73 x 1.52 m) are discussed later.



**Figure 14.**

John Singer Sargent, Study for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", circa 1885, pen and ink on paper, approximately 11 x 21 cm Digital image courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The John Singer Sargent Archive—Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond (2015.2418)

## Pentimenti

Technical examination allowed us to explore how all this developed on the main canvas. Comparing infrared, X-radiographic, and raking light images <sup>7</sup> showed clearly that the figures of the girls and the standard rose were fixed early on, and that the decorative patterning of lanterns and flora were in flux across the whole time Sargent was completing his picture (figs. [15](#), [16](#), [17](#)).



Sargent N01615 IR 11-12-2014

### Figure 15.

John Singer Sargent, Infrared photograph of "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 16.**

John Singer Sargent, X-radiograph image of "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



Sargent N01615 RLT 11-12-2014

**Figure 17.**

John Singer Sargent, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose" with raking light from the top, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

Edwin Blashfield, a fellow artist, described aspects of Sargent's process. Importantly, he recorded that Sargent scraped back his painting repeatedly. This practice would not necessarily be identifiable to us without evidence from contemporary sources; investigating the absence of something by scientific means is tricky. Blashfield's written account emphasizes Sargent's efforts to paint in specific light conditions and that his ways of achieving this, although spontaneous in some respects, were also planned and considered:

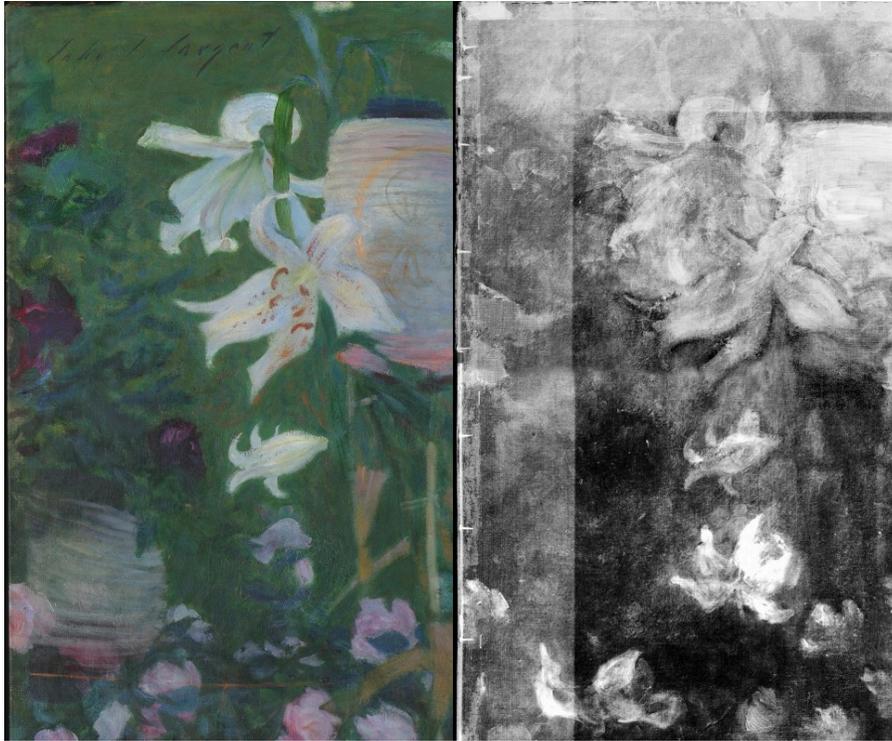
Little Pollie [sic] and Dollie [sic] Barnard . . . would begin to light the Japanese lanterns among the tall stemmed lilies. For just twenty-five minutes, while the effect lasted, Sargent would paint away like mad, then would carry the canvas in, stand it against the studio wall and we would admire. In the morning when after

breakfast we went into the studio we always found the canvas scraped down to the quick. This happened for many days, then the picture, daughter of the repeated observation and reflection, suddenly came to stay.<sup>8</sup>

Pentimenti identified in X-radiographic and infrared images and by the location of drying cracks (fig. 18), indicate the extent to which Sargent adjusted his image through different painting processes: scraping back, painting out, and painting new motifs on top. For example, X-rays show that two lilies now painted out at the left, were each changed to a rose (fig. 19); the change is also visible in cross-section (figs. 20, 21). A lantern at the right was originally painted tall and rectangular, but its position was shifted and its shape changed to circular (fig. 22), as can be seen in both infrared photography and the X-radiograph. Scraping back is possibly evidenced by some abrupt horizontal features also visible in this area of the X-ray.

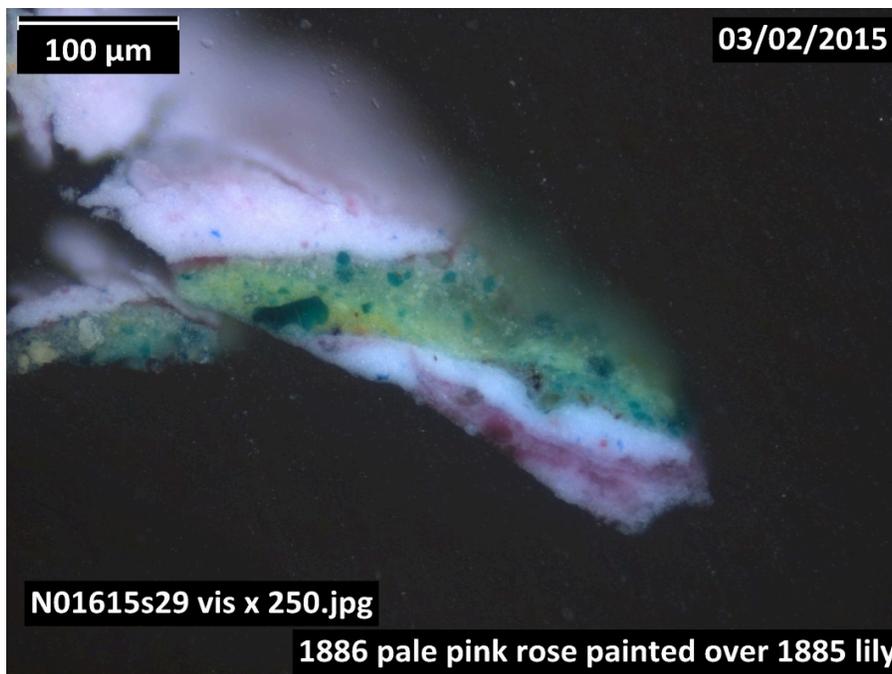


**Figure 18.**  
John Singer Sargent, Detail of "Carnation,  
Lily, Lily, Rose" with drying cracks in green  
leaves, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 ×  
197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate,  
2016 (N01615)



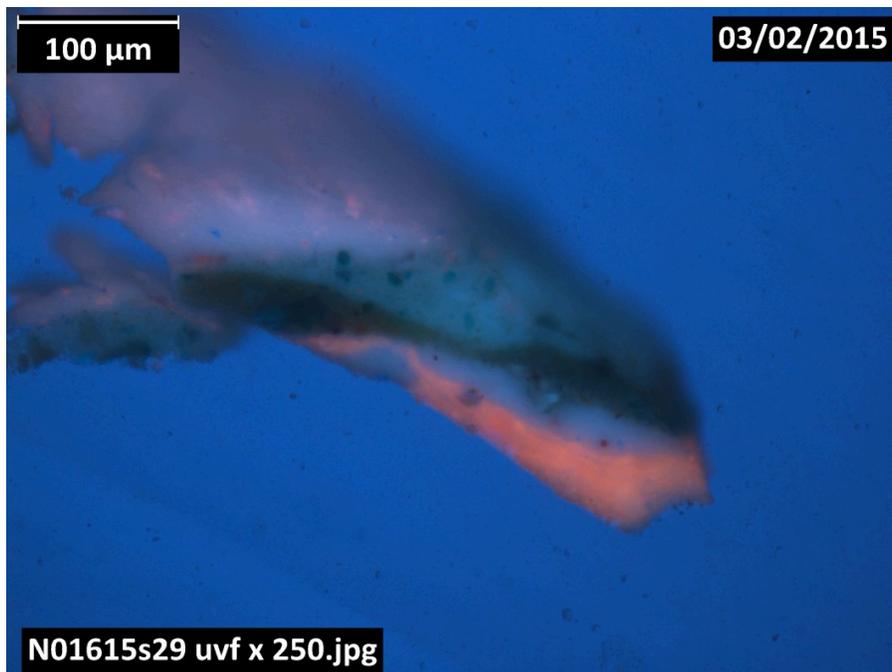
**Figure 19.**

John Singer Sargent, *Pentimenti*, details of lilies changed to roses, corner upper left in normal light and X-radiograph, from *"Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"*, 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 20.**

John Singer Sargent, Cross-section of pale pink rose painted over lily, visible light, from *"Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"*, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5  $\times$  197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 21.**

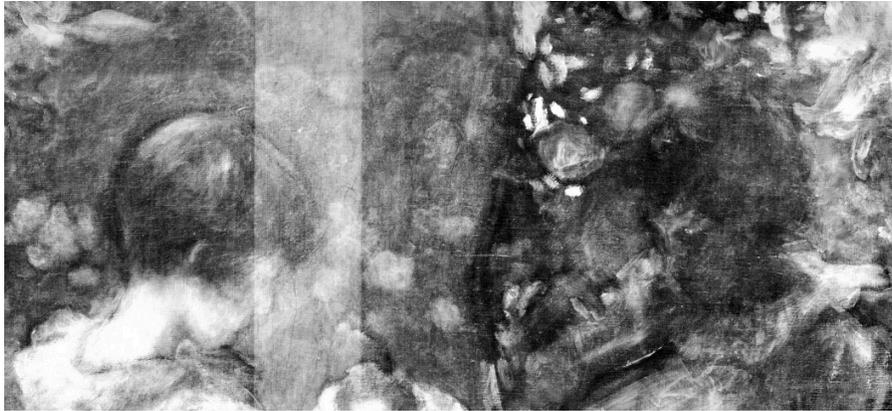
John Singer Sargent, Cross-section of pale pink rose painted over lily, ultraviolet fluorescence, from *"Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"*, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5  $\times$  197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 22.**

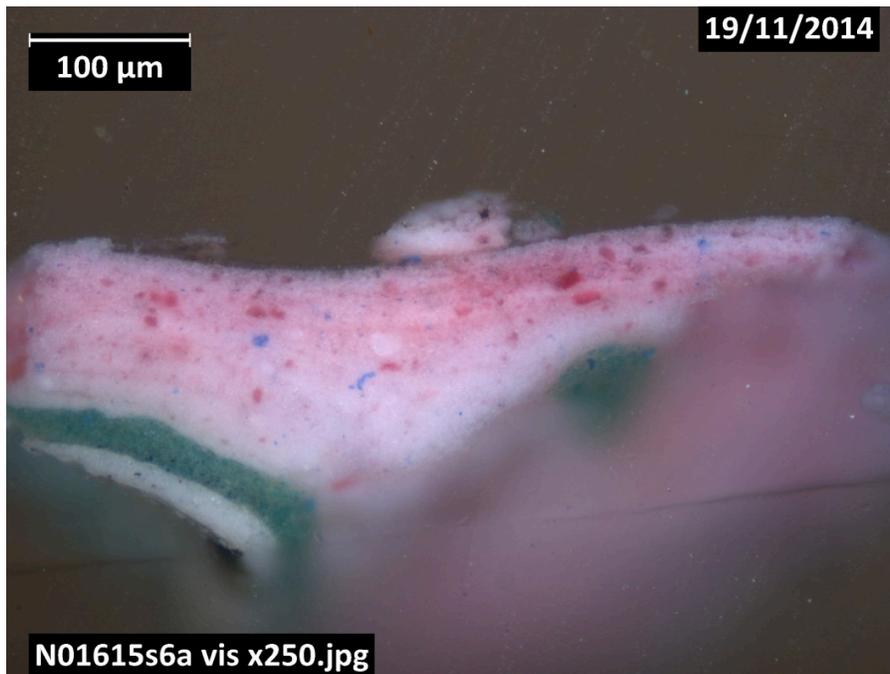
John Singer Sargent, *Pentimenti*, detail of lanterns, *showing position and shape alterations in infrared photograph and X-radiograph*, from *“Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose”*, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm  
 Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

In addition, certain aspects of the composition show fewer alterations. Some which appear less dense in the X-radiograph were painted at an early stage; for example, thinly painted lilies, Polly’s face, and the figures of the girls ([fig. 23](#)). They all appear as wet-in-wet applications in cross-section, but with a relatively simple stratigraphy with one range of colours. Other thicker areas, perhaps applied during the second Broadway season, show, in cross-section, pink wet-in-wet layers sitting on top of green ones, where a rose has been added on top of the grassy background ([fig. 24](#)). At the upper right, a lily is revealed to have been applied later in the process by its having adhered poorly to the already dried green paint below: the paint curls up in small local drying cracks ([fig. 25](#)). Certain textures in the paint which are clearly visible in raking light show that Dolly’s face, neck, and collar were further built up, and there is some adjustment to the profile of her nose ([fig. 26](#)). Whilst the technical clues vary in each part of the painting, together they build a consistent story of Sargent’s determination to paint “au premier coup”, and highlight just what perseverance and repetition that really took.<sup>9</sup>



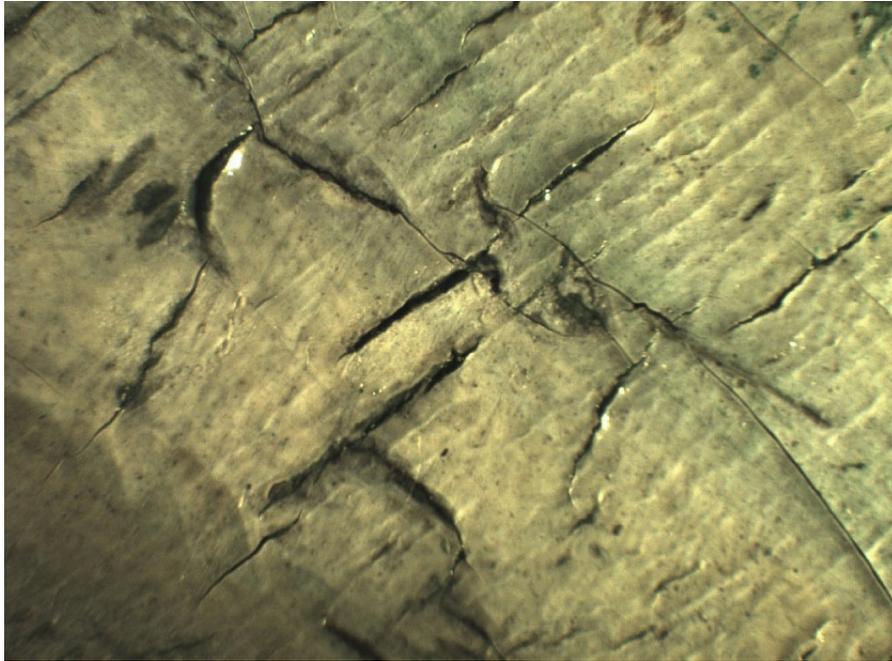
**Figure 23.**

John Singer Sargent, Detail of X-radiograph, centre right, showing the faces of both Dolly and Polly, from "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



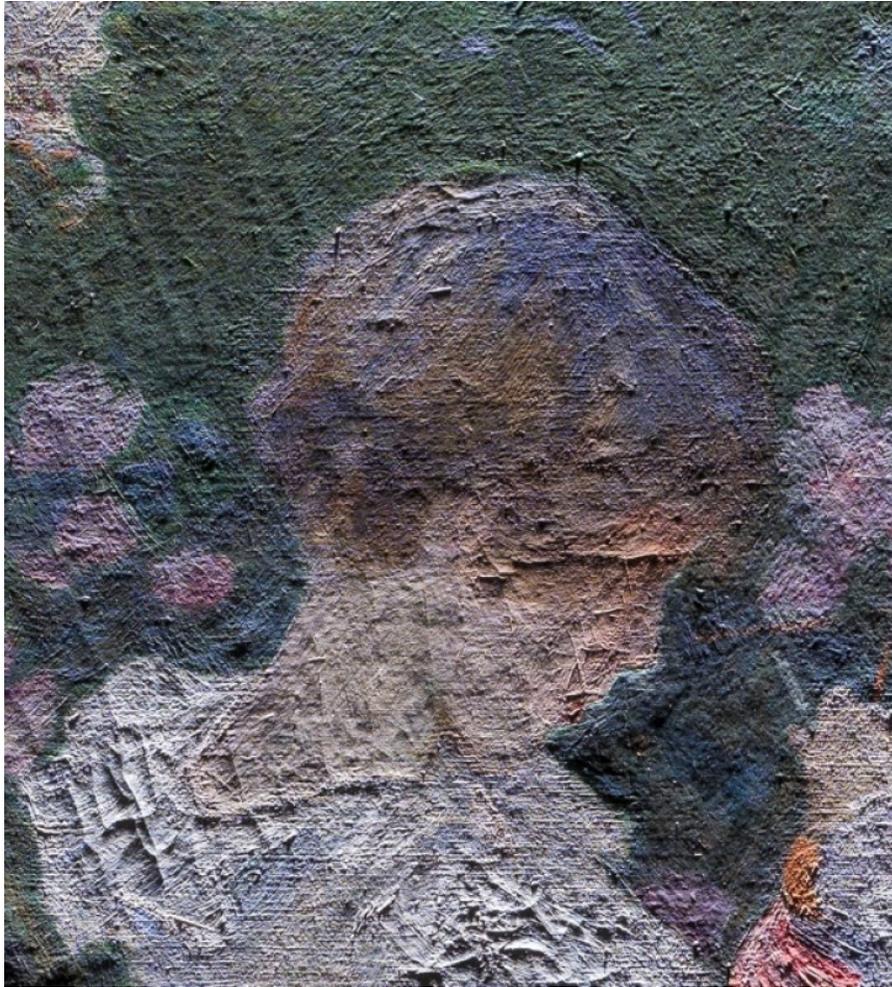
**Figure 24.**

John Singer Sargent, Cross-section of pale pink rose painted over green paint, visible light, from "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 25.**

John Singer Sargent, Photomicrograph of upper year 2 lily drying feature where paints curls up, from "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)



**Figure 26.**

John Singer Sargent, Detail, raking light, Dolly with her profile adjusted, from *"Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose"*, 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

Perhaps even more surprising is that for all Sargent's efforts at Broadway to paint the composition *en plein air*, it is clear that two lanterns, one depicted unlit at the upper left, and another glowing brightly on the right, were painted back in his London studio and subsequent to framing. This is apparent because the lanterns stop short of the edge of the canvas, where a slip or inner frame has covered the front edges by about 2.5 centimetres. Another closed lily was painted over with green to provide space for the inscription of the signature in red at the upper left. This was probably done at a very late stage, possibly also after framing.

## A rare photograph

Unusually at this date in Sargent's career, there is a photograph of him at work on *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (fig. 27).<sup>10</sup> He is painting lilies in a pot that is balanced on a stool in front of a building. The photograph makes it clear that Sargent is treating the painting of his "big picture" by approaching his motifs one at a time—in a sequence of moments. The angle of the canvas means that the composition is only partially legible. We can see the figures are in position, and assume the rest is in the process of change, but what else in our understanding of process can the photograph help us with?



### Figure 27.

Unidentified artist, Photograph of Sargent Painting "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose" at Broadway in Worcestershire, gelatin silver print on paper, 11.2 × 9.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Mrs Francis Ormond (1937.7.27.1.A)

What the photograph does reveal is nineteenth-century inventiveness, as it shows Sargent with his canvas on a “Hook Easel”—a light-weight piece of *plein air* equipment. It would have helped enormously to have such a flexible and easy system as Sargent hopped from one location to another, repeating the process daily, when the weather allowed. The holes where eyelets were screwed into the stretcher, allowing the two poles to be fixed in place, are still visible at the edges when the painting is unframed. The bottom edge of the stretched canvas itself formed the third piece of this simple, clever tripod system.



**Figure 28.**

Old Sheikh's restaurant (formerly the barn, Farnham House), Broadway, Worcestershire, 2015 Digital image courtesy of Andrew Dakin

Sargent's second late summer/autumn at Broadway was spent at Russell House (fig. 28), but on-site research in the two Broadway gardens failed to identify the building represented in the photograph. However, a short walk between the two houses (they are only about 180 metres apart) resolved the matter. The photograph (fig. 27) shows Sargent painting on the roadside, with the side elevation of Farnham House behind him (this part of the building was a barn at the time).<sup>11</sup> There have been some modern alterations to the door and window, but the dormer window visible in the photograph is still there, and the footpath at the base of the walls and the position of the drain and drainpipe are consistent. The site, between the two principal houses, does not help us ascertain whether the photograph dates from 1885 or 1886. The height of the present building and Sargent's own height (1.8 m) have been used to estimate the size of the canvas in the

photograph.<sup>12</sup> Professor Stuart Robson suggests it is five foot, ten-and-a-half inches (1.56 m) high—that is, approximately four inches (10 cm) taller than the finished painting.<sup>13</sup> The estimation of measurements we gain from the photographic evidence suggests there was a sequence of resizing; careful incremental choices were made about the size and format of the image.

In the photograph, a fair amount of excess canvas appears to be folded over at the back of the stretcher. The accrued evidence leaves us with two good estimates for the size of the canvas at the start (from Abbey, who suggests seven feet by five/2.13 x 1.52 m) and in the middle (from the photograph, height five foot, ten-and-a-half inches/1.56 m), with which to compare the final dimensions (five feet, seven inches by five feet/1.73 x 1.52 m).

One interpretation of this evidence is that Sargent began on a substantially larger “working stretcher” in 1885.<sup>14</sup> Then, possibly by 1886, he reduced the working stretcher to dimensions that approximate closely to the finished size and format (perhaps the stage represented in the photograph). On returning to London, and once a decision had been made as to framing, the canvas was then stretched to its final size, onto the good quality bespoke expandable wooden stretcher it retains today, probably by an assistant. The edges are trimmed neatly and—as we know from other examples—it is unlikely this was completed by Sargent. This reformatting of his image by resizing the canvas is a continuation of the dilemmas we see Sargent circling around in his preparatory workings.

## **Family mythology**



**Figure 29.**

John Singer Sargent, Detail, X-radiograph, centre right, showing tear, "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

While a recent study of Sargent's methods in oil confirms that the reformatting and restretching of large canvases was a key part of Sargent's practice, there has long been a myth attached to his reasons for doing so with *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*.<sup>15</sup> According to Millet family tradition, Sargent was obliged to change the format of the composition, truncating it by some two feet (60 cm) at the left side, when he unrolled the canvas in 1886 to find that it had been punctured by a pitchfork.<sup>16</sup> In an X-radiograph, a small puncture is visible in the top right quadrant of the painting (fig. 29). It is small (about 15 mm in length) and runs vertically. Tines in pitchforks from the era, as shown in Winslow Homer's *Girl with Pitchfork* (1867), are good candidates for the cause of the tear, which has an early patch repair at the reverse with similar canvas to the original.<sup>17</sup>

Family tradition also records that Sargent painted a portrait of Mrs Barnard on the discarded piece of canvas. The portrait of Mrs Barnard (private collection; fig. 11) was certainly painted over a study for *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, as discussed earlier, and is likely to have been painted in 1885; the

more formal three-quarter length of the same sitter in which she appears to be wearing the same gown (Tate; [fig. 10](#)) certainly belongs to that year, but transmitted light photography confirms there is also nothing underneath the image ([fig. 30](#)).



Sargent N05901 T 10-12-2014

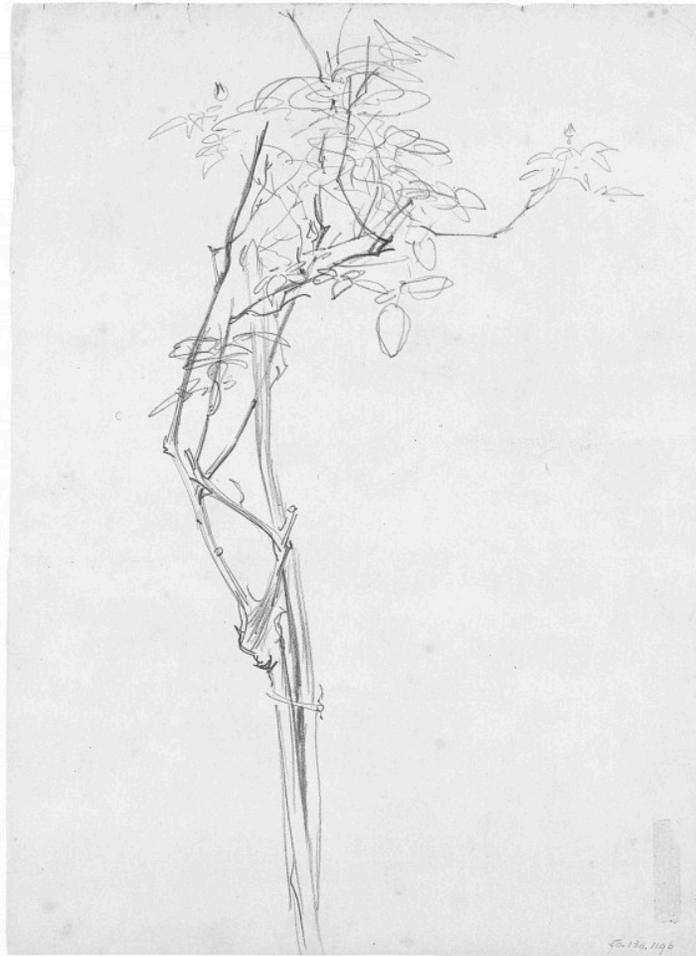
**Figure 30.**

John Singer Sargent, Transmitted light photograph of "Mrs Frederick Barnard", 1885, oil on canvas, 104.1 × 57.1 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N05901)

It seems likely then, that the story transmogrified into an exaggerated family myth, but was founded on a real incident. No part of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* was cut off and repainted on, but there is physical evidence for an early incident causing a tear.

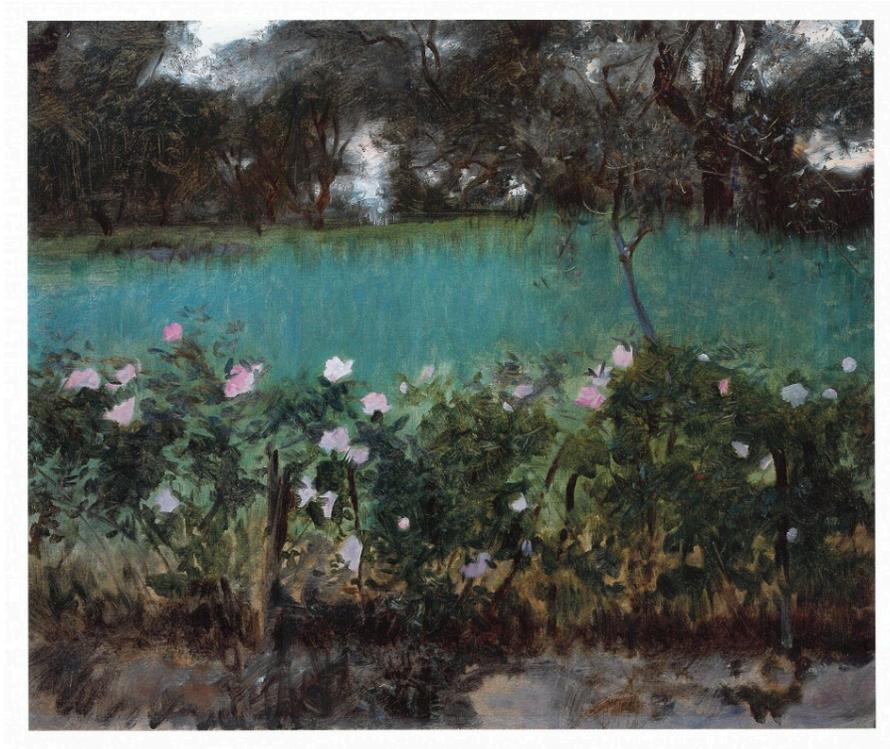
## Flora

The composition and its format were a preoccupation for Sargent, but he continued to look carefully at individual elements of the painting. The rosebush, with its distinctive forked stem, is consistent across various iterations of the composition (it even appears in the slight study of the garden of Farnham House, [fig. 2](#), probably one of the earliest preliminary studies for the painting). A pencil study ([fig. 31](#)) describes a standard rose very similar to the one close to the figure of Polly in [fig. 9](#), and in the finished picture. A forked rosebush also appears in an oil study of a landscape (1885; [fig. 32](#)). This landscape is of additional interest because the horizontal band of roses is similar to the band in the finished work (though the blooms in *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* are more abundant).



**Figure 31.**

John Singer Sargent, *Rose Branch*, Study for "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885, graphite on paper, 34.5 × 24.5 cm Digital image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs Francis Ormond (1950 50.130.119)



**Figure 32.**

John Singer Sargent, *Landscape with Roses*, 1885, oil on canvas, 51.1 × 63.5 cm Digital image courtesy of private collection



**Figure 33.**

John Singer Sargent, *Garden Study of the Vickers Children*, 1884, oil on canvas, 137.8 × 91.9 cm Digital image courtesy of Flint Institute of Arts, Michigan, Gift of the Viola E Bray Charitable Trust via Mr and Mrs William L. Richards (1972.47)

The rose and the lily are two of the three floral motifs that give the picture its title. A number of pencil studies of lilies show Sargent's concern to describe the complex flower properly. It is our view that painting out the lilies, and the changes from lilies to roses, was done for subtle aesthetic purposes. The modifications prevent the creation of too bower-like an effect over the girls, suggesting a movement away from a literal towards a more decorative aesthetic. Sargent had experimented with the flat, decorative effect of lilies in 1884 in his study of the children of Mr and Mrs Albert Vickers painted in their Sussex garden ([fig. 33](#)). The lilies are more realistically secured in their pots than are those in *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, but they arc over the children in a similar way and form a flat, decorative pattern across the upper part of the picture space. *The Garden Study of the Vickers Children* suggests

that aspects of the decorative aesthetic of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* predate Sargent's observation of the striking scene at Pangbourne, of children lighting lanterns in a garden near the river.

### Sargent's materials and the paint box

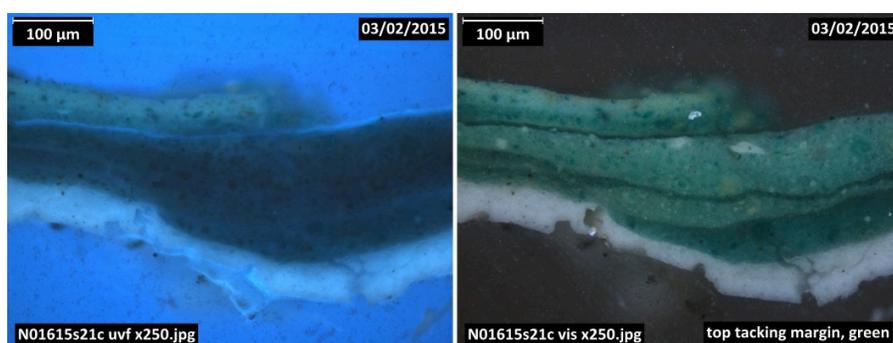


**Figure 34.**

John Singer Sargent, Sargent's paint box with tube paints, folding rectangular palette, and round palette, all used for oil painting Digital image courtesy of private collection

New evidence concerning Sargent's materials has been greatly informative to the project, and has included study of a paint box belonging to the artist, full of tubes of paint, a glass vial, some brushes, palette knives, and charcoal (fig. 34). Although Sargent's paint was often much thinned (with turpentine) and he enjoyed using extremely fluid oil paint for early and later elements of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, the surface is full of thicker-textured paint applied wet-in-wet, with localized cracking and different drying features, all very clear in raking light. Poppy seed and linseed oil and a medium modifier such as Megilp (a gelled medium made by mixing together mastic varnish and an oil prepared with a lead drier), which dries fast and glossy, have been identified in samples from *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*; and an inter-layer of "retouching varnish" designed to wet out the surface can be seen in cross-section from some parts of the picture (fig. 35).<sup>18</sup> Tubes of Megilp were also found in Sargent's paint box. It has the property of being thixotropic—keeping its shape, forming impasto when needed, thinning out when brushed, and capable of being spread out into transparent more glaze-

like layers. Throughout the painting Sargent employs thinned paints to begin with, and later on in areas such as the designs depicted on the Japanese lanterns, as well as thicker impasto, with many layers applied wet-in-wet. His signature use of red lake is here deployed only to create the intense dark crimson carnations—a deep red fluorescent madder mixed with Megilp medium has been applied thickly on top of an opaque pink. This is a technique Sargent had employed since his first exhibited painting, and is testament to a certain consistency of method.



**Figure 35.**

John Singer Sargent, Cross-section, green background, retouching varnish, visible light, and ultraviolet fluorescence, form "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

The paint box, also part of this wider study, has shown Sargent's usual practice of shopping locally for at least some of his materials. Of the twenty-seven tubes of paint, all from well-known British colourmen, seven of the Winsor & Newton tubes are also labelled Parker or Ewens, who were suppliers in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (fig. 36).<sup>19</sup> The labels and the known history of these colourmen imply that eleven or more of the Winsor & Newton tubes predate 1884, and must have been resold in Cheltenham before Ewens died in 1888 (fig. 37).<sup>20</sup> It is plausible that these tubes were used in 1885 or 1886, when Sargent was painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* not far from Cheltenham, and needed to obtain materials locally.



**Figure 36.**

Three tubes of Winsor & Newton paint, also labelled Parker or Ewens, from Sargent's paint box Digital image courtesy of private collection



**Figure 37.**

One tube of rose madder paint from Sargent's paint box, Digital image courtesy of private collection

Pigments identified in the layers of 1885 and 1886 are of very good quality, with few extenders: his lead white, for example, was in general very pure (although a little zinc white appears from the period after his move to London).<sup>21</sup> Whilst there is liberal use of bone black in much of Sargent's oeuvre, in this painting little was identified, indicating that for this piece he followed a practice closer to that of his friend Monet. Strong reds are in evidence in this painting—vermilion was used to make the opaque oranges and pinks—and further types of red are present in this work: non-fluorescent red lead, madder (on aluminium substrate), another madder (on a different substrate), and a non-fluorescent red lake (fig. 38). We see from the paint box that Sargent also used cadmium red, Mars red, Mars orange, and intense yellows such as genuine Indian yellow, pale lemon chrome, two cadmium yellows, and Mars yellow. A superb range of many of these pigments is visible in particular in the lanterns. His greens and blues are of excellent

quality—the emerald green employed in the grasses, stems, and leaves of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* is found in high quantity, and the cobalt blue is an intense and dark grade. Others, such as viridian, cerulean blue, natural ultramarine ash, and synthetic ultramarine are all present in the paint box, but it is a strong cobalt blue and emerald green that are particularly prevalent in the small paint samples we took from this picture.<sup>22</sup> These darker grades of pigments are mixed in and used (in place of blacks) to create darker passages. The exquisite intensity of Sargent’s paints is achieved by quantity and quality—a high volume of good pigments layered wet-in-wet, with occasional clever use of glazing in his reds and purples, as the carnations demonstrate so well.

## **Varnishing**

How did Sargent finalize his painting and create a surface gloss to suit his intense use of pigments and complement his overall aesthetic? The ultraviolet light image ([fig. 39](#)) suggests a hint of final varnish, which is patchy and stops short of the edges of the canvas by about two and a half centimetres, suggesting that this “finish” was applied after the painting was framed.



Sargent N01615 UV 11-12-2014

**Figure 38.**

John Singer Sargent, Ultraviolet light photograph, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", 1885-86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

The question of varnishing is pertinent to any discussion of surface and Impressionism. Artists such as Claude Monet, with whom Sargent painted *en plein air* (see *Claude Monet Painting by the Edge of a Wood*, probably 1885, Tate, London) were against varnishing their pictures.<sup>23</sup> However, Sargent, despite producing this great piece of "English Impressionism", illustrates that varied preferences for varnishing occurred amongst practitioners like him, who were knowledgeable of Impressionist approaches and highly adept technically. Sargent himself is known to have commented that he didn't like a glossy varnish, so we are assured that he was interested in a range of surface effects, from matt to satin.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, many paintings were varnished after leaving Impressionist artists' studios by owners or dealers who may not have comprehended an artist's wishes, or who perhaps wanted to protect the paint surface or preferred a

glossier aesthetic. Fortunately, this painting's conservation history means that the surface has been preserved untouched except for surface cleaning with deionized water, and Sargent's image is as close as possible to an "original" finish as one might find in a surface of this date. The only notable change is in one type of the three lake pigments identified, which shows evidence of fading, revealed by paint which was covered by the frame's rebate.

Sargent's practice, then, was sophisticated and focused in this area. His use of Megilp ensured a satin surface due to its resinous varnish content. Using Megilp medium and applications of very thin varnishes both between paint layers (visible in cross-section in [fig. 35](#)) as well as on the upper surface, suggests he had an exacting eye for his desired level of gloss and saturation. Sargent wanted a well-bound paste surface and was keen his colours did not "sink", which we know from his application of intermediary or "retouching varnishes" in between the first and second years of work on *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. Should sinking have occurred, it would have changed the refractive index of the surface, caused a more matt surface, and affected the vibrancy of the palette. It is worth repeating here that the physical evidence suggests that the work was finished in his studio, when two extra lanterns were added at each side of the composition—one bright and lit up and one dull with no flame yet ([fig. 39](#)). It is possible that some of the adjustments he made in London were also related to surface.

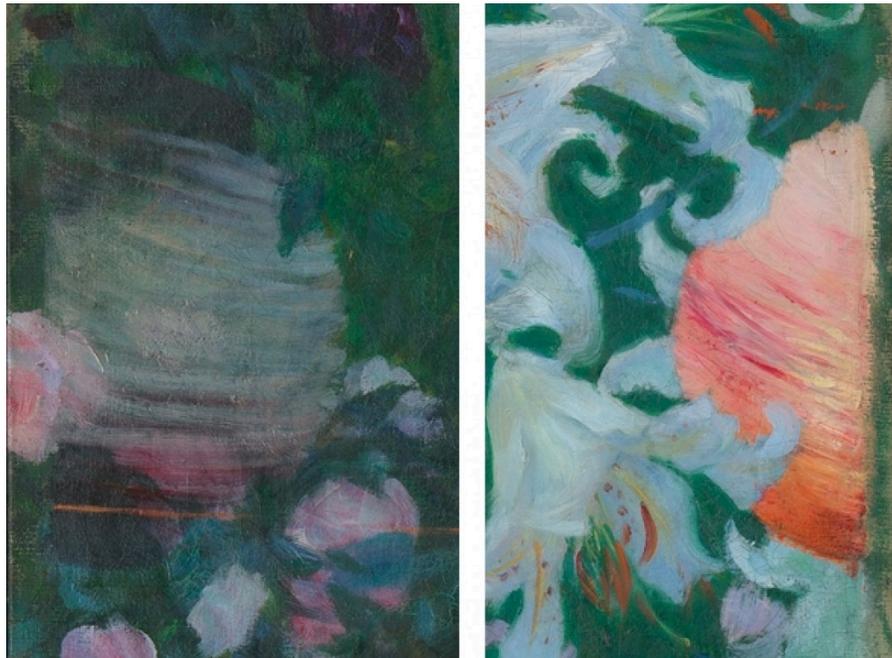
## **Natural light and artificial light**

There are two topics to consider in a discussion of light and *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*. First, we need to understand the challenge to Sargent of painting artificial light generated by lanterns and depicting both these, the figures, and the other motifs in his painting whilst natural light was fading. It is useful to consider what was happening while Sargent was generating the "big picture", which he did iteratively, over two years, at a variety of locations in Broadway *en plein air*. Within those two summer/autumn periods the light at sunset would have differed between August and the end of October. The identification of the location for some of this activity, in the photograph of Sargent painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* ([fig. 27](#))—the still life set up by the road side—was surprising. The road would not have been a busy thoroughfare in the mid-1880s, but it is still an unusual working site with no obvious advantage of background scenery. Setting the canvas and lilies there could have been for other reasons, perhaps one of them being to get the right light.

Capturing this moment of tension between fading natural light and brightening artificial light was a great challenge for Sargent, and he approached the task carefully using different methods. He positioned darker-

toned red elements—deep crimson red carnations and roses—against varying shades of grass and greenery. The brightest and lightest tones are achieved in the lit lanterns (which glow and reflect on the faces of Dolly and Polly) and the equally bright whites of the lilies and dresses. However, the position of some of the crimson carnations, for example, exploits colour contrasts more than tonal ones.

The second topic in a discussion of light and this work concerns viewing the painting once it was finished. The experience of seeing the painting in the conservation studio over a prolonged period at various times of day and under different conditions of light was informative. Without any influence from artificial light, depth of field in the image seemed to deepen during the period of twilight, the image becoming progressively less flattened. Tate photographers carefully documented this over fifteen-minute intervals, allowing us to compare the painting at different times as daylight faded ([fig. 40](#)).



**Figure 39.**

John Singer Sargent, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (details), *Two lanterns at left and right do not go to the edge, and suggest the painting was finished in the studio* Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

Sargent also made observations about the effects of different lights under which his painting was viewed and when it was displayed in new conditions back in London. Ultimately he was concerned he had not represented the scene quite as he wished to capture it, in particular in his use of colours. In a letter to an artist who was asking permission to copy his image, he notes:

a possibility of improvement that I have often thought the picture itself wanted, that is a slight glaze of yellow, say raw sienna or gold ochre. The picture itself was painted in a very warm light, after sunset, and in London it looks best on a grey or foggy day, and decidedly too cold on a clear one. If the picture were still in my possession, I should, on a fine day when it looks too cold, glaze it all over, and I suggest that you do this to your copy if you feel disposed. <sup>25</sup>

In examining new evidence about *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, we have traced Sargent's creation of a painting inspired by the memorable sight of children lighting lanterns at dusk in a riverside garden, born of numerous experiments and refined through continual adjustments. He devised a pictorial language and fashioned luminous colour that together depict a moment, but which also encourage repeated visits and close attention. This sustained re-examination and technical analysis has revealed new aspects of the gestation of an apparently familiar work, and we hope it will inspire further research and encourage dialogue across disciplines, integrating and embedding the technical with traditional approaches.



**Figure 40.**

John Singer Sargent, Studio light versus natural light image, "*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*", 1885–86, oil on canvas, 218.5 × 197 cm Digital image courtesy of Tate, 2016 (N01615)

## Appendix

**Au premier coup:** painted in one process, not as several stages with the paint drying in between.

**Cadmium red:** an opaque scarlet pigment made from cadmium sulphoselenide, sold in London from the 1880s.

**Cadmium yellow:** cadmium sulphide, an opaque bright yellow pigment available from the 1840s.

**Cerulean blue:** an opaque, greenish blue made of cobalt stannate and used from 1860.

**Cobalt blue:** an opaque blue, manufactured pigment made of cobalt aluminate in use from 1802.

**Deionized water:** water that has had all of its mineral ions removed.

**Drier (siccative):** a material added to an oil to increase the rate of drying through oxidation and cross-linking of the molecules.

**Emerald green:** a brilliant opaque bluish green made of copper acetoarsenite, first made in Germany in 1814. Highly toxic.

**Ground:** a field on which to paint, usually lean, opaque paint applied as a single, unmodified colour to the support in readiness for painting.

**Indian Yellow:** bright translucent yellow originally manufactured from the urine of cows fed on mango leaves. Made synthetically from the late nineteenth century.

**Lake pigments:** translucent pigments made by precipitating a dye onto a base such as aluminium hydrate.

**Lemon yellow:** bright, opaque yellow pigment made from either barium chromate or strontium chromate or any other yellow of a pale cool hue.

**Madder:** Purple red dye extracted from the madder plant (*Rubia tinctorum*).

**Mars red/orange/yellow:** manufactured earth pigments.

**Megilp:** a gelled medium made by mixing together mastic varnish and an oil prepared by heating and adding a lead drier.

**Poppy seed or poppy seed oil:** drying oil extracted from the seeds of the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*). It yellows less than linseed oil but takes longer to dry and forms a less hard paint film.

**Priming:** the application of size and/or the ground to a support to prepare the surface for painting. Sometimes also used instead of the term "ground".

**Rebate:** L-shaped recess in a frame moulding, typically designed to take the painting.

**Red lead:** very bright, opaque, orangey red pigment (tetroxide of lead).

**Refractive index:** the degree to which the rays of light are bent while passing through a transparent substance—a pigment with a comparatively low refractive index similar to that of oil, e.g. chalk, appears transparent in an oil medium, while one with a high refractive index such as lead white appears opaque.

**Size:** traditionally a weak solution of animal glue used in the priming of canvas and panels, but may also be made from other adhesives.

**Synthetic ultramarine:** chemically identical to the natural variety, first produced in France around 1826–27 and manufactured ever since.

**Ultramarine ash:** a very palely coloured grade of natural ultramarine.

**Viridian:** deep transparent green pigment hydrated chromic oxide, discovered in the 1830s but only in widespread use from the 1860s.

**Wet-in-wet:** the application of one colour on to another, before the first has dried, so that some mixing into the earlier application can occur.

**Zinc white:** an opaque cool white manufactured pigment from zinc oxide. It was produced in a suitable form for oil painting from the 1850s.

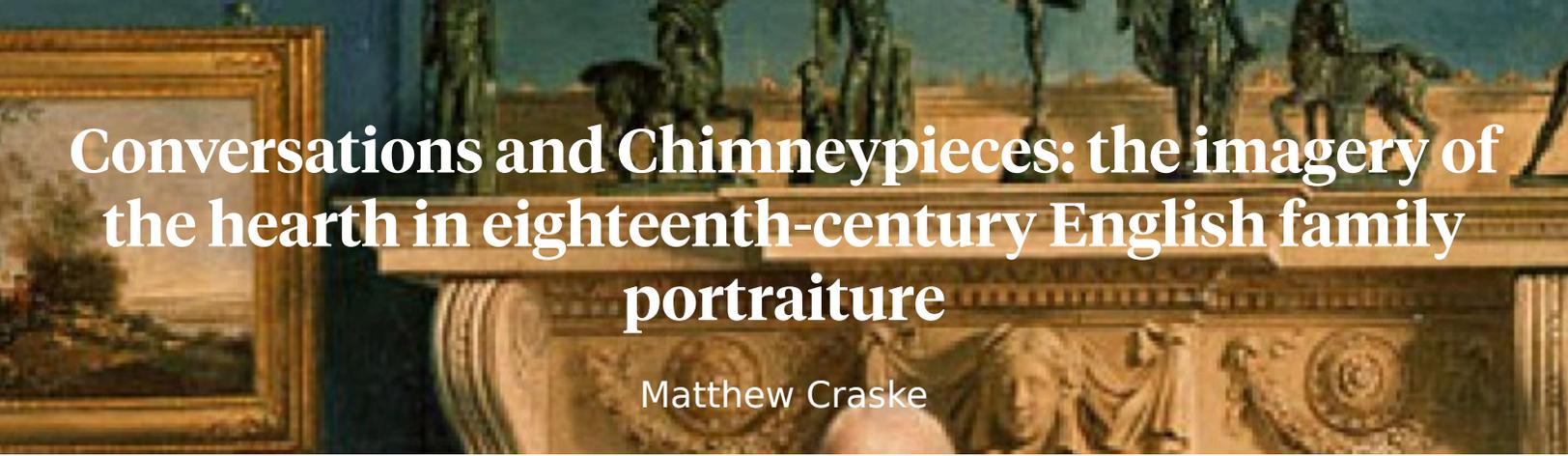
## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> We were able to expand and further develop technical analysis previously completed for an essay for volume 9 of the John Singer Sargent catalogue raisonné. See Rebecca Hellen and Joyce Townsend, “‘The Way in which He Does it’: The Making of Sargent’s Oils”, in *John Singer Sargent, Figures and Landscapes, 1914–1922*, ed. Richard Ormond and Elaine Kilmurray (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2016), 29–55 (forthcoming).
- <sup>2</sup> Lucia Millet to her parents, 24 Aug. 1885, continued on 2 Sept. 1885, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter AAA), Francis Davis Millet and Millet Family Papers.
- <sup>3</sup> Lucia Millet to her parents, 6 Sept. 1885, AAA, Francis Davis Millet and Millet Family Papers.
- <sup>4</sup> Undated letter from the artist to his sister Emily, headed “Broadway/ Worcestershire/Tuesday”, private collection. A facsimile of the letter is illustrated in Charteris, *John Sargent*, between pages 76 and 77.
- <sup>5</sup> The outlines of the image have been identified and interpreted by conservators in the UK and the US.
- <sup>6</sup> Edwin Austin Abbey to Charles Parsons, 28 Sept. 1885, quoted in E. V. Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey, Royal Academician: The Record of His Life and Work*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1921), 1:150.
- <sup>7</sup> Raking light is where a strong angled light is used to show up texture in the paint surface or undulation in the support.
- <sup>8</sup> Edwin Howland Blashfield, “John Singer Sargent—Recollections”, *North American Review* 221, no. 827 (June 1925): 643–44.
- <sup>9</sup> “*Au premier coup*” means done in one process, not as several stages with the paint drying in between.
- <sup>10</sup> An historical accident—there happen to be few photographs of him at work on identifiable pictures at this time.
- <sup>11</sup> Sargent was at Farnham House in 1885 and at Russell House, to which the Millets had moved, in 1886. The identification of the building does not provide a definitive date for the photograph.
- <sup>12</sup> This is based on a pixel count for comparison with these known measurements. Stuart Robson, Head of the UCL Department of Civil, Environmental & Geomatic Engineering and Professor of Photogrammetry and Laser Scanning, “scaled off the artist’s height in pixels against the height of the middle of the painting in pixels to arrive at an approximate canvas height” at the time of the photograph (personal correspondence, December 2015).

- 13 Personal correspondence with Professor Stuart Robson, UCL, December 2015.
- 14 This was common practice for Sargent, as established in Hellen and Townsend, "The Making of Sargent's Oils".
- 15 Hellen and Townsend, "The Making of Sargent's Oils", 29-55.
- 16 Hilda Millet Booth and John Parsons Millet, "Frank Millet: A Versatile American", unpublished manuscript (1938), AAA, Francis Davis Millet and Millet Family Papers, chapter 6, p. 13.
- 17 My thanks to Rod Tidnam, Tate photographic department, for his suggestions regarding the pitchfork.
- 18 Medium analysis under contract by Dr Brian Singer, Northumbria University, UK. See Conservation Record, N01615, Tate.
- 19 For three tubes, PARKER / ARTIST REPOSITORY / MONTPELLIER / CHELTENHAM, and, for four tubes, FREDK. EWENS / Winsor & Newton's Artists' Materials / Picture frames / English and Foreign Fancy Goods / Stationery and Colour Stamping / 18, Promenade Villas, Cheltenham.
- 20 See [www.npg.org.uk/research](http://www.npg.org.uk/research), under "Artists and their suppliers", at the directory "British artists' suppliers, 1650-1950" and the summary note, "John Singer Sargent's suppliers of artists' materials". We thank Jacob Simon for further information derived from his unpublished research (personal communication).
- 21 Hellen and Townsend, "The Making of Sargent's Oils", 29-55.
- 22 Materials identification carried out by Joyce Townsend, Senior Conservation Scientist, Tate, see Analysis report, N001615, Conservation Record, Tate.
- 23 Anthea Callen, "The Unvarnished Truth: Mattness, 'Primitivism' and Modernity in French Painting, c.1870-1907", *The Burlington Magazine* 136, no. 1100 (Nov. 1994): 738-46.
- 24 Letter to Vernon Lee, see Charteris, *John Sargent*, 55.
- 25 John Singer Sargent to Miss Gaitskill, 2 Feb. (no year date), private collection.

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# Conversations and Chimneypieces: the imagery of the hearth in eighteenth-century English family portraiture

Matthew Craske

## Abstract

*This is a study of the conventional settings that were employed by painters of conversation piece portraits in eighteenth-century England. The focus is upon the placement of groups “in conversation” around the hearth, in front of a chimney piece. My argument is that this situation was commonly used because it was understood that the hearth was a desirable place at which to greet one’s guests. I suggest that one of the main functions of the hearth conversation piece was to replicate the experience of meeting hosts who had placed themselves in a highly appropriate location. The main argument here is that this type of portrait generally replicated the experience of a private greeting. I suggest that this type of picture points to the strong connection between conversation piece portraits and rituals of hospitality. Hearth conversations were, it is argued here, not likely to be acts of conspicuous consumption. Similarly, it is unlikely that they functioned to project codes of politeness, as sometimes argued. These pictures undoubtedly reflect notions of good or polite behaviour, particularly as regarded the meeting and greeting of guests. It is, I suggest, open to question whether they were ever intended to promulgate values.*

## Authors

Lecturer in Art History at Oxford Brookes

## Cite as

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## I

The study of the “conversation piece” portrait, in which a family group poses in an elegant interior or garden, is now central to the history of English Georgian art. Such is the obvious relevance of these images to the history of “the family” that they are often used as material evidence in the analysis of domestic order.<sup>1</sup> The recent tendency to define the eighteenth century as a period of “polite sociability” has encouraged scholars to focus on determining the meaning of the “conversation” referred to in these works.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the typical conversational activities represented, from taking tea to playing cards, have attracted the notice of those concerned with tracing the essential rituals of genteel existence. David Solkin, for instance, has interpreted this kind of painting as a mode of exemplifying and fostering ideals of “politeness” as fashioned in the early and mid-Georgian “public sphere”.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, social historians have focused on the particularities of these paintings: the identification of sitters, the analysis of their familial grouping, and relationship to specific things.

This kind of focus has, to some degree, diverted attention from the conventional nature of the conversation piece. Types of situation have yet to be categorized, let alone to attract sustained analysis. Looking at such pictures from this perspective allows us to recognize the continuities of setting that they exhibit. Thus, where an indoor scenario was required, a family or couple were typically grouped around an architectural component such as a Serlian window or chimneypiece.<sup>4</sup> In particular, hearth conversation portraits, in which a group gather around a chimneypiece, comprise around a third of surviving interior “small figure” conversation pieces; this being the most popular scenario from the 1730s to 1760s. Sitters who demanded garden settings appear to have been no less conventional in their expectations. In gardens, families were posed around certain conspicuously artificial props, such as a vase or statue on a lawn, a terrace with a fine balustrade, a garden house or temple.<sup>5</sup> Clients who insisted upon being seen in an overtly natural setting were typically placed by the painter beyond the scope of architecture, interior or exterior. The most common convention in these circumstances was to place a tree, usually an oak, at the centre, as a meeting place. This device was employed in such well-known conversation portraits as Johann Zoffany’s two paintings of children of Lord Bute (1763–65) or Thomas Gainsborough’s *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (1748).



**Figure 1.**

Arthur Devis, Mr. and Mrs. Hill, circa 1750-51, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 63.5 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1981.25.226)

In composing settings, some painters, most overtly Arthur Devis, routinely employed a limited range of stock props (fig. 1). Devis's standard scenarios were envisaged as the context for certain proscribed polite postures; his sitters pose in accordance with the recommendations of conduct manuals, in particular François Nivelon's *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737).<sup>6</sup> The most prestigious metropolitan purveyors of conversation portraits, led first by William Hogarth and afterwards by Johann Zoffany, distinguished themselves through providing works that more thoughtfully catered to the individual tastes, characteristics, and foibles of their employers.<sup>7</sup> However, these artists were no less dependent upon conventional staging; indeed, their superiority to routine practitioners was expressed in their witty subversion, or charming embellishment, of the stock modes of scene-setting employed by competitors.<sup>8</sup> Thus, whether defining convention or analysing

its variants, it is necessary for the art historian to establish the meaning of compositional constructs, which can be expressed linguistically through phrases such as “grouped beneath a fine tree” or “gathered around the chimney breast”.

In this article, which offers itself as a test-case for such an approach, I shall focus on that most popular of settings within such pictures: the hearth. The types of chimney breasts these paintings customarily depict are modest. They are indicative of a pictorial mode in which it was conventional to eschew such display of wealth as might be censured as luxurious. Marble, as a character in a play by John Aikin stated, “is the luxury of architecture” and the material of the ceremonious “chimneypiece and hearth”.<sup>9</sup> So expensive were premier marble chimneypieces that one architect’s primer by John Carter explicitly advised practitioners that patrons who were not carefully forewarned might balk at, or reject, the bill:

Let the person who proposes a chimney of this kind, or who receives a proposal from his proprietor, first represent to him the expense. This is a very needful article at first setting out, for if it be omitted, he must expect, either that the owner will be startled at the charge, or that the work will disgrace him.<sup>10</sup>

However, even though heavily carved Italian marble chimneypieces became an almost mandatory indication of a high status mid-Georgian dwelling, such works rarely featured in conversation portraits. I have only encountered one painted representation of the second highest order of chimneypiece, the “continued” design where the entire chimney breast was marble, centring upon a substantial high-relief panel above the mantel.<sup>11</sup> There are no paintings that pose families before the most expensive type of all, that with life-size caryatids, or “Persians”, supporting the mantel.



**Figure 2.**

William Hogarth, *Assembly at Wanstead House*, the family and friends of Sir Richard Child, Viscount Castlemaine, circa 1729–31, oil on canvas, 64.7 × 76.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art: The John Howard McFadden Collection, 1928

Instead, the painters of hearth scenes preferred to set the scene in “family rooms”, in which mundane and intimate sociability was expected. In so doing, they left unrepresented what John Cornforth has defined as the chambers of “state” or “parade” that were reserved for ceremonious hospitality.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Hogarth’s famous conversation piece, *Assembly at Wanstead House* (fig. 2), is extremely atypical in that it seems to feature an accurate representation of a large, convivial but distinctly stately, dynastic gathering before an impressive marble hearth in one of most magnificent reception rooms of a retirement palace which was famous, even notorious, for its grandeur.<sup>13</sup> Hearth “conversations”, in their focus on somewhat more modest interiors, were, in this regard, well suited to the social circumstances of provincial gentry families; an actuality that probably explains the great number of hearth portraits made by Arthur Devis, who catered specifically to the provincial gentry of the Midlands and North of England. Such clients, who aspired to affluent respectability rather than magnificence, generally did not own “state” chambers. As a consequence, their highest social expectation was to conduct a display of decency in a room modestly fitted out to receive company. The interiors of the conversation pieces they commissioned tended, as Lorna Weatherill has

observed, to represent the height of material aspirations for gentry families.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, dynasties which moved in the grandest metropolitan social circles, of the kind which commissioned hearth conversations from Hogarth and Zoffany, seem to have employed this conspicuously intimate form of portrait to celebrate a calculatedly understated form of hospitality. For the clients of these painters, as opposed to those of Devis, a conversation piece was regarded as a suitable format for “in-house” or “in-joke” forms of pictorial narrative. These pictures were primarily intended for the intimate observer. It was not simply that metropolitan sophisticates could afford to engage painters capable of wit or playfulness, such as Hogarth, Francis Hayman, and Zoffany. Rather, I would suggest, this class of person was more likely to adopt an air of informality, in which they revealed foibles suitable for exposure to privileged guests, and which was distinct from their capacity to conduct hospitality of a more formal and “stately” character. Art historians have debated whether the small figure conversation piece is essentially bourgeois or aristocratic in character.<sup>15</sup> This essay argues, instead, that it became suitable for a wide range of social “conversations”, above the level of “the middling sort”.<sup>16</sup> Yet, although conventions of scene-setting applied across classes, it seems that the tenor of social introductions varied considerably according to the cultural sophistication of the hosts, just as in the case of an actual invitation to tea or cards.

## II

As Isaac Ware asserted in *A Complete Body of Architecture* (1756), the hearth was typically the centre of attention in a well-appointed room; architects were advised to begin with the chimneypiece and plan a room to suit its proportions. Ware compared the significance of a chimneypiece within interior architecture to that of a portico in exterior design. Both components provided the essential point of determination from which to measure the proportion and character of all other, secondary, elements of “decorative architecture”:

The rule being established with respect to outside decorations, must therefore hold, according to what we have shown, with regard to those within. It follows therefore, that the chimneypiece being the first thing designed, and the fixed point from which an architect is to direct his work in the rest, all is to rise from it in a like proportion.<sup>17</sup>

Ware advocated a fresh response to decorative architecture and chimneypiece design. Formerly, in the 1720s and 1730s, such components had been the subject of a pattern-book approach to interior decoration; the

central indication of the importance of chimneypieces to English architecture being the sheer number of variants that were suggested to the solution of adorning the hearth. <sup>18</sup> From the mid-1750s onwards, however, attention shifted to a literary codification of decorative architecture. “Rules” of decorum were prescribed. This determined that a chimneypiece should be appropriate, whether in architectonic character or carved subject matter, to the kind of room in which it was placed. Following Ware, William Chambers, in his *Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1759), promoted the understanding that the architect who adorned the chimney breast was responsible for setting a moral and aesthetic tone for the household. <sup>19</sup> Both architects deplored the nude figures that were essential to the most ostentatious chimneypieces, which included “caryatid” and “Persian” supporting figures. These figurative elements were supposed to subvert domestic morals. Chambers advised that:

All nudities, and indecent representations must be avoided in chimneypieces and, indeed, in every other ornament of an apartment to which children, ladies and other modest and grave persons, have constant recourse. <sup>20</sup>

For Ware, who thought his professional responsibility was to protect “delicate” sensibilities, male nudity was the greatest problem. <sup>21</sup> He saw the virtue of female spectators as compromised by the life-size muscular males who were deployed as fictive props to premier mantelpieces:

Modern sculptors are fond of nudities; but in a chimneypiece it would be abominable; they would shock the delicacy of our sex and could not be seen by the modesty of the other . . . Let no statuary here object, that the great excellence of his art is withheld, for that it would consist of muscular figures. We banish anatomy from the parlour of the polite gentleman: that is all. <sup>22</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, the chimney breast had become an acknowledged locus for the definition of domestic morals for the full range of the propertied classes. By 1763, the national tendency to regard the chimney breast as the repository of domestic virtues was so familiar as to be theatrically lampooned by Isaac Bickerstaffe in his comic opera, *Love in the Village*. A lady’s sewing mania is here satirized in order to subvert the notion of “homespun” wisdom. She boasts to have stitched “the creed and the ten commandments in the hair of our family” and to have had the image “framed and glazed and hung over the chimneypiece in the parlour”. <sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the hearth became a sacrosanct locus of a particularly *English* domesticity. From John Aheron's *General Treatise on Architecture* (1754) onwards, architectural treatises in the English language recognized the adornment of the chimney breast as a distinctive national concern.<sup>24</sup> George Richardson, who published a whole book on chimneypiece design in 1781, justified his project by claiming that he catered to an established and defining artistic preoccupation of the English:

Neither the French nor Italians have been famous in compositions for chimneys, their productions of this sort in common are whimsical fancies, at present this country surpasses all other nations with respect to magnificent chimneypiece, not only in point of expense, but likewise in taste and goodness of workmanship.<sup>25</sup>

Richardson took his nationalistic cue from Chambers's *Treatise on Civil Architecture*, which argued that the chimneypiece was, owing to the damp chill of the climate, the natural art form of the English:

The chimneypiece was not with them [foreigners from "hotter countries"], as it is with us, a part of such essential importance, that no common room, plain or elegant, could be constructed without it. The eye is immediately cast upon it when entering, and the place of sitting down is naturally near it. By this means it becomes the most eminent thing in the furnishing of the apartment . . .<sup>26</sup>

By these criteria, the Englishman could be expected, as a matter of natural inclination and cultural tradition, to seek out the hearth as he entered a room. English conversation piece portraits which assume the chimneypiece as a central focal point, and group their sitters around it, can reasonably be supposed to have followed a similar understanding of national social rituals.

In seeking to trace the origins of the tendency in English domestic lore to pay honour to the chimney breast, it is important to remember that the portrait painter's convention of posing a family before the hearth was not itself invented in England, nor did it have a particular currency in that country before the 1730s. Grand seventeenth-century family groups, as conceived in the courtly tradition established by Van Dyke, did not employ such mundane, functional props as chimney breasts. In this milieu of portraiture, architecture typically had no prosaic function, the preferred context of posturing being the heavily swagged, richly columned, garden pavilion.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it was

through the process of inventing the “small figure” conversation portrait, a type conspicuously at odds with traditions of aristocratic magnificence established in the Stuart court, that hearth imagery rose to the fore in English portraiture. “Small figure” conversations borrowed their scale and general sense of spatial relationship of figure to interior, from mid-seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish cabinet paintings.<sup>28</sup> Given that much of this kind of painting commonly centred upon groups conversing before the chimney breast, there can be little doubt that they provided the fundamental prototypes which English portrait painters adapted. The group portrait by Gabriel Metsu known as *The Family of the Burgermeister, Dr. Gillis Valckeneir* (ca. 1675), anticipated by more than fifty years the hearth “conversations” of Hogarth.<sup>29</sup> The identification of “hearth” with “home” seems, thus, to have derived from the “Golden Age” culture which first defined pictorially the ideals of bourgeois Protestantism. The idea of expressing this ideal through group portraiture began, in the 1730s, to enjoy particular appeal in England. It was also in this decade that representatives of important English dynasties, seeking to entertain in “state”, began to make overt visual reference to the supposed “sacredness” of the ancestral hearth in decorating the great reception rooms of their dynastic seats. Employing marble sculpture to draw attention to the “ancient” traditions of hearth hospitality was clearly the province of the national political elite. By contrast, the “modern” hearth conversation was primarily suited to “bourgeois” modes of domestic living. Yet, particularly in the hands of highly prestigious metropolitan painters such as Hogarth and Zoffany, it clearly had applications to aristocratic and even to princely circumstances.

### III

When British architectural theorists codified the design of chimneypieces they were patently conscious that this was a modern form. There was broad agreement that nothing like a chimneypiece had been discovered in an archaeological investigation of an ancient classical site. George Richardson wrote that:

Among the ruins of ancient buildings which the author has seen and examined in Rome, throughout Italy and the south of France, he has not found any chimney in the manner of ours, nor even the smallest hint in favour of that opinion.<sup>30</sup>

Architectural writers advising on the design of chimneys and their adornments for classicizing apartments were thus required to integrate this modern form within an ancient decorative vocabulary. To help naturalize this process, a sense of the special significance of the hearth as the centre of the

modern English home was grafted onto an awareness that “the ancients” had regarded this locus as sacred to the family and its hospitality.<sup>31</sup> The most important ancient authors, Homer and Virgil, wrote in honour of the “sacred hearth”.<sup>32</sup> Pope in his notes upon his translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* described how the “genial hearth”, as sacred to Vesta, was regarded as a “place of refuge”.<sup>33</sup> As, in the ancient world, a man sought domestic sanctuary at his hearth, and it was the greatest of defilements to attack or denigrate him at this “hospitable” place.<sup>34</sup> For the Romans, the hearth had been sacred to ancestry. It was the essential province of the benign goddess of domestic accord, Vesta, and the residence of the most important household gods, the *lares* and *penates*.<sup>35</sup> The “images” of ancestors were stored in cupboards near to the main hearth, where they declared the legitimacy of a dynasty’s claim to be a bloodline of significance to the public weal.<sup>36</sup> In Georgian Britain, those who placed busts of honoured family members or political heroes and statues of gods appropriate to the spirit of the home on, or around, the chimneypiece, probably took their cue from such ancient precedent. Such was the vogue for erecting sculptured images of household gods on mantels that in 1756 *The Connoisseur* suggested, in jest, that a tax should be placed upon the practice. The English, it was claimed, were characterized by “the *Penates* in our libraries and *Lares* on every chimneypiece”.

From the 1730s onwards, sculptors and architects decorating the great English ancestral seats celebrated the ancient association of the hearth with sacredness through placing relief renditions of scenes of Roman sacrifice above or below the mantel. Solemn and ceremonious in character, such references to ancient fire rituals generally applied to the state rooms of dynasties at the pinnacle of the social pyramid. Michael Rysbrack helped to establish this tradition with the chimneypieces he produced for the great state entertainment chambers at Houghton and Clandon.<sup>37</sup> In the Stone Hall at Houghton, a sacrifice scene was situated directly above the bust on the mantel of Robert Walpole, the dynasty’s *paterfamilias* and the nation’s premier statesman. Immediately above, in the stucco ceiling, appeared portraits of his heirs and relations. This iconography recalled the understanding that the great classical atriums of consequential ancestral seats were places of ceremonial hospitality necessary to the social life of a man in public affairs. Here, by Roman tradition, visitors were introduced to a dynasty of consequence through the assembled “images” of family members and ancestors. Sir Richard Colt Hoare wrote, at the close of George III’s reign, of his decision to fill the atrium at Stourhead with portraits:

Family portraits [are] a very appropriate decoration for the first entrance into a house . . . They remind us of the genealogy of our families, and recall to our minds the hospitality, & co., of its former inhabitants, and on the first entrance of the friend, or stranger, seem to greet them with a SALVE or welcome.<sup>38</sup>

The employment of Latin in this quotation reminds us that the ultimate source of the tendency to regard the assemblages of portraits as a form of introduction “to friends and strangers” was in classical writing and practice.<sup>39</sup> Despite these “ancient” associations, the eighteenth-century English hearth was open to being celebrated in distinctly “modern”, even modish, ways. The hearth conversation portrait was among several fashions of this sort. It also became customary to keep the finely printed appointment cards, by which persons established and remembered their social engagements, on the mantelpiece.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, there were instances when the chimneypiece was reconstituted as a political shrine or tomb. These functions were observed in a pair of chimneypieces made by Joseph Wilton, to the designs of Joseph Gandon, for the once-famous library of Lord Charlemont’s Dublin townhouse. Here, one chimneypiece was equipped with a bust and long monumental inscription to General Wolfe. Another was conceived as a place sacred to the head of Charlemont’s Whig clan, Lord Rockingham, whose bust was attended by a long honorific inscription.<sup>41</sup> The monumental implications of the common practice of adorning mantels with busts were occasionally explicit. A bust completed by Peter Scheemakers in 1764 of the recently deceased Sir Paul Methuen (d. 1757), was placed in the grand picture gallery of Corsham Court, designed by Capability Brown to house his bequeathed collection. Accompanied by a monumental inscription and placed at the centre of the mantel, this bust defined the picture collection as Methuen’s domestic monument. It was a replica, and the inscription an abbreviated variant, of that placed upon Methuen’s slightly earlier monument in Westminster Abbey.

The association of the hearth with domestic veneration, whether of a blood ancestor or a sponsor of the family, is frequently manifest in the imagery of hearth conversation portraits. Francis Hayman, who produced numerous hearth conversations for London’s culturally sophisticated bourgeoisie, invoked the notion of the tributary chimney breasts in his portrait of the family of Jonathon Tyers, manager of Vauxhall Gardens (fig. 3).<sup>42</sup> He gathered the Tyers family around a chimneypiece, above which is represented a sculpted rendition of the bust of the prime sponsor of the family business, Frederick, Prince of Wales. In numerous conversation portraits painted for the northern English gentry by Arthur Devis, the

chimney breast is conceived as a mount for icons of the family, painted or sculpted.<sup>43</sup> This is the conceit of the portrait of John Orde (1702–1767) and his spouse welcoming to the family hearth their son and heir, Thomas (1746–1807), who brings a gift of a shot bird (fig. 4). This painting appears to commemorate some dynastic coming-of-age ritual, which has the blessing of dead ancestral benefactors who appear, in the form of busts, on the chimney breast.<sup>44</sup> Such was the association of the hearth with expressing honour to a patron, political hero, or ancestor, that for the head of the household to place above it an image of himself was a recognized indication of impropriety and pomposity. This was the kernel of a joke at the centre of Zoffany’s painting of a scene in Frederick Reynolds’s play, *Speculation* (fig. 5). Here the pomposity of the central character, “Alderman Arable”, is suggested by showing him seated before a grand chimneypiece surmounted by his own full-length portrait in City garb. Given that this is a satire upon vanity and luxury, it is significant that the chimneypiece represented here, with a lavish classical scene carved below the mantel, is much the grandest specimen in a “conversation” painting by Zoffany.



**Figure 3.**

Francis Hayman, Jonathan Tyers and his family, 1740, oil on canvas, 77.8 mm × 106.2 cm Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London



**Figure 4.**

Arthur Devis, John Orde, His Wife, Anne, His Eldest Son, William, and a Servant, 1754-56, oil on canvas, 94 × 96.2 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



**Figure 5.**

Johann Zoffany, William Thomas Lewis, Joseph Shepherd Munden, John Quick, and Tryphosa Jane Wallis, in Scene from "Speculation", 1796, oil on canvas, 102 x 128 cm Digital image courtesy of The Garrick Club

The mounting of ancestral busts on the mantel, as seen in the Orde conversation, echoed the iconographic conventions of contemporary funeral monuments; there was a simultaneous fashion for tombs that took the form of an architectural platform for "images" conceived as statements of legitimate succession.<sup>45</sup> One way of comprehending the hearth conversation piece, perhaps, is as a variant upon a church monument, and upon the function of such monuments in establishing patterns of succession, here adapted to the less sombre inflections of the living home environment. This relationship is particularly evident in a conversation piece by Hogarth depicting the performance of Dryden's play *The Conquest of Mexico* in the London house of Isaac Newton's heir, John Conduitt (1732-35; fig. 6).<sup>46</sup> The painting seems, literally, to play upon the solemn, tomb-like inflections of the ancestral hearth. One way of interpreting this picture is as a gentle subversion of the understanding that a hearth was a place of highly serious family drama. As is seldom noted, the part of the *Conquest* being performed in this painting (Act IV, scene iv) was, as can be seen from the contrast between the sombre prison setting and charming child actors on the stage below, a sophisticated tragicomic experience. Centred upon scenes of romantic attachment, confinement, and torture, this play was not obviously applicable to being performed, as we see it here, by children. The nature of the joke may well be inferred by the spectacle of the children's tutor, Dr

Desaguliers, in the dark wings, seeming to prompt the children as they stumble through their complex lines.<sup>47</sup> The employment in this humble role of Desaguliers, a figure otherwise famous for his serious mission of promoting Newton's ideas in the public realm, may well be part of the joke of this painting. He is situated behind a classical statue of a goddess that recalls, through its physical attachment to the hearth, the Roman cult of the *lares* and *penates*. The position of the figure exactly tallies with the definition of the *lares* provided in Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1741):

**Lares**, among the ancients, a kind of domestic genii, worshipped in houses, the esteemed guardians and protectors of families; supposed to reside more immediately in the chimney corner.<sup>48</sup>

In this case, the imagery seems to suggest that the god of this household is theatrical, for the female figure clearly bears a classical actor's mask. Suitable to the tragicomic nature of Dryden's play, and to the comedic inflections of children playing such tortured roles, it is uncertain whether the figure represents Comedy or Tragedy, for the mouth of the mask seems purposefully hidden in the shadows. Yet, she is accompanied by a small faun playing pan pipes, which is indicative of the iconography of comedy. The gaze of this statue is clearly directed towards the bust of Newton that is set on the mantel, establishing the suggestion of a light-hearted reflection upon the redeployment for children's play of a place sacred to an ancestor famed for the most serious of philosophical reflections.



**Figure 6.**

William Hogarth, *The Conduitt Piece, a performance of Dryden's 'The Indian Emperor, or The Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards' in the house of John Conduitt*, circa 1732-35, oil on canvas, 80 x 146.7 cm Digital image courtesy of Private Collection

Hogarth seems here to be making witty reference to the way in which children literally play with the sacred dynastic legacy of their elders. The portrait gently commemorates the movement of Conduitt's family into the courtly elite. The picture shows a group, including the young Duke of Cumberland and Princesses Louisa and Mary, watching Conduitt's sole heir, a daughter who was to marry into a peerage family. She performs with two children from a noble family. The entitlement of the family to move in exalted circles is asserted by the presence of the pseudo-Roman bust of Isaac Newton that dominates the mantel before which invited guests gather. On the chimney breast are also seen the portraits of the absent hosts, John Conduitt and his wife, the natural philosopher's niece. The visual proximity of their images to Newton's bust, set above the mantel in conjunction with a cast of a relief panel that appeared on the philosopher's tomb in Westminster Abbey, is essential to the monumental inflections of the painting.<sup>49</sup> This relief, indeed, may well have been the prompt for the charming comedy of the painting. It featured playful boys bearing emblems of Newton's achievement, who, like the children below, render charming a serious point of family honour and public circumstance. Indeed, Conduitt (who died in

1737, shortly after this painting was completed) had willed that he should be buried close to Newton's monument, for which he had paid.<sup>50</sup> John Conduitt's family erected a monument to him on the west wall of the Abbey, which was designed to be received as a pair with that of the philosopher. The presence of classicizing commemorative statuary establishes a sense of an antique hearth, sacred to the pieties of ancestral inheritance. Fittingly, it was the daughter of the painted couple, their sole heir, who was depicted as the main performer on the stage in front of the hearth. Yet, she does not here take the role of a starched representative of her dynasty. Rather, she recites her lines with a typically child-like incompetence that requires the anxious prompting of her tutor. The audience of royal and noble children immediately before the hearth do not misbehave, they communicate the charming artlessness of their years. They exist, literally, in the shadow of the most serious mind of the modern age, yet they are neither conspicuously beholden, nor is this their elder's indulgent expectation.

There had been a strong post-Reformation tradition of conceiving this locus of the home in the manner of a tomb.<sup>51</sup> Chimney breasts, like the canopies of funeral monuments, were frequently encrusted with complex armorial diagrams of dynasties (fig. 7). This practice did not die out in the eighteenth century, when a few great houses, such as Burton Constable and Boughton House, were fitted with conspicuous heraldic mantel adornments.<sup>52</sup> In the Georgian era, the chimney breast could function as a platform for family busts; the faces of relatives and ancestors replacing earlier heraldic abstractions in the communication of a family's lineage. However, the idea of depicting family groups in conversation before the hearth, sometimes placed in contrast to the static iconic presence of dead relations or patrons, offered a conceptualization of the family that was far more immediate than that conveyed by sculptural adornment. Unlike the busts which were customary upon funeral monuments, conversation portraits had no established role in the iconography of death; rather the family relationships recorded through conversational art were emphatically lively. A dynasty was literally brought to life at the same time as it was recorded for posterity, in a manner that had considerably greater emotive resonance than would an abstract family tree. The family laid out for the viewer before the mantel by Georgian portraitists might be an extended cousinhood, as in paintings such as Hogarth's *Assembly at Wanstead House* (fig. 2) and *Wollaston Family*. Generally, however, they were a small and affectionate group, as in Hayman's *Tyers Family* (fig. 3) or, later, in Zoffany's portraits of the *Dutton Family* (fig. 8) and *Willoughby de Brooke Family*. Through such imagery, the pompous, dynastic post-Reformation armorial hearth was translated into a form in which the family was reconceived as an institution of affectionate "conversation".<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 7.**  
Tudor timber fireplace, circa 1560s Digital image courtesy of The Library  
at Combermere Abbey



**Figure 8.**

Johann Zoffany, *The Dutton Family*, 1771–72, oil on canvas, 101.5 × 127 cm Digital image courtesy of Private Collection

Having first been realized in the 1730s, the understanding that a conversation piece constituted an option to display a more intimate vision of the family than other types of portrait available to patrons was maintained into the late eighteenth century. One important hearth conversation piece, Philip Reinagle's *Mrs Congreve and Family* (ca. 1785), seems to make similar points to Hogarth's *Conquest of Mexico* concerning the function of the hearth conversation as an alternative to more formal and public modes of revealing a family through portraiture. A hearth scenario has here been chosen as the appropriate format in which to represent the domestic relationships of a patron's wife to her youngest children. They sit in front of Reinagle's recently painted (ca. 1782) conversation portrait of the absent father of the family, General Congreve, and his eldest son, performing manoeuvres at Woolwich Military Academy. This imagery seems to define the outdoor conversation as, in this case, a more fitting format for encountering the family's men of action.<sup>54</sup> A contrast between the hearth as a forum for private child's play, and the outdoors as a public realm of adult activity, is made through the clever deployment of ballistic imagery. The youngest male child is playing with a small model of a siege cannon on a hearth table of the kind conventionally seen in this type of image. In the painting behind, the toddler's elder brother, who has reached a sufficient maturity to begin his training, takes part in real military exercises. He stands with his father before a rugged cliff, up which engineers haul a heavy cannon. This depicted

martial conversation piece is itself surrounded by a range of other family portraits, which introduce the dynasty in different guises. Above the mantel, in the traditional position of “sacred” honour, is encountered the most famous ancestor of the family, and ultimate *paterfamilias*, the playwright, William Congreve. Reinagle here created, as had Hogarth in *The Conquest of Mexico*, a portrait about portraiture; revealing pictorially the capability of the most economically successful representatives of the professional classes to celebrate their dynastic identity in a succession of contrasting portrait images.

The hearth conversation piece, then, demands to be understood in its original domestic environment: as a conventional option in the panoply of equally conventional types of portrait. It advanced an invitation to view the family that was likely to be manifestly more privileged, and revealing of intimacies, than other portraits accumulated by a household. Yet it is debatable whether the basic mode of invitation which such paintings, right through the century, seem to represent was ever radically revised from that operative in the 1730s. This essay is distinct from other approaches to conversation piece portraiture in the degree of importance that it attaches to its conventional character. From this stance, it is to be expected that conformity with traditional kinds of address is given priority over the narratives of transformative change in familial culture that have tended to be emphasized by previous historians of the genre. This essay shifts the scholarly agenda away from charting how portraiture developed under a gradually intensifying pressure to communicate some model of the “affective nuclear” family; rather, what appears to be at stake is the development of a new range of ways of employing art to celebrate domestic relationships. The hearth conversation piece was redolent of the most relaxed dimension of sociability: “family room” hospitality. The formation of this kind of hospitality did not necessarily reflect a cultural movement away from formal dynastic “parade”. On the contrary: families can be considered to have developed this kind of informal sociability, as John Cornforth implies, to escape some of the rigours of “state” hospitality in which more formal dynastic theatre was in demand.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, the rise of the “conversation” portrait might be interpreted as an indication of an intensification in the obligations of dynasties to “parade”, rather than as an indication of the development of “polite society” towards relaxed modes of congress.

#### IV

An important element of the hearth conversation piece is its literalism. The proposition that these paintings, though designed to operate within a culture where familial bonds could be considered as having a “sacred” or classically rooted character, also provided for those viewers who elected not to relate to such abstract concepts, is strongly supported by the evidence that they were

intended to replicate actual and ordinary experience. More specifically, many paintings have details suggestive of an intention to represent the sensation of meeting the family as arranged before the hearth in expectation of receiving guests.<sup>56</sup> Occasionally, the imagery makes clear that those depicted await company, as in Arthur Devis's portrait of Mr and Mrs Hill (ca. 1750-51, see [fig. 1](#)); the couple, the only persons in the room, stand before a tea table set with seven cups.<sup>57</sup> A vital factor in comprehending these paintings is that the viewer of the image was encouraged to feel as though he or she were meeting the family in accordance with established conventions of proffering hospitality. These dictated that a familiar guest, having been received through the main portal by a servant, would be conducted directly to a reception room, where the family, or host, would be prepared to grant welcome.<sup>58</sup> By convention, the hearth, as the visual focal point in its scheme of decoration, was construed as the best place to play host. Such was the literalism of the convention that there is a remarkable preponderance, across the subgenre, of chimney breasts that have been stripped of their grates for the summer season, temporarily boarded over or adorned with a vase of flowers.<sup>59</sup> Where windows also appear in the image, the prospect of green leaves generally emphasizes further the situation of the scene in the period of the year when families tended to return to their estates to avoid the heat of the town and enjoy the countryside. High summer, also the typical time of year celebrated in outdoor conversation pieces, was the main period in which guests were received at family seats.

The typical viewpoint of a hearth conversation piece replicates the experience of entering a reception room. In the majority of cases, the perspective is that of a central viewpoint with the chimneypiece seen directly from the front; the family being symmetrically disposed around the chimney breast to greet the viewer. A second convention placed the family before a hearth that was seen, in foreshortened perspective, on an end wall. In both traditions, the convention conformed with the advice of William Chambers in his *Treatise* of 1759, that the chimneypiece should be sited at some remove from the main entrance to a room to allow a host to greet his or her guest from before the hearth:

The chimney should always be situated so as to be easily seen by those who enter the room, that they may not have the persons already in the room, who are generally seated near the fire, to look for.<sup>60</sup>

Taking Chambers's standards of design as a guide to proper conduct, it seems that painters of conversation portraits recreated the correct ritual of welcome. In this respect, such paintings are a highly literal expression of

politeness. The literalism of this convention is occasionally made plain by the presence of an empty chair awaiting the guest and viewer. Arthur Devis's portrait of John Smith Barry, his wife, Dorothy, and two children (Marbury Hall Cheshire, ca. 1735) is typical. The focus of the viewer is on the male head of the family, standing before the chimneypiece. He looks directly at the viewer and leans against an empty chair, as if to offer a seat.

It is significant that the majority of these hearth conversations featured a small portable table that was placed before the hearth.<sup>61</sup> This was often set with tea, a hand of cards, or an open document, in such a manner as to create the impression that the viewer is invited to join the company. On account of its portability, a hearth table of this kind articulated the duty of the host to make his or her guest aware that the room had been purposefully prepared for their reception. These modest, though elegant, tables reminded the viewer of the character of the conversation piece itself: that of a permanent testimony to a temporary gesture of welcome. The table and the chimneypiece had contrasting functions in these dramas of hearth hospitality; the portability of the former contrasting with the fixed presence of the latter. As a temporary forum for shared activities, the table was regarded as a place of disclosure and welcome. The chimneypiece and hearth, a solid vertical presence beyond this temporary horizontal surface, was the host family's permanent inner-sanctum.



**Figure 9.**

Johann Zoffany, *Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Grandson*, 1769–70, oil on canvas, 101.5 × 127 cm Digital image courtesy of The Art Archive / Marquess of Zetland / Eileen Tweedy

With literalism of experience being central to the function of this kind of painting, it follows that excellence in the genre was often defined in terms of fidelity to actual sensation. In this respect, it is useful to compare Devis's image of the family of John Smith Barry, with Zoffany's portrait of Sir Lawrence Dundas and his grandson (fig. 9). When Zoffany inherited the tradition of the hearth conversation piece in the 1760s, it was a tradition more than thirty years old. His response seems to have been to adapt established types of composition along the lines set by Hogarth; handling the social drama of the conversation with wit and taking strict care to reproduce the actual interiors that his clients would recognize.<sup>62</sup> In the decades before Zoffany arrived in England, Devis had employed generic situations in the majority of his family conversations: the same hearth table, painting, or chimneypiece appearing in numerous works. Zoffany, by comparison, was careful to reproduce in loving detail every element of a room in 19 Arlington Street as it appeared in about 1769.<sup>63</sup> Yet, in constructing this record, Zoffany also appropriated the traditions utilized by Devis. Like Devis's patron and main male subject, Lawrence Dundas acts as welcoming host to the imagined viewer, who approaches in the conventional manner from a door in line with the mantel. An empty chair awaits this viewer, in a manner far more skilfully devised to make the viewer feel the invitation to sit down. The notion of witness to an act that defines the family is also more overt than in Devis's

painting. There is a clear impression that Dundas is presenting to his guest the infant (born 1766), who was defined by law of entail as his heir in the next generation, to the viewer.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, much as Dundas had recently been granted the title of baronet, which was inheritable in perpetuity, the painting ably communicates the dynastic significance of grandfather to grandchild. The conventional hearth table is spread with an open body of papers, with the empty chair drawn up to allow for their consultation. These details seem to have been important, because Zoffany deviated from his impeccable perspective to tilt the table and show them clearly. Giles Worsley believed, with good reason, from the seals and bindings, that these were formal documents, rather than letters. The figure of Dundas clearly points to a quill pen on the table as an invitation to the viewer to sign. One possibility, given that his grandson is at the other hand, is that these papers are representative of a will. Dundas had provided for this boy, the first born of his eldest son, as the eventual inheritor of the heirlooms that surround the two figures in Zoffany's painting.<sup>65</sup> The implication of the pointing gesture is that the viewer is invited to sign the pictured documents, suggesting that Zoffany and his patron regarded the painting as a symbolic form of witness.<sup>66</sup>

This scene, therefore, seems knowingly to proceed from the classical tradition of regarding the hearth as sacred to rites of patriarchal succession. By contrast to Devis, who mainly created entirely generic hearth scenes, Zoffany was careful to produce a precise representation of a particular chimneypiece that had an established significance to his patron. Such was Dundas's concern to define his architectural taste through his discernment in the field of chimneypieces that he later functioned as dedicatee of George Richardson's *A New Selection of Chimneypieces*. Published in 1781, the year of its patron's death, this book begins with a glowing tribute to Dundas's classical learning, as witnessed in his taste for chimneypieces.<sup>67</sup> Zoffany's care to make this painting a faithful witness of Dundas's taste, as well as the terms of his dynastic succession, was also displayed in the care taken to adorn the mantel with an assortment of bronzes that Dundas is known to have possessed.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 10.**

Bernard Baron after William Hogarth, *Marriage à-la-Mode*, Plate II: The Breakfast Scene, 1745, engraving, dimensions unknown Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art

The fashion of adorning the chimneypiece with classical statuary, as recorded in the Dundas conversation, seems to have been a phenomenon of the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> It was one of a number of alternatives to the much criticized early and mid-eighteenth-century practice of loading the mantel with oriental ornaments; the most ridiculed tradition being for fatuously sage “Mandarin” figures, equipped with nodding heads.<sup>70</sup> One of Josiah Wedgwood’s contributions to national manners was his design of ranges of classical ornaments which displaced “exotics” in the national favour. One of those to praise Wedgwood for this type of innovation was John Ireland, who supplied one of the first literary glosses upon Hogarth’s prints. The context of Ireland’s eulogy upon Wedgwood was his review of the second print in the *Marriage à-la-Mode* series (1743). Wedgwood was praised for providing “beautiful Etruscan forms” to substitute for “the grotesque and fantastic ornaments” that Hogarth included on the mantel of the dissipated “Viscount Squanderfield” as an emblem of his modish tastelessness. It is an indication of the Viscount’s luxuriant excesses that he has equipped his mantel with not one, but two, “nodding mandarins”. A broken-nosed antique bust resides in the centre of the mantel, that position where it was customary to place a bust of an honoured relation or family patron. The point here was, probably, to sustain the theme of the first image of the series: that

this was a couple who lacked an honourable example of parenting and put fashion before moral substance (fig. 10).<sup>71</sup> In this instance the “mode” that was censured was that for collecting archaeologically recovered antiquities.

This image was clearly a knowing satire upon the conventions observed in the conversation pieces of jobbing painters such as Devis, in which a couple were stiffly seated before the hearth, their chairs turned attentively upon each other to symbolize their union. Hogarth lounged his dissolute pair on chairs diagonal to the hearth, confirming through their postures that they are oblivious to each other’s existence. The great marble chimneypiece, said by Ireland to be a satire upon the grandiose designs of William Kent, divides rather than unites. The obligatory small hearth table is in closest proximity, as was common, to the principal woman of the family. Yet, it is not drawn up directly in front of the hearth and she merely uses it as a repository for her opera accessories. The floor before the chimney is covered in the appointment cards that were customarily set upon the mantel, indicative of the couple’s neglect of the formal visitation rituals of polite society.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, a third chair, which in better households would have been proffered to a guest, is toppled over on the carpet. Approaching the couple from the typical stance of a guest moving from door to hearth, the viewer of the image is greeted with a chair that is not prepared for his visit. The conventions of reception before the hearth, as familiar to the viewer of conversation piece portraits, were thoroughly transgressed.

Hogarth’s *Marriage à-la-Mode* series is replete with imagery of effeminate men who, unobservant of the appropriate conduct of their gender, destroy the institution of marriage. The inability of Squanderfield to assert his masculinity upon his family hearth is signalled by the accumulation of “josses”, a word invented especially to describe the mantelpiece bauble. Such ornaments were widely considered to be a sign of feminine and effeminate excess. Beginning with Joseph Addison, eighteenth-century satirists regarded an overburdened mantel as an emblem of the domination of the household by the over-precious forces of fashion.<sup>73</sup> The main culprits for the introduction of this type of taste were most commonly identified as women. Addison’s fictional “Mary Oddly” was criticized for overtaking the house of Sir John Neville. She was said to have:

Set herself up to reform every room of my house having glazed all of my chimneypieces with looking glasses and planted every corner with such heaps of china, that I am obliged to move about my house with the greatest caution and circumspection for fear of hurting our brittle furniture.<sup>74</sup>

In the mid-eighteenth century, a new word, “knickknack”, evolved partly to describe the dressing of chimneypieces.<sup>75</sup> This onomatopoeic word, which echoed the sound of little useless things knocking together, was invented partly to describe the collection of modish trivia that empty-headed persons gathered together on the mantel. These persons were, by literary convention, most frequently ladies.<sup>76</sup> When, for instance, John Gwynn addressed the subject of poor taste in chimneypiece adornment in his *London and Westminster Improved* of 1766, he elected to castigate the “ladies”:

Ladies, nothing can be more trifling or ridiculous than to see a modern chimneypiece set out with josses and such horrid monsters, which can have no other charms to recommend them than deformity, a high price and the their being the production of a very remote country.<sup>77</sup>

On account of the strong association of the grossly adorned chimneypiece with female tastes, it became natural to link, when viewing a male household, a fussy mantel with an effeminate beau. In his expostulatory novel *Mount Henneth* (1788), Robert Bage imagined an adorned chimneypiece as the prime component of the rooms of a nauseating modish beau. On entering this apartment, he observed that:

On the Chimneypiece, amongst the mackaws and china josses, of the Worcester manufactory, lay a gold repeater, and a pamphlet, *The London Jester*. The chairs were furnished with a green coat, buttoned with the newest pattern from Soho; silk stockings, and embroidered waistcoats.<sup>78</sup>

Whilst a mantel piled with “josses” was widely considered a sign of excess, a well-ordered arrangement of china seems open to interpretation as definitive of neat domesticity. Arthur Devis and Francis Hayman, for instance, frequently placed porcelain vessels on the mantels in their conversation piece portraits, clearly considering such ornaments to be consistent with taste and domestic rectitude. Unlike the fantastic exotic beasts and “mandarins” which became icons of tawdriness, a well ordered line of modest vessels seems to have been considered consistent with the modesty of virtuous femininity. These values are summarized in Devis’s *Orde* portrait, in which a small collection of porcelain graces the mantel. This may well suggest the social authority of the matriarch of the *Orde* household, for there was a tradition of regarding such neat collections as emblems of the

discretion of a worthy woman.<sup>79</sup> The impression that the tastes of such a woman predominate in the Orde family is reinforced by the fact that it is she who extends her hand to receive the hunting trophy, which is presented as the focus of hospitable exchange.

These modest collections of elegant and exotic objects were appropriate for households who liked to be construed as tasteful, though not ostentatious. It is significant in this regard that, in devising his fictive hearths, Devis always preferred simple chimneypiece designs, redolent of taste without excess. There were, however, social constituencies in which even this kind of modest refinement was regarded as excessive. Rooms in which such values prevailed were usually male preserves. Modern military men were notorious for preferring to place guns over the mantel, an extension of the ancient English tradition, seen in Hogarth's *Falstaff*, of keeping swords and shields on the chimney breast.<sup>80</sup> As women were criticized for adorning the mantel with delicate, useless things, men of action and business were expected to regard it as a place of storage, suitable to matters of practical purpose.<sup>81</sup>

An important example of this tendency is Thomas Hudson's portrait of a group of City gents who are presented as the friends of William Benn and John Blachford, Lord Mayors of London, respectively, in 1746 and 1750 (fig. 11). The painting shows a group of seven sober men about to drink a toast from modestly proportioned glasses. A sense of the relaxed and modest affability of the masculine group can be taken from the casual placement of a cane and gloves on the plain mantelpiece. This scene of bourgeois respectability was presented to the Goldsmiths' Company by Blachford in 1752.<sup>82</sup> It was situated above the courtroom fireplace, where it served to define the tenor of affable masculine conviviality around which the business of the City turned.<sup>83</sup> Whilst being a celebration of drinking alcohol, it is not an image of drunkenness. The figure identified in the key as William Benn is defined as the leader of the company by being the only figure to hold a bottle. The others await, with empty glasses, his hospitality. To emphasize that this is an image celebrating the expectation of a drink, Hudson wittily shows Robert Alsop polishing his glass in anticipation of it being charged. The disposition of the room is reminiscent of Hogarth's well-known comic image, *A Midnight Modern Conversation* (1733; fig. 12), though stripped of the indecorous excesses therein recorded. In it, Hogarth posed a carousing group before an obliquely positioned chimney breast. Here the adornment of the mantel symbolizes the values of no-nonsense masculine drinking culture. Given over to wild carousing, the "Midnight" group were seen to use the mantel as a place to store their hats and empty bottles. As Ireland observed, the number of empty bottles—two for each person represented—had been collected, in the manner of defeated trophies, to "prove" the company had "not lost a moment" in dedicating itself to drunken oblivion.<sup>84</sup> Despite the

different tenor of these drinking scenes, both established the understanding that robust male company defined itself through its contempt for the delicate and ornamental mantel.



**Figure 11.**

John Faber the Younger after Thomas Hudson, Benn's Club; group portrait of six alderman around table in club, 1752-56, mezzotint, 25 x 35.1 cm  
Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum



**Figure 12.**

William Hogarth, A Midnight Modern Conversation, 1733, engraving, 32.7 x 45.4 cm Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

Given the strong association of over-precious mantel adornment with women, it is reasonable to associate the late eighteenth-century “reform” of this practice, through the utilization of refined classical pieces, with the reassertion of masculine values. In this respect, it is significant that Zoffany’s Dundas conversation piece is a scene of masculine sociability. With the exception of Giambologna’s Mercury at the centre, the bronzes seen over Lawrence Dundas’s mantel are miniature renditions of classical nudes. All, including the Mercury, are strongly muscled male figures. The masculine air of the collection asserts the gender of this mantel and of the sociability offered there. Indeed, the masculine tone of the image befitted Dundas. A member of a famous military family, Dundas had been Commissary-General of the army during the triumphs of the Seven Years’ War which had come to conclusion only a few years before this commission. Zoffany’s awareness that the hearth adorned with classical nudes was an essentially male social scenario was also expressed in his portrait of Charles Townley in his library at Park Street (1781–90). Zoffany is known to have arranged the room especially for this portrait, bringing statues from the gallery rooms to the library to form a composition that suited his particular creative ends. It is reasonable to posit, though it is not a feature of typical art-historical review, that part of Zoffany’s intentions were comedic, as was typical of the character of conversations depicting solely male company back to Hogarth’s early career.

It is known from a letter that Townley comically regarded the classical statues at Park Street as his household gods. He specifically employed the term “penates” to describe them.<sup>85</sup> The employment of this term may well explain why, for the purposes of this painting, Zoffany elected to group statues, which had been brought from the galleries, around Townley’s hearth. By the standards of the subgenre to which it belongs, the hearth conversation, this painting is conspicuously unconventional. The host, who was not married, could not be appropriately situated in the conventional act of introducing his family. Thus, he is not seen in the usual position, before his own chimney breast. Rather, Zoffany presented Townley at some remove from the chimneypiece, offering his guests the privilege of the hearth and the mandatory small table.<sup>86</sup> On this table, where by convention one expects to find a seated matriarch, Zoffany placed the famous bust of Clytie which Townley was known to refer to as his “wife”.<sup>87</sup> The witty variance upon tradition suggests a degree of knowing, sexually centred humour. Adding to this impression, male and female nudes, chiefly of an explicitly erotic type, are postured before and around the chimney breast. A figure of Eros arming his bow dominates the mantel and, in gathering around the bust of Clytie, Townley’s male guests are granted the opportunity of communing with the piece of antiquity in his collection that was most associated with the sexual charms of womanhood.

Significantly, the principal guest at Townley’s table, Pierre Hugues d’Hancarville, famously propounded the theory that the ancient Greeks had been phallus worshippers and that their sculpture was accordingly to be associated with fertility rights. D’Hancarville was at this very time compiling this theory in a text known as *Venere et Priapi*, which was published in association with the Duke of Hamilton in 1784. That this literary work was received as an erudite justification of sodomy may be of relevance here. Less controversially pertinent is the general interpretation of antiquity which was advanced and sustained by this particular social group. In this subculture the idea developed that antique civilization owed its exceptional vibrancy to its primal connection to invigorating sexual impulses, signified in an apparent dedication to phallus worship. This encouraged Townley to regard his impulse to collect as quasi-sexual, akin to what in other men was expressed in the desire to procreate and seek out mistresses. In this regard, it is unusually legitimate to take note of the phallic implications of Zoffany’s imagery. The figure of d’Hancarville directs his gaze towards a seated Townley, who has deposited his coat and cane at the base of a bust of Homer on a pedestal. The coat bulges forward in the very place where on an antique herm a phallus was situated, to be honoured with libations in the practices of fertility cults. The impression is of an erection, silhouetted against the light of a curtained window. D’Hancarville has at his feet a rendition of the Barberini

Faun that is pushed before the hearth. The legs of this figure are splayed wide open, his posture, hardly redolent of decorous restraint, indicative of the absence of shame in phallic display.

Like so many eighteenth-century conversation portraits that were dedicated to male sociability, as opposed to the typical conventions of familial domesticity, this painting seems redolent of a kind of “conversation” that strays beyond the usual restraints of familial respectability.<sup>88</sup> Zoffany’s placement of the nubile Eros over the mantel is indicative of the values of a company who were ready to entertain, in the privacy of their libraries, an ancient lore of love somewhat outside the conventions of modern respectability. It is probable that Townley, deeply read in matters of artistic cultivation as he was, knew the strictures of Ware and Chambers against the employment of nude classical figures, male and female, on the mantel. By Ware’s standards, in which it was contrary to the role of a “polite gentleman” to place a nude figure on his mantel, Townley and his friends had contravened the rules of respectable hospitality. Zoffany’s homage to the sociability of men who clearly did not “banish anatomy from the parlour of the polite gentleman” implies that his sitters were proud to be outsiders to the polite conventions of the hearth.

## VI

The essential argument of this essay has been that the conversation piece portrait is less about the representation of the family than the replication of a social encounter of a conventional, even ritualistic, character. The viewer was regarded not just as an observer, who stood to be impressed or informed, but as a participant in the “conversation”. The invitation of hospitality implied by these paintings was specific, as opposed to general; the viewer, conceived as an individual, or part of a small group, was imaginatively invited to share an experience such as taking tea, viewing a document, or joining a game of cards. Peter de Bolla has recently advanced the argument that this kind of work was about spectacle, or the viewing experience of a greater public.<sup>89</sup> Yet, it requires to be remembered that the essential conventions of the English conversation piece, including those which focused on the hearth, were formed in a time that long preceded annual public exhibitions. There is little indication that any of the paintings reviewed above—with the exception of Zoffany’s image of Townley’s library, which was displayed at the Royal Academy—were widely seen at the time of their completion. The only family painting mentioned in this essay to be engraved was Hudson’s image of Benn and Blachford. Hogarth’s *Conquest of Mexico* was engraved seventy years after its completion. It is significant, in this respect, that there survives no substantial contemporary literature of

reception for such works: the introduction advanced by the conversation piece was, in practice as well as by formal implication, a private and privileged matter. <sup>90</sup>

Hearth conversation pieces were, then, about replicating the experience of a private introduction, not displays of privacy or means of communicating to a broader public the values contingent upon a virtuous or normative domestic existence. That these paintings are now seen by crowds in galleries and employed as illustrations in books on art creates a deceptive impression that they existed to generate notions of morally excusable consumption or functioned as visual manifestos for new ideals of family life. In so far as they were experientially intimate, these pictures seem unlikely to have been produced to promote behavioural ideals. The intimate guest, whose experience this kind of painting reproduced, was likely to be a peer. These pictures seem to have assumed shared, unspoken values, and to align themselves with private forms of shared experience. The conversation piece itself, in fact, operated as a ritualistic means of sharing such shared experiences.

## Footnotes

- 1 For this approach at its most advanced, consult Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006). For a sense of the considerable departure this socio-historical approach constitutes from traditional, formal, art-historical analysis, compare with Sacheverell Sitwell, *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of English Domestic Portraits and their Painters* (London: Batsford, 1936). Retford was not the first, however, to analyse the mode of sociability implied in these works. In this respect, Ellen D'Oench's *The Conversation Piece: Arthur Devis and his Contemporaries* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1980) was groundbreaking. Five years earlier, Ronald Paulson suggested readings of conversation pieces which took into account the social history of the family. See Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), chap. 8, 121–36.
- 2 For an account of the relationship of notions of social “conversation” and the development of the conversation piece portrait, see Mark Hallett, *Hogarth* (London: Phaidon, 2000).
- 3 David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 78–105.
- 4 A classic exemplar of this genre is Arthur Devis's *Robert Gwilym and Family*, in which the group poses in the locus of a chimneypiece and Serlian window (D'Oench, *Devis*, 15).
- 5 Some of these conventions were adapted from those of the *fête champêtre* as developed by Watteau and Pater. One of the artists who introduced the form of outdoor conversation to Britain, Philippe Mercier, was clearly thoroughly aware of the conventions of this type of painting. In general, though it is beyond the specific scope of this essay, modes of introduction implied in such rural settings are more relaxed and “natural” in tenor than indoor scenes. Lounging postures, redolent of *fête champêtre*, were far more tolerated.
- 6 See the exhibition catalogue: *Polite Society by Arthur Devis, 1712–1787: Portraits of the English Country Gentleman and His Family* (Preston: Harris Museum and Art Gallery, 1983), 16.
- 7 It was well established by George C. Williamson, in his introduction to *John Zoffany, R.A.: His Life and Works, 1735–1810* (London: Bodley Head, 1920), that Zoffany put great stress on visiting the houses of those to whom he was employed to make conversation portraits, and recording the specifics of their lives. Hogarth's works of this type strongly suggest that he had the same policy, as they do not exhibit the sort of standard studio furnishings which appear in the conversation pieces of Arthur Devis and Francis Hayman. On one occasion, that of the *Assembly at Wanstead House*, we can be completely satisfied that he visited and recorded the hearth that is seen in the picture. See Arthur S. Marks, “‘Assembly at Wanstead House’ by William Hogarth”, *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 77, no. 322 (Spring 1981): 3–15.
- 8 Many painters fell between these types. Francis Hayman, for instance, seems to have composed his many hearth conversations in his studio, for we see a certain chair, with double-hoops (*Maurice Greene and John Hoadly, 1747*), in numerous works by this painter. Hayman does seem to have been far more attentive than Devis to the personality quirks of his groups of sitters, however, as witnessed in his most ambitious hearth conversation, the intimate and amusing *Family of Grosvenor Bedford*.
- 9 John Aikin, *Evenings at Home; or, the Juvenile Budget Opened* (London, 1794), 4.

- 10 John Carter, *The Builder's Magazine: or Monthly Companion for Architects, Carpenters, Masons, Bricklayers, &c.* (London, 1774-78), 121.
- 11 This is a little-known conversation portrait, probably by Charles Phillips, of Lady Portland and family at Bulstrode, which features a marble sacrifice scene and female bust, possibly also of Lady Portland, over the mantel. The chimney breast is as rich as any of the period, ornamented with a pair of Corinthian columns and two female emblematic figures, one of which is Minerva.
- 12 John Cornforth's *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004) has, for the first time, defined the kind of decorations that were deemed appropriate for each type of room in the highest status Georgian houses. His work, which begins with an account of chambers of state, has been a strong influence on this essay.
- 13 At Wanstead, Hogarth seems to have been recording a type of interior that evinced a Kentian grandeur in its furnishings that he was otherwise prone to satirize as ostentatious, in, for instance, the *Marriage à-la-Mode* series (ca. 1743). For an account of the Kentian furnishings in this portrait, see J. Downs, "Some William Kent Furniture", *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 24, no. 125 (Feb. 1929): 13-20.
- 14 Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), 18-42.
- 15 This argument is advanced by Alistair Young (*In Trust for the Nation: Paintings from National Trust Houses*, London: National Trust/National Gallery, 1995, 51) who takes issue, very persuasively, with Mario Praz's vision of the conversation piece as "bourgeois" (*Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America*, London: Methuen, 1971).
- 16 Weatherill chose an English hearth "conversation" by Joseph van Aken known as *Grace before a Meal* (ca. 1720) as the "best and most realistic" representation of the range of goods utilized by a family of "the middle-rank". By these standards of an unadorned, smoke-stained, chimney breast and rough wood mantel, all surviving hearth conversation portraits relate to the living standards of the gentry and above.
- 17 Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture* (1756; London, 1787), 587.
- 18 The pattern-book method is exemplified by James Gibbs's *A Book of Architecture* (London, 1727). It continued to be a method after William Chambers and Isaac Ware supplied written rules. See Batty Langley, *One Hundred and Fifty New Designs for Chimneypieces* (London, 1758), and John Crunden's *The Chimneypiece Maker's Daily Assistant* (London, 1766).
- 19 Chambers's strictures were given comic expression in a play by Richard Jodrell, in which a certain Miss Harriot is corrupted by a relief of Cupid and Psyche placed over the mantel in "mama's bedchamber": *One and All; a farce of Two Acts* (London, 1787), 31.
- 20 William Chambers, *A Treatise on Civil Architecture* (London, 1759), 79.
- 21 An interesting elaboration on Ware's opinions appears in Carter's *Builder's Magazine*, 120-21.
- 22 Ware, *Complete Body of Architecture*, 574.
- 23 Isaac Bickerstaffe, *Love in the Village. A Comic Opera* (1763; London, 1787), 23.
- 24 One of the earliest British architectural treatises to express a sense of superiority over the rest of Europe as regards chimneys was John Aheron's *A General Treatise of Architecture* (Dublin, 1754), in which he complains of "the Italians who make very frugal fires". Much the most influential text on the subject was by William Chambers, who in his *Treatise on Civil Architecture* announced Inigo Jones as the first architect to perfect the chimneypiece, he having been followed in excellence by William Kent.
- 25 George Richardson, *A New Collection of Chimneypieces* (London, 1781), 5.
- 26 Chambers, *A Treatise*, 79.
- 27 The circumstances in which such columned structures, most commonly conceived as garden pavilions, were employed by painters of Georgian conversation portraits, are discussed below. This type of scenario was clearly different in its social associations to the mundane hearth, however embellished.
- 28 It is reasonable to suppose that it was in the 1720s, and in the works of Marcellus Laroon the younger, Philippe Mercier, Joseph van Aken, and Peter Angelis, that the transition was first made in England from genre painting to small figure conversation piece portrait.
- 29 Metsu painted numerous domestic scenes in which characters are grouped before the chimney breast, most conspicuously *Lady with Gentleman Tuning a Violin*, and can be seen to have adapted this form to portraiture.
- 30 This quote is drawn from an extensive passage in the introduction to Richardson's *New Collection of Chimneypieces* (3-5), in which he discusses the history of the chimney in classical architecture. He cites both Robert Adam and William Chambers as authorities on this matter.
- 31 For a long and exhaustively scholarly account of the sacred character of the hearth in ancient civilizations, see Gregory Nagy, "Six Studies of Sacral Vocabulary Relating to the Fireplace", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 78 (1974): 71-106.
- 32 A long passage in *The Aeneid* (Book III, lines 254-61) describes the hearth as sacred to the ancestral gods and a place of sacrifice.
- 33 Alexander Pope, trans., *The Odyssey of Homer*, 5 vols. (London, 1760), 2:129.
- 34 As recounted in a famous passage of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book II, lines 680-85.

- 35 The sacred hearths of antiquity were presided over by the goddess Vesta, whose name derived from the Greek for fire. The Roman practice of venerating their ancestors at their innermost hearth, through the cult of the *Iares* and *penates*, is discussed in every eighteenth-century Roman history and classical primer. A typical account appears in Joseph Spence's *Polymetis* (1741; London, 1765), 244–45.
- 36 Alexander Nisbet, *An Essay on the Ancient and Modern Use of Armouries* (Edinburgh, 1718), 5. The many sources which refer to the employment of the hearth as a location for images of the ancestors draw on Pliny the Elder and Polybius.
- 37 The notion of the hearth as a repository of the family's sacred flame, as borrowed from classical antiquity, was expressed in the popularity of the practice, introduced by Rysbrack, of placing sculptured scenes of sacrifice, involving a flame and tripod, above chimneypieces. The admixture of this imagery with a dynastic bust can be seen at the hearth of the Marble Hall at Houghton Hall (Rysbrack, 1731), in which a bust of Robert Walpole appears on the mantel below a sacrifice scene. Henry Home, Lord Kames considered a "Grecian or Roman sacrifice scene" the most suitable adornment for a "marble chimneypiece". See Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1785), 2:474.
- 38 Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire: The Hundred of Mere* (London, 1822), 70 (as recommended by Alistair Laing).
- 39 For a full account of the Roman employment of atriums and hearths and the "ancestral images" therein as a means of saluting guests, see the article on the "atrium" by Oskar Seyffert, in *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities: Mythology, Religion, Literature & Art*, revised by Henry Nettleship and J. E. Sandys (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1904).
- 40 Reference to this "modish" practice is made in numerous sources, such as George Lyttleton's *Dialogues of the Dead* (London, 1768), 332. Most sources refer to the chimneypiece as a place to display one's full social calendar. In this respect, see the anonymous pseudo-diary *The Bachelor: or speculations of Jeoffrey Wagstaffe, esq.* (Dublin, 1769), 24. This records the trials of living with a foolish woman who is preoccupied with such cards: "To imitate her betters, she sends cards to invite her company a month or two in advance, for fear they should be pre-engaged, and my parlour chimneypiece is full of cards, praying her to small parties, drums and routs." We will encounter this practice below as part of the comedy of the second scene of Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-Mode*.
- 41 A lost interior, known from photographs, it is described in Robert Bisset, ed., *The Historical, Biographical, Literary and Scientific Magazine* (London, 1799), 1:288.
- 42 The information here is largely drawn from John E. Ruch, "A Hayman Portrait of Jonathon Tyers's Family", *The Burlington Magazine* 112, no. 809 (Aug. 1970): 485–95.
- 43 The placement of the portraits of the most important ancestors over the mantel as a sign of respect is a practice much documented in this era. It is recorded, for instance, at Fonthill Abbey: see John Rutter, *A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne* (London, 1822), 30, 52. In the Cabinet room, "Alderman Beckford" was recorded to have installed his father's portrait over the mantel, with his grandmother to the left and grandfather to the right.
- 44 D'Oench, *Devis*, 60, following Egerton, identifies these as the busts of John Orde's cousin William and his wife, who had bequeathed their fortune to the family. She dates the painting to the coming of age, at eighteen, of Thomas.
- 45 For this practice consult Matthew Craske, *The Silent Rhetoric of the Body: A History of Monumental Sculpture and Commemorative Art in England, 1720–1770* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), chaps. 6–15.
- 46 The interpretation of this painting as a reflection upon childish playfulness is a development upon that of Marcia Pointon in *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press), 208–09.
- 47 The identification of the sitters is drawn from a strongly evidentially grounded account in Elizabeth Einberg, *Manners and Morals: Hogarth and British Painting, 1700–1760* (London: Tate Gallery, 1987), 89–90.
- 48 Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia: or An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London, 1741), vol. 2 (unpaginated).
- 49 Casts of Rysbrack's relief for the Newton monument were certainly made for domestic decoration. One such work found its way into the hallway of Saltram House; its presence there is currently unexplained. I await compelling evidence to show that this chimney breast ever actually existed, and was not just a conceit invented by Hogarth to communicate a comic point.
- 50 For the monument and testamentary affairs, consult the Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills of John and Catherine Conduitt, respectively: PCC PROB 11/683, 1737 and PROB 11/700, 1740.
- 51 A case of the placement of carved arms over the chimneypiece is recorded by John Albin in his account of Carisbrooke Castle in *A New, Correct, and Much-Improved History of the Isle of Wight* (Newport, 1795), 486. Here, in the early seventeenth century, Richard Weston, Earl of Portland, had the mantel of the drawing room elaborately decorated with arms and military implements.
- 52 Kate Retford discusses the fitting of this heraldic mantel by the Catholic William Constable in *Art of Domestic Life*, 164. An illustration and discussion of the overmantel at Boughton appears in Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors*, 221. This kind of overmantel had been popular for around two centuries, witness a good sixteenth-century example at Chillingham Castle, Northumberland, in the Plaque Room.
- 53 This mode of interpretation is broadly inspired by Kate Retford's article, "Sensibility and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-century Family Portrait: The Collection of Kedleston Hall", *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (Sept. 2003): 533–60.

- 54 It is important to note in this respect that the outdoor conversation portrait had, at this very juncture (the close of the American War), been adapted to the national business of recording the proceedings of military parades and exercises. Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg had recently completed two grand conversation portraits of a *Mock Attack and Royal Review* at Warley Common (Royal Collection). In Ireland, Francis Wheatley had very recently embarked on a series of conversation portraits of the Dublin volunteer regiments on exercise.
- 55 See, for instance, Cornforth's comments on employing side entrances to allow for the family to occupy "family" chambers which did not require the standards of formal presentation demanded in state apartments (*Early Georgian Interiors*, 3-30).
- 56 A central means of achieving this was the direction of the sitter's gaze. A profitable comparison can be drawn between Devis's *John Orde and Family* and a painting with a very similar composition, *Mr and Mrs Richard Bull*. In the former, where the person entering into the room is seen, both receiving parties look towards the door and not outward. In the latter, where the viewer is the guest, the glance of the woman is outside the picture plane.
- 57 D'Oench, *Devis*, 60.
- 58 This convention is evident in the very rare cases where one sees the guest invited into the room, as in Devis's *John Orde and Family*, where one witnesses the servant opening the door for William Orde.
- 59 It is so familiar to encounter the represented hearths fitted for summer that it is best to note the remarkable works in which we do see a fire blazing in the hearth, such as Devis's Bacon family and Johann Zoffany's paintings of the Dutton and Willoughby de Brooke families.
- 60 Chambers, *A Treatise*, 78.
- 61 Clearly, this conventional aspect of these paintings would benefit from a protracted analysis of this item of furniture and its functions. Currently, there are only the beginnings of this type of discussion in Ralph Edwards's "Hogarth's Tea-Tables", *The Burlington Magazine* 93, no. 582 (Sept. 1951): 304.
- 62 Zoffany's largely unacknowledged role as a comic artist, who attached himself to the tradition of Hogarth, is important to recognize. Links with Hogarth did not escape contemporaries. Williamson (*Zoffany*, 121) produced an excellent quote to this effect. His conversation portrait of cockfighting at the court of the Nawab of Oudh was recognized in the *Public Advertiser* of 11 March 1791 as a tribute to Hogarth's famous print, *The Cock-Pit*.
- 63 The most detailed review of this painting is by Giles Worsley in "Recovering Sir Lawrence's Bronzes", *Country Life*, 9 June 1988, 270.
- 64 Dundas had one son, Thomas, who outlived and succeeded him. The grandchild, however, promised a succession of more than one generation: such was the perilous nature of succession where only one son had been produced, that Dundas named his brother and his heirs as successors, in the event of the death of Thomas. See the will of Lawrence Dundas: Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PCC PROB 11/1082, 1781.
- 65 Worsley assumed these to be "business papers" that are taken to refer to the acquisition of Dundas's "fortune of £600,000". This implies what I take to be a misunderstanding of the social meaning of the portrait as a kind of ostentatious expression of wealth and possessions. This assumed agenda seems entirely foreign to Dundas's reputation as an impeccably tasteful individual. More likely, the function of the painting was to witness and affirm the legitimacy of Dundas's succession.
- 66 The employment of a conversation piece by Zoffany as a statement of witness to a legal deed of succession seems also to be implied in the painting of Robert Ferguson of Raith. Consult the interpretation in Craske, *Silent Rhetoric*, 169.
- 67 In this respect it is entirely possible that the chimneypiece before which Dundas sits in Zoffany's painting, which Worsley attributes to Adam, is a work by Richardson. He was an assistant to Robert Adam when the latter administered the decoration of the interior of 19 Arlington Street.
- 68 Worsley very effectively documented the actual existence of these bronzes, along with the paintings seen on the walls.
- 69 Typical was an account of the Library chimneypiece at Kingsgate in Thomas Fisher, *The Kentish Travellers's Companion* (Canterbury, 1794), 253. Here a small collection of statuary was described, which was mixed "with some trifles dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum".
- 70 One of the many complaints at the "nodding mandarin on the chimneypiece" can be found in John Berkenhout, *A Volume of Letters from Dr. Berkenhout to his Son at the University* (Cambridge, 1790), 330. I have not been able to encounter a mandarin complaint as early as 1743, when Hogarth employed the joke. It may well be that the print made this literary reference popular.
- 71 John Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated* (London, 1791), 1:221.
- 72 The cards on the floor in the second scene of *Marriage à-la-Mode* were commented upon by John Ireland (*Hogarth Illustrated*, 1:223).
- 73 This way of thinking about the chimneypiece was by no means only English. Stéphanie-Félicité, comtesse de Genlis, in her *Adelaide and Theodore: Or Letters on Education*, 3 vols. (London, 1783), 1:161, evoked the decoration of a chimneypiece as an emblem of empty-headed parade: "This apartment, which you may well imagine to be a Temple consecrated to friendship, to study, to meditation, is only a room for parade; all these books spread on the desk are merely designed for ornament, like the china on a chimneypiece."
- 74 *The Spectator*, no. 299, 12 Feb. 1712.

- 75 An instance of the emergence of this word can be taken from the anonymous erotic novel *The History of Miss Pamela Howard* (Dublin, 1773), 26, in which a character contemplates his friend seducing an attractive girl and setting her "on his chimney-piece with the rest of thy nick-nackery".
- 76 The strong association of the adornment of the chimneypiece with a kind of fussy, false, respectability is expressed in William Dodd's description of the pretensions of an exalted whore in *The Visitor*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1768), 1:49. This character was observed to have always followed the fashion: "her dress was ever in the mode: and her dining room was furnished with taste; the chimneypiece had no small share of Bow-China Ware."
- 77 John Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved, illustrated by plans* (London, 1766), 131.
- 78 Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth; a novel, in a series of letters*, 2 vols. (London, 1788), 2:78.
- 79 A sense of the degree of modest respectability that could be attained by a lady who set ceramics neatly upon the mantel is indicated by a description of the modest and frugal "Lady Frances" in *The Agreeable Medley or Universal Entertainer* (Malton, 1748), 28. Here a female admirer comments that "my ladyship finds as great satisfaction in ranking a set of delft dishes on a freestone chimneypiece, as I ever I have in disposing my fine china on an Indian cabinet."
- 80 This practice is satirized in Zoffany's *Scene from "The Mayor of Garratt"* (1764), in which arms appear above the chimneypiece of an obviously old-fashioned house in which men perform absurd military theatrics. Record of this as an actual practice is preserved in a court case against an individual rumoured to store arms above the chimneypiece. See *Trials at Large. On Prosecutions for the Crown*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1792), 1:153.
- 81 A sign of the masculine contempt for the precious adornment of the hearth was the tendency to deck it with overtly brutal things, like shotguns. Thomas Rowlandson satirized the etiquette of the hearth in a drawing where he posed his famously irreverent friend, Henry Wigstead, standing before an elegant fire to warm his backside. A hearth inscription recorded in *The Asylum or Weekly Miscellany*, 3 vols. (Glasgow, 1795), 1:304, declares this a place where a man is free to be who he chooses: "To my best of friends are free/ Free with that, and free with me;/ Free to pass a harmless joke,/ And the Tube sedately smoke,/ Free to drink just what they please,/ As at home and at their ease."
- 82 This beautiful portrait was unfortunately damaged by fire. It has a key added some years after its presentation by Blachford. The painting is signed with a date of 1751, suggesting it was painted with the intention of presenting it to the Goldsmiths' Company.
- 83 A description of this painting in its original position appears in James Peller Malcolm, *Londinium Redivivum; or, An Antient History and Modern Description of London*, 2 vols. (London, 1802-07), 2:572.
- 84 Ireland, *Hogarth Illustrated*, 1:103.
- 85 Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 190.
- 86 A reliable account of the identity of the figures and date has been provided by Mary Webster in "Zoffany's Painting of Charles Towneley's Library at Park Street", *The Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 736 (July 1964): 316-23.
- 87 Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique*, 191.
- 88 A number of conversation pieces survive in which the company is solely male and the characters clearly drunk and behaving with domestic impropriety. The most famous of these are Hogarth's *Captain Lord George Graham in his Cabin* (1715-47) and *The Hervey Conversation Piece* (ca. 1739). Equally interesting are Philippe Mercier's *Sir Thomas Samwell and Friends* (ca. 1733) and Joseph Highmore's *Nathaniel Oldham and Friends* (1735-45).
- 89 Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape and Architecture in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 49-71.
- 90 Kate Retford, in "From Interior to Interiority: The Conversation Piece in Georgian England", *Journal of Design History* 20 (2007): 291-30, was only able to draw on two, significantly brief, comments inferring reception; one relating to George Vertue, the other to Horace Walpole.

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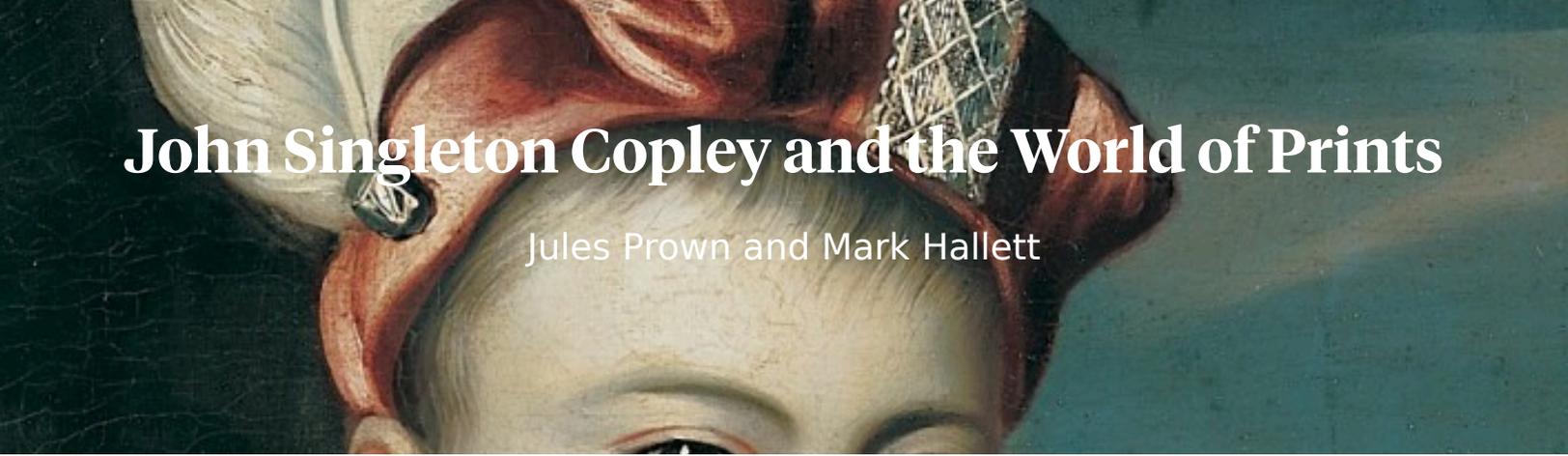
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# John Singleton Copley and the World of Prints

Jules Prown and Mark Hallett

## **Authors**

Paul Mellon Professor Emeritus of the History of Art at Yale University

Märit Rausing Director at the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

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John Singleton Copley (1738–1815) is known for his painted portraits of colonial Americans (oils, pastels, and miniatures) and his English history pictures, but the relationship between Copley and prints is relatively obscure. Yet he was involved with prints throughout his career and beyond, from his earliest exposure to art in the Boston studio of his stepfather to the sale four years after his death of his collection of around 1,125 prints by and after old master and contemporary artists, and many engravings after his own paintings.



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**Figure 1.**

Graphic Encounters: John Singleton Copley and the World of Prints, Conversation between Jules Prown and Mark Hallett. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law.



# Yale Center for British Art

David Lewis

## **Authors**

Independent Scholar and Curator

## **Cite as**

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The covers of Issue 2 of *British Art Studies* present a series of images inspired by the renovation and temporary closure of the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, a building designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn. I wanted to make moving images because Kahn's aesthetic intentions are tied up in movement. Having spent a year working in the museum, I became aware that the building is subtly animated by air, light, and human movement. When the museum closed in 2015, I wanted to use this special opportunity to record such motion: the art and temporary walls were removed, revealing the full expanse of the galleries. The exposure of the building's bones meant that Kahn's intentions could be read more clearly. Architecture and photography have a long and entwined history. This "Cover Collaboration" presents a different way of capturing Khan's architecture. What follows is a description of each of the animated images, which I took in response to this fleeting moment in the building's history.



**Figure 1.**  
David Lewis, *Gallery Shutters*,

*Gallery Shutters* shows the building with nothing on the walls but the light. Emptied of the art collection assembled by Paul Mellon which usually hangs here, sunlight became as intensely felt as if one were standing under the oculus of the Pantheon. But the space is no Pantheon. It was as if one were standing in a giant's fabric-lined steamer trunk, a series of linen-lined rectilinear volumes with construction detritus collecting like fluff in the corners. Even as a construction site, the building felt tidy.



**Figure 2.**  
David Lewis, Library Light,

*Library Light* portrays an electric light twisting and drifting within the limits imposed by its wires after it was jolted by human contact. As Kahn explained when discussing the Kimbell Art Museum not long before his death in 1974, he intended the static geometry of the building's structure to provide a framework for natural motion, both articulating it and giving it order.

"Structure is the giver of light", he said.<sup>1</sup> This idea was not alien to American art of the period: it can be found in the gentle movement of an Alexander Calder mobile, for instance, inscribing arcs in the air, driven by physical forces but controlled by the limits of its armature and wires.



**Figure 3.**  
David Lewis, Stair: Passing Clouds,

*Stair: Passing Clouds* explores Kahn's hope that austere, monumental surfaces would make light perceptible, a phenomenon Kahn had first comprehended as the sunlight played over the masonry vaults of Roman ruins. Simple, orderly geometry would set off the complex movements of natural light as it changed with the seasons and climate. Kahn wanted the weather and time of day to be sensed within the building. He aimed to connect the building's occupants with the world around them rather than isolating them from it—a humanist impulse appreciated by his Yale University patrons. He realized that, paradoxically, the more rigid the geometry, the more human the space could become.



**Figure 4.**  
David Lewis, *Fan*,

*Fan* shows the space animated in a new way by forced air. Construction imposed its own geometries and movements on the building. We often write about architecture as if it were static, frozen in the moment of its completion; that is, the moment when the architect's intentions are most clearly expressed, before the inevitable replacement of parts or modification for unforeseen uses begins. Part of the purpose of this conservation project has been to address the accretive changes to the building since it opened in 1977—to reverse some patinas and to preserve others; to remove off-the-shelf components such as exit signs and hardware that do not embody Kahn's aesthetic. It has also been possible to open up the full length of the so-called Long Gallery, an idea initially conceived by the first Director, Jules Prown, but not realized until now.



**Figure 5.**  
David Lewis, *Concrete Patina Scroll*,

*Concrete Patina Scroll* shows that the materiality of buildings also has a temporal element. The movement of light, the presence of life, the running of water over the surfaces as it returns to the earth—these all leave their marks. The camera intensifies the panning motion of the viewer's eye over a surface weathered by decades of exposure to the climate. The usual frameworks of art-historical analysis can have limitations when dealing with buildings. Eyes may burn metaphorical holes, but they leave no physical trace. The movement of people in the space of the Center does leave a trace; buildings are shaped by their users, in slow, subtle ways. The condensation of human breath, the catching of shoes in holes in the travertine, the leaning of chairs against concrete—all contribute to this marking.



**Figure 6.**  
David Lewis, *Empty Gallery*,

In *Empty Gallery*, wire on stands and partially inflated plastic ventilation tubes occupy stripped spaces in the process of transformation. Change did not bother Kahn. It was natural and inevitable. “The architect cannot camp in his building”, he told Prown.<sup>2</sup> The building’s structure merely set constructive limits on the range of change that could take place within it. Change occurred both in the daily changing of light, weather, and season, and in the gradual modification of the space by human activity. Kahn was adamant that in his work there should be “Nothing static, nothing as static as an electric bulb, which can give you only one iota of the character of light.”<sup>3</sup> However, once a building becomes regarded as a masterpiece, change becomes problematic. How do we preserve Kahn’s work, while embracing his attitude towards change?



**Figure 7.**  
David Lewis, *Highlights and Leaves* ,

*Highlights and Leaves* captures the way the placement of trees was designed to frame the building with rustling leaves, their dancing shadows emphasizing the slowly brightening or dulling sheen of the rigid rectangular panels (Kahn insisted that the surface be matt and non-reflective—an effect he likened to that most British of building materials: lead). The frame of dancing leaves flutters away in the autumn and for much of the year is not there. With the arrival of the harsh New Haven winter, the steel’s sheen becomes dull and dead, and the snow drifts down in front of gaps in the steel cladding, where plate glass releases an incandescent glow into the dark.

The building is not to be contemplated in the abstract only—it is choreographed. A building grows and ages like the human life within it—sometimes unpredictably. In Kahn’s work, rigid geometrical abstraction is at once aesthetic frame and container of human activity. Kahn unfortunately died before he had much opportunity to describe the YCBA. Luckily, his

descriptions of the nearly contemporaneous Kimbell Art Museum give us some idea of his intentions: “So the museum has as many moods as there are moments in time, and never as long as the museum remains a building will there be a single day like the other.”<sup>4</sup>

## Footnotes

- 1 Nell E. Johnson, *Light is the Theme: Louis I. Kahn and the Kimbell Art Museum* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 21.
- 2 Jules Prown, *The Architecture of the Yale Center for British Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), 10.
- 3 Johnson, *Light is the Theme*, 16.
- 4 Johnson, *Light is the Theme*, 16.

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