

A group of people, including a man with glasses and a woman, are working on large, ornate red ceramic vases. They are wearing purple gloves and appear to be in a workshop or studio setting. The vases are decorated with intricate floral and butterfly patterns in gold and white. The background is dark, making the bright red vases stand out.

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# Contents

“From a Sheet of Paper to the Sky”, Inga Fraser

“The Snob’s Chaldron”: Alexander Davison and the Private Patronage of History Painting in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain, Katherine Gazzard

A Photobook of the Shimmer:  
Pearl Fisheries, Photography, and British Colonialism in South Asia, Natasha Eaton

Elegant Engravings of the Pacific:  
Illustrations of James Cook’s Expeditions in British Eighteenth-Century Magazines, Jocelyn Anderson

Art by the Many: London Style Cults of the 1960s, Thomas Crow

Seeing Red, Glenn Adamson and Richard Caspole

The *Famous Women* Dinner Service: A Critical Introduction and Catalogue, Hana Leaper

The *Famous Women* Dinner Service: In Conversation with Contemporary Art, Judy Chicago, The Women’s Art League, Carmen Hermo, Hana Leaper and Jonathan Law



# “From a Sheet of Paper to the Sky”

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## A Methodological Statement

This short film, *“From a Sheet of Paper to the Sky”*, grew out of research that I conducted for an essay of the same title, written for the catalogue accompanying the *Paul Nash* exhibition at Tate Britain (October 2016 to March 2017). In that essay, I argued against the traditional art historical tendency to review an artist’s work in different media separately, and instead proposed that a consideration of Paul Nash’s painting alongside his three-dimensional and textile designs, his printmaking, and photography, resulted in a fuller understanding of both the conceptual underpinnings and the recurring visual motifs in Nash’s work.

During the course of the research, I amassed a large number of images of his work—from catalogues, archives, and public and private collections—which, when sorted chronologically rather than according to material, yielded new insight into Nash’s oeuvre; for instance, disproving the assumption that an artist’s work in design is necessarily derivative of their painting.<sup>1</sup> Instead, such analysis showed that work executed outside the sphere of “fine art” might pre-empt and direct work executed in Nash’s “primary” medium of painting. In parallel, I looked among Nash’s writings for evidence to support this reading of him as an “intermedial” artist, and found much to substantiate my hypothesis.

Nash was a lively and stimulating writer and, as well as various unpublished lectures and other notes, he wrote articles for a range of popular and specialist periodicals including *The Listener*, *Week-End Review*, *Architectural Review*, and *Signature*. Copies of these articles, Nash’s drafts and other unpublished material are all held in the Papers of Paul Nash in the Tate Archive.<sup>2 3</sup>

Budgetary and spatial economics restrict the scope of any one exhibition.<sup>4</sup> I could demonstrate the breadth of Nash’s work to a greater degree in the illustrative images accompanying my essay in the catalogue but, still, a book is similarly defined spatially and financially. It seemed I had a point to make that was best made visually, with direct reference to the works themselves and to the “voice” of Nash as found among his various writings. Consequently, when asked to present a paper on the theme of my catalogue essay for the Paul Nash study day organized jointly by Emma Chambers at Tate and the Paul Mellon Centre, I proposed to make a short film that would allow space and time for the works, and for Nash, to speak for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Concurrently, I was reading a collection of essays published last year on the nature of documentary film in contemporary visual culture. In their introduction, the editors define documentary “not as a category or genre [ . . .

.] but as a critical method”,<sup>6</sup> and identify a present-day need to “interrogate the processes by which we transform lived experience into meaning through representational practices.”<sup>7</sup> The authors’ texts raise questions as to what may constitute “a stable and proper document”, the possibility of non-linear temporal progression in visual culture, and the ethical relations between object and subject.<sup>8 9 10</sup> Given the material I wanted to present, and with these methodological approaches in mind, I wanted to experiment, in a modest way, with a different way to communicate ideas about an artist’s work. I was aiming for a simplified presentation of Nash’s work outside the clamour and constraint of the exhibition or book, in a format which would allow for the examination of a greater number and type of works, for different perspectives, and for easier juxtapositions: enlarged details alongside architectural *mises en scène*.

Though spare in its construction, the film is no less subjective. As the film historian, Christa Blümlinger, notes, “observed objects... are intrinsically subject to change because they are exposed to the transformative influence of the gaze.”<sup>11</sup> As I sorted the images, manipulated them in the editing software, and ordered them alongside the quotations from Nash I had selected—choosing to give prominence to lesser quoted passages from his writings in which he advocates the close relationship between design and art—it is most definitely my gaze directing that of the eventual viewer of the film. I hoped to lead the viewer through my own analysis of the material, towards the conclusion that themes and motifs overlap to such an extent in Nash’s work that they must be considered in tandem. In Nash’s words, “the two occupations, picture-making and applied design, as expressed in relation to printed and woven textiles and in decorations for books and so on, do not work eccentrically but in close sympathy.”<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, by means of the sequential succession of images that prompt the viewer to recognize connections between Nash’s works, I hoped to hint at the artist’s own tendency to recognize hidden patterns in nature, art and the built environment, and his attribution of a certain mysticism to these associations.<sup>13</sup> It is this ecumenical approach to the observed world—demonstrated in his expansive definition of pattern as “a surface figured”, in which “figure includes everything from a constellation to the check on this shirt and surface comprises everything from a sheet of paper to the sky”—which first led me to want to consider Nash’s design and art output as a singular and related body of work.<sup>14</sup>

## Footnotes

- 1 Catalogues including Alexander Postan, *The Complete Graphic Work of Paul Nash* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973); Susan Lambert, *Paul Nash as Designer* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1975); Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See “Select Bibliography”, in Dr Emma Chambers (ed.), *Paul Nash* (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 181, for further list. Archives at the Tate include TGA 769 Writings, artwork, correspondence, photographs, and ephemera relating to Paul Nash; TGA 7050 Correspondence and papers of Paul Nash and his wife Margaret; TGA 7127 Miscellaneous papers of Paul Nash; TGA 8313 Letters and papers of Paul Nash; TGA 8611 Artwork and reproductions by Paul Nash. Other public collections include the Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 2 Some of which also appear in Andrew Causey’s *Paul Nash: Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 3 See Note 1 for details.
- 4 For instance, the chrome and glass bathroom that Nash designed and was built for the dancer Tilly Losch, the wife of Edward James, relates to earlier paintings such as *Lares* (1929–30), but would have been prohibitively expensive to reconstruct in the context of this exhibition. It was reconstructed in 1979 by the architect Julian Feary for an exhibition on design in the 1930s at the Hayward Gallery and it is from that reconstruction that the colour slide images in the film are taken.
- 5 All but one of the readings, an excerpt from an article in *Architectural Review*, are from Nash’s words. The article in *Architectural Review* (February 1944: 2–8) is credited to “the editor”, and titled “Exterior Furnishing or Sharawadgi: The Art of Making Urban Landscape”. The article was illustrated with photographs taken by Nash of benches by the sea in Swanage and he was sent a transcript of the text, which is now among his papers in the Tate Archive. All the works depicted are by Nash, excepting the portrait and studio photographs, which include those by Helen Muspratt, Francis Bruguière, and Tom Stuttard, and the colour photograph of the Hayward Gallery reconstruction of Nash’s bathroom design, which was taken by the architect on the project, Julian Feary. The film excerpt is Jill Craigie’s *Out of Chaos* (1944).
- 6 Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, “Introduction: The Documentary Attitude”, in Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds), *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 18.
- 7 Balsom and Peleg, “Introduction”, 15.
- 8 Christopher Pinney, “Bruises and Blushes: Photography ‘Beyond’ Anthropology”, in Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds), *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 22.
- 9 See Ariella Azoulay, “Photography is Not Served: *The Family of Man* and *The Human Condition*”, in Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds), *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 110–41.
- 10 See, for instance, essays by Sylvère Lotringer and Sohrab Mohebbi, in Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds), *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 236–50 and 280–93 respectively.
- 11 Christa Blümlinger, ‘Reading Between the Images’, in Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds), *Documentary Across Disciplines* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 178.
- 12 *Paul Nash: An Exhibition of Applied Design 1908–1942* (London: CEMA, 1943), 3–4.
- 13 See for instance Nash’s interest in the writings of Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941) and Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682).
- 14 Paul Nash, [unpublished text on pattern]. Tate Library and Archive: The Papers of Paul Nash. TGA 7050.3(X), 3.



# “The Snob’s Chaldron”: Alexander Davison and the Private Patronage of History Painting in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain

Katherine Gazzard

## Abstract

*In 1806, the wealthy merchant Alexander Davison commissioned eight leading artists to produce paintings depicting scenes from British history to hang in the dining room of his London townhouse in St James’s Square. Many of these pictures are now lost but a record of the gallery is preserved in the patron’s Descriptive Catalogue, which is presented here as a digital facsimile. Davison’s project represents a rare example of a private individual investing heavily in history painting at a time when the dearth of patronage for the genre in Britain preoccupied artists and critics, prompting widespread debate over who could and should support the production of historical pictures. This article explores Davison’s activities in the light of these concerns. It argues that the gallery was designed to serve an ambitious private agenda as the merchant—a prosperous parvenu and convicted fraudster—sought to secure entry into upper-class society and to escape the taint of scandal. Deploying a traditionally public genre for private gain, Davison’s project invites us to consider the opportunities, as well as the problems, associated with patronizing history painting in early nineteenth-century Britain.*

## Authors

Katherine Gazzard is an AHRC-funded collaborative PhD candidate at the University of East Anglia, the National Maritime and the National Portrait Gallery. The topic of her doctoral project is portraiture and the British naval officer, 1739–1805.

## Acknowledgements

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descendants in Germany, who kindly provided me with information. My contact with this branch of Davison's family was facilitated by Martyn Downer, who was extremely generous in sharing his research with me. Thanks as well to the staff of the Bodleian Library, the British Library, and the National Art Library, and to Oliver Cox for sending me a copy of his DPhil thesis.

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## Introduction

By collecting from other countries, the individual may possibly enrich himself, but can never give immortality to his name for patronage, or the country in which he lives the honour of having cherished the fine arts. The encouragement, therefore, extended to a single *living artist* . . . is a higher proof of true patriotic ardour. <sup>1</sup>

In July 1806, during a brief interruption to his tenure as President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West wrote these words in a letter to Alexander Davison, a wealthy merchant who had risen from lowly origins to become a powerful government contractor and a close friend of Admiral Lord Nelson. <sup>2</sup> In his letter, West accepted a commission from Davison to participate in an ambitious artistic project. Already active in the art world in various capacities, including as a collector of rural genre paintings and a supporter of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts, Davison became a major player when, on 10 June 1806, he contracted the engraver Valentine Green to oversee the creation of a gallery of painted scenes from British history in the dining room of his house at number 9 St James's Square in London. With Green acting as his agent, Davison commissioned pictures from eight leading artists, upon whom he imposed two unusual conditions: first, each painter should choose his own historical subject; second, each should include a self-portrait within his work. <sup>3</sup> The artists selected to take part were James Northcote, David Wilkie, Henry Tresham, Robert Smirke, John Singleton Copley, Richard Westall, Arthur William Devis, and West. By June 1807, all eight commissions had been completed and delivered to Davison. They were joined on the walls of his dining room by an earlier work, Copley's *Death of the Earl of Chatham* (Fig. 1), which Davison won in a lottery shortly after announcing his project and decided to incorporate in his nascent gallery. <sup>4</sup> The patron celebrated the display's completion by publishing a "descriptive catalogue" of the collection. This contained entries on the individual paintings written by the artists themselves and typed facsimiles of their correspondence with Davison, including the letter from West excerpted above. <sup>5</sup>

The gallery had a relatively short life and was dismantled in 1823. <sup>6</sup> Of the nine paintings which originally constituted the display, only three are presently known to survive: Copley's *Death of Chatham*, West's *Sir Philip Sidney, Mortally Wounded, Rejecting the Water Offered to him, and Ordering it to be First Given to a Wounded Soldier* (Fig. 2), and Wilkie's *Alfred Reprimanded by the Neat-Herd's Wife* (Fig. 3). There is a visual record for a

further two of the pictures: Devis's *The Conspiracy of Babington against Queen Elizabeth, Detected by her Minister, Sir Francis Walsingham* was engraved in 1830 (Fig. 4) and Copley's *The Offer of the Crown to Lady Jane Grey, by the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, and other Lords, Deputies of the Privy Council* is known through an early twentieth-century photograph, published in the *Connoisseur* magazine in 1928 (Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> The other four paintings have not been traced to date. However, the remarkable *Descriptive Catalogue* has survived and provides a wealth of information about the gallery.<sup>8</sup>



[View this illustration online](#)

**Figure 1.**

John Singleton Copley, *The Death of the Earl of Chatham in the House of Lords on the 7th July 1778*, 1779–81. Oil on canvas, 228.6 x 307.3 cm. Collection Tate, London (N00100). Digital image courtesy of Tate, London 2017.



**Figure 2.**

Benjamin West, *The fatal wounding of Sir Philip Sidney, who rejects the water offered to him and orders it to be first given to a wounded soldier*, 1806. Oil on canvas, 198.1 × 157.5 cm. Collection Woodmere Art Museum: Bequest of Charles Knox Smith (Inv. 202). Digital image courtesy of Woodmere Art Museum: Bequest of Charles Knox Smith, Photograph by Rick Echelmeyer.



**Figure 3.**

David Wilkie, *Alfred Reprimanded by the Neat-herd's Wife*, 1806–07. Oil on canvas, 109.2 × 154.9 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Hulton Archive.



**Figure 4.**

John Singleton Copley, *The Offer of the Crown to Lady Jane Grey, by the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, and other Lords, Deputies of the Privy Council*, 1806-07. Oil on canvas, 191 × 171.5 cm. Collection unknown. Digital image courtesy of Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.



**Figure 5.**

John Charles Bromley after Arthur William Devis, *The Conspiracy of Babington against Queen Elizabeth, Detected by her Minister, Sir Francis Walsingham*, 1830, mixed media mezzotint engraving on paper, 66.6 × 57.3 cm. Collection the British Museum (Inv. 2010,7081.5831). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

A facsimile of the catalogue, taken from a copy at the Yale Center for British Art, is published alongside this article (Fig. 6). This is intended to draw attention to a unique and understudied primary source. Consisting of a collection of detailed essays written by the eight artists about their own work, the catalogue is without parallel among documents from the same period. Moreover, it contains copies of the painters' initial correspondence with the patron. Such letters, if they survive, are usually buried in personal archives, rather than typed and bound in a published volume. It is hoped the facsimile will be useful beyond this article to scholars of British art, especially those interested in history painting, artists' writings, and the artist-patron relationship. In this article, the *Descriptive Catalogue* is used to help

construct an account of the gallery from its creation in 1806 to the dispersal of the paintings seventeen years later, focusing upon the motivations and ambitions of the display's prosperous but shady patron.

[View this illustration online](#)

### Figure 6.

Alexander Davison, *Descriptive catalogue of the series of pictures, formed on subjects selected from the history of England, painted by British artists for Alexander Davison, Esquire, MDCCCVI. In the order in which they arranged, at his house in St. James's-Square, London.* (London : Printed by Bulmer and Co., 1807). Collection of the Yale Center for British Art (Call Number N5247 D3 D3+ Oversize). Digital image courtesy of Digital facsimile courtesy of Yale Center for British Art.

## Questions

Alexander Davison was a wealthy parvenu, a nouveau riche from a humble background who, in the 1780s and 1790s, amassed an immense fortune as a shipping magnate, factory owner, government contractor, and banker, and set about establishing a place for himself within the metropolitan elite.<sup>9</sup> However, his rapid social rise stalled in 1804, after he was found guilty of electoral malpractice and handed a nine-month prison sentence. Following his release, he endeavoured to rebuild his reputation but, less than two years later, he was in trouble again, facing accusations of serious financial fraud. It was during this tumultuous passage in his life that he created his gallery of history paintings.

Davison's project has been largely overlooked by modern scholars, except for a brief analysis by Holger Hoock, who examines the gallery in the context of broader trends in private collecting.<sup>10</sup> As Hoock observes, the acquisition of foreign Old Masters was widely regarded in eighteenth-century Britain as the most prestigious form of art collecting. In the early nineteenth century, however, increasing numbers of wealthy individuals, including the politician Samuel Whitbread II and the landowner Sir John Leicester, began assembling collections dominated by the work of living British artists.<sup>11</sup> Hoock terms this practice "collecting British", although the behaviours involved might be more accurately described as "patronage" or "sponsorship".<sup>12</sup> Citing Davison's gallery as an example, he suggests that "collecting British" functioned as "a form of conspicuous cultural patriotism."<sup>13</sup> This assessment is supported by the above excerpt from West's letter to Davison, in which the painter casts aspersions on the "patriotic ardour" of those who purchase pictures "from foreign countries" compared to those who patronize native artists. West also suggests that the latter practice could "give immortality to [the patron's] name", according with Hoock's conclusion that collectors who invested in "the cultural cachet and patriotic prestige that came with sponsoring British

artists” often did so in order to “legitimise [their] private agendas”.<sup>14</sup> Building on this scholarship, I will argue that Davison’s gallery was designed to serve a particularly ambitious private agenda as the merchant sought to enhance his social status and to repair his damaged name.

Among patrons of this period, Davison was highly unusual in choosing to commission history paintings. Although several early nineteenth-century commentators exhorted private patrons to commission such pictures, their pleas went largely unheeded.<sup>15</sup> Defined by the representation on a large scale of narrative subjects, typically historical, mythological, literary, or biblical in character, history painting was presented in academic theory as the pinnacle of artistic achievement. It was traditionally viewed as a publicly oriented genre, the imagery, patronage, and display of which were supposed, ideally, to promote public good over private interest. Given the prestige attached to the genre, many British artists and theorists were eager to see it thrive in their own country. Yet a lack of patronage from the state and the church—the public institutions which supported the flourishing schools of history painting on the Continent—worked against the realization of this goal. From charitable donations to the Foundling Hospital to entrepreneurial solo-shows, the eighteenth century witnessed various attempts to find alternative patrons, display spaces, and audiences for history painting in Britain. Blurring the boundaries between public and private, these efforts generated widespread debate about whose interests the genre might legitimately serve. The same questions continue to preoccupy scholars today.<sup>16</sup> In Louise Lippincott’s words, “the principal questions then and now were and are: who would support history painting in eighteenth-century Britain, why would they do it, and how?”<sup>17</sup>

To these three questions—who, why, and how—I would add a fourth: where? Davison’s gallery needs to be understood in relation to the cultural geography of early nineteenth-century London, which provided crucial precedents for the display. The gallery space itself is another “where” that must be considered. Davison did not exert complete control over the room, instead allowing his agent, Valentine Green, and his painters to make their own decisions concerning the subject matter and display of the artworks. Yet the collection remained tied to the patron’s reputation and perceptions of the gallery shifted in line with changes in his status. Investigating what was at stake for the merchant in this grand but ultimately ill-fated endeavour provides a unique insight into the functions that history painting could serve at a time when the patronage of the genre raised more questions than answers.

## Context and Precedents

Davison commissioned this series of history paintings in the midst of a personal crisis. Having earned vast amounts of money as a merchant in Quebec, Canada, during the American Revolutionary War, and as a government contractor in Britain following the outbreak of the French Wars in 1793, Davison, the son of a Northumbrian farmer, endeavoured in the late 1790s and early 1800s to enhance his social position.<sup>18</sup> In 1795, he bought a country estate in Northumberland and, three years later, he acquired his elegant townhouse in St James's Square.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, he deepened his long-standing friendship with Admiral Nelson, which had begun in Canada.<sup>20</sup> This connection to Britain's most celebrated naval commander helped Davison establish a network of influential contacts, including government ministers and royal princes. He also demonstrated his patriotic credentials: in 1798, he sponsored a medal for veterans of the Battle of the Nile; in 1799, he oversaw an ultimately unsuccessful project to erect a public monument commemorating a series of recent British naval victories; and, during the invasion crisis in 1803, he spent £3,000 raising the Loyal Britons volunteer corps.<sup>21</sup> However, his social aspirations were dealt a major blow in 1804, when he was sentenced to nine months in prison for electoral fraud, the charges relating to his unsuccessful attempt to gain a parliamentary seat two years previously.<sup>22</sup> The conviction severely damaged his reputation, costing him a knighthood.<sup>23</sup> His problems were then worsened by the death of Nelson, his most valuable personal connection, at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805.

Seeking to recover his social standing, Davison set about creating an impressive picture gallery in his London residence. At this time, St James's Square was embedded within a thriving hub of cultural activity. The Square opened onto the genteel thoroughfare of Pall Mall, then home to numerous polite public attractions, many of which involved artistic displays.<sup>24</sup> The surrounding streets were filled with opulent private dwellings, in which members of the social elite displayed their artistic treasures. Davison recognized the importance of art collecting as a mechanism for constructing elite identity. He displayed his collection of history paintings in his dining room, where he regularly hosted fashionable dinner parties attended by "very distinguished personages". The merchant's motive for sharing his "hospitable board" and his art collection with this elite audience was, according to one observer, "the project . . . of making him a *baronet*".<sup>25</sup>

Old Masters were the pictures traditionally most sought after by private collectors in Britain. Davison would have encountered many impressive displays of such works in the townhouses of his wealthy and aristocratic

neighbours in London's fashionable West End. Belonging to Granville Leveson-Gower, first Marquess of Stafford, the largest and most famous collection of this sort in Britain at this time was displayed in Cleveland House on St. James's Street, off Pall Mall.<sup>26</sup> Davison did not entirely reject this model of cosmopolitan collecting, acquiring several seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes and two paintings by Claude Lorrain for his library.<sup>27</sup>

However, in his dining room, Davison sought to create a different kind of display, one consisting entirely of modern British paintings. There were relatively few precedents for a gallery of this type. An early trailblazer for the collecting of contemporary British art was Charles Watson-Wentworth, second Marquess of Rockingham. The marquess's eclectic art collection encompassed classical sculpture, family portraits, and Italian religious paintings but, in the early 1760s, he created a display of recent works by British artists in the "large front parlour" of his townhouse in Grosvenor Square.<sup>28</sup> Including animal pieces by George Stubbs and landscapes by the Irish artist George Barret, this gallery functioned as a stage for Rockingham's "aristocratic self-fashioning".<sup>29</sup> The parlour was furnished with expensive sofas, chandeliers, and a marble chimneypiece. Large windows enabled people on the street to glimpse the magnificent interior and the artworks on the walls. In these grand surroundings, the marquess—the eponymous leader of the Rockingham Whigs—met his allies to debate political strategy. His British paintings provided a backdrop to the discussion, foreshadowing Davison's later decision to place contemporary art at the heart of his social life.<sup>30</sup>

Rockingham died in 1782. His patriotic model of patronage was slow to catch on but, by the early nineteenth century, the number of private collectors investing in British art had begun to increase. For example, in 1805, Sir John Leicester converted the library of his house in Hill Street into a "Gallery of Paintings by modern Artists".<sup>31</sup> In the following year, it was rumoured that Robert Grosvenor, second Earl Grosvenor, planned to furnish a room in his new house on Park Lane "with English pictures only".<sup>32</sup> However, these individuals remained in the minority among private collectors in Britain, most of whom continued to covet Old Masters above all else. Thus, in commissioning British artworks for his dining room, Davison was adopting an innovative mode of art collecting.

The merchant's gallery was especially unusual because, unlike other collections of British art being formed at this time, it was exclusively devoted to history painting. Art collectors in this period were generally reluctant to commission historical pictures, preferring instead to acquire portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings.<sup>33</sup> The most significant exception to this rule was the king. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, George III

commissioned upwards of forty history paintings from Benjamin West, including a series of eight pictures representing the life of Edward III for the Throne Room in Windsor Castle.<sup>34</sup> Focusing on English history, this suite of paintings offers a precedent for the display of subjects from “the annals of our own country” that Davison sought to create in his dining room.

Yet royal palaces were not the only places in Britain where history paintings were displayed at this time. Although only accounting for a small percentage of submissions, examples of the genre routinely occupied prominent positions in the capital’s annual exhibitions and, since the 1780s, some artists had been exhibiting their own history paintings in spectacular one-picture shows.<sup>35</sup> There was, however, a significant difference between these temporary public exhibitions and the permanent gallery that Davison sought to create in his private dining room. A closer parallel for this domestic display was provided by West, the king’s favoured history painter, in his house and studio at 14 Newman Street in Westminster, which he occupied from 1774 until his death in 1820.<sup>36</sup> Placing the artist in the vicinity of wealthy and aristocratic patrons and projecting an image of social and professional respectability, the establishment of a grand residence at a fashionable address was considered almost essential for successful painters, sculptors, and architects in this period.<sup>37</sup> However, West’s home was unique among contemporary artists’ residences because it was dedicated to the promotion of history painting. Visitors to the property, who included potential patrons, aspiring painters, and members of the public, were conducted through a long gallery hung with the artist’s preparatory sketches before emerging into his painting room.<sup>38</sup> Here, they would encounter his current works-in-progress, surrounded by examples of his finished history paintings. West himself was often present in this space, receiving his visitors as he worked. Dramatizing the production of historical compositions and culminating in a live demonstration, this sequence of displays framed the artist as a pre-eminent exponent of the genre.

In spring 1806, shortly before Davison launched his gallery, West boosted the profile of his house and studio as a display space by withholding his most recent historical picture from the annual exhibition at Royal Academy and insisting that visitors viewed the work at his residence.<sup>39</sup> The painting in question depicted the death of Nelson, a recent event which had captured the national imagination, and its display attracted significant public and critical attention.<sup>40</sup> This would surely have caught Davison’s interest, given his friendship with the late admiral. The exhibition shone a spotlight upon West’s private residence, where, as Kaylin Weber observes, the artist had created “an elaborate ‘temple’ to history painting and to himself”.<sup>41</sup> In his

dining room, Davison sought to establish something similar, except, rather than focusing upon the process of artistic creation, it celebrated the act of patronage.

### **The “Liberal-Minded Maecenas”**

A long-standing source of concern in the British art world, the patronage of history painting became an especially prominent issue in 1806, following the demise of John Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery and Robert Bowyer’s Historic Gallery. Boydell and Bowyer were print publishers. Launched in 1786 and 1792 respectively, their galleries had sought to turn history painting into a profitable enterprise.<sup>42</sup> Both men commissioned leading artists to paint subjects from a famous British text: the works of Shakespeare in Boydell’s case and David Hume’s *History of England* (1754–61) in Bowyer’s. The resulting canvases were publicly exhibited and engraved, the publishers generating revenue by selling the engravings in periodic instalments.<sup>43</sup> These ventures were initially successful but, after losing access to the lucrative European print market during the Napoleonic Wars, both became financially unsustainable. The closure of the Shakespeare Gallery was announced in March 1804 and completed the following January.<sup>44</sup> One month later, Bowyer applied to Parliament for permission to dispose of his paintings by lottery, initiating a lengthy process which concluded in April 1807 with the dispersal of the collection.<sup>45</sup> Together with fellow publisher Thomas Macklin, who undertook a similarly ill-fated project with subjects from English poetry in 1787–99, Boydell and Bowyer provided a steady stream of historical commissions for British artists at a time when few other patrons were investing in the genre.<sup>46</sup> The withdrawal of this vital source of support caused artists and critics to fear for the future of history painting in Britain.

In St James’s Square, Davison lived in close proximity to the Shakespeare Gallery and the Historic Gallery, which were both located on Pall Mall.<sup>47</sup> In commissioning history paintings from contemporary artists, he picked up where the publishers had left off. His desire to create a display of pictures representing subjects from English history, albeit not specifically from Hume’s text, suggests that the Historic Gallery in particular may have inspired him. He certainly took an active interest in Bowyer’s venture, helping the publisher promote the lottery of his paintings in the winter of 1805–6.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Davison hoped that his private gallery would be seen as a phoenix rising from the ashes of the unfortunate commercial project.

Davison's gallery can be read as a response to contemporary opinions regarding the ambitions and misfortunes of Boydell and Bowyer. In his *Rhymes on Art* (1805), the painter Martin Archer Shee outlined two commonly held but starkly opposed views of the Shakespeare Gallery. Some observers, he wrote, considered the project to be "a vast commercial speculation", which had encouraged the "advancement of the arts" in order to derive "profits". Others viewed it as "a plan originating in the patriotic ambition of a man, [who was] . . . raised above the temptation of interest" and "determined to risk the accumulations of his life" in support of British art.<sup>49</sup> The latter viewpoint echoed the promotional rhetoric that Boydell and Bowyer had employed when launching their projects. Both publishers had claimed to be pioneers working to "establish an *English School of Historical Painting*," a genre which had "[hitherto] been almost unknown" in Britain due to a want of "adequate encouragement".<sup>50</sup> In this way, they presented their actions as a generous service to the nation, disguising the fact that they were divorcing history painting from its traditional role as an instrument of public moral instruction and redeploying the genre in pursuit of private financial gain. Seen according to this viewpoint, the relationship between Boydell, Bowyer, and Davison could be construed as one of continuity. Although men of commerce, the publishers had acted in a manner removed from narrow self-interest; at their downfall, Davison, another man with a mercantile background, had taken over their patriotic mission of cultivating "an *English School of Historical Painting*".

Equally, Davison could claim that his gallery was superior to the schemes of Boydell and Bowyer because it was not driven by commercial imperatives. The publishers' commercialism could be viewed positively: Boydell had been hailed as a "commercial Maecenas" and had highlighted "the advantage of promoting the Arts, in a commercial point of view", suggesting that his project would benefit the British economy, as well as the nation's art.<sup>51</sup> However, the financial collapses of his and Bowyer's galleries prompted a pessimistic reassessment of the value of commerce as a means to support the arts.<sup>52</sup> Shee, for instance, declared that "the arts treated commercially . . . never can flourish".<sup>53</sup> He argued that art could only be properly supported by government funding or by private patronage from "men of rank", who were elevated above the "wants and caprices" of the market.<sup>54</sup> Prince Hoare, the Royal Academy's Secretary of Foreign Correspondence, echoed these sentiments, suggesting in 1806 that, following the Historic Gallery's failure, it was time for a "patron in a higher station of life" to become "the liberal-minded Maecenas".<sup>55</sup> Viewed from this perspective, Davison's privately funded gallery could be interpreted as a corrective to Bowyer's profit-making one.

One year prior to launching his art project, Davison donated 105 guineas to the newly founded British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts, an organization funded entirely by wealthy and aristocratic collectors.<sup>56</sup> Taking over the premises on Pall Mall formerly occupied by the Shakespeare Gallery, the Institution claimed to be rescuing the arts from the vicissitudes of commerce. It aimed to encourage “the talents of Artists of the United Kingdom” by displaying Old Masters for their education and staging public exhibitions of their works.<sup>57</sup> Although it did not focus exclusively on history painting, it presented the promotion of the genre as its ultimate goal.<sup>58</sup> Shee welcomed this development, suggesting that the “rank, respectability and influence” of the Institution’s donors would enable them to “execute [their plan] with effect.”<sup>59</sup> Through the British Institution, Davison made important contacts in the art world. Indeed, this is presumably how he met Valentine Green, the engraver whom he subsequently hired as his agent, who was the inaugural Keeper of the British Institution. As Davison donated more than one hundred guineas to the British Institution, he was automatically appointed to the body of Hereditary Governors.<sup>60</sup> These governorships were advantageous for arrivistes like Davison: the only condition for appointment was a generous donation but, because they were hereditary, they carried an aristocratic lustre. Associating social prestige with artistic patronage, this may have encouraged the merchant to believe that his personal ambitions could be served by responding to the calls for a “liberal-minded Maecenas” that followed the downfall of Boydell and Bowyer. In effect, the art world’s reaction against the publishers’ unsuccessful efforts to exploit history painting for commercial gain created what Davison must have seen as the perfect conditions for him to deploy the genre in pursuit of a different kind of private profit, as he sought to recover his damaged reputation.

Reports of the merchant’s gallery were published in a number of contemporary newspapers and periodicals, providing Davison with the favourable publicity that he craved. In 1807, *The Artist* heralded the paintings as one of the “principal collections lately formed from the works of living painters, and with the noble purpose of encouraging contemporary merit.”<sup>61</sup> The *Examiner* wrote, in May 1808, that Davison was “conspicuous among the Patrons of Painting for his munificent encouragement of British Art, in the noble example he has set to wealthy amateurs, in his series of pictures from British History.”<sup>62</sup> As these comments reveal, supporters of the project presented Davison’s gallery as a generous and patriotic endeavour. Shaped by the period’s ongoing debates about artistic patronage, this rhetoric is a testament to the way in which Davison carefully positioned his project in relation to existing models and recent events in the London art world.

## Inside the Gallery

Although Davison's gallery was widely discussed in the press, his artworks were hidden from public view. None of the pictures were engraved until the 1820s and Davison declined to follow the example being set by other leading collectors of the period, including Thomas Hope and the Marquess of Stafford, who opened their galleries to the public during the social season.<sup>63</sup> Hanging in his dining room, Davison's paintings were seen only by the important individuals who attended his "grand dinners". Following his imprisonment and the death of Nelson, the merchant continued to stage these lavish entertainments. For example, the *Morning Post* reported in February 1806 that the Prince of Wales and "most of the Ministers" had attended a recent "festive party" hosted by Davison.<sup>64</sup> With his reputation under threat, he presumably saw these exclusive events as a means of reasserting his place in high society. The creation of his gallery produced a grand setting for this concerted campaign of social networking.

It is difficult to reconstruct the spectacle that the gallery would have presented to Davison's guests. Two-thirds of the original artworks are lost and there are no visual records of the display. The house in St. James's Square survives but the eighteenth-century neoclassical interiors, designed by Robert Adam, were removed in the nineteenth century. Although it is not known for certain which of the numerous parlours served during Davison's occupancy as the dining room, the large front room on the first floor appears to be the most likely candidate.<sup>65</sup> Piecing together evidence from different accounts, it seems that the room was accessed through the library, where the merchant displayed his two Claudes, some Dutch landscapes, and a large number of rural genre scenes by the British artist George Morland.<sup>66</sup> From this space, visitors proceeded into the dining room, entering through a door in the north wall. There were windows on the south wall, opposite the entrance, and the nine history paintings were divided equally between the other walls, as detailed in a list at the beginning of the *Descriptive Catalogue*, which also gives the works' dimensions. The pictures are numbered in the catalogue "in the order in which they are arranged", starting with James Northcote's painting "on the left hand of the door" and proceeding in a clockwise direction around the walls.<sup>67</sup> Printed only for "private distribution", the catalogue may have been intended for perusal within the space, guiding visitors' movement around the room.<sup>68</sup> Now that the gallery no longer exists, it is a vital source of information about the display.

Catalogues were a common part of the apparatus of artistic display in the early nineteenth century. They were produced for commercial galleries, private collections, and temporary exhibitions, including those at the Royal

Academy. In most cases, however, they gave only the title of each work, the name of the artist, and occasionally a quotation from a relevant text.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, Davison's catalogue features lengthy entries for each of the paintings, introducing their historical subject matter and giving a detailed description of the composition. This level of detail was consistent with other self-proclaimed "descriptive" catalogues of the period, most of which were dedicated to foreign Old Masters. These texts were typically written by connoisseurs, critics, and dealers, rather than by patrons or artists.<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Daniel Daulby's *Descriptive Catalogue of the Works of Rembrandt* (1796) and the *Descriptive Catalogue . . . of some Pictures, of the Different Schools, Purchased, For His Majesty, the Late King of Poland* (1802) published by the picture dealer Noel Desenfans prior to his sale of the Italian, Spanish, French, German, Flemish, and Dutch works from the collection.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, in 1793, Valentine Green wrote a catalogue of this type for an exhibition of his mezzotints after Old Master paintings in the Dusseldorf Gallery. He stated that he had produced a descriptive catalogue because "without [one], a competent idea of the magnitude and consequence of that Collection cannot be formed."<sup>72</sup> It is therefore tempting to see the creation of a similar catalogue for Davison's collection as evidence of Green's active role in managing and shaping the project. This decision made a bold claim for British art, suggesting that its productions were equal in "magnitude and consequence" to important works of the Continental schools. Yet, although it conformed in some ways to a pre-established type, Davison's catalogue was unique in two respects: the entries were written by the painters themselves; and it also featured letters from the artists to the patron.

The catalogue stresses the freedom that Davison allowed those whom he employed. It begins with a letter from the merchant to Green, in which he entrusts the engraver with "the chief arrangement of the business with regard to the choice of Artists, and of the Subjects for the Pictures".<sup>73</sup> Green appears to have functioned as a negotiator and facilitator, mediating between the preferences of the patron and the ideas of the artists. Examining the selection of artists, it is curious that, alongside well-established history painters such as West, Northcote, and Copley, the young Scottish artist, David Wilkie, was also invited to participate. Debuting at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1806, Wilkie burst onto the London scene only a few weeks before Davison launched his project. There was undoubtedly cultural prestige in acquiring a work by the art world's newest star but, given that his fame was founded on a small-scale rural genre scene, he was an odd choice for a gallery of history paintings.<sup>74</sup> This strange selection was perhaps prompted by Davison's enthusiasm for patronizing Scotsmen, which stemmed from his own Anglo-Scottish identity, the result of having grown up near the border in Northumberland.<sup>75</sup> However, although this suggests that the merchant exerted some influence over the choice of artists, it was Green

who approached the chosen individuals: the painter and diarist Joseph Farington recorded that, when he called on Robert Smirke on 25 July 1806, “Green was there upon the subject of giving Smirke a Commission to paint an Historical picture for Alexander Davison.” <sup>76</sup>

### “Subjects from English History”

When it came to the choice of subjects, Green may have guided the selection, but he did not dictate what the painters should represent. A prefatory note in the catalogue asserts that the artists were given “the entire advantage of having selected their own subjects”. <sup>77</sup> They were reportedly asked to submit “a List of three Subjects from English History”, from which Davison would “make his choice of one from each.” <sup>78</sup> From the correspondence in the catalogue, it seems that Northcote was the only painter who followed this instruction. <sup>79</sup> The other artists propose only one option in their letters to Davison, some soliciting his approval, others presuming his automatic consent. <sup>80</sup> However, it is unlikely that they would have defied the patron, if he had rejected their choice. He also retained the right to refuse to admit their pictures to his gallery: “after each picture is finished,” Farington noted, “[Davison] will pay the money due for it. . . . If it be approved He will place it in his picture room, if not he will send it to an Auction.” <sup>81</sup> There is no evidence that Davison rejected any works and it can be assumed that all of the paintings met with his approval.

The prefatory note in the catalogue also states that, “intending to mark this Collection distinctly from others of their works,” the artists were required to include self-portraits in their pictures. <sup>82</sup> The acquisition of self-portraits aligned Davison with several highly prestigious precedents, including the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, who amassed an extensive collection of painters’ self-portraits over the course of the eighteenth century. <sup>83</sup> However, the merchant’s request that the artists embed their likenesses within history paintings was unusual. Acting of their own accord, painters sometimes depicted themselves as historical figures—James Barry had famously painted himself as the ancient Greek painter Timanthes in *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture* (1777–83), his series of murals for the Society of Arts—but this was rarely done at a patron’s behest. <sup>84</sup> George III’s insistence that West include a self-portrait in *The Institution of the Order of the Garter* (1787), one of the Edward III paintings for the Throne Room at Windsor, provides perhaps the only precedent for Davison’s stipulation. <sup>85</sup> Thanks to the presence of the self-portraits, the artists themselves were as much the subject of the display in the merchant’s gallery as the historical scenes that they chose to represent.

For viewers in the early nineteenth century, some of the historical episodes selected by the painters would have been very familiar. Six of the eight artists—West, Wilkie, Tresham, Smirke, Copley, and Westall—picked scenes that were identical or closely related to subjects depicted in Robert Bowyer’s *Historic Gallery*.<sup>86</sup> This is unsurprising given that the publisher’s project was an important source of inspiration for the gallery as a whole. Wilkie, the most inexperienced history painter in the group, elected to paint *Alfred the Great in the Neat-Herd’s Cottage*, an iconic moment in English history which had been represented many times throughout the eighteenth century, providing the artist with a surfeit of potential models.<sup>87</sup> However, as a comic incident in a rural cottage involving burnt cakes and mistaken identity, this scene was also ideally suited to his talents as a genre painter.

Two of the painters selected more obscure historical incidents. These were apparently chosen because they were appropriate to Davison’s personal interests, or to the requirements of his commission. Northcote depicted *Henry Percy, fifth Earl of Northumberland, presenting the Princess Margaret, eldest daughter of Henry VII, to James IV of Scotland*, which he believed had “never yet been painted.”<sup>88</sup> This scene saluted Davison’s Anglo-Scottish identity and featured an ancestor of his long-standing friend and aristocratic patron Hugh Percy, second Duke of Northumberland.<sup>89</sup> Devis also depicted a scene for which there was little artistic precedent, representing *The Conspiracy of Babington against Queen Elizabeth*. His painting showed the Tudor queen viewing an incriminating group portrait of the conspirators. Depicting himself as Babington’s portraitist (the figure holding the painting), Devis selected this subject, according to his friend John Landseer, because it offered an “adroit” solution to Davison’s instruction that “each Artist should introduce his own Portrait” in his picture, allowing the painter to represent himself as an artist.<sup>90</sup>

Whatever specific reasons each artist had for selecting his subject, there are some recurring themes among their choices. All eight painters depicted scenes from the Medieval or Tudor period featuring royal or noble protagonists. This is consistent with the historicist interest in the knightly and courtly culture of the Middle Ages that became an increasingly prominent feature of British culture during this period.<sup>91</sup> Other common themes can also be discerned. A number of these are explored by Holger Hoock and summed up in his description of the display as a “gallery of scenes of virtuous royal, civic, and military leadership and English dynastic history.”<sup>92</sup>

One particularly intriguing aspect of the gallery is the preponderance of scenes centred upon female royalty, of which there were five. Two of these subjects—the marriage of Margaret Tudor and Elizabeth I saved from Babington’s plot—depicted moments of dynastic growth and personal

survival. By contrast, the other three represented royal women in distress: Elizabeth Woodville forced to surrender her children; Lady Jane Grey pressured into accepting the crown; and Mary, Queen of Scots, fleeing from defeat. In the gallery, these three subjects were displayed together on the east wall. Opposite, on the west wall, hung the Elizabeth painting while the Tudor marriage scene was on the north wall. This arrangement invited viewers to compare and contrast different historical models of femininity. In eighteenth-century histories, Woodville, Grey, and the Queen of Scots were seen to exemplify “the proper ornaments of [their] sex”, such as beauty and tenderness, and the vulnerability associated with these “ornaments”, which caused them to be led astray by “treacherous counsel” and doomed their attempts to occupy positions of power.<sup>93</sup> By contrast, Elizabeth I was presented as a successful monarch because, it was claimed, she lacked “those amiable weaknesses by which her sex is distinguished”, possessing instead the masculine qualities of “vigour”, “magnanimity”, and “heroism”.<sup>94</sup> This imagined contrast between feminine weakness and masculine strength was writ large upon the walls of Davison’s gallery, where the tribulations of Woodville, Grey, and the Queen of Scots were juxtaposed with Elizabeth’s triumph over Babington. Positioned in between these two extremes, Northcote’s representation of Margaret Tudor “modestly presenting her hand to the King of Scotland” and, in so doing, bringing about “peace and amity” between the warring nations of England and Scotland offered an ideal model for the union of masculinity and femininity through the institution of marriage.<sup>95</sup> The emphasis in the gallery upon female roles raises the possibility that women formed part of the intended audience. When the newspapers reported upon Davison’s “grand dinners”, the attendees mentioned by name were generally male. However, the merchant’s wife, Harriett, is recorded as playing an active role in hosting these “fashionable parties”, suggesting that women were also present upon these occasions.<sup>96</sup>

The grouping of three similar subjects on the east wall prompts further questions about how the subjects were chosen. As the dimensions given in the catalogue show, the canvases were different sizes. This was apparently done to enable specific paintings to fit specific spaces, such as above the door, and to create symmetry on each wall.<sup>97</sup> The arrangement must therefore have been worked out before the artists started painting. One possibility is that the painters selected their subjects independently and the hang was designed around their choices. Yet it is also possible that the selection of subjects and the placement of the works evolved in tandem, through a process of consultation and coordination between the various artists, Green, and Davison.

## Exemplary Patronage

Although the choice of subjects for the gallery may have resulted from a collaborative effort, the catalogue entries are self-contained texts, each artist discussing only his own painting. This presents the gallery to the reader as a series of independent artistic efforts. In the late eighteenth century, independence, together with originality and freedom, was heralded as one of the distinguishing features of British art, echoing an older ideal of “Englishness” associated with liberty and Protestantism.<sup>98</sup> For Davison, there was prestige in appearing as an appreciative facilitator of this supposed creative independence. In an open letter to the Society of Dilettanti in 1798, James Barry had condemned “self-important” individuals who imposed their own “ideas” upon artists and argued that the true role of a patron was “to furnish a field for the exercise of talents.”<sup>99</sup> Davison’s wish to be seen to embody this ideal offers a compelling explanation for the most unusual features of his project: the self-portraits and the *Descriptive Catalogue*. His desire to display his painters’ likenesses suggested his respect for them as individuals. Written in the artists’ own words, the catalogue entries showed his willingness to allow their genius to speak for itself.

Of course, there was one picture in the gallery that Davison had not commissioned: the *Death of Chatham*. Depicting the fatal collapse of William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham, in the House of Lords on 7 April 1778, this work was painted by Copley between 1779 and 1781.<sup>100</sup> It was a speculative production, the artist seeking to make his profit through a one-picture exhibition and print sales. He also hoped to sell the painting but failed to find a buyer. It remained unsold for more than two decades until, facing mounting debts, he resolved to dispose of the work by lottery. Tickets were priced at one hundred guineas each, one twentieth of his original asking price for the painting, and the draw was held on 27 June 1806.<sup>101</sup> Emerging as the winner, Davison resolved to install the picture in his nascent gallery of history paintings. Divided into two sections and featuring a description of the composition, the entry for *Chatham* in the *Descriptive Catalogue* is similar to the other catalogue essays but appears to have been written by someone other than the artist, probably Green. It does not describe how Davison came to possess the picture, perhaps because revealing the method of acquisition—at a bargain price, through a lucky gamble—risked undermining the munificent self-image that the patron sought to project. Glossing over the painting’s past, the entry hails the work as evidence of “present high state of national talent in this first walk of the graphic Muse [history painting]” and issues a rallying cry for future patronage: the picture is said to call “most imperiously and persuasively” on “the patriotism and the liberality of the affluent, to enrich their country and posterity with similar examples of

excellence in art.” <sup>102</sup> This statement functions as an implicit tribute to Davison, framing his commissions as proof of his exemplary “patriotism” and “liberality”.

Extolling the virtues of the merchant’s patronage, the artists’ letters printed in the second half of the catalogue reinforce this message. Northcote refers to Davison’s commissions as “such singular proofs of your truly liberal character”, while Tresham asserts that the patron “will be awarded the rich harvest of public applause for his patriotic munificence”. <sup>103</sup> This obsequious language is conventional for such letters: it was expected that artists would respond to offers of employment with grateful blandishments. <sup>104</sup> However, Davison was alone among patrons of the time in publishing the flattering missives that he received from his artists. In so doing, he relayed their testimony concerning his importance to British art to the influential individuals with whom he shared his catalogue, presumably hoping that it would enhance his reputation in wider society.

Davison himself has the last word in the *Description Catalogue*. The concluding text is a letter that he sent to Green upon the gallery’s completion, in which he writes,

I trust [the paintings] will leave it no longer doubtful whether the productions of our own country deserve the patronage of the great and the affluent . . . May this example have the full effect it was meant by me to produce! <sup>105</sup>

Like the rest of the catalogue, these comments advance his effort to achieve self-advancement under the aegis of patriotism. Presenting himself as a champion of British art and a model for his powerful friends to follow, the merchant simultaneously asserted his willingness to serve the cultural interests of the nation and his status, despite his lowly origins and criminal record, as an exemplary member of “the great and the affluent”.

## **Downfall**

In his gallery, Davison sought to create the perfect stage for self-promotion but, before it was even complete, his ability to play the part of the munificent patron upon this stage suffered a crushing blow. In January 1807, the Parliamentary Commissioners of Military Enquiry published a report highlighting major financial irregularities in his military supply contracts. <sup>106</sup> Accused of embezzling thousands of pounds from the government, he was

put on trial in December 1808. Three months later, he was convicted and sentenced to twenty-one months in prison, his second prison term in five years. <sup>107</sup>

After Davison's dishonest dealings came to light, satirists and political commentators assaulted the claims to respectability and liberality upon which he had staked his reputation. As one newspaper quipped, "Col. Davison", the supposedly patriotic commander of the Loyal Britons volunteers, deserved to be rechristened "Coal Davison", a soubriquet that referred to his blackened name and to his abuse of his contract to supply the Army with coal. <sup>108</sup> Davison's coal fraud was the subject of a scathing satirical print titled *The Coal Contractor, or a New Way of Supplying Government Wholesale by the Bushel* (Fig. 7). Dorothy George attributes this caricature to the engraver Charles Williams and his publisher Samuel Fores but the print itself states only that it was published "by an Honest Scotch man" in "Feb. 1806". <sup>109</sup> This date is erroneous: the print cannot have been published before January 1807, since it refers to details from the report of the Commissioners of Military Enquiry. The print shows Davison writing in a ledger. He looks over his shoulder at two soldiers as they collect a delivery of coal from a pair of labourers, one of whom metes out the order using a bushel. References to bushels and chaldrons, the measures used in the sale of coal, are littered throughout the print, alluding to Davison's deceitful manipulation of this measuring system. <sup>110</sup> One of the soldiers suggests that "we shall have [the coal] by the Snob's Chaldron next." Davison's status as a "snob", meaning an individual of low breeding or bad taste who seeks, through superficial and ostentatious displays, to associate with his social superiors, is thus drawn into the print's attack upon his corruption. <sup>111</sup>



**Figure 7.**

Attributed to Charles Williams, he Coal Contractor, or a New Way of Supplying Government Wholesale by the Bushel, 1807, hand-coloured etching on paper, 25.1 x 35.3 cm. Collection the British Museum (Inv. 1868,0808.7424). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

The caricature plays off Davison's criminal activity against his attempts at self-promotion, including his gallery project. In his letter rack is a missive addressed to "[Alexander Davison] Esq., Patron [of] the Arts" and behind him is a door inscribed "Pictu[re] Gall[ery]", through which can be glimpsed several large paintings in gilded frames. Hanging beside this door are an admiral's hat and sword, a reference to the way in which Davison traded upon his friendship with Nelson to enhance his social credit.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, on the shelf above his desk is a book of "Subjects for British Artists", together with a log of "Expences [sic] of raising my Corps", referring to the founding of the Loyal Britons, and volumes highlighting official responsibilities financially abused by Davison, including his prize agency for the Navy, his appointment as Treasurer of the Ordnance, and his victualling contracts. On the floor, books of "Cash reciev'd in advance" and "Profits by Contract £1000,000" are piled atop a page of "Expences [sic] of the Entertainment given to his Royal [Highness]", alluding to the Prince of Wales's frequent attendance at Davison's dinners. This extended juxtaposition of the merchant's fraudulent enterprise with his efforts to cultivate a respectable public persona makes his pursuit of social status appear sordid and superficial.

Similar attacks on Davison appeared in the press. *The Times* joked that, while “the DAVISON Gallery of Historical Paintings” had been begun by “Copley and other eminent Artists”, it would be finished by “those equally eminent designers in their own way, Sir ARTHUR PIGOTT [the attorney general], Sir SAMUEL ROMILLY [the solicitor general], and others,” who, in prosecuting the merchant for his crimes, would paint a more accurate picture of his character.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register* argued that the claims of “*the Davison Gallery!!*” to “liberality” and “public-spirit” were belied by its “enormous price”, which revealed the patron’s greed.<sup>114</sup> Together with *The Coal Contractor*, these comments highlight the gamble that Davison had taken in attempting to exploit history painting for personal gain. The effectiveness of his scheme hinged upon his patronage being perceived as genuinely patriotic, an image that the exposure of his corruption compromised his ability to maintain.

### ***Magna Charta***

Despite his distress, Davison did not give up on the idea of using his paintings to his advantage. It is a testament to how well he had positioned his project to speak to the art world’s anxieties concerning the patronage of history painting that his gallery continued to attract praise in spite of his disgrace. A particularly powerful tribute appeared in the second issue of the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, a periodical launched by the architect James Elmes in 1816.<sup>115</sup> Elmes dedicated the first instalment in a series of “Descriptive and Critical Catalogues of the Most Splendid Collections of Works of Art in Great Britain” to Davison’s gallery, arguing that it most fully embodied the ideal of patriotic patronage: it contained, he noted, “nothing but works of native artists; all but one of which . . . were commissions from that liberal patron of his countrymen.”<sup>116</sup> Elmes’s account of the gallery quotes extensively from the *Descriptive Catalogue* and comments on the arrangement of the pictures in the room, indicating that he had been granted access to the gallery.<sup>117</sup> This suggests that Davison supported the production of the article and remained committed to publicizing his patronage.

Published in October 1816, Elmes’s tribute appeared in the midst of a desperate period for the patron. Despite the fines and loss of business that followed his release from prison in 1811, Davison had initially managed to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. However, in June 1816, his banking business collapsed, plunging him into debt and forcing him to sell his house in St James’s Square, together with most of the contents.<sup>118</sup> Held in April 1817, the house sale featured the bulk of Davison’s art collection, including his genre paintings, his Dutch landscapes, and his two Claudes.<sup>119</sup> Davison refused, however, to sell his historical commissions, suggesting that, even in

his indebted state, he continued to prize their value as symbolic capital over their monetary worth. Copley's *Chatham* was offered for sale but it was bought back for Davison by his friend the second Duke of Northumberland, who also purchased the house.<sup>120</sup> Confusingly, it seems that the merchant's history paintings remained in the dining room in St James's Square and continued to belong to Davison even though the house was inhabited by the second Duke's son, who inherited his father's title shortly after the sale.<sup>121</sup> This bizarre situation encapsulates the widening gulf between Davison's diminishing social position and the dignified self-image that he persisted in attempting to cultivate using his paintings.

Remarkably, Davison added a new painting to the gallery during this period, despite no longer owning the room in which the collection hung. This latest work was Arthur William Devis's *Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, shewing to the Barons of England, in the Abbey of St Edmund at Bury, the Charter of Liberties that had been granted by King Henry I, and on which the Great Charter of King John was subsequently founded* (Fig. 8), often known simply as *Magna Charta*.<sup>122</sup> Davison had commissioned this painting, which cost four hundred guineas, in 1808, after the exposure of his corruption but before his trial, imprisonment, and financial difficulties.<sup>123</sup> However, the work was not completed until late 1817, whereupon, as the *Annals of the Fine Arts* reported, it was installed "among the other British pictures" in the dining room of the house in St James's Square "at present inhabited by his Grace the [third] Duke of Northumberland."<sup>124</sup>



**Figure 8.**

Arthur William Devis, *Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, shewing to the Barons of England, in the Abbey of St Edmund at Bury, the Charter of Liberties that had been granted by King Henry I, and on which the Great Charter of King John was subsequently founded*, 1816-17, oil on canvas, 115 × 150 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Although considerably smaller in size, *Magna Charta* emulates Copley's *Death of Chatham* in composition, featuring a frieze-like band of standing figures. This compositional parallel underscores a thematic link between the two paintings, both of which represent peers of the realm acting as statesmen, albeit in different historical eras. The new painting reprised the focus upon the Medieval period that characterized the first set of paintings commissioned by Davison. <sup>125</sup>

In other ways, however, *Magna Charta* stood apart from the patron's earlier commissions. Whereas they included only a single contemporary likeness—the self-portrait of the artist—it was crammed with present-day portraits. A key was produced to identify the depicted individuals (Fig. 9). It reveals that the naval author James Stanier Clarke, the physician Martin Tupper, and the engraver Thomas Cheesman appeared as clerics attending Archbishop Langton. <sup>126</sup> More significantly, the medieval barons were represented by portraits of modern-day nobles supposed to have been their descendants. <sup>127</sup> Other artists of the time, including James Barry,



Institution, it is not surprising that the merchant turned to its exhibition—an annual event frequented by members of the social elite—as an alternative arena in which to promote his patronage.

However, although Davison remained intent upon using his history paintings to enhance his reputation, his debts eventually rendered their sale unavoidable. On 28 June 1823, his eight original commissions, plus the *Death of Chatham* and *Magna Charta*, were put up for auction.<sup>134</sup> After the sale, Davison withdrew to his Northumberland estate, acknowledging in a letter to his son that he had failed to secure the place he desired in metropolitan society: “no one”, he wrote, “was ever more sick of a place than I am of London and [I] care not were I never to see it again.”<sup>135</sup> He died in December 1829, his laconic obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* simply noting the death of “Alexander Davison, esq. of Swarlard Park, co. Northumberland, and formerly of St James’s-square, London.”<sup>136</sup> Yet, to the bitter end, he and his family still sought publicity for the artworks that manifested his grand ambitions. Having failed to sell in 1823, Devis’s *Babington Conspiracy* and *Magna Charta* remained in Davison’s possession. Within four years of his death, large-scale mezzotints of both paintings were published (Fig. 4, Fig. 10), presumably authorized by the patron in the final months of his life or by his son, who inherited the works.<sup>137</sup>



**Figure 10.**

John George Murray after Arthur William Devis, *The Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, presenting to the assembled barons the old charter of Henry 1st as the foundation for the Magna Charta in the Abbey of St Edmund at Bury*, 1833, mezzotint and stipple engraving on paper. 65.8 × 93.3 cm. Collection the British Museum (Inv. 1893,0612.88). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

## Conclusion

From the inception of his project through his ignominious downfall to his dying day, Davison's actions evince a steadfast commitment to the idea that history painting could serve as a powerful vehicle for the pursuit of personal advancement. Featuring contemporary portraits embedded within historical compositions and obfuscating the pursuit of private gain with a gloss of patriotism, the merchant's gallery underscores the necessity, asserted by Lippincott, of looking beyond the traditional opposition between history painting and public virtue, on the one hand, and portraiture and private interest, on the other, and considering instead "the 'life' of eighteenth-century paintings first as commodities, then as property".<sup>138</sup> History painting is often characterized as a burden that the British art world perpetually struggled to accommodate, financially and ideologically. However, for certain individuals, it was a useful and surprisingly flexible tool, the uncertainty surrounding the genre generating opportunities as well as alarm. Davison's story may be one of failure, his ambitions ultimately thwarted by his corruption, but it invites us to ask an important question: what could history painting actually do for patrons in this period?

## Footnotes

- 1 Benjamin West to Alexander Davison, 25 July 1806, in [Alexander Davison and others], *Descriptive Catalogue of the Series of Pictures, formed on subjects selected from the History of England, painted by British Artists for Alexander Davison, Esquire, MDCCCVI. In the order in which they are arranged, at his house in St. James's-square, London* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1807), 32.
- 2 Benjamin West served as President of the Royal Academy from 1792 to December 1805 and then from December 1806 until his death in 1820. For West in 1806, see Robert C. Alberts, *Benjamin West: A Biography* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 306-35.
- 3 For the launch of this project, see Kenneth Garlick, Angus D. Macintyre, and Kathryn Cave (eds), *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 16 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1978-84), 7: 2799 (28 June 1806), 8: 2833 (25 July 1806), 2835 (9 August 1806). For Davison's collection of rural genre scenes, see [Mr. Farebrother] *The Entire Property of Alexander Davison, Esq. . . . Which will be Sold by Auction, by Mr Farebrother, on the premises, On Monday, 21st of April, 1817, and Fifteen following Days* (London: Smith and Davy, 1817), 44-48.
- 4 Held on 27 June 1806, the lottery was an attempt by Copley to unload a work that he had been attempting unsuccessfully to sell for the last twenty-five years. Garlick et al. (eds), *Farington*, 7: 2799 (28 June 1806).
- 5 Alexander Davison and others, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Series of Pictures, formed on subjects selected from the History of England, painted by British Artists for Alexander Davison, Esquire, MDCCCVI. In the order in which they are arranged, at his house in St. James's-square, London* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1807). Hereafter cited as *Davison Catalogue*. For the completion of the gallery, see Garlick et al. (eds), *Farington*, 8: 3004 (5 April 1807); Martha Babcock Amory, *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, R. A.* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1882), 286.
- 6 [Mr. Stanley], *A Catalogue of a Splendid Collection of Pictures, by British Artists, The Subjects taken from English History: Painted expressly for Alexander Davison, Esq. which Will be Sold by Auction, By Mr Stanley, at his Great Room, Maddox-Street, Hanover-Square, On Saturday the 28th of June, 1823, at One O'clock* (London: Gold and Walton, 1823).
- 7 Copley also produced a copy of this painting in 1808, which is now in the Somerset Club, Boston. In the Boston version, Copley has changed the figures in the background and omitted the self-portrait. See Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley in England, 1774-1815* (Cambridge, MA: Published for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, by Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), 445.
- 8 The catalogue is extremely rare and only two copies are presently known to exist: one is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the other is in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.
- 9 For Davison's life and wide varied business interests, see Martin Downer, *Nelson's Purse: The Mystery of Lord Nelson's Lost Treasures* (London: Corgi Books, 2005; original ed., 2004); H. T. Dickinson, "Davison, Alexander (1750-1829)," in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), online ed., January 2016, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/7298; and Leslie W. Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk: Alexander Davison, Lord Nelson and the Northumberland Landscape," *Archaeologia Aeliana* 34 (2005): 129-50.
- 10 Holger Hoock, "'Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice': Patriotism and the Collecting of British Art at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 3 (July 2010): 566-91, esp. 580-84. Very brief mentions of Davison's gallery also occur in Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 46; and Mark Salber Phillips, *On Historical Distance* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 165.
- 11 Prince Hoare, "Galleries of English Paintings," *The Artist* 1, no. 21 (1807): 3-14; Stephen Deuchar, *Paintings, Politics and Porter: Samuel Whitbread II (1764-1815) and British Art* (London: Whitbread & Co., 1984); Selby Whittingham, "A Most Liberal Parton: Sir John Fleming Leicester, Bart., 1st Baron de Tabley, 1762-1827," *Turner Studies* 6, no. 2 (1986): 24-36; Peter Cannon-Brookes (ed.), *Paintings from Tabley: An Exhibition of Paintings from Tabley House* (London: Heim Gallery, 1989).
- 12 Hoock, "'Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice,'" 572. For the distinction between collecting and patronage in this period, see Deuchar, *Paintings, Politics and Porter*, 11-12.
- 13 Hoock, "'Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice,'" 572.
- 14 Hoock, "'Struggling against a Vulgar Prejudice,'" 588 and 590.
- 15 Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 56-96.
- 16 See, for example, Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750-1810* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006); Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 9-32; John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1986); David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), esp. 157-213; Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy*.
- 17 Louise Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995), 75.

- 18 For Davison's family background and business career, see Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 59–132, and Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk", 132–33.
- 19 Davison's country estate was Swarland House, near Felton in Northumberland. See Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 128–31 and 166–7, and Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk", 133.
- 20 Downer's *Nelson's Purse* provides a detailed account of the friendship between Davison and Nelson, which began in 1782 when Nelson was a young captain stationed in Quebec. See also James Saunders, "A Portrait of Alexander Davison and his Friendship with Nelson," *The Nelson Dispatch* 8, no. 2 (2003): 81–105, and Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk," 134–35.
- 21 Nicholas Penny, "'Amor Publicus Posuit': Monuments for the People and of the People," *The Burlington Magazine* 129, no. 1017 (Dec. 1987): 795–96. For the Nile medal, see J. G. Pollard, "Matthew Boulton and Conrad Heinrich Küchler," *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th ser., 10 (1970): 284–86, no. 15. In the naval monument project, Davison was in charge of raising funds for the project through a public subscription scheme; see Garlick et al. (eds), *Farington*, 4: 1266 (12 Aug. 1799). For the Loyal Britons, see Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 311–16.
- 22 "Chronicle," *The Annual Register* 46 (1804): 383. See also Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 266–73, 276–80, and 325–8, and Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk," 137–8.
- 23 The scandal caused George III to reject Nelson's nomination of Davison as his proxy for his installation as a Knight of the Bath, a role that would have involved the award of a knighthood. See Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 295.
- 24 For the cultural and artistic geography of Pall Mall and the surrounding area, see Rosie Dias, "'A World of Pictures': Pall Mall and the Topography of Display, 1780–99," in Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers (eds), *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century*, 92–110 (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004).
- 25 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 17 Dec. 1808. For Davison's reputation for hosting "fashionable parties", see also *Morning Post*, 14 Feb. 1801.
- 26 For the Cleveland House collection, which was begun by Francis Egerton, third Duke of Bridgewater, see Peter 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; and Peter 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. For townhouse displays in this period, see Giles Waterfield, "The Town House as Gallery of Art," *London Journal* 20, no. 1 (1995): 47–66.
- 27 For Davison's Old Master collection, see [Farebrother,] *Entire Property*, 44–48.
- 28 Douglas Fordham, "George Stubbs's Zoon Politikon," *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 1 (2010): 3–23; Nicholas Penny, "Lord Rockingham's Sculpture Collection and 'The Judgement of Paris' by Nollekens," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 19 (1991): 5–34; H. F. Constantine, "Lord Rockingham and Stubbs: Some New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 95, no. 604 (1953): 236–39. Rockingham may be the "gentleman of rank" whom John Gwynn described in 1766 as having "appropriated a room in his house for the reception of English merit"; see John Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved* (London: Printed for the Author, 1766), 56.
- 29 Fordham, "George Stubbs's Zoon Politikon", 10.
- 30 Douglas Fordham suggests that at least two of the pictures—Stubbs's *Lion Attacking a Horse* and *Lion Attacking a Stag*—held specific political meanings for Rockingham and his associates. Fordham, "George Stubbs's Zoon Politikon," 15–23.
- 31 *Morning Herald*, 18 June 1805. For Leicester's Hill Street gallery, 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; and Cannon-Brookes (ed.), *Paintings from Tabley*, 14–15.
- 32 Garlick et al. (eds), *Farington*, 8: 2803 (2 July 1806).
- 33 One exception was the banker Thomas Hope, who commissioned two history paintings of mythological subjects from Richard Westall in 1804 and a further three from Benjamin West in the following year. David Watkin, *Thomas Hope, 1769–1831, and the Neo-Classical Idea* (London: John Murray, 1968), 44; Jeannie Chapel, "Thomas Hope's Contemporary Picture Collection," in David Watkin and Philip Hewat-Jaboor (eds), *Thomas Hope: Regency Designer* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 155.
- 34 Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 19; Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), 93 and 192–203, nos. 56, 58, 61, 64, 67, 72, 74. George III also commissioned West to produce thirty-six works on the theme of "the progress of revealed religion" but only twenty-eight of these were executed before the king abruptly terminated the project in 1801.
- 35 Martin Myrone, "The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House," in David H. Solkin (ed.), *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Courtauld Institute Gallery, 2001), 77–91; Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 104–105.
- 36 Kaylin Haverstock Weber, "The Studio and Art Collection of the 'American Raphael': Benjamin West, P.R.A. (1738–1820)," (PhD diss., Univ. of Glasgow, 2013); Alberts, *Benjamin West*, 161–78.
- 37 Famous examples include Joshua Reynolds's house in Leicester Fields and Richard and Maria Cosway's residence in Stratford Place. See Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996), 103–104; and Stephen Lloyd, "The Cosway Inventory of 1820: Listing Unpaid Commissions and the Contents of 20 Stratford Place, Oxford Street, London," *The Walpole Society* 66 (2004): 163–217.

- 38 For contemporary accounts of visiting West's studio, see Sophie von la Roche, *Sophie in London, 1786: being the Diary of Sophie v. la Roche*, eds. Clare Williams and G. M. Trevelyan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 152-53; and Samuel I. Prime, *The Life of S. F. B. Morse* (New York: Appleton, 1875), 35-36.
- 39 This was intended by West as a protest against his perceived ill-treatment by the Academy, having been forced to resign as its president the previous December. Von Erffa and Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 220-22, no. 108; Garlick et al. (eds.), *Farington*, 7: 2757 (11 May 1806).
- 40 *La Belle Assemblée*, 1 May 1806; *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 4 June 1806; Garlick et al. (eds.), *Farington*, 8: 2802 (2 July 1806), 2806 (8 July 1806).
- 41 Weber, "The Studio and Art Collection of the 'American Raphael,'" 1.
- 42 For the Shakespeare Gallery, see Sven H. A. Bruntjen, *John Boydell, 1719-1804: A Study of Art Patronage and Publishing in Georgian London* (New York: Garland, 1985), 69-158; and Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale Univ. Press, 2013). For the Historic Gallery, see Robert Bowyer, *General Design for a Complete History of England, Superbly Ornamented* (London: R. Bowyer, 1792); and T. S. R. Boase, "Macklin and Bowyer," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26, no. 1/2 (1963): 169-77.
- 43 They also collected subscriptions for new, illustrated editions of their chosen texts and Bowyer charged an admission fee at his exhibition rooms.
- 44 For the collapse of Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, see *Morning Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1804.
- 45 For Bowyer's application to Parliament, see "Proceedings in . . . Parliament," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 75, no. 1 (1805): 361; and *London Gazette*, 9 March 1805. For the dispersal of the Historic Gallery in 1807, see John Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries* (London: Leadenhall Press, 1893), 139-43.
- 46 For Macklin's Poets' Gallery, see Boase, "Macklin and Bowyer," 148-69.
- 47 Thomas Macklin's Poets' Gallery was also situated on Pall Mall. See Dias, "'A World of Pictures'", 94-5; and Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness*, 43-8.
- 48 See *Morning Chronicle*, 24 Dec. 1805; and *The Times*, 11 Jan. 1806.
- 49 Martin Archer Shee, *Rhymes on Art; or, The Remonstrance of A Painter: In Two Parts. With Notes, and a Preface, including Strictures on the State of the Arts, Criticism, Patronage, and Public Taste*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for John Murray and John Harding, 1805), 94. See also Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy*, 56-96.
- 50 John Boydell, *A Catalogue of the Pictures in the Shakspeare [sic] Gallery, Pall-Mall* (London: J. Boydell, 1789), v; Robert Bowyer, *Elucidation of Mr Bowyer's Plan for a Magnificent Edition of Hume's History of England, with a Continuation by G. Gregory, D. D. &c.* (London: R. Bowyer, 1795), 8-9. See also Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture," 79.
- 51 "Maecenas" is Gaius Maecenas, Roman statesman and patron of Horace and Virgil. The description of Boydell as the "commercial Maecenas" is attributed to the Prince of Wales, though the comment is thought to have been written for him by Edmund Burke and approved by Joshua Reynolds, see *London Chronicle*, 25-28 April 1789; and Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy*, 34. For Boydell's comments, see Boydell, *Catalogue*, vi.
- 52 Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy*, 56-96.
- 53 Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, xxi, lvii.
- 54 Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, lvii.
- 55 Prince Hoare, *An Inquiry into the Requisite Cultivation and Present State of the Arts of Design in England* (London: Printed for Richard Phillips, 1806), 230-31.
- 56 [British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts,] *An Account of the British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, containing a Copy of the By Laws, a List of the Subscribers, together with Extracts from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Committees, and General Meetings* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1805); Peter Fullerton, "Patronage and Pedagogy: The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Art History* 5, no. 1 (March 1982): 59-72; Ann Pullan, "Public Goods or Private Interests?: The British Institution in the Early Nineteenth Century," in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1998), 27-40.
- 57 [British Institution,] *Account*, 3.
- 58 [British Institution,] *Account*, 23.
- 59 Shee, *Rhymes on Art*, xlv. See also Hoare, *Inquiry*, 232; and *Morning Post*, 24 March 1806.
- 60 For the Institution's governorships, see [British Institution,] *Account*, 5.
- 61 *The Artist* 1, no. 5 (1807): 15. See also Hoare, "Galleries of English Paintings," 3.
- 62 *The Examiner*, 22 May 1808.
- 63 Hope opened his gallery to the public in 1804, and Stafford in 1806. See Waterfield, "The Town House as Gallery of Art," 56-7, and Chapel, "Thomas Hope's Contemporary Picture Collection," 163.
- 64 *Morning Post*, 25 Feb. 1806.

- 65 My thanks to Martyn Downer for his thoughts on the possible location of the gallery. The house in St James's Square is now number 11, rather than number 9, as it was in the early nineteenth century. For the property, see "St. James's Square: Nos 9, 10 & 11," in F. H. W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London: Volumes 29 and 30, St James Westminster, Part 1* (London: London County Council, 1960), 118-34. British History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols29-30/pt1/pp118-134>.
- 66 The following account is based upon James Elmes, "*Descriptive and Critical Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures painted by British Artists, from Subjects selected from the History of Great Britain, for, and in the possession of, Alexander Davison, Esq.*" *Annals of the Fine Arts* 1, no. 2 (1816): 245; [Farebrother,] *Entire Property*, 46; and *Davison Catalogue*, [ii].
- 67 Elmes, "*Descriptive and Critical Catalogue*," 245.
- 68 A hand-written note on the title page of the Bodleian copy of the catalogue states that it was "Printed for private distribution". The catalogue's limited circulation is also suggested by the fact that copies are now extremely rare.
- 69 See, for example, Robert Bowyer, *Exhibition of Pictures, Painted for Bowyer's Magnificent Edition of the History of England* (London: R. Bowyer, 1793).
- 70 For a descriptive catalogue that focused upon British artworks, see George Perry, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Collection of the Marquis of Stafford in London* (London: J. Walker, 1807). For the use of the term "descriptive catalogue" in this period, see Martin Myrone, "Introduction: *The Great Style of Art Restored*," in Martin Myrone (ed.), *Seen in My Visions: A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures*, by William Blake (London: Tate, 2009), 20-2.
- 71 Daniel Daulby, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Works of Rembrandt* (Liverpool: Printed by J. M'Creery, 1796); Noel Desenfans, *A Descriptive Catalogue (with remarks and anecdotes never before published in English) of some Pictures, of the Different Schools, Purchased, For His Majesty, the Late King of Poland, Which will be exhibited early in 1802, At the Great Room, no. 3, in Berners-street* (London: Exton, 1802).
- 72 Valentine Green and Rupert Green, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, from the Dusseldorf Gallery, exhibited at the Great Room, Spring-Gardens, London* (London: Printed by H. Reynell, 1793), 3.
- 73 *Davison Catalogue*, [i].
- 74 Wilkie's debut exhibit at the Royal Academy was *The Village Politicians*, a Scottish tavern scene. See Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: The People's Painter* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2007), 8; and David H. Solkin, *Painting Out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008), 7-33.
- 75 Hepple, "Nelson's Obelisk," 129-50.
- 76 Garlick et al. (eds.), *Farington*, 8: 2833 (25 July 1806).
- 77 *Davison Catalogue*, [ii].
- 78 *Davison Catalogue*, [ii].
- 79 Northcote appears to have submitted at least three choices: his letter begins with the assertion that, having already sent "my list of subjects for painting", which is not included in the catalogue, he would like to add another subject for the patron's consideration. See *Davison Catalogue*, 39.
- 80 Copley names his subject only in a postscript. See *Davison Catalogue*, 47.
- 81 Garlick et al. (eds.), *Farington*, 8: 2835 (9 Aug. 1806).
- 82 *Davison Catalogue*, [ii]. In the catalogue entries, the painters identified the figures within their respective compositions which bore their likenesses.
- 83 The Medici collection of self-portraits was frequently discussed in travel guides in this period, for example, Peter Beckford, *Familiar Letters from Italy, to a Friend in England*, 2 vols. (Salisbury: J. Easton, 1805), 1: 169-70; Thomas Martyn, *The Gentleman's Guide in his Tour through Italy: With a Correct Map, and Directions for Travelling in that Country* (London: Printed for, and sold by, G. Kearsley, 1787), 338.
- 84 For Barry's self-portrait as Timanthes, see Anon., *A Description of the Series of Pictures Painted by James Barry, Esq. and Preserved in the Great Room of the Society Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce* (London: Printed by W. and C. Spilsbury, 1800), 16.
- 85 The king's instruction to West was reported in the press and mentioned in many Windsor guidebooks. See *Public Advertiser*, 3 Aug. 1787; and John Britton and others, *The Beauties of England and Wales; or, Delineations, Topographical, Historical and Descriptive, of Each County*, 18 vols. (London: Vernor and Hood, 1801-15), 1: 223.
- 86 See David Hume, *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (London: Robert Bowyer, 1806). Westall's subject—Mary, Queen of Scots, fleeing by boat after her defeat at the Battle of Langside—was not included in Bowyer's *History* but it was very similar to another episode from the life of the Scottish queen—her escape from Lochleven Castle in a fishing boat—which was painted for the publisher by Robert Smirke.
- 87 A. D. Harvey, "Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage: History Painting and Epic Poetry in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Philology Quarterly* 86, nos. 1-2 (2007), 143-62. See also Simon Keynes, "The Cult of King Alfred the Great," *Anglo-Saxon England* 28 (1999): 225-356; and Oliver Cox, "'Rule, Britannia!': King Alfred the Great and the Creation of a National Hero in England and America, 1640-1800," (DPhil diss., Univ. of Oxford, 2014), I am grateful to the author for allowing me access to this work.
- 88 *Davison Catalogue*, 39.

- 89 Davison exploited his relationship with the duke to enhance his own social status. Most notably, he made Northumberland godfather to his first-born son in 1788, and named the boy Hugh Percy Davison in his honour. See the Davison family papers in the British Library, Add. MS 79200/109.
- 90 Devis wrote in his catalogue entry that "the picture . . . is supported by the Artist himself"; see *Davison Catalogue*, 21. Landseer recorded that Devis had represented himself "in the . . . character of Babington's portrait painter"; see John Landseer, *A Short Account of the Detection of Babington's Conspiracy against Queen Elizabeth intended to accompany Mr John Bromley's mezzotint engraving of that subject after a picture by Arthur William Devis, Esq. in the collection of Colonel Davison* (London: Bowyer and Parkes, 1830), quoted in Sydney Herbert Pavière, *The Devis Family of Painters* (Leigh-on-Sea: F. Lewis, 1950), 108.
- 91 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 147. See also Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 19-24; Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 34-37.
- 92 Hoock, "'Struggling Against a Vulgar Prejudice,'" 583-84.
- 93 David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688 in Eight Volumes, A New Edition, with the Author's Corrections and Improvements*, 8 vols. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1778), 4: 366-69, 5: 319-20. See also, Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), 65-71; Cynthia E. Roman, "Robert Bowyer's Historic Gallery and the Feminization of the 'Nation,'" in Dana Arnold (ed.), *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 21-26.
- 94 Hume, *The History of England*, 5: 448-49.
- 95 *Davison Catalogue*, 3-4.
- 96 "Mrs Davison's fashionable parties are expected to commence in the course of a fortnight." *Morning Post*, 14 Feb. 1801.
- 97 *Davison Catalogue*, [ii].
- 98 Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness*, 77-8; William Vaughan, "The Englishness of British Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1990): 11-23.
- 99 James Barry, *A Letter to the Dilettanti Society, Respecting The Obtention of certain Matters essentially necessary for the Improvement of Public Taste, and for accomplishing the original Views of the Royal Academy of Great Britain* (London: J. Walker, 1798), 34-5.
- 100 *Morning Chronicle*, 4 May 1781; *Davison Catalogue*, 26. See also Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 275-91.
- 101 Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 288; Garlick et al. (eds), *Farington*, 7: 2721 (16 April 1806), 2788 (18 June 1806), 2799 (28 June 1806).
- 102 *Davison Catalogue*, 24.
- 103 *Davison Catalogue*, 39 and 44.
- 104 Deuchar, *Painting, Politics and Porter*, 22. For example, writing to Sir John Leicester in 1808, West suggested that the landowner's support for British art entitled him "to the first claim of its Patronage in this country", see Benjamin West to Sir John Leicester, 25 March 1808, in Douglas Hall, "The Tabley House Papers," *The Walpole Society* 38 (1960-62): 100, no. 217.
- 105 *Davison Catalogue*, 49.
- 106 J. Drinkwater, "The Third Report of the Commissioners of Military Enquiry. Appointed by ACT of 45 GEO. III. Cap. 47. Office of the Barrack Master General. Stores and Supplies. Order to be printed 22d December 1806," *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online*.
- 107 "The whole Proceedings, before the Court of the King's-Bench, in the Case of Alexander Davison, Esq., for defrauding his Majesty of various Sums of Money, by means of false and fraudulent Vouches: 49 George III. A. D. 1808-9," in *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and other Crimes and Misdemeanours from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, comp. T. B. Howell and Thomas Jones Howell, 33 vols (London: Printed by T. C. Hansard, 1809-26), 31: 99-250. Davison publicly protested his innocence but his efforts were in vain; see Alexander Davison, *Observations on the Third Report of the Commissioners of Military Enquiry* (London: Henry Reynell, 1807); and Alexander Davison, *Syphax's letters on the trial by jury, illustrated in the case of Alexander Davison, Esq., as they recently appeared in the British Guardian* (London: Chapple, 1809).
- 108 *Morning Post*, 3 April 1807. For the details of Davison's coal fraud, see Drinkwater, "Third Report," 14-28.
- 109 Charles Williams usually signed himself "Ansell" in this period and this pseudonym has been noted in pencil on the British Museum copy of the print. Mary Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 10 vols (London: British Museum, 1870-1952), 8: 414-15, no. 10538.
- 110 Drinkwater, "Third Report," 18-20.
- 111 For the meaning of "snob" in the early nineteenth century, see *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, June 2017), s.v. "snob," <http://www.oed.com/>.
- 112 The sword may refer specifically to the "Turkish scimitar" that Nelson bequeathed to Davison in his will. See *Morning Post*, 26 Dec. 1805; and Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 45.
- 113 *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1807.

- 114 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 31 Jan. 1807.
- 115 James Elmes, "Descriptive and Critical Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures painted by British Artists, from Subjects selected from the History of Great Britain, for, and in the possession of, Alexander Davison, Esq." *Annals of the Fine Arts* 1, no. 2 (1816): iii-iv, 242-54.
- 116 Elmes, "Descriptive and Critical Catalogue," iii-iv.
- 117 Elmes suggested that the inferior quality of Copley's *Lady Jane Grey* was unfavourably highlighted by its hanging opposite the same artist's "excellent" *Death of Chatham*. Elmes, "Descriptive and Critical Catalogue," 250.
- 118 For the collapse of Davison's bank—Davison, Noel, Templer, Middleton & Wedgwood of Pall Mall—see Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 448-51; and F. G. Hilton Price, *A Handbook of London Bankers: With Some Account of their Predecessors, the Early Goldsmiths* (London: Catto & Windus, 1876), 47.
- 119 [Farebrother], *Entire Property*, 45-48.
- 120 *Morning Chronicle*, 12 April 1817; Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 453. See also Denys Mostyn Forrest, *St James's Square: People, Houses, Happenings* (London: Quiller Press, 1986), 99.
- 121 "Works in Hand," *Annals of the Fine Arts* 2, no. 5 (1817): 289. The second Duke of Northumberland died on 10 July 1817.
- 122 Pavière, *Devis Family*, 132, no. 114; Stephen Whittle, *Arthur William Devis, 1762-1822* (Preston: Harris Museum & Art Gallery, 2000), 22, 59, no. 34.
- 123 *The Examiner*, 1 May 1808. For the cost of the commission, see *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Politics, etc.*, 6 March 1819.
- 124 "Works in Hand," *Annals of the Fine Arts* 2, no. 5 (1817): 289. The *Annals* had reported in October the previous year that Devis was at work on the painting: "Works in Hand," *Annals of the Fine Arts* 1, no. 2 (1816): 258. It is difficult to see where exactly *Magna Charta* would have fitted within the carefully organized dining room hang. It is the same size as Wilkie's *Alfred*, suggesting that it may have been intended to replace that painting over the door. I am grateful to Martyn Downer for ascertaining the dimensions of the work for me.
- 125 Devis's source for the subject was Hume. See Hume, *The History of England*, 2: 79.
- 126 While Clarke was well known to Davison, Tupper and Cheesman were friends of the artist and do not appear to have had any connection to the patron, suggesting that Devis may have been allowed some creative leeway in whom he included. Davison gave substantial support to Clarke's biography of Nelson; see James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur, *The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson, K. B. from his Lordship's Manuscripts*, 2 vols (London: Printed by T. Bensley for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809). For Devis's friendships with Tupper and Cheesman, see Sydney Herbert Pavière, "Biographical Notes on the Devis Family of Painters," *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 25 (1936-37): 116, 163.
- 127 Devis's key gives both the name of the Medieval baron (above) and the modern-day noble (below). In 1822, presumably in response to a commission from Davison, Thomas Willement, "Heraldic Artist to the King", produced a manuscript "to explain in what way the affinity [between the Medieval barons and the living nobles] exists; and to trace the authorities on which such armorial bearings have been given." See Thomas Willement, "Explanation of a picture painted by the late Arthur William Devis for Alexander Davison Esqr. representing Stephen Langton Archbishop of Canterbury shewing to the Barons of England in the Abbey Church of Saint Edmund at Bury the charter of liberties that had been granted by King Henry the 1st and on which the Great Charter of King John was subsequently founded," Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, Yale Center for British Art, D497.D48 W5 1822.
- 128 James Barry, *The Progress of Human Knowledge and Culture: A Description of the Paintings by James Barry in the Lecture Hall or "Great Room" of the RSA in London written by the Artist*, ed. David G. C. Allan (London: Calder Walker Associates, 2005), 55 and 62.
- 129 *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Politics, etc.*, 13 March 1819.
- 130 For Hastings's role in Davison's trial, see "The Whole Proceedings", 186-88; and Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 438.
- 131 Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 327.
- 132 [British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts,] *Catalogue of the Works of British Artists placed in the Gallery of The British Institution, Pall-Mall, for Exhibition and Sale. 1819.* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co., 1819), 14, no. 92.
- 133 For Wilkie's exhibition in 1812, see Allan Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie; With His Journals, Tours, and Critical Remarks on Works of Art; and A Selection from his Correspondence*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1843), 1: 351-52. For Westall's exhibition in 1814, see Richard Westall, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of a Selection of Works of Richard Westall, R. A. including Two Hundred and Forty Pictures and Drawings, which have never before been exhibited* (London: Joyce Gold, 1814), 3, no. 7.
- 134 [Mr. Stanley], *A Catalogue of a Splendid Collection of Pictures, by British Artists, The Subjects taken from English History: Painted expressly for Alexander Davison, Esq. which Will be Sold by Auction, By Mr Stanley, at his Great Room, Maddox-Street, Hanover-Square, On Saturday the 28th of June, 1823, at One O'clock* (London: Gold and Walton, 1823). For the results of the auction, see "Mr Alexander Davison's Pictures," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 93, no. 2 (1823): 64-65, and Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 453.
- 135 Alexander Davison to William Davison, June 1823, in Downer, *Nelson's Purse*, 453.
- 136 "Deaths," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 100, no. 1 (1830): 93.

- 137 *The Conspiracy of Babington* was published on 1 March 1830, and *Magna Charta* was published on 1 July 1833, accompanied by a key identifying the portraits. For these prints, see Pavière, *Devis Family*, 121, 132, nos. 11, 114. Although *The Conspiracy of Babington* has been lost, the painting of *Magna Charta* remains in the possession of Davison's descendants; my thanks to Martyn Downer for this information.
- 138 Lippincott, "Expanding on Portraiture", 75.

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# A Photobook of the Shimmer: Pearl Fisheries, Photography, and British Colonialism in South Asia

Natasha Eaton

## Abstract

*This article examines Lionel Wendt's photographs of the Sri Lankan shoreline and its pearling economy during the British occupation in the 1930s and 1940s. It considers the light they shed on labour, as well as the tangled relationships between wealth and waste, in an environment where the detritus (cultch) generated by harvesting luxury pearls also formed the most common building materials. The ambivalences of Wendt's aesthetic are connected to the qualities of pearlescence and the shimmer, which themselves were freighted with both metaphorical meaning and technical possibility, for theorists of modernity like Walter Benjamin and early scientists of photography alike. Considering what was, and was not depicted in Wendt's photographs, the article describes the materiality of the coercive labour that existed in the Gulf of Manaar, as well as its connected imaginaries, both local and colonial.*

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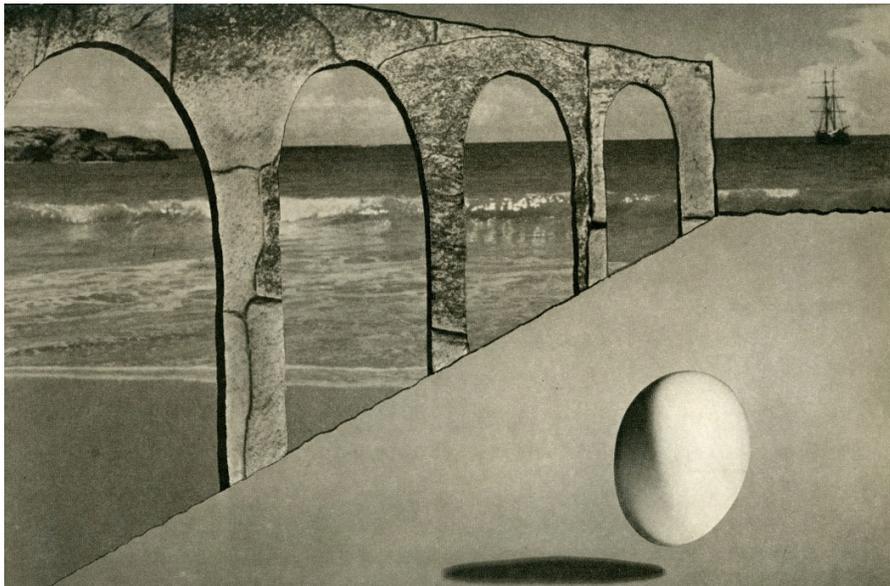
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## Photobook Aesthetics and Shadows Beyond “An Eye for the Tropics”

*But an earthly stone Flashing here and there Changed into a dove  
Changed into a bell Into immensity, into a piercing Wind; Into a  
phosphorescent arrow, Into salt of the sky.*<sup>1</sup>

Writing with the memory of his deceased friend Lionel Wendt (1900–1944) in mind, Neruda described silence “intensified into a stone” where “broken circles are closed”.<sup>2</sup> The Sri Lanka-based photographer Lionel Wendt is now best known for his posthumously published “Photobook”.<sup>3</sup> Wendt’s photomontage has been most conventionally and variously comprehended through its pastiche of influences and motifs such as De Chirico’s futurist arches, Magritte’s “Ceci n’est pas un oeuf,” Piero della Francesca’s Brera Madonna, Georges Bataille’s rumination on the story of the eye, and the recurrent vignette of a distant brig.<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1) Although he clearly held great admiration for those artistic circles he came into contact with in Europe, it seems a bit too summary merely to insert him within these narratives.



**Figure 1.**

Lionel Wendt, *Gay Abandon*, circa 1940, photogravure, from *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London, Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd, 1950). Digital image courtesy of Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd.

I would like to conjecture that there is another kind of more localized geopolitics at stake—one which is sometimes a faint or spectral presence in his images. These images are only one aspect of what I propose is a kind of virtual photobook or distinctly colonial Ceylonese genre of photography.

Today this photography is much desired: the late nineteenth-century firm Plâté & co., based now in downtown Colombo, has (given the obscure subject matter) quite a substantial collection of glass slides to do with pearling by many photographers (though none of them by Wendt), to which I shall return. Wendt is otherwise very much present in the city's reverence for Group 43, a modern art movement formed in Colombo in 1943, and the Photographic Society of Ceylon. He's also tied into a network of private collectors, who like to brandish him as the great artist of the city, in spite of his obvious colonial position, and suspect cosmopolitanism associated with his time in Western Europe. As part of my fieldwork this spring, I devised the notion of an essay as photobook. Wendt's hundreds of photographs are a miscellaneous, sprawling constellation of collections scattered across many countries.

I want to anchor his work within the environs of Sri Lanka, that is, the photographic practices, commercial and otherwise, present there during his lifetime, so as to flesh out a mid-twentieth-century aesthetic not much studied by scholars. I take *photobook* to be an expanded term, as a kind of collecting perhaps not dissimilar to how one might approach assembling or interpreting an album. "Photobook" can and does encompass postcards, official publications, and *mestijzo* painting, to exist as a veritable ragbag. For instance, Skeen & co's azure/argent moonlit beach sold as a postcard might pertain to Wendt's artistic attempts to capture the shadows typical of shoreline aesthetics ([Fig. 2](#)). But Wendt's manner of seeing goes beyond "an eye for the tropics" where, as Derek Walcott puts it, a scene needs to have "proper palm trees".<sup>5</sup> Rather, there is at times in Wendt's extensive oeuvre a conflation of shoreline shadow with the pain of labouring bodies that is difficult to account for aesthetically ([Fig. 3](#) and [Fig. 4](#)). The frequency of crouching figures' backs, presented close-up, more than counters Wendt's current reputation as a champion of the erotic male body. Wendt's contemporary, the colonial fisheries' official James Hornell (who was employed in Colombo from 1900 to 1906), practised a kind of photography that sought out the blurred sepia-toned movements of multiple bodies in action, and continued to publish on colonial maritime economy in the decades following. Wendt's use of photogravure, by contrast, and precise study of the male body, might be seen as attempt to both escape from and celebrate labour.



**Figure 2.**  
Andrée Photographic Studio, Colombo, Postcard No.104, The Seashore, Colombo by Moonlight, circa 1930. Collection Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, Delhi. Digital image courtesy of Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, Delhi.



**Figure 3.**  
Lionel Wendt, Untitled Study, circa 1940s, gelatin silver print on paper. Digital image courtesy of Lionel Wendt Foundation for the Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka.



**Figure 4.**

Lionel Wendt, *Untitled Study*, circa 1940s, gelatin silver print on paper.  
Digital image courtesy of Lionel Wendt Foundation for the Arts, Colombo,  
Sri Lanka.

To think about the photobook in this way also allows us to ruminate on photography *qua* analogy and the magical. As is well known, Walter Benjamin being inspired by photography and mechanical reproduction made aura formative to his theories on the entanglement of aesthetics and politics. What interests me here is how his fascination with photography, labour, and magic have had such a formative role in studies of colonialism. Both Christopher Pinney and Michael Taussig make the case for a kind of Benjaminesque legacy—one where perceptions of colonial realities are infused with hashish, shamanism, and the fuzziness of the holograph.<sup>6</sup> In their work, Pinney and Taussig conceptualize photography as both the palimpsest and the interval. There is something of the proto-cinematic about the photographic when read in this anthropological light. What I mean by this is that there is a strong sense of movement, depth, and interruption that can be read in relation to Wendt's seemingly often oblique engagement with labour.

The same quality of movement, tied to improbable or magical transformations, is seen in both Neruda's poem and *Gay Abandon*, which each metamorphose a stone into the weightless and possibly the ephemeral. Neruda's "earthly stone" becomes a dove, a bell, into "immensity". The abstract stone in Wendt's photograph is similarly in suspension, perhaps caught in a thick air with a shadow cast. For the photographer and the poet, a "stone" and its play with light could encapsulate qualities of "phosphorescence" and illumination, and how this might pertain to the materiality of pearlescence. Through the lens of colonial photography, this sense of "stone" can be projected onto a divers' labour, the pearl, their shells, and transformations between detritus and value. In this sense, I propose that in various ways the pearl economy was critical to forging modern photographic practices and notions of memory. Here I'm less interested in viewing pearls as rarities than in analysing pearl shells' status as both the waste and the currency of British colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Certainly in the Gulf of Manaar it would seem that the need for lime (*chunam*) made from oyster shells (essential to building/architecture) long pre-dated the market for seawater pearls.

### **Echoate Modernity and the Archaic**



**Figure 5.**

Unknown creator, Pearl divers waiting to embark on a voyage of pearl fishing, circa 1920s. Collection Natasha Eaton. Digital image courtesy of Plate & co., Colombo, Sri Lanka.

In the sepia glare of the early sun, two boats' worth of divers bare their hands up to, for, and against the world (Fig. 5). The janissary and his team stand a little at a distance seemingly engaged or not; it's difficult to tell,

given the scrubby quality of the blown up reproduction and its veering chiaroscuro. Waiting for the two boats from which the government wants them to dive, the divers have now been made to chuck shells. For the outfit, a pearl or two picked from shell flesh under lazy scrutiny will not go awry. Bleached in, stained by the light, their limbs outstretched almost beyond measure, the divers offer a glimpse of a kind of economy of pearling not otherwise recorded in or by photography. It's a kind of pearling of the anti-commons: there is a coercive as well as performative aspect to both the activity and the image. A dugout canoe dragged up to the *kotthu* (the official shelling enclosure) just to bestow perspective; the shoreline as a dumping ground for shells and the shoreline made to cohere as the shelling commons *in toto*. The image is titled "Pearl Divers Waiting to Embark on a Voyage of Pearl Fishery c.1920's [sic.], Marichchikadi", intimating that even waiting turns into coerced labour, which otherwise would seem to have no surplus value.<sup>8</sup>

More theoretically, there have been two principal ways of thinking about the relationship between the modern self and the shell: the shell as channelling sound and memory, and as a metaphor for personal psychic terrains. For Walter Benjamin, seashell sounds take two forms—a mythical model that has seashells as conduits for voices from a communal past and a materialist model whereby seashells resonate as the chambers of individual, located experience: "what Benjamin hears in the conch is the primordial murmurings of the universe, but in the form of their smallest acoustical singularities."<sup>9</sup> It brings to mind his Berlin childhood: "like a mollusk in its shell, I had my abode in the nineteenth century, which now lies hollow before me like an empty shell."<sup>10</sup> The shell is also the space for distorted self-reflection. In Germaine Dulac and Antonin Artaud's proto-surrealist film, *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1928), the deluded priest drinks from and stares at his reflection in a giant shell only to see how the shell metamorphoses into a mirror and throws into space what might be one way of exploring the unconscious in modernity.<sup>11</sup> The process of thinking and writing may itself be understood as "oyster-like. We inhabit strange folds, closures, openings. We dive into the oyster's chaotic insides, the pool of confusing liquid that its shell contains like diverse that plunge in head first in search of pearls."<sup>12</sup>

During the epoch of British colonization of the ocean and the shoreline of the Gulf of Manaar, the figure of the diver came to be increasingly romanticized. The world of the underwater was played with by Jules Verne, Georges Bizet, and Jules Michelet, and materialized by the eerie phosphorescent light of the aquarium and the emergence of narratives of submarine adventures and underwater photography.<sup>13</sup> But the "birth of the aquarium" and "tragedy of the commons" also signalled the rise of regimes, which viewed the sea as a giant aquarium that needed to be enclosed.<sup>14</sup> Although there is fascinating

literature on this position, there are also alternatives where the multi-layered and more uncertain notions of temporality, space, and rights must be accounted for. More productively, administrative materials taken from the Manaar colonial archive can be entangled with photographic practices (and their absence) to suggest unusual and sometimes elliptical alignments of art and politics. For instance, in Wendt's "Gay Abandon" (Fig. 1), the anachronistic Dutch brig approaching the shoreline and the shape of the stone akin to one type of pearl valued in the Sri Lankan jewel market, can also suggest a complex economy of pearl trading which shaped the architecture and the shoreline of the Gulf of Manaar. Stone, I insist in this essay, is not necessarily pearl but also "culch" (broken shells, grit, and rocks in which oyster beds form) or the diver's 15 to 20lb "Christ Stone", the function of which is unknown beyond its importance to the divers, many of whom were Christians. It also resonates with the world of sharks, shamans, and the diver. <sup>15</sup>

To mark these overlaps between art and politics, Wendt's photographic montage works as a point of entry into the colonial economy of the pearl and the pearl shell. This mode of inquiry is not intended as a comprehensive study of Wendt's work but rather his scattered photographs (posthumously gathered and published, then recently republished, and now rumoured to be the subject of an upcoming Tate exhibition) serve as means of approaching the status of photography in relation to pearls as materials, as trade, as magical substance, and as waste. <sup>16</sup> Wendt's family were wealthy burghers, who made money from luxury trades and jurisprudence—a kind of economic jurisprudence built on the backs of pearl divers.

Relatively recently, Taussig has turned self-reflexively to his own photographs, drawings, and fieldwork notebooks, all of which point to "another order of reality altogether"; a "wild miscellany". <sup>17</sup> Photographs act as devices for delving into economic exploitation and all of its strange "beauty". <sup>18</sup> Photographs also find a mnemonic parallel in Taussig's excursus on Simryn Gill's *Pearls* (1989-) (Fig. 6). Informed by the rhetoric of bibliomancy, Gill either mines second-hand bookstores and flea markets for works by Fanon, Benjamin, and many provocative or playful writers (Borges *et al.*), or she cuts out from books sent as gifts. In both cases, she carefully destroys the text to fashion what she believes to be prescient constellations of words, which she carefully folds and folds over and over, to gesture towards the layers of both a pearl and the act of reading. She sent Taussig one of her pearl necklaces from Australia, each pearl being made up of a line cut from Walter Benjamin's essays "Unpacking my Library", "Letter to Gerhom Scholem on Kafka", and "Berlin Childhood". The incision of her knife into the text steals and transforms the book's organs, so that the content of the book is no longer accessible but is still present in pearl form. Asked to

write on Gill's paper pearls, Taussig ruminates on the importance of photography to her practice. So fragile, perhaps such pearls are untouchable; their viscosity has to operate through the photographic image.



**Figure 6.**

Simryn Gill, Pearls, Joseph Conrad 'Heart of Darkness' in Three Stories: Youth, *Heart of Darkness*, *The End of the Tether*, (London, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1948), 2006. From Gill's ongoing *Pearls* series of paper necklaces, 1999 onwards. Private Collection, London. Digital image courtesy of Simryn Gill.

Sometimes worn by friends and strangers in the images, the pearl necklaces are of course criticisms of those worn by society women and maharajahs as photographed by the likes of Cecil Beaton. Wendt's engagement with the economy of the pearl is more difficult to pin down. Unlike the photography of James Hornell—the British official who I discuss below, best known for his extensive investigation of the Manaar fisheries—Wendt's poetic interventions are quiet, uncrowded, meditative. Neither is he the participant observer as exemplified by his near contemporary Malinowski's study of resting pearl divers on the Trobriand shorelines.

Perhaps intended as a critique of the kind of administrative photography associated with nacreous trafficking, they allude to a vanishing world of trading, melancholia, and nostalgia. This nostalgia would come to haunt Neruda's verse. In their works, neither Wendt nor Neruda employed a coherent narrative: both their verse and photographs (as precursors of Gill's paper necklaces) can be read as singular "pearls of wisdom" loosely strung together. Wendt and Neruda toured north-west Sri Lanka together during the 1930s and 1940s. For thousands of years, the Gulf of Manaar or *Salubham—The Sea of Grain* - constituted the world's most important source of oyster shell, chank shell, lime, and pearls. The major South Indian ruler, Muhammad Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic (r. 1749-1795), refused to allow any pearl fisheries during the Dutch VOC's occupation of Ceylon. After his death and British conquest of Ceylon the following year, the English East India Company attempted relentlessly to extract pearls from the Gulf of Manaar as an important new resource aimed at expanding markets for luxury goods in Russia and Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Although there has been admirable scholarship on the coming of a machine-driven modernity and its "market imaginary" in late nineteenth-early twentieth-century Sri Lanka, what must also be accounted for is the persistence of the archaic and its tactical intervention in the formation of a fraught colonial modernity.<sup>20</sup> The archaic is the world of the impoverished diver, who worked naked without the right to a diving suit, nose clip, or his own diving stone, forced to dive for up to twelve hours at a time with little reward and limited opportunity to sell his oysters at the daily sunset shore auction.<sup>21</sup> It is also the world of the male or female itinerant shark shaman and their complicit "foe"—white colonialists and itinerant witches.

## Photography as Pearlescent

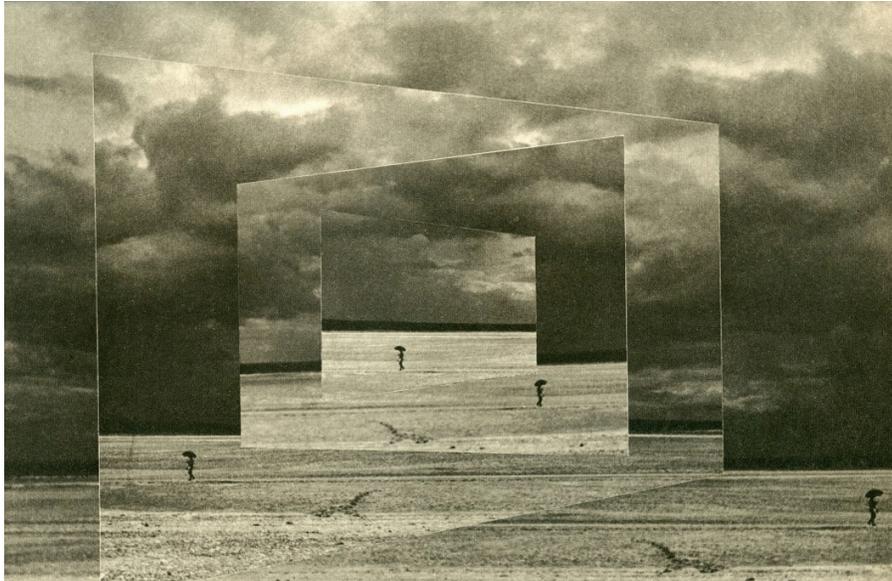
In *Strange Decor* (Fig. 7), the seemingly random placement of a 1941 issue of *Russia Today*, lying on the quayside and showing its headline "Shaw on Stalin", the spectral presence of an eighteenth-century brig, and the cut-off telegraph station pole opens up a world of maritime telegraphy. The cultural theorist John Frow's insights on thingness hones in on the agency of a stone, a camera, and objects in a scene where human presence is everywhere implied yet not rendered. Such metamorphoses can be said to allegorise "a world in which a commercial trader is also a telegraph pole, and the telegraph pole takes on the human capacity to listen to the messages that pass through it [. . .]. The fusion is never complete."<sup>22</sup> Whilst Frow's is a suitably messy world of things, perhaps there is also room in his account for subaltern notions of magic. The broken-down telegraph station, deemed not worthy of being featured whole within the image, and the brig-as-ghost ship, speak to an economy already passed. Shark Charmers had once harnessed

the telegraph wire to their huts as magical channels. Wendt's *Adventure in Space* (Fig. 8), reverses itself laterally twice. Offset by a brooding horizon, a man with an umbrella wonders the silverine shoreline alone. Possibly a Shark Shaman chanting mantras or praying until the pearling boats return, he might—unbeknown to us—be communicating with his two fellow shamans, that is, that isolated shaman regarding an Argentine fish talisman in his beach hut; the other working with the divers twenty miles out at sea . . .



**Figure 7.**

Lionel Wendt, *Strange Décor*, 1933-34, photogravure, from *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London, Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd, 1950). Digital image courtesy of Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd.



**Figure 8.**

Lionel Wendt, *Adventures in Space*, circa 1930s-1940s, photogravure, from *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London, Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd, 1950). Digital image courtesy of Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd.

Pearls and pearl diving are also at the heart of the mythical formation of fieldwork-based anthropology and the parallel evolution of photography and its prehistories.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps photography from the outset (even in its predecessors) was to be at least partially grounded or framed by pearls and pearl shells. Frequently presented and kept safe in mother-of-pearl inlaid leather cases, it can be conjectured that nineteenth-century photographs are like pearls protected by a suitably shell-like lining. But there's more to it than that.

The inventor of the kaleidoscope was physicist, mathematician, and astronomer Sir David Brewster, who is most famous for his discovery of the photoelastic effect—a procedure which helped to bring into being optical mineralogy. His work was also important for later experiments to do with the photographic plate. Brewster fixed a piece of mother-of-pearl to an instrument for measuring angles with a “cement” of resin and beeswax. When removing the piece of mother-of-pearl from the cement in a hard state, using a knife to prise open the compound, Brewster found that “the plate of mother of pearl had left a clean impression of its own surface, and had actually given the cement the property of exhibiting its peculiar colours.”<sup>24</sup> What intrigued Brewster was that the colours and the light of mother-of-pearl were not of an innate chemical nature; rather, they resided on its surface. When he examined this, he perceived a grooved exterior, “closely resembling the delicate texture of the skin at the tip of an infant's finger, or the minute corrugations often observable on surfaces which are covered with

oil paint or varnish.”<sup>25</sup> This impression of pearlescence could also be seen on the wax; these slight “mirrors” or material(ist) rainbows have certain grooves which break up a beam of light that falls upon the plates of shell:

each of which is reflected to the eye from the bottom and sides of the little grooves, and assumes a particular colour according to the angle at which it is reflected, the cause of iridescence was placed beyond all doubt.<sup>26</sup>

This discovery triggered a mimetic/technological approximation of pearlescence. Several of Brewster’s later experiments sought out “this singularly beautiful appearance”, this particular combination of rainbow and iridescence through what he perceived to be the filmic quality of light.<sup>27</sup> He believed that pearlescence could be transferred through the mediums of either gum Arabic or balsam of Tolu (South American resin tapped from the living trunks of *Myroxylon toluiferum*). Pressed between two plates of mother-of-pearl, a thin, iridescent film would be elicited. The effect of pearlescence could also be communicated by hammering mother-of-pearl onto a clean surface of lead or to a compound of mercury and bismuth. To dissect iridescence was to search for grooves. Sometimes there could be perceived 2,000 grooves per inch square within a certain pearlescent imprint. Often there were so many grooves that they were incalculable. But “the light will remain even when the mother of pearl is ground up.”<sup>28</sup>

Taken as the mnemonics of light, pearlescence would assume a critical agency in the formation of British currency. Mr John Barton (1771–1834) of the British Royal Mint took mother-of-pearl to be a model for British coinage: the number of grooves should somehow be equivalent. He devised an engine, which sought to approximate the number of grooves perceived by Brewster to be present on the inside of a shell.<sup>29</sup> :

Such surfaces, when viewed on a cloudy day present but few appearances of colour; but when the light of the sun or of gas falls upon them an extremely brilliant display of colours is the result:—every gradation of tint is exhibited, and a change is produced by every motion either of the object or the source of illumination.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps mother-of-pearl could itself become coinage or become akin to (perhaps even a prototype for) certain forms of photography. Barton, following Brewster, experimented with aquafortis, nitric acid, and “the

cutting energies of the lapidary” in order to separate layers of mother-of-pearl. Through these experiments, scaly, transparent laminated structures could be made into impressions. These impressions could supplement tortoiseshell or veneers from certain woods, to be the mirrors of materials. Impressions of mother-of-pearl could, with turpentine varnish, be drawn onto films or plates. Then the shell is repeatedly brushed with strong, nitrous acid; those parts not varnished are eaten away. The varnish is then washed off with oil of turpentine. It is possible to cut several films of shell together. They are then soaked in warm water so as to prize them apart from one another.

In the early days of the daguerreotype, photographers intended to use cut sheets of mother-of-pearl as photographic plates. Although never popularized, perhaps this play with the materiality of light would have been one way to save on the costs of the expensive silver or silver-coppered plates of the daguerreotype. Like indigo, which was sometimes used either as the base or the colorant of photographs of indigo production (Fig. 9), pearl shell and silver-inscribed colonial photographic processes were considered to be two of the major currencies of empire.<sup>31</sup> Unlike silver and indigo, pearl shell proved too shimmering and too brittle to be put in the service of colonial representation and its media technologies.



**Figure 9.**

Oscar Jean-Baptiste Mallite, Indigo cake cutting, Allahabad, India, circa 1880s. Collection of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Digital image courtesy of Director and the Board of Trustees, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

But the shimmering nature of pearl would persist in two ways. Pearls and pearlescence really pushed photography. By this, I mean in terms of the kind of light that was involved—the search for the shimmer. The shimmer bears within itself a slight iridescence that incites movement in and of the image.<sup>32</sup> Alongside the careful study of the variegated iridescence of seawater (explored by Franz Boas, most famously), pearl trading had a powerful effect on the entanglement of anthropology and photography.<sup>33</sup> Branislaw Malinowski’s relatively perfunctory photographic practice was radically improved—both in technique and by his visual engagement with the subject—once he encountered the pearl trader Billy Hancock in the Trobriand Islands.<sup>34</sup> At one time, Malinowski captures Billy photographically with a pearl in his left hand. Later he would complain that pearl traders had tried to intervene in the Trobriand *kula* economy with their crassly made arm shells. Despite this, the pearl trader and the anthropologist playfully exchange places with their respective cameras, or Billy stands shyly (Fig. 10), to the right of Malinowski: “Bill developed 3 rolls all of them good. Only the picture of the two of us is very bad.”<sup>35</sup>



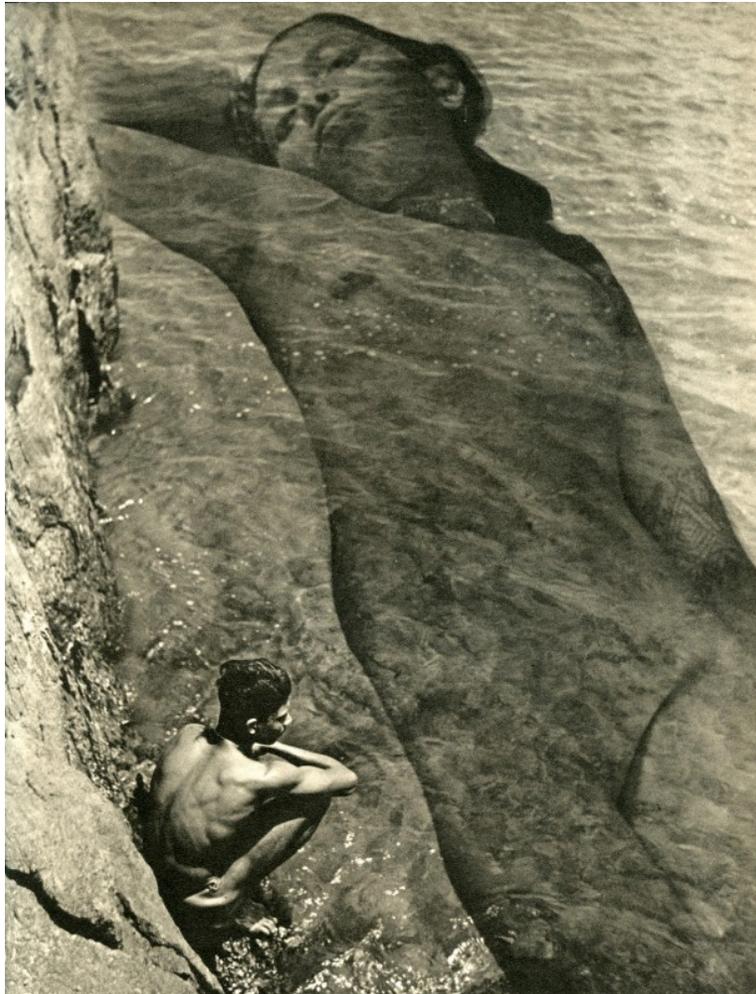
**Figure 10.**

Unknown creator, Branislaw Malinowski and Billy Hancock, circa 1918. Collection The London School of Economics (MALINOWSKI/3/25/6). Digital image courtesy of The London School of Economics.

## “Unresolvable Oscillations” and the Shark Charmer

Whilst for Malinowski, it was Billy the creole pearl trader who helped him to experiment with his photographic practice—a practice dominated by the ocean and the shoreline—for Wendt, working a few years later, the diver off-duty opened up another way of reading the pearling economy. A crouching

figure, perhaps a fisherman or diver, dreams of a nubile girl shimmering in the watery depths below (Fig. 11). This languid figure inhabits the economy of sea wives and representations of the trans-oceanic Indian/African goddess, Mami Wata.<sup>36</sup> Increasingly demonized since the 1970s, Mami Wata participates in a wider cult of globalizing salt water “fetishisms” and their “unresolvable oscillations”.<sup>37</sup> Certainly in eastern Indonesia, mythical and fetishized sea wives assisted pearl divers and in return demanded store-bought goods, which divers could ill afford.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 11.**

Lionel Wendt, *Dreaming*, 1933–34, photogravure, from *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London, Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd, 1950). Digital image courtesy of Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd.

The sea wives’ presence is still crucial to the workings of local and long-distance commodity trade and debt. In Papua New Guinea, pearl shells “epitomise a kind of cultural metamorphosis that has been central to our understanding and misunderstanding of Melanesian life.”<sup>39</sup> Pearl shells are

either dismissed as emblems of vanity or else they are restricted to a utilitarian purpose. Pearl shells constituted a form of coercive currency as can be seen in the case of pioneering prospectors who flew them over the Papua New Guinea Highlands in their thousands. *Kina* (Melanesian *pidgin* for pearl shell) was used in complex patterns of ornament and exchange. White colonialists became enthralled to shell money and the cargo cult which they sought to deflect through the coercive introduction of paper currency from the 1950s. <sup>40</sup> Banks and government film companies issued propaganda films and booklets, which sought to justify paper money in lieu of the “inferior” status of pigs and shells, although in the South Highlands, banknotes known as *kina* notes, were sometimes likened to *kina* shells. <sup>41</sup>

Strangely given this rich anthropological literature, the shell culture of the Gulf of Manaar in the colonial period is relatively absent from discussion, despite the devastating attempts of British colonial authorities to re-engineer the shoreline and its customary economics. <sup>42</sup> Manaar divers were repeatedly vilified by colonial officials intent on squeezing as much labour from the subaltern body as possible. <sup>43</sup> Invited to the home of the Gomez family settled at Kilakari, the colonial zoologist, seafaring ethnographer, and the chief colonial official charged with inspecting the pearl fisheries, James Hornell interviewed the local head diver, M. Kirutuneia. M. Kirutuneia claimed to be seventy years old and to have laboured as a pearl diver since he was nine years old. Ever on the relentless search for objective data on the nomadic lives of elusive oysters, Hornell wrote somewhat disappointedly that M. Kirutuneia “had much to say, but few facts of consequence were elicited.” <sup>44</sup> He also complained that very few local men would dive for the British at any time, especially when plans for a second fishing season were introduced:

The divers utilized, with their usual skill, the stalking horse cry of “Sharks on the banks”. As any stick is good enough to beat a dog, so any excuse is considered good enough to utilize when the divers for any reason wish a fishery to come to an end. At one time it is “sharks”; at another, the alleged scarcity of oysters, “chippie illei”, illness, rumours of cholera, small profits, rough weather, chill winds are all utilized with the utmost cunning but the true reason is that they have made enough money, is always kept in the background. <sup>45</sup>

Hornell advocated replacing divers with dredging machines (then being introduced by British colonialists in northern Australia and the Torres Strait). A second alternative would be to lure Arab divers from the Persian Gulf—men he considered more disciplined and able. <sup>46</sup> In “Problems of the Conditions of

Parawas,” Hornell examined what he saw as the inexplicable *mestizjo* nature of the Parawa (divers) “caste”.<sup>47</sup> Although he dedicated much of his career to close empirical study of shell detritus and the lives of oysters, Hornell relies here (as many officials did) on what can be termed the recursive archive.<sup>48</sup> It is as if his analysis of the Parawa caste had to generate afresh the rhetoric of previous colonial accounts:

The Parawas are distinctly *brachycephatic* whereas the Dravidians who constitute the higher castes in South India are notably long-headed and approximate closely in physical characteristics to the Mediterranean race. The Parawas are probably derived from ancient elements akin to the progenitors of the Polynesians—perhaps the Nagas of the ancient Tamil clerics.<sup>49</sup>

According to earlier colonial accounts, “poverty was the compelling power” to dive.<sup>50</sup> Many men went blind from diving and it seems to have been a common colonial practice to make the blind and the crippled dive until old age or death. Often the British forced divers to dive way too deep—with fatal consequences. In return for their hard labour, which included having to lie on their hard-won bluebottle infested open oysters, waiting for the oyster to rot, which enabled pearls to be extracted, divers could buy small pieces of stone from the local rajahs to establish their own villages.<sup>51</sup> The purchase of local “waste” stone brought with it a certain authority in that the Parawas could then negotiate to elect their own chief, known as the King of the Parawas, if they gifted the local rajah an annual present in lieu of “other” taxes. The king or “don” acquired revenue from districts as far afield as Quilon and Bengal, although the British attempted to reduce his influence and revenue as far as possible.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, given his fixation with the regulation of the pearl/oyster driven bazaar, which I discuss below, Hornell cited what he believed to be an agreement between the Parawa divers and the local rajah whereby:

guards and tribunals were to be established to prevent all disputes and quarrels arising from this open market, every man being subject to his own judge, and his case being decided by him; all payments are then also divided between the headsmen of the Parawas, who are the owners of that fishery [. . .]. They had weapons and fisheries of their own, with which they are able to defend themselves.<sup>53</sup>

There was, however, also a magical/nomadic aspect to the rights of the Parawas. Whether Roman Catholics, Muslims, or Hindus, the Parawa divers relied on the powers and presence of the Shark Charmer. Hornell's contemporary Edgar Thurston, the curator of the Madras Government Museum, became fixated with local shamans and what he termed their omens and superstitions (Fig. 12).<sup>54</sup> Although his fascination with these men and women was far from unique, what makes his investigations intriguing are his brief discussion of the proximity of the shaman's hut—tied by an electric cable—to the local telegraph pole, and his penchant for collecting silver "Argentine" talismans, which possibly had been used by Parawa divers (Fig. 13).<sup>55</sup> Perhaps both conjure sympathetic magic as telepathy, which here functions as a disjunctive, hybrid term capturing the British colonial phobia and fetishization of knowledge systems that colonial officials could not fully comprehend.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 12.**

Edgar Thurston, South Indian Holy Man, circa 1900-1906. Collection Royal Anthropological Institute, London (RAI 6133). Digital image courtesy of Royal Anthropological Institute.



**Figure 13.**

Edgar Thurston, Silver South Indian Charms, circa 1900, from *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India* by Edgar Thurston (London; Leipsic: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), facing p. 160. Collection The British Library (T36620). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Divers would only agree to search for oysters, if they were protected by at least two charmers. Known also as shark binders (*kadal-kotti* in Tamil; *hai-banda* in Hindustani, or locally as *Pillal kadlar*), these shamans travelled for the seasonal pearl fishing. Perceived to have extraordinary powers, which also included controlling the winds, the currents, and land animals, the nomadic Shark Charmers often worked in pairs at a distance:

One goes out regularly in the head pilot's boat. The other performs certain ceremonies on shore. He is stripped naked and shut up in a room, where no person sees him from the period of the sailing of the boats until their return. He has before him a brass basin full of water, containing one male and one female fish made of silver. If any accident should happen from a shark at sea, it is believed that one of these fishes is seen to bite the other. The divers likewise believe that, if the conjurer should be dissatisfied, he has the power of making the sharks attack them, on which account he is sure of receiving liberal presents from all quarters.

57

Associated with volt sorcery and sympathetic magic, the Shark Charmer had for centuries held an important place in Portuguese, Dutch, and British territories in southern India and Sri Lanka, and it's certain that without them

no fisheries would have operated.<sup>58</sup> Verbal descriptions of the charmers describe them as usually tall, dark, long-haired, and wearing beads, with “mysterious characters” marking his arms to resemble a South American medicine man.<sup>59</sup> Romanticized or otherwise, the figure of the Shark Charmer was the totemic/taboo figure around which the fisheries were organized. They can be glimpsed in photography, if only in terms of the gestalt.

Edgar Thurston observed, in his typically *bricoleur* manner:

It is recorded by Marco Polo that South Indian pearl divers call in the services of an Abraiman (Brāhman?) to charm the sharks. “And their charm holds good for that day only; for at night they dissolve the charm, so that the fishes can work mischief at their will.” [. . .] Before the fishery of 1889, at which I was present, the divers of Kilakarai on the Madura coast, as a preliminary to starting for the scene thereof, performed a ceremony, at which prayers were offered for protection against the attacks of sharks.

“The only precaution,” Tennent writes, “to which the Ceylon diver devotedly resorts is the mystic ceremony of the shark-charmer, whose power is believed to be hereditary. Nor is it supposed that the value of his incantations is at all dependent upon the religious faith professed by the operator, for the present head of the family happens to be a Roman Catholic. At the time of our visit, this mysterious functionary was ill, and unable to attend; but he sent an accredited substitute, who assured me that, although he was himself ignorant of the grand and mystic secret, the fact of his presence, as a representative of the higher authority, would be recognised and respected by the sharks.”

At the Tuticorin fishery in 1890, a scare was produced by a diver being bitten by a shark, but subsided as soon as a “wise woman” was employed. Her powers do not, however, seem to have been great, for more cases of shark-bite occurred, and the fishery had to be abandoned at a time when favourable breezes, clear water, plenty of boats, and oysters selling at a good price, indicated a successful financial result.<sup>60</sup>

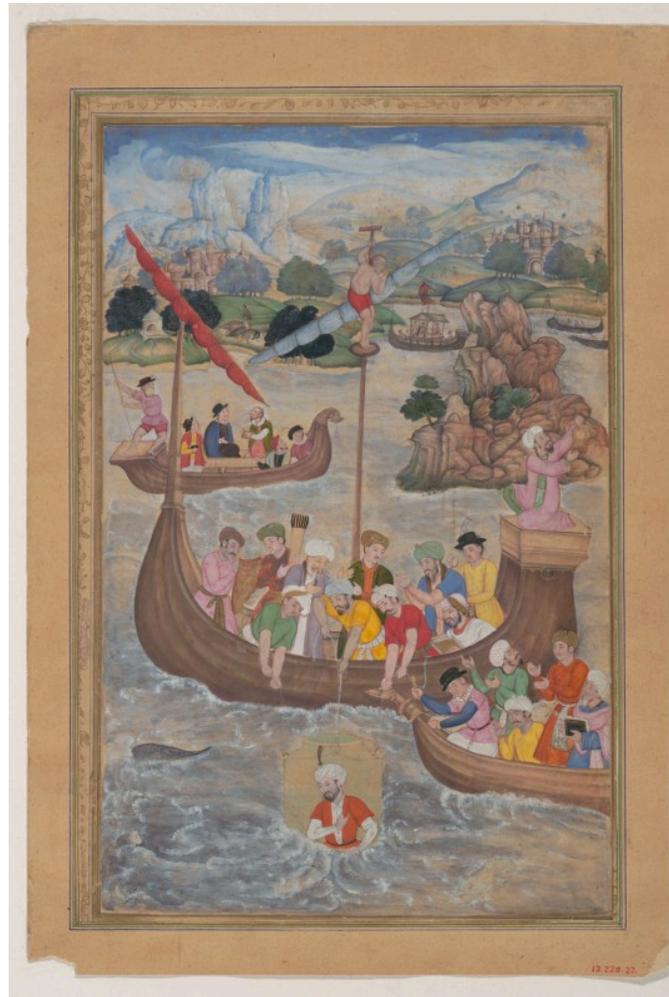
Working with the Parawa divers, the charmers encouraged these men to carry an amulet made from a dried palmyra leaf inscribed with mystical characters, which they wrapped in oil cloth.<sup>61</sup> The British attempted to reduce the shark charmers’ activities and rewards by stipulating that each shark charmer was only to receive one oyster a day from each diver.

Nonetheless, they needed the charmers to be present, paying them 9 pence a day and allowing them a choice of the best oysters.<sup>62</sup> Only the charmers—also known as “binders” as they had the ability to close the mouths of sharks during daylight hours—could keep divers safe. Shifting sands, migrating oysters, unpredictable currents, and other difficult conditions allow us to characterize these colonial fishing grounds in terms of what Michael Taussig would call miasma—that is, that unruly, ambiguous space of the abject commons that blurs land, sea, and an invisible city.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Pearl Fishery Camp as Invisible City**

*“Did you ever happen to see a city resembling this one?” Kublai Khan asked Marco Polo<sup>64</sup>*

Italo Calvino’s osmotic chapters on memory, desire, the dead, the sky, the hidden, and the double, etcetera, read as a wonderful palimpsest of the meeting between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. Fluttering, almost gossamer as a shuffling of miasmatic places characterized by hagiographical, occasionally plague-ridden names and tales from chronicles/*namas*, (Sophronia, Eurtropia, Evsilia, Beersheba, Theordora, Perinthia, Zemrude, Zebeide, Zenobia), these mythical cities can be playfully categorized in terms of the ninth and final category of Jorge Luis Borges’s Chinese Encyclopaedique taxonomy as “etcetera”.



**Figure 14.**

Attributed to Mukunda, Alexander is Lowered into the Sea, folio from an illustrated manuscript, 1597-98, ink, watercolor and gold on dyed paper, 23.8 × 15.9 cm. Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (13.228.27). Digital image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913.

As is well known, the Mughal emperor Akbar's chief chronicler Ab'l Fazl (1551-1602) repeatedly revised his own writings for the emperor. He is rumoured to have drawn at least one bird's eye view of the Mughal imperial camp.<sup>65</sup> This camp (of as many as 200,000 officers, servants, wives, and so on) was in fact two near-identical camps. Described by Ab'l Fazl as having travelled two days or so ahead of the emperor's camp, the *doppelgänger* camp was intended to provide a kind of horizon line, always just visible to the other following behind. For Ab'l Fazl, writing under his ruler's daily instruction, Akbar himself ultimately embodied the city. Under Ab'l Fazl's direction, Akbar's leading court artists depicted him immersed in a kind of "bell jar" device being lowered to the ocean floor, where he could encounter

many fish and aquatic monsters.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, given Akbar's penchant for militant/mythical/heroic forefathers, he also demanded that his court artists portray Iskander (Alexander) observing a beautiful if deadly female sea dragon (Fig. 14).

By contrast, in Western modernity, the camp as the sinister double of the city can be stripped to bare life—at least according to the genealogy laid out by Giorgio Agamben's early volumes of *homo sacer*.<sup>67</sup> Excessively policed, the camp is for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the hideous space of industrial light, torture, and confinement. Agamben's timely intervention has enabled scholars to ruminate on the relationship between the city and the camp, which is most presciently emphasized by academic attention to *black sites* as "invisible" centres of detention in the USA. One scholarly backlash to the harrowing testimonies of the expanded notion of the camp has been to "redeem" dark, unruly spaces in terms of the "right to opacity".<sup>68</sup> To ruminate on the nomadic aspects of the pearl fishery as camp, the camp is a space which not only incites white racist surveillance but whose "opacity" is instrumental to its very existence.

The boats bristling in the seascape, the temporary camp, and the smattering of Indian and European officials, recall the subject matter and style of Company School painting associated with the north-eastern city of Patna (Azimabad) in India (Fig. 15). These artists had been economically forced by the British to migrate from the courtly *karkhāna* to the *bazaar*. Their ambitious Mughal gouache and/or English watercolour views of cityscapes, trade, and religious festivals (*melas*) would be collected well into the twentieth century (Fig. 16).<sup>69</sup> Perhaps mimetically, there is something of such *Kampani Qalam* in the pearl fishery.<sup>70</sup> Although bearing more than a passing resemblance to Patna *qalam*, it is attributed to the *mastico* Pondicherry-born artist, Hippolyte Silvaf.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 15.**

Hippolyte Silvac, View of a pearl fishery, Gulf of Manaar, Ceylon, circa 1840s, watercolour. Collection Colombo National Museum Reserve, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Digital image courtesy of Colombo National Museum Reserve Collection, Colombo, Sri Lanka.



**Figure 16.**

Unknown creator, A Muharram Scene, a Company painting (made by an Indian artist for the British in India) from the Patna region depicting the Muharram muslim ceremonies, circa 1807, watercolour on paper, 43.5 x 56.5 cm. Collection Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.74-1954). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

As well as being one of the few surviving images of the pearl fishery in the Gulf of Manaar, Silvaf's "polyrhythmic" Patna-style painting speaks to the diasporic nature of the north-eastern Indian economy, which played an instrumental role in Manaar's pearl fishery bazaar.

It's not surprising that this diasporic pictorial mimesis extended also to the structure of the Manaar *mela*/bazaar. The majority of pearl bidders and traders who frequented the Manaar fisheries came from Bihar and Bengal, bringing with them a certain "modular" idea of what constituted the rhythms and structure of the northern and eastern bazaar economy.<sup>72</sup> To be polyrhythmic is to transgress the expected boundaries of geographical and colonial temporalities; here, this quality stemmed from the archaic nature of labour and the diasporic, sacred nature of the bazaar. The world of the nomadic camp invokes the coming together and displacement of several forms of economy which, as Silvaf's mimicking of Patna painting intimates, is best conceptualized through the *mela* (religious festival). Whilst it's easy to dismiss the *mela* as yet another form of the carnivalesque, I suggest that *mela* as camp-city defined the model of the colonial oceanic economy.<sup>73</sup> Whether pearls, precious stones, or other materials, many goods traded in the bazaar were already sacred.<sup>74</sup> It is not only where "the gods go to market" but also where the nomadic shaman might preside. Although in many respects analogous to Mami Wata, the figure of the Shark Charmer eludes pictorial representation both in the vernacular chromolithographs of the bazaar and in colonial prints, drawings, paintings, and photographs.

Mami Wata perhaps naturally incites something other than visual inscription within an image, even those of the seemingly dull colonial officialdom kind. James Hornell published a few of his own photographs of the pearl camp-city. In a different way to Malinowski's attempt to capture the "filmic" movement of Trobriand rituals, Hornell's blurry images (the originals are lost) juxtapose the quotidian quietude of the camp, with its orderly wide streets—seemingly sparsely peopled and embodying the ideal lines of a cantonment—with the frenzied dumping of oyster shells into the *kottu* (pearl and pearl shell market enclosure) in the evening. The Manaar pearl fisheries/*melas* sprung up as sporadic "heterotopias" of up to 50,000 men, women, and children, who set up home and shop around the town of Marichchukkaddi. Living in thatched mud huts, they gathered en masse through word of mouth, rumour, or after the colonial government posted annual advertisements in the press announcing the imminent opening of the fisheries. Travelling from Malabar, Ceylon, the Malay Archipelago, Canton, Madras, and north-east India, this cosmopolitan, subaltern crowd meant for some supporters of British colonialism, "the scum of the East and the ruffraff of the Asiatic littoral."<sup>75</sup>

The camp-as-heterotopia soon came to be highly regulated by British colonial officials. They regularly doused the camp-city with cheap disinfectant, whilst proudly announcing the presence of a police court, jail, bank, post and telegraph offices, auction room, hospital, and cemetery. Heterotopia, as is well known, describes spaces such as beaches, ships, brothels, and colonies in terms of rites of passage, with an emphasis on the imaginary.<sup>76</sup> The beach camp population was regularly counted as part of an attempt in the name of “public peace” to prevent sedition, although regular riots and illicit trading took place.<sup>77</sup> Avoiding the colonial gaze, divers swallowed pearls, hid shells on their bodies and in the ships’ sails; they returned to shore to open shells when they knew the colonial supervisor and his attendants would not be present. They opened as many oysters as possible outside of the colonial tanks into which they were forced, and then closely watched in the activity of shell chucking. Deemed to be looting if caught, the removal of shells without colonial sanction could lead to imprisonment. In an attempt to alleviate some of the stench of rotting oysters in this “black mass of flies” brought to camp daily, the colonial government agreed to finance the amateur inventor G. G. Dixon’s Washing Machine. Not particularly efficient, this arcane device became a source of controversy. Under pressure from the British government, colonial authorities in Ceylon and Madras had to agree to lease its fisheries out to the private Ceylon Company of Pearl Fisheries Limited in 1906, as well as to sell them the machine.

Although yielding the south Indian and Ceylonese colonial authorities’ largest single source of income, the fisheries repeatedly failed to produce a regular harvest. Within three years of taking over the Manaar fishery from the Dutch, the British had succeeded in depleting the number of oysters entirely, which led to an anxious spate of articles, public addresses, and reports on the rapid collapse of a potentially lucrative luxury monopoly. In spite of this archival fervour during the nineteenth century, only thirty-six fisheries took place. Colonial officials repeatedly concluded that “the pearl fishery is a branch of revenue too precious a nature to be comprehended at present.”<sup>78</sup> Manaar oysters were believed to generate the best pearls when seven years old—just one year before their anticipated death. Their shells, being thin and brittle, were not suitable for the mother-of-pearl market; rather they ended up as “camp filling”, *chunam* or they were ground up and digested along with betel nut (tiny pearls were also chewed, ingested, or spat out in this way). *Chunam* and betel with areca nut together constituted “a luxury of which all ranks partake”.<sup>79</sup>

## Colonial Planning and “Millions of Millions of Pearly Surfaced Shells”

Given his long-term commitment to the economy of pearls and conch shells, Hornell advocated for the disciplining and punishment of crowds. He chose to make Tondi the modular makeshift city, including a detailed plan of what should constitute the built environment of its shell auction (Fig. 17). The Tondi camp-city, Hornell advocated, would be rigorously regulated in terms of its spatial layout. He believed the presence of a colonial police force was necessary as “The chief trouble experienced was in preventing nuisances along the sea front; after a few examples were made the people learned the necessary lesson and behaved satisfactorily.”<sup>80</sup> Aside from the coercive implications of “making an example”, the camp included a resident medical officer, who was supposed to assist in the eradication or at least in the containment of cholera and other diseases, which the colonial authorities feared were being spread by the nomadic travels of the camp inhabitants. The hospital should, in all camps, be located at the outermost edge—in Tondi’s case, this meant beyond the northern creek. Additionally, the fishery city should include a telegraph, latrines, a water tank, and some kind of “lighting arrangements”. Ultimately, “Instead of a large number of miserable oil lamps, a dozen kitson lights were hired”.<sup>81</sup> These vaporized oil burners Kitson Empire Lighting & Co. claimed to be six times more powerful than oil lights. Such powerful light might have seemed to officials like Hornell as a way of disciplining the shoreline camp, but light “is devious” and luminosity “in itself only makes blacker and more opaque the surrounding darkness.”<sup>82</sup>



FIG. 1. EXCAVATING A TRIAL SHELL-PIT, KOTHURU, SONAPUR.

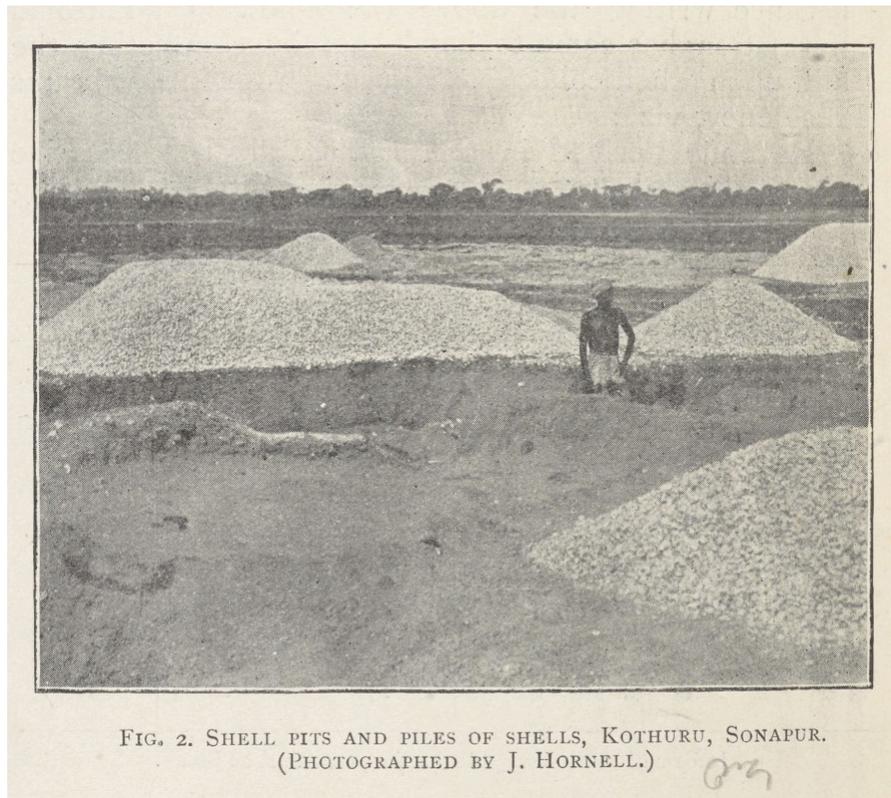
**Figure 17.**

James Hornell, *Excavating A Trial Shell-Pit, Kothuru, Sonapur*, 1916, from *Madras Fisheries Department Bulletin*, No. 8 (1916): 126. Collection The British Library (Asia, Pacific & Africa ST 302). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Although seemingly dissatisfied with the lighting conditions, Hornell and his fellow colonial officials did not seem too concerned with the aesthetics of these makeshift cities, or with colonial architecture generally, for that matter. As the beacon for the returning fishing boats, casting its shadow over the shore where small girls were made to winnow the sand for pearls (as they also did at Foul Point), stood The Doric.<sup>83</sup> The Doric—a former British governor's house built in the eighteenth century, and once admired by colonial pearl inspectors for its polite layout and for its glistening oyster chunam lime whiteness—collapsed in the nineteenth century, returning its shell substance to the ocean and to the wind. Whiteness, so exigent to the creole aesthetic of neoclassicism in the colonial cities of Calcutta, Madras, and the Anglican churches of Zanzibar and Singapore, had its origin in the use of ground and burnt shells as plaster in southern Indian temples and shrines.<sup>84</sup> Although considered auspicious for millennia in the Gulf of Manaar for the whitewashing of local villages, temples, and shrines, British colonialists complained that chunam lime was too ephemeral, too unstable, and not suited to the desired intricacies of their architectural

ornamentation—whatever these intricacies might have been, given the dearth of white architects with any knowledge of the tenets of European architecture.<sup>85</sup>

The Doric as an architectural order is, after all, the “most basic” and war-like of Vitruvius’ “Five Orders”. Read less ideologically and more pragmatically, maybe lime was the only material readily available to colonial architects/engineers: perhaps also, they were unable to comprehend the higher architectural orders, which required greater refinement and a nuanced understanding of a building’s load-bearing capacities. The materiality of seashells confounded and eluded colonial practices even though much of the British Empire was built on, or of, Madras lime (*chunam*). Again, as with the figure of the Shark Charmer, the intelligence, allure, and the lore of the ocean calls to the magical, archaic, worlds of the shell and its “intransigent” materiality.



**Figure 18.**

James Hornell, Shell Pits and Piles of Shells, Kothuru, Sonapur, 1916, from *Madras Fisheries Department Bulletin*, No. 8 (1916): 126. Collection The British Library (Asia, Pacific & Africa ST 302). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Culching (Fig. 18) involved both government-regulated work and a gleaning of the commons. Even if not represented photographically, Parawa women mostly undertook the labour of culching, working under the licence of

government contractors, who rented the shell pits from the Public Works Department. As payment for their labour, the women could open the molluscs and remove the flesh, which could then be sold to those castes who ate oysters.<sup>86</sup> In a parallel industry, women's marriage jewellery also helped to construct the local villages, shrines, and temples, as the waste from chank shell bangle-making factories at Korkai at the mouth of the Tambaraparni was used in lime making, as can be seen in the mortar of local temple walls.<sup>87</sup> In certain districts in the Gulf of Manaar, everyone had the right to gather shells from the seabeds, although the collection of shells from other sources was increasingly controlled by the colonial authorities.<sup>88</sup> Hornell lamented that: "At present no control is exercised; the miners dig where they like [. . .]. The ground is unsystematically and wastefully worked." Not surprisingly, given his desire for a modular pearl fishery camp-city, he advocated government-regulated digging.<sup>89</sup> Culching usually took place during the dry season, when water levels went down.<sup>90</sup>

To walk upon the sward:

The visitor is at first scarcely aware that the nice sward he walks over is but the surface covering millions of millions of pearly surfaced shells. In digging foundations for buildings or cutting lines for the enclosures in which the oysters are placed to putrefy and be examined, the nature of the subsoils is at once shown. Indeed the surface over large areas glistens with fragments of shells. I may add that the shells, when bleached by exposure to sun and rain, assume the beautifully white, lustrous colour which is always associated with the "oriental pearl", as counter-distinguished from the somewhat pinky hued gems of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.<sup>91</sup>

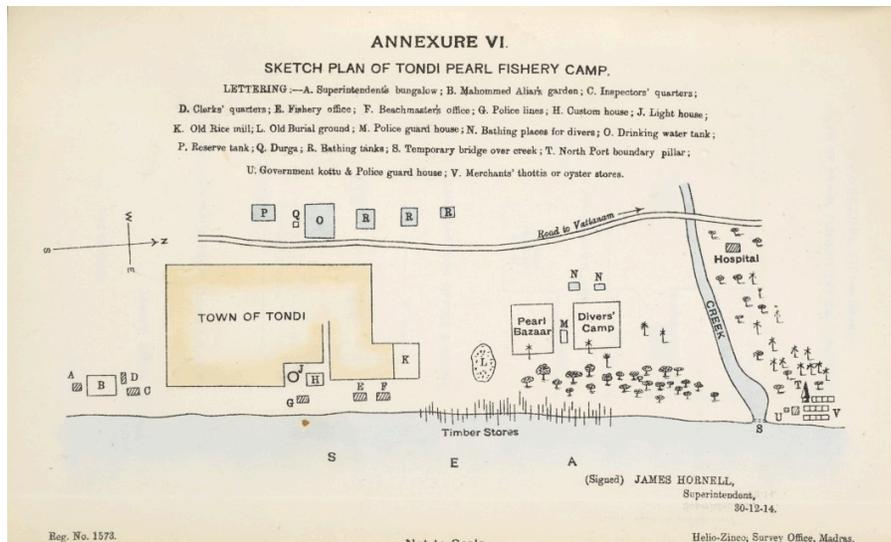
To culch is also to fill ravines with oyster shells; to make anew the ocean and the shoreline with waste:

The heaps of shells from past fisheries [are] utilized for this purpose, as no great profit could be obtained from removing them to a distance for burning into lime or exporting them to Europe as a material for mother of pearl. The iridescence of the Ceylon pearl-yielding oyster is very beautiful, but the smallness of the shell detracts from its commercial value.<sup>92</sup>

The Manaar shoreline, which is made up of millions of half-buried shells, still dazzles and shimmers. Is it possible that waste can be redeemed?

## Conclusion: Ocean as Intelligence

*Busqué una gota de agua* <sup>93</sup>



**Figure 19.**

James Hornell, Sketch Plan of Tondi Pearl Fishery Camp, 1914, from *Madras Fisheries Department Bulletin* (1916): facing p.92. Collection The British Library (Asia, Pacific & Africa ST 302). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Wendt's *Silence* offers a final, perhaps allegorical photograph of the fate of pearl fishing in the Gulf of Manaar (Fig. 19). Japan and China increasingly dominated the trade in synthetic (fresh) water pearls. For Karl Marx, pearl diving went against the modern trend for artificial pearls bringing to a head the crisis in value. Marx asked: what happens to use value when substances such as wax, glass, or mother-of-pearl attempt to imitate the lustre of seawater pearls? By the time of Marx's writing (his 1844 manuscripts on economics and philosophy), scientists and jewellers were injecting hollow beads of glass with a mixture of liquid ammonia and white matter taken from the scales of fish. The assumed essence/core of the pearl came from crushed herring scales. In terms of the phenomenology of the commodity, this begs the question: "What is value in the light of the development of simulants and the redeployment of rubbish?" <sup>94</sup> Marx's writings on jewels—their simulation and how they might delude the senses—best encapsulates his general theory of species being and labour. <sup>95</sup> Aside from the dumping of opened and unopened oysters in Papua New Guinea and the Gulf of Manaar, oysters

contributed to the formation of the light of modernity. The Third Reich's experiments with colour and light (the best known example being the concentration camp-based dyes and rubber projects of IG Farben) relied on oyster shells. In 1930s Germany, the pioneering of radiolithic paints produced the desired fluorescence that "allowed Nazi eyes to penetrate the darkness", in ways other than those of the British colonial authorities in Sri Lanka. <sup>96</sup>



**Figure 20.**

Lionel Wendt, Silence, circa 1930s-1940s, photogravure, from *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London, Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd, 1950). Digital image courtesy of Lincolns-Prager Publishers Ltd.

Perhaps it's possible to contemplate this essay's beginning and ending images (Fig. 1 and Fig. 20) as a form of closure in their own right. By the time of the posthumous publication of *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* in 1950, photogravure as a technique of reproduction, which was championed by such photographic pioneers as Paul Strand, had been deemed obsolete. <sup>97</sup> Penning *Las Piedras del Cielo* with a copy of Wendt's slightly faded, blurred, sepia, and bluish plates to hand, for Neruda, the ocean had by 1970 a strain of nostalgia associated with the vanished, vanquished world of the Shark Charmer. <sup>98</sup> Like Wendt's photographs, his melancholic longing is offset by a joyous homage to jewels' shimmering affinity with the ocean: <sup>99</sup>

Silence is intensified Into a stone: Broken circles are closed. <sup>100</sup>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pablo Neruda, "Piedras del Cielo", Poem I

- 2 Pablo Neruda, *Piedras del cielo* (London: Routledge, 1970), 54. The sea/ocean is a recurrent theme in Neruda's poetry—for instance, his collections *The Sea and the Bells*, *On the Blue Shore of Silence*, and *The Captain's Verses*. See also Sara Contreras and Michel Etienne, "Neruda, poète ou malacologue," *Techniques and Culture* 29 no. 2 (2012): 45–56.
- 3 For Wendt, see Ellen Dissanayake, "Renaissance Man: Lionel Wendt—Creator of a Truly Sri Lankan Idiom," *Serendib* 13 (1994): 1–6; *Lionel Wendt: A Centennial Tribute* (Colombo: Lionel Wendt Memorial Fund, 2000); Rajit Juroda (ed.), *The Gaze of Modernity: Photographs by Lionel Wendt* (Fukoka: Fukoka Asian Art Museum, 2003). See also Diva Gujral's poetic "Pictures in the Water: On Time and Memory in Lionel Wendt's Ceylon," unpublished MA dissertation, (University College London, 2015) for Wendt's nostalgia for Europe and ocean-as-memory perceived in a largely Proustian manner. For photographic practice in Sri Lanka, see John Falconer, "19th-century Photography in Ceylon," *The Photographic Collector* 2, no. 1 (1981): 21–29; *Imagining the Isle Across: Vintage Photography from Ceylon* (Delhi: The Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, 2015). See also Benita Stambler's online resource "A Guide to Locating Photographs of Colonial Ceylon," November 2014, prepared for the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies, <http://www.aisls.org>.
- 4 Wendt learned how to develop his own film experimenting with photomontage, solarization, and brom-etching. He was the founding member of the Photographic Society of Ceylon (est. 1935). The photographs I discuss in this essay use the technique of photogravure. Wendt wrote extensively in the journal *Leica News and Techniques*. His most famous work is the posthumously published *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon* (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1950 and Colombo: Lionel Wendt Memorial Fund, 1950), which was compiled by Bernard A. Thornley with L.C. Van Geyzel. It consists of 120 photographs published with a print run of 5,000. Wendt's photographs in this publication date about 1933 to 1944. It was initially intended to be the first of three volumes; volumes two and three were abandoned because of the financial failure of volume one. It was re-released in 2000 with 110 additional photographs and accompanying essays as *A Centennial Tribute*.
- 5 Walcott cited in Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2006), 4.
- 6 Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion, 2011); Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980).
- 7 For a different take on the importance of the shell, see Charlotte Guichard, "The Shell in the 18th Century: A Border Object?," *Techniques and Culture* 59, no. 2 (2012): 150–63. This essay appears in a special issue of *Techniques and Culture*, "Shell Itineraries". Also see *Techniques and Culture* special issue as a follow up, "Vivre sable!," *Techniques and Culture* 61 (2013). In this essay, I am more interested in the shell as "waste".
- 8 The image discussed is available for sale at the oldest surviving firm of photography in Colombo—Plâté & co. Plâté & co have a large number of reproduced photographs of labour in Ceylon—primarily of tea and coffee. Pearl fishing amounts to eleven separate photographs; fieldwork, spring 2016.
- 9 Robert Ryder, "Walter Benjamin's Shell Shock: Sounding the Acoustic Unconscious," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 8, no. 2 (2007): 105–55. See also Stefan Helmreich, "Seashell Sound: Echoing Ocean, Vibrating Air, Brute Blood," *Cabinet* 48 (Winter 2012–13): 8–12. Famously, the Paduan anatomist, Gabrielle Falloppio, described the inner ear in 1561 as the *cochea* (Latin for snail).
- 10 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1935–1938*, vol. 3, ed. Paul Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 374.
- 11 Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); May Helen Kolisyk, "Surrealism, Surrepetition: Artaud's Doubles", *October* 64 (Spring 1993): 78–90. As well as acting as a model for exploring the (optical) unconscious in modernity, there is a long trajectory of the animated, anthropomorphic, speaking shell. See Charles Williams, *Silver-Shell or Adventures of an Oyster* (London: Peter & Galpin, 1857). I discuss aspects of this text below.
- 12 See Dejan Lukić and Nik Kosieradzki, "The Oyster: In 8 Manifolds" published as an online essay (A Furniture in Motion Pamphlet, published by Rattaplast, 2013). They make the case that the oyster is akin to Deleuze's reading of the monad whilst relating the shell to the principles of Baroque architecture.
- 13 Most famously, the aquarium is associated with Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Aragon's disorientation in the Paris Arcades. For Benjamin, the Arcades were like a dusty fata morgana.
- 14 See the classic study of Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons", *Science* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243–48; and Bonnie J. McCoy and James M. Acheson (eds), *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources* (Tucson, AZ: Univ. of Arizona Press, 1987); Gísli Pálsson, "The Birth of the Aquarium: The Political Ecology of Icelandic Fishing," in Tim Gray (ed.), *The Politics of Fishing* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 209–27; Sam Dolbear, "Flooded Displays: The Arcade and the Aquarium", unpublished paper uploaded onto academia.edu.
- 15 They were known as "Christ Stones" as divers were often associated with both early Christianity (St Thomas) or with Francis Xavier's zealous programme of conversion. From 1740, divers could no longer own their own diving stones; they had to be rented out from the VOC—a practice that continued under the British.
- 16 During my research in Colombo, the "spectre" of the Tate show was mentioned by several institutional curators and private collectors. Wendt is certainly beginning to garner attention globally.
- 17 Michael Taussig, "Fieldwork Notebooks: Feld-forschungs-notizbücher," *dOCUMENTA 13* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012): 45–48. See also Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings and Fieldwork Notebooks* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Univ. Press, 2011).
- 18 Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Univ. Press, 2004).
- 19 Most often associated with the Buddha's third eye, the pearl has been seen as the highest essence of wisdom. Pearls from the region appear in various sources throughout history: the Magawanso Pearls of ... [carry on until] ...and Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*."

- 20 Nira Wickramasinghe, *Metallic Modern: Early Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 4.
- 21 Divers were male which differentiates them from Japanese divers, who were often women. For anonymous photographs of these women divers, see the collection of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London nos. 27531 and 27532. I am grateful to Sarah Walpole for bringing these rare images to my attention. As well as the risk of the bends, divers were frequently subjected to diseases of the lungs and chest, and to deafness. Blood frequently flowed from their mouths, ears, and nostrils. Each dive was around 40 to 50 seconds; divers dived up to sixty times a day, usually at a depth of 6 to 8 fathoms.
- 22 John Frow, "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man who turns into a Telegraph Pole," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 270-85; 272.
- 23 Christopher Pinney, "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and History," in Elizabeth Edwards (ed.), *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 74-95.
- 24 Sir David Brewster's work on shell iridescence and optics is discussed by Rev. Charles Williams in his intriguing work, *Silver Shell, or Adventures of an Oyster*, 36. See also David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic addressed to Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (London: John Murray, 1834); for brief discussion of the use of mother-of-pearl, see David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: its History, Theory and Construction with its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1870).
- 25 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 36.
- 26 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 36.
- 27 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 37.
- 28 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 37.
- 29 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 38. Barton devised an engine on which he engraved, on the surface of steel and metals, lines so minute that from 2,000 to 10,000 could be viewed within a single inch.
- 30 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 38-39.
- 31 See Christopher Pinney's evocative lecture, "Opium, Indigo, Photography," from Berlin Documentary Form 2: New Practices Across Disciplines, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (31 May-3 June 2012), which is available online. For indigo, cyanide, and sepia in/as colonial photography, see Natasha Eaton, "Subaltern Rustle: Raqs Media Collective, the Colour Blue and the Colonial Archive," *MARG* 67, no. 1 (September 2015): 13-21. The intriguing photograph I reproduce here is taken, signed (and may be coloured) by Oscar Mallite; the Christopher Rawson collection of photographs of indigo production in the Economic History Botanical Archive at Kew Gardens, London.
- 32 For theorization of the notion of the shimmer, see Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977-1978)*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier, text established, annotated, and presented by Thomas Clerc under the direction of Eric Marty (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005), 105-107.
- 33 Franz Boas wrote his Kiel habilitation of 1888 on seawater. See Stefan Helmreich, "Nature/Culture/Seawater," *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 1 (2011): 132-44.
- 34 Billy Hancock traded in what were considered to be valuables (*veguwa*) for pearls from a local diver. I return to the importance of pearl shells as a major global currency below.
- 35 This remark is made by Malinowski in his diaries, which were never intended to be published; see Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 148. There are over 1,100 of Malinowski's photographs in the archives at the London School of Economics, all of which make for fascinating viewing. Billy Hancock is included in the "Encounter" and "The Ethnographer" classifications of this archive. See also Michael W. Young, *Malinowski's Kiriwina: Fieldwork Photography, 1915-1918* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Univ. Press, 1998). Malinowski had an ambivalent relationship with Bill(y) Hancock with whom he worked in 1917-18. For instance: "The camera seemed too heavy. I reproached myself for not having mastered the ethnographic situation and Bill's presence hindered me a bit [ . . . ]. He thinks this is all very silly"; Malinowski, *A Diary*, 148.
- 36 The modern iconography of African "cargo/commodity" goddess Mami Wata was strongly influenced by the Hamburg-based company Adolph Friedlander's 1880s chromolithograph of a Hindu snake charmer Maladamatajaute. At least 12,000 copies were printed in Bombay and sent to traders in Kumase, Ghana to be copied by the Shree Ram Calendar Company. As a transcultural icon, Mami Wata's iconography is frequently merged with that of Lakshmi or the spirit Mami Titi in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. See the exemplary work of Henry John Drewal (ed.), *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Univ. of Indiana Press, 2008).
- 37 It would appear that the cult of Mami Wata is also present in Haiti, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. See Divinatons: Mami Wata Healers Society of North America, <http://www.mamiwata.com/divine.html>; and <http://www.mami-wata.fr/>. For "fetishisms" and their oscillations/instabilities, see Patricia Spyer (ed.), *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.
- 38 Patricia Spyer, *The Memory of Trade: Modernity's Entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian Island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
- 39 Roy Wagner, *Lethal Speech: Daribi Speech as Symbolic Obviation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 64.
- 40 Robert J. Foster, "Your Money, Our Money and the Government's Money: Finance and Fetishism in Melanesia," in Patricia Spyer (ed.), *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* (London: Routledge, 1998), 60-96. The term "cargo cult" was first used in the 1950s, in the news magazine *Pacific Islands Monthly*, as part of a three-sided debate between colonial administrators, expatriate planters, and Christian missionaries. This did have a precedent in German colonies from 1990 onwards. In 1920, the colonial government of Australia issued the Native Currency Ordinance.

- 41 Robert J. Foster, *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2002), 41: "The challenge of colonial education lay in teaching a mode of symbolization in which money could be apprehended as a signifier referring beyond itself."
- 42 For a more general overview of pearl trading in the Gulf of Manaar, see Radhika Gupta, "Changing Courses: A Comparative Analysis of Ethnographies of Maritime Communities in South Asia," *Maritime Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 21-88.
- 43 Aside from Bizet, Verne, Michelet *et al.*, the British colonial government attempted to generate institutional interest in pearl diving. A government-sponsored aquarium—the Madras Aquarium was established; in the Colombo Museum, Case 31 contained a rather muddled display to do with fishing in which was included a model of a pearl fishing boat and sinking stones from the 1904 fishery. See Anonymous, *A Guide to the Collections of the Colombo Museum, Ceylon, Part I Archaeology and Ethnology* (Colombo: H. C. Cotte, Government Printer, Ceylon, 1912).
- 44 James Hornell, "The Indian Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Manaar and Palk Bay," *Madras Fisheries Bulletin* XVI, 1-188 (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1930). Interview 27 April 1904, 64.
- 45 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 143-44.
- 46 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 144, and 166-67. For the Persian Gulf and pearls, see Robert A. Carter's thorough *Sea of Pearls: 7000 Years of the Industry That Shaped the Gulf* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012).
- 47 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 12. Hornell remained obsessed throughout his career with the relationship between racial profiling and fishing; Hornell, "The Negro as Fisherman," *Discoveries* (June 1929): 201-205.
- 48 In Hornell's case, this is most readily apparent in his work "The Indian Pearl Fisheries of the Gulf of Manaar and Palk Bay," where draws heavily on Portuguese and Dutch accounts and economic figures.
- 49 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 12. This kind of physical anthropological analysis had previously been put forward by Herbert Risley and Edgar Thurston.
- 50 James Cordiner, *A description of Ceylon, containing an account of the country, inhabitants, and natural production with narratives of a tour round the island in 1800, the campaign in Candy in 1803, and a journey to Ramisseram in 1804*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1807), vol. 2, 33-34. This is substantiated by V. Govindan, "Fishery Statistics and Information: West and East," *Madras Fishery Bulletin* 9 (1916): 120-40. Govindan makes a careful survey of the Gulf of Manaar fisheries, noting the high level of poverty in almost every diving community.
- 51 Stone was considered to be an inferior building material to shells.
- 52 By 1891, the king/don was only allowed by the Government to have one boat for pearl diving; *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Madras*, no. 702 (1889).
- 53 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 13.
- 54 Thurston's intriguing photographs pertaining to southern India are held in the Royal Anthropological Institute, London.
- 55 So far in my research, I have not found a specific silver charm associated with the Shark Charmer. One reference is made to colonial appropriation or brief sight of such a charm is made by Lt. Col. W. M. G. Colebrooke, in his talk "Observations on the Pearl Fisheries of the Island of Ceylon," published in *Proceedings of the Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India* 10, no. 29 (2 February 1833): 205-206: "A copy of the talisman, prepared by the Mohamedan shark charmer to protect the divers is annexed." For important critical work on the telegraph, see Richard Taws, "Telegraphic Images in Post-Revolutionary France," *Art History* 39, no. 2 (2016): 400-21.
- 56 The word "telepathy" was first coined by the English psychologist Frederic Myers in 1882. Taken literally, it means "feeling from afar" from tele + pathy.
- 57 Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, vol. 2, 52.
- 58 For the Shark Charmer, see *The Steubenville Herald*, 12 November 1896; Robert Percival, *An Account of the Island of Ceylon: Containing its History, Geography, Natural History, with the Manners and Customs of its Various Inhabitants* (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1805), 65-66; Lt. Col. W. M. G. Colebrooke, "Observations on the Pearl Fisheries of the Island of Ceylon," *Proceedings of the Societies: The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India* 10, no. 39 (2 February 1833): 305-306. For more recent literature, see Markus Vink, *Encounters on the Opposite Coast: The Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai in the 17th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 95 and 639; N. Athiyaman, "Shark Charming: A Magic Act in Pearl Fishery," *Indian Historical Studies* 10, no. 2 (April 2014): 21-30.
- 59 Williams, *Silver Shell*, 77.
- 60 Edgar Thurston, *Notes on the Pearl and Chank Fisheries and Marine Fauna of the Gulf of Manaar* (Madras: Madras Government Museum, 1912), 198.
- 61 E. R. Power, "The Pearl Fishers of Ceylon," in *Friendship's Offering* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1837), 506; James Stueart, *An Account of the Pearl Fisheries of Ceylon with an Appendix* (Colombo: Government Press, 1843), 15. These charms were often written by the Roman Catholic priests. At this time, each shark charmer received ten oysters a day from each boat.
- 62 George Frederick Kunz and Charles Hugh Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science and Industry of the Queen of Gems* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1908), 116.
- 63 Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum*, 45-56.
- 64 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
- 65 Ab'l Fazl, *Akbarnama*, trans. and edited by Henry Beveridge, 2 vols (Delhi: Rare Books, 1972), vol. 1, 123.

- 66 See Maurice S. Dimand, "Mughal Painting under Akbar the Great," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, 12, no. 2 (1953): 46-51.
- 67 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998); and Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002). Agamben's project on bare life consists of eight volumes; seven have been published (out of volume order) so far. For an interpretation of Agamben on the camp in relation to Judith Butler and Hannah Arendt with insightful citations relating to the thresholds of the topological and the topographical, see François Debrix, "Topologies of Vulnerability and the Proliferation of Camp Life," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 3 (2015): 444-59; T. Campbell, *Improper Life: Technology and Biopolitics from Heidegger to Agamben* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011).
- 68 Edouard Glissant, quoted in T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Democracy During Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2013), 132.
- 69 For Patna *qalam*, see Mildred Archer, *Patna Painting* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1947) and Rebecca M. Brown, "Colonial Polyrythm: Imagining Art in Early 19th-Century Patna," *Visual Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2013): 269-97.
- 70 The watercolour was included as part of a presentation copy of James Steuart's *Pearl Fisheries of Ceylon*, dated 1837. The watercolours of the pearl fishery at Arippu, including his life-size depictions of pearl oysters, were stolen from the Royal Commonwealth Library Collection, Cambridge University Library.
- 71 Born Phillip Antoine Hippolyte Silvaf or Sylvaf, Silvaf supposedly came from Pondicherry. He worked as a medical draughtsman in Sri Lanka for twenty years. He was a freelance portraitist and watercolourist. He also provided work for *The Illustrated London News*. He gave lessons in French and music and he tuned pianos. He was also the art tutor of the well-known Dutch, Sri Lankan-born painter, John Leonard Kalenberg Van Dort, who also worked in Colombo. A few of Silvaf's works are reproduced in the journal *Young Ceylon* 1, no. 1. It has been suggested that he travelled to Manaar in the 1850s and that he established a school in Kandy. In addition to what I have noted above, important works also stolen from Cambridge University Library include eleven drawings from his work *Costumes of Ceylon*. It would, however, appear that fifteen postcard-size prints were taken from these images, which appear in Alistair Mackenzie Ferguson's *Souvenirs of Ceylon: A Series of One Hundred and Twenty Illustrations of the Varied Coast, River, and Mountain Scenery of the Beautiful "Eden of the Eastern Wave"* (Colombo: A. M. Ferguson, 1868). Much of Silvaf's work relating to his time in the Gulf of Manaar is uncatalogued in the National Museum of Sri Lanka. The museum recently paid \$40,000 for two small albums of his exquisite fish drawings. The art scene in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sri Lanka is relatively underexplored by scholars. See R. K. de Silva's extensive cataloguing of Sri Lankan art exemplified by his comprehensive book *19th-Century Newspaper Engravings of Ceylon-Sri Lanka* (London: Serendib Publications, 1998), which includes reference to Silvaf and K. Warnapala, "Caricaturing Colonial Rule in Sri Lanka: An Analysis of Muniandi, *The Ceylon Punch*," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 3 (2012): 3-56; and Kanchaneskes Warnapala, "The Portraits of the Colonial Artist in Sri Lanka," *Internations* 14 (2012): 54-87. Although not a popular subject for colonial representation, pearl fisheries do feature as a subject in their own right as photographs by late nineteenth- early twentieth-century Jaffna-born professional photographer Adolphus William Andrée's work. He worked mostly in Jaffna and Slave Island.
- 72 There is a wealth of economic/social history on the bazaar in northern and eastern India. Most relevant here are C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); Rajat Kanta Ray, "Asian Capital in the Age of European Domination: The Rise of the Bazaar, 1800-1914," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 3 (1995), 449-554; Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society and the Colonial State in Bihar* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1998); and Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Market Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
- 73 For British colonial attempts to incorporate the *mela* into their notions of economy, see Yang, *Bazaar India*, 150.
- 74 For the argument on how gods go to market and vernacularizing capitalism, see Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*.
- 75 Kunz and Stevenson, *The Book of the Pearl*, 109.
- 76 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 3.
- 77 A. M. and J. Ferguson, *All About Gold, Gems and Pearls in Ceylon and South India* (London: A. M. and J. Ferguson, 1888), 172.
- 78 R. Colebrooke, *An Account of the Pearl Fisheries of Ceylon* (London, 1831), 64.
- 79 Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, vol. 2, 98.
- 80 Hornell, *Indian Pearl Fisheries*, 83. The police were given their own "district" lines, which housed seventy-five constables. They were divided from what the colonial government referred to as the "coolie lines". The main purpose of the presence of the police was to guard the government *kotthu* and the pearl bazaar. For the classic study of colonial lines, see Veena Oldenberg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).
- 81 James Hornell, "The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building in the Madras Presidency," *Madras Fisheries Bulletin* 8 (1914-15): 84.
- 82 Esther Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 161.
- 83 Cordiner, *Description of Ceylon*, vol. 2, 60.

- 84 For brief reference to the use of “Madras chunam” in Anglican church building, see G. Alex Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Architecture in the British Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), 167–68. He notes the difficulties of working with chunam as a building material, that it was almost impossible to drill a nail throughout it, see 167. It was prepared by adding shell lime which must not include sand, which is then beaten with egg whites and coarse sugar to make a kind of paste to which water in which coconut shells had been soaked is then added to the mixture.
- 85 Although British colonial architecture erred towards the Doric or the Ionic order, in the Gulf of Manaar region, this might not have referred so much to either the “orthodox Vitruvian order” or the “stoic” revival of the more war-like order, which had ideological ramifications, as seen in the proliferation of the Doric order in early nineteenth-century British architecture in Scotland for instance, as to the lack of colonial ability to grapple with shell lime as the material of the “higher” architectural orders. The simpler the structure, the cheaper to fix or destroy it would be. Perhaps in this way, colonial cities were not unlike the pearl fisheries camps. Bremner makes the important point that for the Anglican church, stone had always been the primary material chosen. But in a colonial context, it just did not weather—as opposed to shell lime.
- 86 Hornell, “The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building,” 113.
- 87 Hornell, “The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building,” 123–24. Chank shells were also in high demand in Bengal as marriage bangles. This was another reason why so many north-east Indian traders travelled to the Gulf of Manaar.
- 88 Hornell, “The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building,” 14. For instance, in the Guntur and Kistna districts, Rs 2,443 was credited to the Government as rental dues.
- 89 Hornell, “The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building,” 114. Hornell sought out areas for digging near Puttar. Culching usually took place during the dry season, when water levels went down. But to find anyone to dig proved difficult.
- 90 Hornell, “The Utilization of Coral and Shells for Lime Building,” 106.
- 91 Fergusson, *All About Gold*, 381.
- 92 Fergusson, *All About Gold*, 381.
- 93 Pablo Neruda, *Las Piedras del Cielo*, “Poem VI”
- 94 Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, 14.
- 95 Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, 72.
- 96 Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, 235.
- 97 Photogravure is an intaglio printmaking or photo-mechanical process, whereby a copper plate is coated with a light-sensitive gelatin tissue which had been exposed to a film positive, and then etched, resulting in a high quality intaglio print that can reproduce the detail and continuous tones of a photograph.
- 98 No more diving for pearls has taken place since 1962. Dr N. Athiyaman and Dr Justin Wilson recently undertook fieldwork in the Gulf of Manaar to investigate divers’ rituals, interviewing 100 diverse divers of ages ranging from thirty-one to eighty (2013–14). Although divers still pray, there is no evidence of the Shark Charmer today. Through hearsay, they discovered that the Shark Charmer might have been most recently present at the village of Eral near Tuticorn, only to find the village deserted and in ruins. Dr Thanajayan of Palayankottai has also undertaken work on the rituals of the Parawa (Parathava community).
- 99 The search for water is a recurrent theme in Neruda’s *Las Piedras del Cielo*. See, for instance, *Las piedras*, 13, “Poem II” on quartz—quartz being particles of sand: “Quartz opens its eyes in the snow / And grows spiky, / Slipping on the white / Into its own whiteness: / Multiplying the mirrors / It poses in facets, at angles: / White sea urchins / From the depths, / It is the son of the salt / That shoots up to heaven / Glacial orange blossom / Of silence, / Very principle of foam . . . .”
- 100 Pablo Neruda, *Piedras del Cielo* Poem XIX

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# Elegant Engravings of the Pacific: Illustrations of James Cook's Expeditions in British Eighteenth-Century Magazines

Jocelyn Anderson

## **Abstract**

*James Cook's expeditions to the Pacific were unprecedented in late eighteenth-century Britain, and in the years following the expeditions, extraordinary images of the region were presented to the public. The drawings and paintings made by the artists during the expeditions became the basis for dozens of artworks, which brought to life areas of the world that had previously been little known to Europeans. While these were available to a limited public, tens of thousands of British consumers encountered images of the Pacific through magazine illustrations that were subsequently based on those art works. Published in several leading British magazines in the 1770s and 1780s, these illustrations circulated widely and reached people across Britain and in the American colonies, integrating the Pacific into consumer culture in a way that no other product could. They constituted a rich discourse about the Pacific which was informed by the written accounts and ambitious post-voyage art works, but ultimately separated from them: they were a unique set of representations, the production of which was determined above all by the magazine industry. The magazines presented their readers with the most exotic and spectacular glimpses of the Pacific that they could possibly offer, and they achieved this primarily through a focus on indigenous peoples' bodies and dress; accuracy, context, and nuance were often diminished as images were adapted and edited for magazine production. Ultimately, these engravings played a critical role in the construction of the idea of the Pacific, at a time when British colonial activity in that region was just beginning.*

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**Figure 1.**

Unknown creator, *The Head of a New Zealander, ornamented according to the Custom of the Country, and different from every other in the World*, from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 44, 1774, facing p. 19, engraving, 10.3 x 15.5 cm. Collection The British Library (250.c.20). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

James Cook's expeditions to the Pacific were unprecedented in late eighteenth-century Britain: they visited numerous islands in Polynesia (including Tahiti, Tonga, and Hawaii), New Zealand and Australia, and the north-west coast of North America, and in the years following the expeditions, extraordinary images of these sites were presented to the public. Artists were present on all three voyages, albeit in somewhat different capacities: on the first (1768–71), Cook was accompanied by the aristocrat-scientist Sir Joseph Banks, who brought with him two artists, Alexander Buchan and Sydney Parkinson (additional drawings were made by Banks's secretary, Herman Diedrich Spöring); for the second and third (1772–75 and 1776–80), the Admiralty respectively appointed William Hodges and John

Webber as the official artists. The drawings and paintings made by the artists during the expeditions became the basis for dozens of art works, which brought to life areas of the world that had previously been little known to Europeans. The original field-sketches, as well as the oil paintings, fine engravings, and illustrations made after them were made available to a limited public through exhibitions and prestigious book and print shops. But a further, much larger audience of thousands of British consumers was able to encounter images of the Pacific through the many magazine illustrations that were subsequently based on these art works. In 1774, for instance, *The Gentleman's Magazine* published an image of "the Head of a New Zealander, ornamented according to the Custom of the Country, and different from every other in the World" (Fig. 1). Markers of exotic difference dominate this image: layers of dark lines, dashes and dots represent a complex pattern of tattoos, and the man's face is framed by an arc of ornaments, from the feathers in his hair to the hei-tiki pendant around his neck. Based on Parkinson's work, this plate is one of dozens published in British magazines in the months and years following the voyages, a rich body of imagery which presented readers with a unique view of the Pacific. As the 250th anniversary of Cook's first voyage approaches, an examination of the significance of the magazine illustrations related to his expeditions is timely. <sup>1</sup>

The Pacific magazine illustrations were part of a wider eighteenth-century discourse surrounding Empire. At the time of Cook's voyages, the British Empire itself was rapidly changing, both as an idea and as a network of territories. Although the Empire as a concept was well established, its specific geographic definition was often ambiguous: by the middle of the eighteenth century, the term often encompassed Britain, Ireland, the West Indies, and the North American colonies, but it did not necessarily include British possessions in Africa or the East Indies. <sup>2</sup> Similarly, expectations of what kind of political entity the Empire would become were also changing, particularly after the victories of the Seven Years' War led to authoritarian British rule in some regions. <sup>3</sup> Cook's voyages, then, were not part of an Empire, which had clear geographic and ideological identities; rather, they were part of a complex and nebulous web of highly unstable and rapidly shifting imperial activities.

The expeditions had a political goal: while the purported objective of Cook's first voyage was to observe the Transit of Venus at Tahiti, among his secret instructions from the Admiralty was an order which stated: "You are also with the Consent of the Natives to take possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain"; a full discussion of Cook's efforts to claim territories for Britain is beyond the scope of this article, but it must be stressed that he did not have consent from indigenous people to take possession of land and his efforts to justify his actions suggest he was conscious of that failing. <sup>4</sup> Secret instructions aside, at the time of his

expeditions, people in Britain both within and outside the government were interested in the commercial and strategic possibilities of Pacific islands.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when people in Britain read about Cook's voyages, it would not have been unreasonable for them to surmise that the expeditions potentially had imperial implications, even if the specific opportunities remained unclear in the voyages' immediate aftermath.<sup>6</sup>

Magazine illustrations produced in the wake of the Pacific voyages provide critical evidence of the extent of public awareness in Britain of the Pacific as a region and of British activities there. This is important because the question of public awareness and interest in the British Empire has been vehemently debated by historians. While some have argued that the Empire was "taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world" though it was not necessarily "a subject of popular critical consciousness", others have insisted on "examining the evidence for domestic imperialism *empirically and sceptically*, to see if it necessarily stands up."<sup>7</sup> Recent studies have demonstrated that while there is considerable evidence pointing to awareness of specific aspects of British activity overseas, the nature of this evidence is inconsistent and that, at times, far from unconsciously taking the Empire for granted, people were often very explicit in their views about it: in a discussion of the publicity surrounding military leaders, Nicholas Rogers has found that "although much has been made of the saturation of British news with imperial themes, the coverage was actually uneven"; in his book on East India Company nabobs, Tillman Nechtman concluded that the relationship between Britain and the Empire was not only not taken for granted, it was "a hotly contested public debate".<sup>8</sup> Both studies support Kathleen Wilson's argument that there was no universal "imperial experience", but rather many discrete "ways of imagining it in specific historical periods".<sup>9</sup>

It was not unusual for magazines to play a key role in publishing information about imperial activities, thus helping people to better imagine them: between 1756 and 1760, for example, *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The London Magazine* printed numerous maps representing the "theaters of war in Europe" and contested territories in Africa, America, India, and the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the diverse publicity of the Cook expeditions clearly merits investigation: although we cannot assume that the Pacific was in and of itself of enormous popular interest, the proliferation of representations of the Pacific demonstrates that it was at times of great interest, and magazine illustrations were among the most widely available images.



**Figure 2.**

Unknown creator after George Stubbs, An animal of a new species found on the coast of New South Wales, 1773, plate facing p. 320 from *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 43, July 1773, etching and engraving, 21.3 x 13.2 cm (sheet). Collection National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2013.741). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Joe White Bequest, 2013.

The visual productions associated with the Cook voyages represented places in the Pacific through a variety of media, each of which reached people in Britain in different ways. Every text and representation, be it a book, painting, print, collected object, performance, or illustration, must be understood as a product within a specific cultural space which operated under its own terms and conditions. <sup>11</sup> The different ways in which these products and spaces were commercialized and packaged led to the creation of different audiences: in commenting on the consumption of culture in the eighteenth century, Ann Bermingham has stressed that “there was no single public for art [. . .] in fact, there were many publics.” <sup>12</sup> Magazine audiences

represent a public in their own right, one quite different from the audience for art exhibitions: magazines had thousands of readers throughout Britain and sometimes in the American colonies, and many of the leading magazines were designed to be relatively inexpensive, so as to attract as many readers as possible, regardless of their social position or background. Luxury magazines were comparatively rare in the mid-eighteenth century. When it came to the Cook expeditions, magazine illustrations were more widely accessible than any other type of image. In 1773, for instance, shortly after George Stubbs exhibited *The Kongouro from New Holland, 1770* at the Society of Artists (on which occasion a critic declared it a “rather extraordinary” subject), the painting was engraved for *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (Fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> Although its title suggests a socially elevated audience, Gillian Williamson’s recent monograph on *The Gentleman’s Magazine* argues that the empirical data about its readership indicates this was not the case at all: it was purchased by landed gentlemen, but also by professionals, tradesmen, farmers, journeymen, upper servants, and apprentices—what Williamson characterizes as “a broad spectrum of eighteenth-century literate society”—and its commercial success depended on this breadth; it also had female readers.<sup>14</sup> In 1773, it was likely printing around 6,000 copies per month, with several people reading each copy, and it circulated throughout Britain and the American colonies.<sup>15</sup> In Pennsylvania, the engraving was used as the source for a woodcut published in *Der Hoch-Deutsch Americanische Calender . . . 1775* (1774), a popular almanac which was targeted at a wide audience and sold 10,000 copies annually.<sup>16</sup> The kangaroo in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* introduced the Pacific to a large and varied audience, and it was only one of dozens of Pacific images which appeared in British magazines in the 1770s and 1780s.

## **From Exhibitions to Publications: Presenting the Pacific Expeditions to the Public**

After Cook’s expeditions returned to Britain, the field sketches and objects collected during the voyages became the sources for an extraordinary range of art works, displays, and prints. For Londoners and visitors to the city, there were several potential ways to view art and objects associated with the expeditions. Stubbs’s *Kongouro* was not the only Pacific painting to be exhibited in the 1770s: following Cook’s second voyage, William Hodges showed several paintings at the Royal Academy, such as *A View of Matavai Bay in the Island of Otaheite* and *A View taken in the Bay of Otaheite Peha* (both 1776).<sup>17</sup> John Webber also exhibited Pacific paintings at the Royal Academy, and he showed his drawings to people who visited his house (many were sold after his death).<sup>18</sup> Beyond these artists’ works, various collections of Pacific artefacts were on display: after his return in 1771, Banks

displayed his collections in his home at 14 New Burlington Street; around 1773, Sir Ashton Lever opened his museum (also known as the Holophusicon) of natural history specimens, ethnographic artefacts, and other curiosities at Leicester House; and in 1775, the British Museum trustees established a South Sea Room.<sup>19</sup> People visiting these sites, as Jennifer Newell has argued, seem to have been “primarily drawn in by the strangeness of the display”, and for many, the objects left powerful impressions.<sup>20</sup> A more dramatic type of encounter was Philip James De Louthembourg’s pantomime *Omai, or, a Trip Round the World* (1785), a performance in which the eponymous hero travels to Britain and returns by way of various places Cook had visited on his voyages: while the story itself was fictional, the pantomime was praised for “exact representations” of Pacific places and costumes.<sup>21</sup> Louthembourg had in fact done considerable research in preparing his designs: he knew Webber, who provided him with drawings and acted as a consultant and advisor; he was familiar with Hodges’s work; he had been to the Leverian Museum; and he had even acquired his own collection of Pacific artefacts.<sup>22</sup> The pantomime received very positive reviews and ran for seventy shows.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, ultimately the most popular and widely circulating representations of the Pacific were prints.

Dozens of prints were created for books about the expeditions—some authorized and some not. All three voyages were the subject of official accounts sponsored by the Admiralty: John Hawkesworth’s *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of His present Majesty for making discoveries in the southern hemisphere, and successively performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret and Captain Cook* was published in 1773, Cook’s *A voyage towards the South Pole and round the world: Performed in His Majesty’s ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774 and 1775* appeared in 1777, and *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken, by the Command of His Majesty, for making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere*, begun by Cook and completed by James King, was published in 1784. These books sold well: for all three, the second editions followed within a year of the first; when the official account of the third voyage was published, the print run of 2,000 copies was said to have sold out within three days.<sup>24</sup> In addition to these books, two were written by artists on the first and third voyages, and they also featured numerous illustrations: Sydney Parkinson’s *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas* was published by his brother in 1773 (Parkinson had died on the voyage), and William Ellis published his *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke* in 1783. While all these books would have been reasonably well known, by far the most widely circulating images were the magazine illustrations published following the first and third voyages.

Magazine illustrations represent a distinct stage of mediation. Bernard Smith has argued that the field studies made during the Pacific voyages constitute a primary act of draughtsmanship, the finished drawings London artists made for preparing publications a secondary stage, and the engravings made for publication a tertiary stage.<sup>25</sup> The engravings Smith was concerned with were those made for the books; similarly, the Pacific illustrations engraved for magazines constitute a stage of mediation that is at least a tertiary stage removed from the original sketch, and, if magazine engravers were adapting from books, a quaternary stage. Examining how the generic conventions of eighteenth-century magazine illustrations affected the adaptation of Pacific imagery reveals their unique contribution to the British idea of the Pacific that developed at that time.<sup>26</sup> Although encountering these reinvented images would not necessarily have made people especially knowledgeable, their ubiquity makes them extremely important.<sup>27</sup> The Cook expedition magazine illustrations extended the integration of the Pacific into consumer culture in a way that no other product could.

Cook's first voyage to the Pacific received considerable publicity upon the return to Britain. The places the expedition had visited were largely unfamiliar to the British, and when the authorized account was published, not only was the subject matter exciting, it was also controversial: Hawkesworth, who had been charged with producing the official account based on the various captains' journals, was accused of inaccuracies (the captains themselves felt they had been misrepresented) and of offending taste, morality, and religion, particularly through his attitude to the role Providence had played in the completion of the voyages and to the sexual encounters with indigenous peoples.<sup>28</sup> Hawkesworth's and Parkinson's books were published within days of each other, in early June 1773, and shortly thereafter, several of the country's leading magazines published images related to the expedition, inserting themselves into the public controversy over the accounts of Cook's voyage and purporting to offer readers "truthful" images.<sup>29</sup> The title page of *The Westminster Magazine* for June 1773, for example, described the issue as "Embellished with 1. Head of Otegoowgoow, Son of a New Zealand Chief: - and, 2. Head of a New Zealand Chief; but curiously *tataowed*, or marked, according to their Manner. - 3. A War Canoe of New Zealand."<sup>30</sup> Although it is not always possible to tell whether magazine engravers were working from the drawings made for the books, from proofs of the book illustrations, or from the book illustrations themselves, in this instance, an advertisement for the magazine announced that the illustrations were "copied, by permission, from Mr. Sidney Parkinson's Journal".<sup>31</sup> Given that these engravers had permission to copy, they may also have been given advance proofs to work from, but even so, they almost certainly had to produce their plates relatively quickly. In all

likelihood, this would have been viewed as a mutually beneficial arrangement: magazine publishers could have increased their sales by capitalizing on the hype surrounding the books, and the book publishers likely hoped to increase their own sales through magazine publicity.

*The London Magazine*, *The Gentleman's Magazine's* chief rival, published plates throughout the summer of 1773: *Four different Representations of the Natives of Otaheite* appeared in June, *A fine Representation of a New Zealand Warrior*, and *two Natives of New Holland advancing to Combat* in July (Fig. 3), and *The Representation of a singular View in New Zealand, with a War Canoe under a natural-arched Rock* in August (Fig. 4); like the images in *The Westminster Magazine*, all three of these plates appear to be primarily based on plates in Parkinson's *Journal*.<sup>32</sup> Illustrations related to Tahiti were selected for *The Lady's Magazine*, which published *The Dress of the Inhabitants of Otaheite* and *The Method of Burying in the Island of Otaheite* (respectively based on images in Parkinson's *Journal* and Hawkesworth's *Account*), and *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, which published *Captain Wallis paying a Visit to the Queen of Otaheite* and *A Dramatic Entertainment* (Fig. 5) (both based on images which appear in Hawkesworth's *Account*).<sup>33</sup>



### Figure 3.

Unknown creator, *A fine Representation of a New Zealand Warrior*, and *two Natives of New Holland advancing to Combat*, from *The London Magazine*, 42, July 1773, facing p. 32, engraving, 12.3 × 20.6cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5437). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.



*Hippa, or Place of Retreat on an Arch'd Rock in New Zealand, with a War-Canoe; & a Non-Descript's Animal of New-Holland.*

**Figure 4.**

Unknown creator, The Representation of a singular View in New Zealand, with a War Canoe under a natural-arched Rock from *The London Magazine*, 42, August 1773, facing p. 369, engraving, 9.5 x 15.4 cm. Collection The British Library (P.P. 5437). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.



*A Dramatic Entertainment.*

**Figure 5.**

Unknown creator, A Dramatic Entertainment, from *The Universal Magazine*, 53, September 1773, facing p. 113, engraving, 10.5 x 19.2 cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5439). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

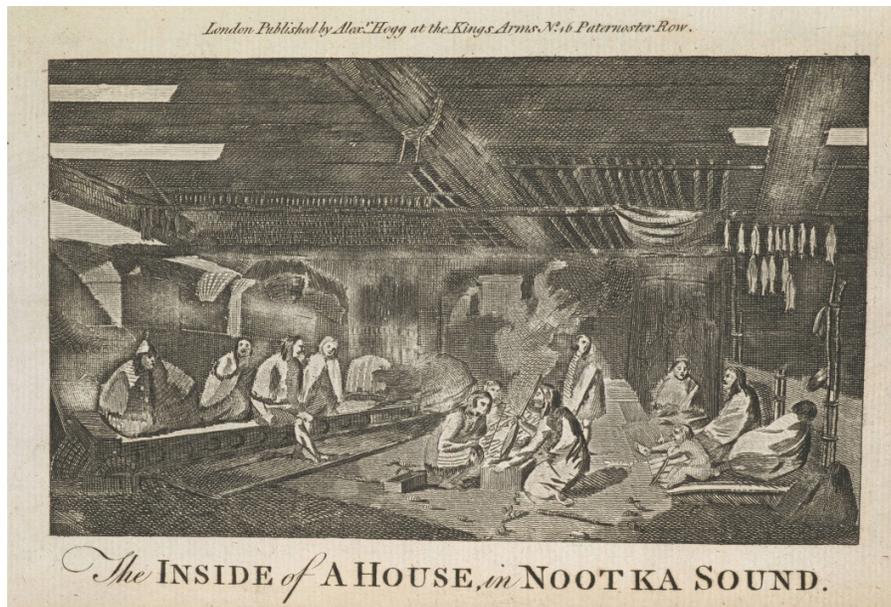
With the exception of *The Gentleman's Magazine's* image of a kangaroo, all of these illustrations represented indigenous people or artefacts from their culture. In several images, their dress and body ornaments dominate the depiction; for example, in *The London Magazine's* image of a New Zealand

warrior, the pattern of his tattoos seems to flatten his face, and his clothing and the weapon he carries across his chest (most likely a patoo-patoo, a type of bludgeon) appear to overpower his body, to the point that the muscles of his torso are reduced to straight lines.<sup>34</sup> The effect that the publishers presumably sought was to present their readers with the most exotic and spectacular glimpses of the Pacific that they could possibly offer, and they achieved this through a focus on indigenous peoples' bodies and dress.

When Cook's account of the second voyage was published, magazine coverage of the expedition was more moderate. In a major study of Cook's voyages, Nicholas Thomas has argued that much of the press interest in the first voyage was due to Banks's celebrity, and that no one on the second voyage, not even Cook himself, had comparable fame; press coverage of the voyagers' return was limited.<sup>35</sup> The leading magazines hardly published any images related to the second voyage. There was nothing inherent in Hodges's illustrations which made them unsuitable: his portraits of men and women of Tanna, New Caledonia, and New Zealand are similar in scale and composition to Webber's portraits from the third voyage, which would prove extremely popular with magazine publishers, and the relative simplicity of some of his views would have been easier to engrave than many of Webber's scenes.<sup>36</sup> The Hodges illustrations were also admired: the *Monthly Review*, for example, acknowledged "with pleasure the very great merit of Mr. Hodges's various designs" and noted that Mr Forster, one of the scientists on the voyage, had testified "to the *truth* of a considerable part of his portraits, landscapes, and other drawings".<sup>37</sup> Despite this praise, it was only following Cook's third voyage that magazines again began to publish numerous Pacific images: when the books about his final voyage were published, Cook was widely admired as a national hero and, having been killed by Hawaiians in 1779, as something of a martyr; this intense public interest may have inspired magazine publishers to try and capitalize on his celebrity.

Series of images appeared in several magazines in the 1780s: *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* published Pacific illustrations every month from June 1784 until June 1785; between 1785 and 1787, *The New London Magazine* published twelve illustrations; *The Lady's Magazine* published twenty illustrations between 1784 and 1787. In total, over sixty Pacific illustrations appeared in British magazines between 1784 and 1787. As in 1773, images depicting indigenous people or their communities were by far the most common subjects: *The New London Magazine* alone, for instance, published *Natives of Oonalashka and their Habitations*, portraits of a man and woman from Oonalashka, an image of a New Zealand Warrior (a figure adapted from the illustration published in *The London Magazine* in 1773), *The Inside of a House in Nootka Sound* (Fig. 6), *A Boxing-Match, in Hapae*, *The Inside of a Hippah, in New Zealand*, and a depiction of a

mourning ritual in Tahiti.<sup>38</sup> Many illustrations were portraits: the series published by *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* included depictions of people from Manglea, the Friendly Islands, Nootka Sound, Prince William Sound, Oonalashka, the Sandwich Islands, and Kamtschatka.<sup>39</sup> Illustrations described as views often featured indigenous buildings: the series in *The Lady's Magazine* included *A View of a Hut, and Plantation at Amsterdam, or Tonga-taboo*, *A Hut on the West Coast of America, Lat. 65° 30' N*, *A View of the Huts and a Boat House, at O'whyee*, *A View of the Market Place at Amsterdam, or Tonga-taboo* (Fig. 7) and *A View at Bolcheretzkoï in Kamtschatka*.<sup>40</sup> Some subjects appeared in more than one magazine: both *The European Magazine* and *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* published images of a man and woman of Oonalashka, and a portrait of a woman from the Sandwich Islands was published in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, *The Lady's Magazine* (Fig. 8), and *Town and Country Magazine*.<sup>41</sup> Magazine publishers evidently expected images of indigenous people from the Pacific to attract attention, and there is evidence to suggest that the illustrations were popular: in July 1784, the editors of *The Lady's Magazine* declared that they had received "great encouragement" and "numerous thanks [...] on account of the late elegant Plate, and the *Extract from Captain Cook's last voyage*".<sup>42</sup> The adaptation and repackaging of the images of Cook's third voyage was clearly successful: all these magazines offered their readers glimpses of exotic spectacles.



**Figure 6.**

Unknown creator, View of the Inside of a House in Nootka Sound, from *The New London Magazine*, 2, 1786, facing p. 74, engraving, 9.4 × 15.9 cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5437.b). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.



**Figure 7.**

James Heath after William Ellis, A View of the Market Place at Amsterdam, or Tonga-taboo, from *The Lady's Magazine*, 16, 1785, engraving, 9.4 × 15.1 cm. Collection the British Museum (1875,0213.245). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 8.**

Unknown creator, A Man and Woman of Sandwich Islands, from *The Lady's Magazine*, 15, 1784, facing p. 285, engraving, 9.3 × 15.7 cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5141). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

## The Audience for the Pacific Magazine Illustrations

Magazine illustrations had the potential to be influential because the circulation of monthly magazines was tremendous: thousands of issues were printed every month, their distribution and price making them relatively easy to acquire.<sup>43</sup> Surviving statistics indicate growth in circulation in the second half of the eighteenth century: in 1746, *The Gentleman's Magazine* was printing 3,000 copies per month; in 1769, *The London Magazine* was printing 4,000; and in 1797, *The Gentleman's Magazine* was printing 4,550, *The European Magazine*, 3,250, and *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, 1,750.<sup>44</sup> Most of these magazines were reasonably popular outside London: *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The London Magazine* circulated extensively in the provinces; *The European Magazine* claimed it had "readers and admirers in every quarter of the globe".<sup>45</sup> Not only were they widely available, magazines were also significantly less expensive than many books, or even access to libraries. Most of the magazines examined in this study, including *The London Magazine*, *The Westminster Magazine*, *The Lady's Magazine*, and *Town and Country Magazine*, sold for 6p. per issue.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, in the middle of the eighteenth century, membership at circulating libraries ranged from 10s. 6p. to two guineas, and Hawkesworth's *Voyages* and the *Voyage* describing Cook's third journey cost 3l. 3s. and 4l. 14s. 6p. respectively.<sup>47</sup> For the eighteenth-century consumer, part of the rationale

behind magazines was that they provided readers with abridged accounts of books, sparing them the need to purchase the books themselves; many people read fiction through magazines rather than novels. <sup>48</sup>

Access was a key factor in editorial decisions: in 1784, the editors of *The Lady's Magazine* claimed that part of their purpose in publishing extracts from and illustrations associated with Cook's third voyage was that the price of the official book was "so much increased, as to be too dear for the purchase of every one". <sup>49</sup> Lists of subscribers confirm that low prices did attract a broad range of consumers, from aristocrats to apprentices and shop assistants. <sup>50</sup> Perhaps most importantly, not only could many people afford magazines, a single copy would often have had many readers: like newspapers, magazines were routinely shared, both in public spaces, such as coffee houses, and in private spaces within the home. <sup>51</sup> In view of this, we can reasonably assume that any Pacific illustration published in a leading magazine would have been seen by tens of thousands of people. <sup>52</sup>

Because diversity among magazine readers was significant, it is difficult to make any conclusions about the readers looking at Pacific magazine illustrations, the vast majority of which appeared in what might be identified as generalist publications. Truly niche publications targeted specific professions or interests, and among general interest magazines, there were many similarities in content; publications like *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* and *The London Magazine* had adopted *The Gentleman's Magazine's* emphasis on miscellaneous, wide-ranging content for a broad readership. <sup>53</sup> The sole exception to this murkiness is *The Lady's Magazine*: although there were men who subscribed to and wrote for *The Lady's Magazine*, it had made a point of reaching out to a female audience and adapting its tone accordingly; in introducing the account of Cook's third voyage as a serial feature, its editors promised to provide "an abridgement of it, adapted entirely to Female taste, and Female curiosity" (they omitted considerable navigational detail, information on the weather, and descriptions of coastlines encountered while sailing). <sup>54</sup> *The Lady's Magazine* routinely published its Pacific illustrations alongside sewing patterns and music sheets; the June 1784 issue, for instance, offered readers "An elegant new Pattern for a Handkerchief, or Apron" and "A Song set to Music by Mr. Handel" in addition to the plate depicting the man and woman of the Sandwich Islands (Fig. 8). <sup>55</sup> In this publication, the Pacific illustrations were thrust into a feminine, domestic space, but this was not necessarily problematic. While the pursuit of scientific knowledge was the most famous goal of the Pacific voyages, Cook himself was celebrated not only as a great

explorer, but also as virtuous, humble and humane, a loyal husband, and a man of sensibility, and these qualities presumably made him, and by extension, his voyages, a suitable subject to present to a female audience.<sup>56</sup>

Not only was there a wide range of people who read magazines, there was a wide range of approaches to reading magazines, and in light of this diversity, we cannot assume that readers would have necessarily connected magazine illustrations of the Pacific to any wider discourse about the voyages. For those readers who purchased magazines as part of a personal ambition to be considered a “polite” person of refined sociability and good taste, it is possible that in addition to encountering the Pacific in magazines, they had read the official accounts of the voyages.<sup>57</sup> But many readers read magazines casually: Francis Place, for example, describing the reading he had done while he was an apprentice in London, noted he had read “many Magazines” (as well as other texts) but considered his reading to be “devoid of method, and very desultory”.<sup>58</sup> The books on the expeditions and paintings created by the voyage artists could provide a very different context for the magazine illustrations; for instance, on encountering *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure’s* illustration of Tahitian women (Fig. 9 *Woman of Otaheite, dancing* and *Woman of Otaheite, bringing a Present*, 1784), a reader familiar with Georg(e) Forster’s account of Cook’s second expedition, *A Voyage Round the World* (1777), might have connected the sensual appearance of the women in the magazine to Forster’s contention that dances which would be indecent in Europe were “perfectly innocent” in Tahiti because the people there did not have the same customs as “civilized Europe”.<sup>59</sup> To make this connection would require well-informed reading, however; in all likelihood, many magazine readers simply connected the plate to the article it accompanied, which described the women as “royal sisters” in “picturesque and elegant” dress.<sup>60</sup> The Pacific magazine illustrations represent a discourse about the Pacific which was informed by the written accounts and ambitious post-voyage art works, but ultimately separated from them, and the magazine illustrations could not carry all of the same connotations. They are a unique set of representations, the production of which was determined above all by the magazine industry.



**Figure 9.**

Unknown creator, Woman of Otaheite, dancing and Woman of Otaheite, bringing a Present, from *The Universal Magazine*, 75, 1784, facing p. 57, engraving, 12.6 × 21.2cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5439). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

## The Publisher's Investment: Promoting and Commissioning Magazine Illustrations

Between them, eight leading magazines printed over seventy plates representing the Pacific. This number of illustrations is an extraordinary total for a single subject, as is the number of magazines they appeared in, but in general, magazine illustration was well established by the late eighteenth century and it was a critical element of the appeal of the product. The variety of content in magazines had led to a correspondingly wide range of illustrations, including maps, diagrams, portraits, illustrations of plants and animals, historical pictures, and views. Plates were an important part of marketing magazines: when it launched in 1785, the editors of *The New London Magazine* claimed that “the very Elegant Copper-Plates with which this Work will be enriched, will be worth of themselves alone more than four Times the Price of the Magazine” (it too cost 6p.).<sup>61</sup> New issues were routinely advertised in newspapers, and these also promoted illustrations. In 1773, the heading for an advertisement for *The Westminster Magazine* appeared as follows:

OTAHITEEANS and NEW ZEALANDERS! NEW DISCOVERIES in the SOUTH SEAS! *Next Thursday will be published, Price 6d.* (Embellished with two heads of New-Zealand Chiefs, curiously tataowed according to their manner; and a war canoe of New-

Zealand; elegantly engraved on a quarto copper-plate, copied, by permission, from Mr. Sidney Parkinson's Journal; and the Fatal Confidence, a beautiful historical Print) NUMBER VII. of THE WESTMINSTER MAGAZINE; or, The Pantheon of Taste. For June 1773. <sup>62</sup>

Advertisements like this one indicate that it was important to offer novel illustrations to consumers, and that the exoticism of the Pacific was expected to attract attention. In all likelihood, this was one of the chief reasons publishers chose to adapt the Pacific images: unlike the men who were behind the official books, who were determined to promote the voyages, these publishers were primarily in the business of selling and profiting from magazines.

The Pacific magazine illustrations were usually based on book illustrations, but relatively little information survives about who was creating the plates for the magazines or what specific images they had access to. Many magazine plates are unsigned, and in general, their production varied tremendously. Some were created by artists closely affiliated with the Royal Academy; for example, the artist Thomas Stothard, who contributed at least fifteen engravings to *Town and Country Magazine* between 1780 and 1785 and at least ninety to *The Lady's Magazine* between 1780 and 1797, became an A.R.A. in 1792 and a full Academician in 1794. <sup>63</sup> Others had less impressive careers, and David Alexander has argued that many plates were unsigned because "some were so poorly done that no self-respecting engraver would have acknowledged them". <sup>64</sup> With the Pacific plates, there are only occasional examples of references to artists: in 1784, for instance, *The Westminster Magazine* published twelve Pacific images after illustrations by William Ellis, one of which was described as "a striking Representation of that inclement Part of the World, engraved from a Drawing taken on the Spot". <sup>65</sup> The credit here is somewhat ambiguous and while it is entirely possible that the magazine illustrator had access to Ellis's drawing, this may have been merely a promotional claim. In contrast, for its first Pacific illustration, *The New London Magazine* pointedly informed readers that the image came from the official account, declaring the plate showed "A Representation of the Natives of OONALASHKA and their HABITATIONS, accurately engraved by Eastgate, from the Folio Edition of Cook's Voyages, performed by Royal Authority". <sup>66</sup>

No matter who the engraver was, these images were a major investment for their publishers: every illustration required its own plate, and the magazine sometimes needed several identical plates in order to print a sufficient number of impressions. <sup>67</sup> The expense and time it took for this type of

production may explain why series of images representing the Pacific sometimes ended up out of sync with their accompanying texts; for example, the description of the people at Nootka Sound was published in the February 1786 issue of *The New London Magazine*, but the accompanying plate only appeared in March.<sup>68</sup> When considered as significant investments, the Pacific magazine illustrations are another indication of the popularity of selling the exotic, a financial opportunity not unlike that exploited by the Louthembourg pantomime. The physical qualities of magazines, however, shaped the nature of the images that they offered readers.

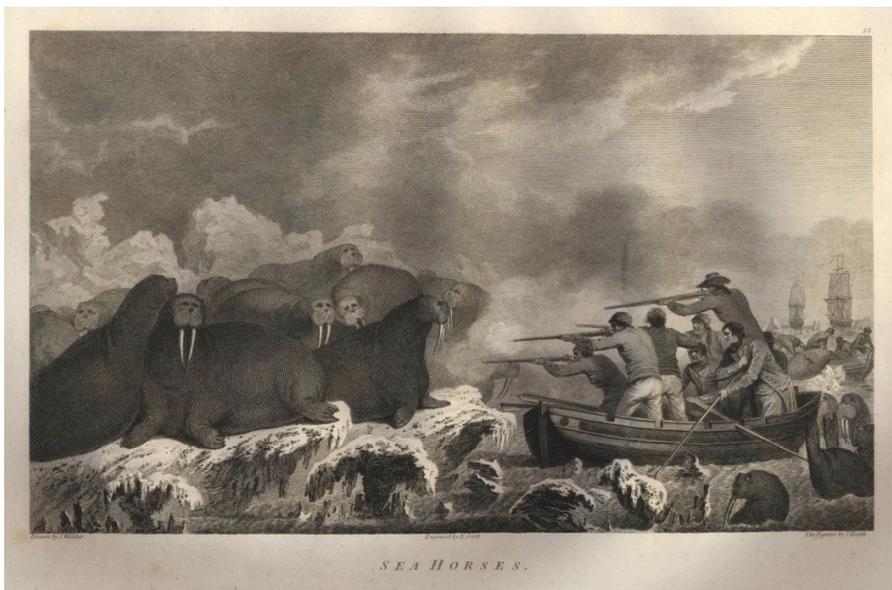
## **The Expectations of Illustrations and the Creation of Magazine Plates**

The aesthetic requirements of illustrations were significantly different from what was required in an exhibition painting. In creating post-voyage works, both Hodges and Webber were aware of distinct expectations for Royal Academy paintings, which were admired for their overall effect and display of artistic talent, and official illustrations, which were admired for accuracy and their presentation of information.<sup>69</sup> Magazine editors had requirements as well, such as a small size, and it was very unusual for the same composition to appear in an exhibition, an official account, and a magazine. Webber's depiction of sailors shooting "sea horses" (now known as walrus) is a rare example of a scene which was painted and exhibited in London (Fig. 10), engraved for Cook's *Voyage* (Fig. 11), and published in magazines (it was published by *The Lady's Magazine* (Fig. 12) in August 1786 and *The New London Magazine* in October 1786).<sup>70</sup> When Webber submitted the painting to the Royal Academy in 1784, the critical response was mixed: a writer for the *Morning Chronicle* declared it "what we must profess ourselves unable to understand—either the subject or the manner of treating it"; the *Morning Post* described it as "a most extraordinary scene, and probably well expressed", but claimed there was "nothing very painter-like in the execution"; and the *Morning Herald* stated "This representation may be in nature, but we must leave to the admiration of the *Iceland Connoisseur*, what is an unpleasing picture in Great Britain."<sup>71</sup> Although the picture failed to satisfy the artistic standards of these critics, all hint that the composition might be acceptable as an illustration of an encounter with nature, if more information was provided to the viewer, and it was included in the official *Voyage*. Publishers' subsequent decisions to invest in engraving the "sea horses" for magazines suggests that as an illustration, the subject was more successful.



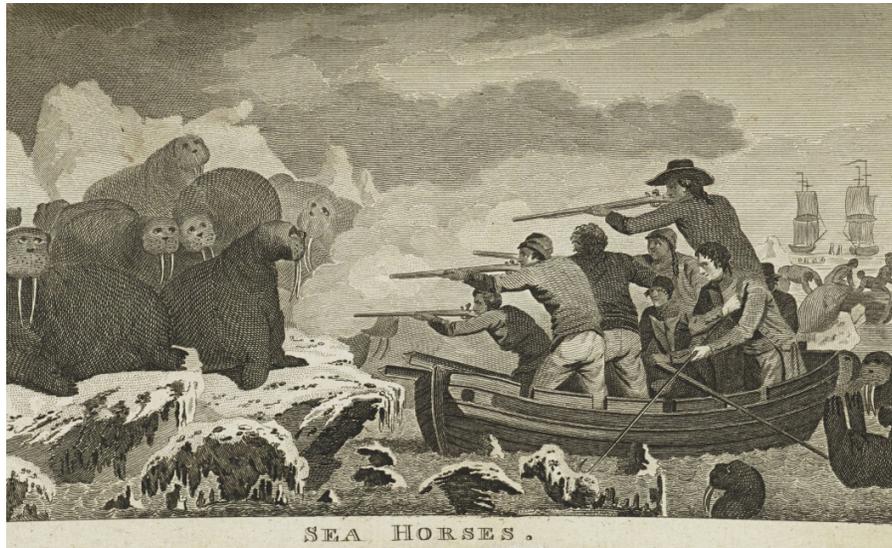
**Figure 10.**

John Webber, A Party from His Majesty's ships Resolution & Discovery Shooting sea-horses, *Latitude 71 North*, 1778, 1784, oil on canvas, 124.5 cm × 157.5 cm. Collection National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (BHC4212). Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



**Figure 11.**

John Heath and Edmund Scott after John Webber, *Sea Horses*, 1784, engraving, 27.2 × 41.3 cm. Collection the British Museum (1957,0705.46). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 12.**

Unknown creator, *Sea Horses*, from *The Lady's Magazine*, 17, 1786, facing p. 432, engraving, 12.5 × 20.8 cm. Collection The British Library (P.P.5141). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

The illustrations in the official books were subject to critical attention as well, and reviewers were attentive to the perceived compromises which occurred when drawings were turned into engravings. Among the illustrations in Hawkesworth's *Voyages*, for example, was an illustration of women in Tahiti dancing (Fig. 13). The illustration was engraved by Francesco Bartolozzi from a drawing which had been created by Giovanni Battista Cipriani, who drew the scene by referring to a number of Parkinson's sketches of figures (the setting is believed to be based on a separate Parkinson drawing, now lost).<sup>72</sup> In general, it was not unusual for the artists and engravers creating the illustrations to make significant changes from what Spöring, Buchan, and Parkinson had recorded in their sketches.<sup>73</sup> This Cipriani-Bartolozzi illustration, however, drew a sharp rebuke from one reviewer, who declared:

Though we were never at Otaheite, or present at a dramatic entertainment in the island of *Ulietea*, yet we may venture confidently to affirm, that *Tupia* [Tupaia, a Polynesian priest who joined Cook's expedition in Tahiti], were he alive, would disown the good company got together in plate No. 7, for his neighbours. Instead of the *Costume* of the South Sea islanders, the spectator is presented with figures which, in the air of the heads, forms, attitudes, &c. continually remind him of the antique, and of the productions of the Roman, Florentine, and other great schools.<sup>74</sup>

Despite this highly public criticism, the image was adapted for *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, which published it in September 1773 (advertised as a “neatly engraved” copper plate which represented “a dance and dramatic entertainment, performed in the island of Bolabola, in the South Seas”) (Fig. 5).<sup>75</sup> In preparing that illustration, further changes were made. A compromise in size was inevitable: the image in Hawkesworth’s *Voyages* measured 33.2 x 44 cm, whereas the related image in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* measured 10.5 x 19.2 cm. Perhaps because the image could not easily be scaled down, the magazine illustrator chose to crop and rearrange it—a decision which had a powerful effect on the composition. For the magazine, eight figures were left out, much of the structure of the house and the surrounding landscape was cropped, and the remaining composition was flipped. The resulting image is quite different: the topless dancer is now at the centre of the image such that the scene appears to pivot around her; the shift in her position, combined with the removal of the female spectators and the seated musician, and the close cropping of the mat which functions as a stage for the dancers, makes this image a much more intimate and titillating encounter than that offered by the book itself. Although the illustrator may have simply been looking for a practical solution to the problem of the large composition, the loss of context and nuance in the image sensationalizes it and undermines the complexity of the culture depicted. What the image does not do, however, is correct or improve on any of the issues the criticism of the Cipriani-Bartolozzi image had identified. The magazine publisher presumably felt that the contexts were sufficiently different that he need not worry about criticism from an engraving connoisseur: this was an inexpensive illustration by an anonymous artist, presented as a fascinating sight rather than an object which merited analysis as a fine art work.



**Figure 13.**

Francesco Bartolozzi after Giovanni Battista Cipriani, Dance of Raiatea or Tahiti women, from *An account of the voyage in the Southern Hemisphere* by John Hawkesworth (London: 1773), 1773, engraving, 33.2 × 44 cm. Collection the British Museum (Oc2006,Prt.51). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Similar contrasts and compromises occurred when Webber's illustrations of the third voyage were published and adapted for magazines. In preparing the official account, the quality of the illustrations had been a priority: special paper was acquired from Paris, and twenty-five engravers were employed, some of whom were very well known and expensive; for a depiction of "a Human Sacrifice in Otaheite", William Woollett was paid 157l. 10s.<sup>76</sup> A note in the book itself highlighted these efforts: at the head of the list of plates, the editor advised

As many of the Purchasers of this Work may choose to preserve the larger-sized Plates in a separate volume in folio, these have been here marked with Asterisks; and Booksellers are cautioned not to have them bound up, with the rest of the Plates, in the places of these volumes pointed out by the respective References, unless they receive particular directions for that purpose.<sup>77</sup>

Once again, the plates attracted reviewers' attention: the *Critical Review* declared "Twenty-seven engravers were employed about these splendid plates; who, in general, have fulfilled every expectation that might be formed from English artists, now, undoubtedly, the first in the world"; in contrast, the

*English Review* claimed “Few or none of the plates will give very great pleasure to the eye of the connoisseur”, though it acknowledged that “our best artists have been employed” and a huge investment had been made.<sup>78</sup> Unlike those images, the magazine illustrations were never intended for folio volumes in a gentleman’s library or for a connoisseur’s attention, and the loss of detail and subtlety in scaling down the illustrations was evidently deemed acceptable. Some magazine illustrators had great difficulty in reproducing Webber’s views of ceremonies and places in the Pacific; for instance, *The New London Magazine’s* illustration of the *View of the Inside of a House in Nootka Sound* (Fig. 6) was described as Webber’s design engraved by Thornton, but it was hardly a successful adaptation. Once again, the image had to be significantly scaled down: the illustration in the official account measures 22.6 x 37.4 cm; the magazine illustration measures 9.4 x 15.9 cm.<sup>79</sup> Important details were lost in the compression, possibly because the magazine engraver(s) simply did not have the skill or the time to replicate details well on a smaller scale (they were most likely under pressure to prepare the plates quickly): the magazine illustrator has included the full composition and all twelve figures shown in the original image, but the figures’ faces have been reduced to the most rudimentary of markings, details of their garments are gone, and even their bodies lack definition; it is also somewhat difficult to recognize that the central group is preparing fish, the smell of which, the book stresses, filled houses in the community.<sup>80</sup> Absent the fine details of the house’s sculptures, the baskets, the ornament on their clothing, and the extent of their provisions, the house looks particularly primitive, and, by extension, the people do as well. The narrative had relied on some of these details; for example, in the official account, Cook made a point of mentioning the carved wooden figures, and declared that “Mr. Webber’s view of the inside of a Nootka house, in which these images are represented, will convey a more perfect idea of them than any description.”<sup>81</sup> It is possible that the crudeness in the magazine was not seen as problematic, as the official illustrations representing the first and third voyages had attracted criticism for their elegance; one reviewer had even suggested that: “the coarsest wooden cuts, exhibiting a faithful copy of Nature, as it appears in this part of the world, would have been more acceptable to every judicious Reader.”<sup>82</sup> Although production limitations are a more likely explanation than the ideology of the engraver or publisher, coarseness was certainly present in *The New London Magazine*.

The *Dramatic Entertainment* and *Nootka House* are two examples of a constant practical challenge for magazine illustrators: because magazines were small publications, scaling down, cropping, and compromising details was routine; however, some images were easier to adapt than others. William Ellis’s images, for instance, were from an unofficial account, and his book was smaller than the official one. Although they were not as prestigious

as the images from the official account, his illustrations were likely attractive to magazine publishers because they did not usually require resizing: his *A View of the Market Place at Amsterdam, or Tonga-taboo* is identical in size (9.4 x 15.1 cm) to an illustration published in *The Lady's Magazine* in June 1785 (Fig. 7).<sup>83</sup> Ellis's images were also graphically suitable for magazines: with their lack of fine details and loose, sketchy lines, even a hack engraver would not have had much difficulty reproducing them.<sup>84</sup> This type of image reuse was not common however, and most illustrations had to be rendered in a smaller size. The Pacific portraits were ideally suited to this, and their convenience for adaptation is most likely one of the main reasons that they were frequently chosen. Even the minor adaptations made, however, had a significant impact on how their indigenous subjects were represented.

When the Pacific portraits were adapted, relatively little of the image was lost, but they were often reframed. *The European Magazine's A Man & Woman of Prince William's Sound* (Fig. 14) exemplifies the advantages of portraits: although they were reproduced at a fraction of the size of Webber's illustrations and two different people are shown on a single page, most of the details of the figures' dress and ornaments have been included. There are slight differences—the delineation of individual hairs and furs is not quite as crisp, the lighting around the eyes is not quite as bright, and the shadows on the faces are not quite as subtle, such that overall, the faces are not quite as expressive—but ultimately, these are fairly good adaptations. The most striking difference is that in Webber's illustration, the figures are set within plain rectangular frames, and they are separate plates; in the magazine, the faces have been placed in circular portals framed with drapery and a cartouche caption, as if to fit them into an elegant, fashionable frame which might just as easily have surrounded portraits of celebrated British individuals. This type of conspicuous reframing was not unique: *The European Magazine* used a similar design to frame its portraits of a man and woman of Oonalashka the following month; and *The Lady's Magazine* used swags and foliage to frame *A Man and Woman of Sandwich Islands* in 1784 (Fig. 8).<sup>85</sup> Although *The Lady's Magazine* did not persist in using this frame for later issues, when it published illustrations of *A Woman of Kamtschatka*, *A Man of Sandwich Islands*, and *A Native of King Georges Sound* (all in 1785), the top of each picture was labelled "Engraved for the Ladies Magazine", as if to emphasize that the image had been rebranded.<sup>86</sup>



**Figure 14.**

Unknown creator, A Man & Woman of Prince William's Sound, from *The European Magazine*, 6 July 1784, facing p. 4, engraving, 9.2 × 15.5 cm. Collection The British Library (PP 5459.z). Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Reframing and rebranding is significant because the European frames implicitly drew attention to the contrast between European culture and indigenous cultures in the Pacific region. In his discussion of the pictorial strategies Theodor de Bry employed for creating engravings based on John White's watercolours made during Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition to Virginia in 1585 (first published in *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, 1590), Michael Gaudio has argued that when de Bry's viewers looked at his representations of indigenous Americans, "they were declaring their difference from the savage by doing precisely that which the savage cannot do" and that "To possess the art of mechanical reproduction, to experience the world through this art, was thus to be aware of oneself as living in an advanced and ever-advancing state of civilization."<sup>87</sup> The magazine illustrations of Pacific peoples do not highlight their status as engravings in the same way as de Bry's, but the plates do remind viewers that they are looking at images specifically created for them, the modern British consumer. To that end, the contrast Gaudio identified is once again at play. The Pacific people Cook and Webber had encountered were effectively being placed on a virtual stage in the British print entertainment industry.

While magazine frames created harsh juxtapositions, the absence of any frame at all could be equally powerful. In order to place as much illustration as possible on a single plate, magazine illustrators routinely extracted images from their original settings and contexts and put them together. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* featured several pairings of portraits of indigenous people, all of which presented the figures as cut-outs

against a white ground, such that they are no longer distinct portraits of individuals but rather heads suspended in a shared space. In the official account, none of the portraits in question were presented as pendants, but the magazine illustrators forced the pairings, which did not even necessarily come from the same parts of the text: the portraits of Poulaho, the King of the Friendly Islands, and a woman from Eao, which were published turning slightly towards each other in July 1784, represent encounters which took place on 27 May 1777 and 12 July 1777 respectively.<sup>88</sup> To bring images of individuals together in this way was to distance them from the narratives they were part of and, by extension, to tacitly encourage viewers to see the people depicted as representing cultural types.

Beyond portrait heads, it was also relatively straightforward to combine full-length figures; for example, *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* of August 1784 included a plate which showed two women, a *Woman of Otaheite, dancing* and a *Woman of Otaheite, bringing a Present* (Fig. 9), both of whom have been extracted from images in which they are shown performing rituals in landscape settings. Here again, the juxtaposition is forced, and in this instance, to place them in isolation is to remove them from their respective stages, taking away the dignity of their performances and drawing attention to the seductiveness of their bodies. For the editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, the juxtaposition of two figures was not only practical, it was potentially interesting: explaining a plate which combined “A New Zealand Warrior in his proper Dress, compleatly Armed, according to their Manner” and “A Native of Otaheite in the Dress of his Country”, he noted the plate showed “Chiefs in two different islands, one in a high, the other in a low latitude, by which their different natures are strongly contrasted.”<sup>89</sup> Although this too may have been an unintended consequence of an illustrator's attempt to offer as many images as possible on a single page, the juxtaposition of figures was effectively eroding the significance of the images as originally presented in the book: what had been representations of encounters was now an illustration of a reflection on indigenous cultures.

Taken out of spatial context, the magazine figures effectively inhabit an imaginary Pacific, to a far greater degree than their counterparts in the books do. In a discussion of artists and colonial encounters, Julie Codell argued that: “The visual arts are capable of projecting atopic spaces [non-places or virtual places] invoked by physical landscape but not tied to the physical”; these spaces then constitute an imaginary geography.<sup>90</sup> From a contemporary perspective, it would be naive to think that the images produced during and immediately after the Pacific voyages are objective and realist. In the eighteenth century, however, the rationale for taking artists on the voyages was that they would be able to produce images which could serve as sources of information, and it is now impossible to know how many

eighteenth-century viewers believed in the veracity of the images they were presented with (reviewers' speculations about accuracy indicates that at least some people had doubts). <sup>91</sup> Magazine illustrations were not rooted in the official accounts' (seemingly) scientific approach: in them the tension between the real and the imaginary is intensified as figures were extracted and rearranged. Isolated from their cultures and the places they inhabited, the indigenous people represented in these images are set against blankness, almost as if they were specimens rather than individuals. Magazine audiences were effectively presented with images of indigenous peoples from the Pacific islands, from Australia and New Zealand, and from the Pacific coast of North America, in which the figures' personhood and places were undermined, and instead the exotic clothing and body ornaments took centre stage.

Extreme versions of an imaginary visual Pacific were created when illustrators synthesized separate images into single compositions. As with reframing and extracting images, this was likely an unintended consequence of a persistent desire to offer as much illustration as possible. With a single composition, though, accuracy—which had been part of the intention of creating the official illustrations—was thoroughly sacrificed for a more interesting or sensational image. One dramatic example of this type was *The Representation of a singular View in New Zealand, with a War Canoe under a natural-arched Rock* published in *The London Magazine* in 1773 (Fig. 4). This plate is a combination of Parkinson's *A War Canoe, of New Zealand* (Fig. 15), his *View of an Arched Rock, on the Coast of New Zealand; with an Hippa, or Place of Retreat, on the Top of it* (Fig. 16), and Stubbs's kangaroo (an animal which the expedition had encountered in Australia), made almost comically disproportionate. The compression of these images into one illustration comes at the cost of detail: for instance, the carving on the war canoe has been attempted in the magazine, but it lacks the clarity of the Parkinson book illustration, in which the creature at the head of the canoe has more finely delineated eyes, tongue, hands, and feet. Compositional elements have also been omitted altogether: although the arched rock is similar in both Parkinson's book and the magazine, in Parkinson's view there is a British ship on the far right which the magazine illustrator has removed. It is as if the illustrator was not actually attempting to adapt any one image, but was rather creating a Pacific-themed collage, with limited attention to the unique meanings of the different elements at play.



**Figure 15.**

Richard Bernard Godfrey after Sydney Parkinson, A War Canoe, of New Zealand, 1773 from *A Journal of a voyage to the South seas in His Majesty's ship, the Endeavour* by Sydney Parkinson (London : printed for Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), engraving, 27.5 × 33.4 cm. Collection The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto (T152098). Digital image courtesy of The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.



**Figure 16.**

James Newton after Sydney Parkinson, *View of an Arched Rock, on the Coast of New Zealand; with an Hippa, or Place of Retreat, on the Top of it*, 1773 from *A Journal of a voyage to the South seas in His Majesty's ship, the Endeavour* by Sydney Parkinson (London : printed for Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), engraving, 27.5 × 33.4 cm. Collection The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto (T152098). Digital image courtesy of The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

A more unsettling example of synthesis is *The Gentleman's Magazine's* image of "the Head of a New Zealander, ornamented according to the Custom of the Country, and different from every other in the World" (Fig 1). Although at first glance this image looks like a portrait, it is in fact a combination of two different portraits in Parkinson's *Voyage*: the man's hair and dress and the tattooing around his eyes correspond with those depicted in Parkinson's *Head of a Chief of New Zealand*, while the tattooing on his cheeks and nose is based on the tattoos depicted in Parkinson's *Head of Otegoongoon, Son of a New Zealand Chief, the face curiously tataow'd*; Parkinson had encountered these men on separate occasions, over a month apart.<sup>92</sup> The magazine illustration has its origins in drawings made during the expedition, but it does not represent anything the travellers saw, it is a London invention. No mention of this synthesis was acknowledged in the magazine's text, which specifically claimed to represent "the head of one of their Chiefs, as it exhibits at once the manner in which the New-Zealanders both paint and ornament themselves."<sup>93</sup> In fact, it showed a man whose tattoos are unlike those of either of the men Parkinson drew.

The connotations of juxtaposition and extraction which are apparent in the magazine illustrations are compounded by their placement within the magazines. Visually, the juxtapositions on plates would have been made sharper in light of the images the magazines published alongside the Pacific illustrations. In September 1773, when *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* published *A Dramatic Entertainment* (Fig. 5), they also published illustrations of General Wolfe's monument, described as "a Copper-plate, representing that grand and elegant Piece of Sculpture, beautifully engraved", a plate illustrating designs for rolling carts and wagons which would be better suited to public highways and turnpike roads, and a plate featuring "an elegantly engraved Figure", which was meant to be expressive of September.<sup>94</sup> For readers who were subscribers, the combined assortment of images in a volume was no less varied; for instance, in 1773, the year it published the illustration of the kangaroo (Fig. 2), *The Gentleman's Magazine* published an extraordinary array of illustrations, including images of newly invented farming implements, a geometrical profile of the abbey church at Rheims, a plan of navigable canals, a perspective view of Cowley Castle, a diagram of a machine for experimenting on air, and eight illustrations of curiosities found in Herculaneum.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the official Pacific illustrations had been created as complex sets of images which included maps, scenes of encounters, views, portraits and depictions of objects. For Nootka Sound, for instance, Webber had not only illustrated the inside of the house, he had created illustrations of a man, a woman, a view of the community gathered around their houses and boats, a medley plate of ritual objects, and a map of the area; the site could also be located on Cook's chart.<sup>96</sup> The view of the Nootka House published in *The New London Magazine* (Fig. 6) was cut off from all of this, and, as with other images which were extracted and adapted, the complexity of the culture represented was unavoidably diminished.

After their initial publication, magazine illustrations remained vulnerable to further loss of context through reuse. This was not what was expected of readers: in the late eighteenth century, most monthly magazines were intended to be bound into annual volumes, and the final issue of the year often included "Directions to Binders", to ensure that the non-paginated plates were bound in the appropriate places.<sup>97</sup> Given that people were invited to purchase single issues, however, and that individual issues were cheap, many images may have been torn out for other uses; in the nineteenth century, as extra-illustration and album-making became more popular, old periodicals were sometimes re-sold for their images.<sup>98</sup> In these cases, the Pacific illustrations would have drifted even further from their original intended role as illustrations of narratives, and critical information might be lost; for example, the image identified as a man of the Sandwich Islands on the plate in *The Lady's Magazine* was identified in the

accompanying text as “taken from a portrait of Kaneena” (Fig. 8).<sup>99</sup> Absent his name and any explanation of the events, the image has only the flimsiest of connections to the real Pacific, but it could still have offered a striking visual contribution to a British idea of the place.

## Conclusion

Magazine illustrations are comparatively modest physical objects, but for tens of thousands of people in eighteenth-century Britain, these images would have been their first, and possibly only, visual encounter with the Pacific. These engravings thus played a critical role in the construction of the idea of the Pacific, at a time when British colonial activity in that region was just beginning. Distanced from the grand narratives Cook and his fellow travellers published in their books, these images only offered glimpses of what the expeditions had encountered, and their narrative was unique. It focused almost exclusively on indigenous Pacific peoples, depicting them in sensational scenes, with coarsely drawn features, or in portraits, in which exotic facial ornaments and clothing are prominent. It highlighted the contrasts between these cultures and modern British culture, and it distanced the people represented from their own environments. Accuracy, nuance, and context were abandoned in favour of what was easiest to jam onto a single page. Ultimately, magazine representations of the Pacific implicitly encouraged readers to see it as a place dominated by primitive people, an impression which likely made it all the easier to think of it as a place ripe for colonial activity.

Although they were not texts used to make imperial policies, Pacific magazine illustrations’ contributions to public perceptions of the Pacific are a crucial element of the history of British activities as they expanded their colonial ambitions for the region. Following Cook’s voyages, there was no single policy which shaped British activities in the Pacific. For the government, the American Revolution had led to the loss of penal colonies, and in 1786, the decision was made to establish a convict colony at Botany Bay (Sydney, Australia).<sup>100</sup> Whalers and merchants were drawn to the trade possibilities in the Pacific—both the oil which could be obtained from sperm whales in the southern seas and the potential fur trade with indigenous people on the north-west coast of North America were very valuable—and evangelical Christians in Britain began missionary work in the region.<sup>101</sup> People had clearly begun to see the vague, exotic Pacific as the site of imperial possibilities, and it was not long before many were drawn into activity there (voluntarily or otherwise). In a popular poem of 1790, John Freeth invited people to focus on the Pacific and the future, declaring “The loss of America what can repay?/New colonies seek for at Botany Bay.”<sup>102</sup>

For any consumer seeking to imagine these colonies, the magazine illustrations of the Pacific expeditions were there to provide them with a vision of the British Empire's newest opportunities.

## Footnotes

- 1 Among the exhibitions planned to mark, reflect and critique these voyages are "The Voyages of James Cook" (British Library, 27 April–28 August 2018), "Oceania" (Royal Academy, 29 September–10 December 2018), and the opening of the "Endeavour Galleries" at Royal Museums Greenwich (date TBC).
- 2 David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 171 and 181–82. For more on the ambiguities of the term "Empire", see P. J. Marshall, "Introduction," in P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II, The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 7–8; and Kathleen Wilson, "Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities," in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 11.
- 3 P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c. 1750–1783* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 7. For more on the changing perceptions of and attitudes towards "Empire" in the 1760s, see H. V. Bowen, *Elites, Enterprise and the Making of the British Overseas Empire, 1688–1775* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 171–93; and Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), 28.
- 4 "The Instructions," printed in J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768–1771* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1955), cclxxix–cclxxxiv (cclxxxiii). Nicholas Thomas, *Discoveries: The Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 127–28; for more on the significance of the Admiralty's instructions and the issue of consent, see also 21, 83, and 110. For the long-term significance of Cook's actions for the British Empire and the controversies surrounding his personal legacy, see Thomas, *Discoveries*, xvii–xxxvii; Anne Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), xix–xxii; Frank McLynn, *Captain Cook: Master of the Seas* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 414–18; and Brian W. Richardson, *Longitude and Empire: How Captain Cook's Voyages Changed the World* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 2005), 172–97.
- 5 Alan Frost, *The Global Reach of Empire: Britain's Maritime Expansion in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, 1764–1815* (Carlton, VIC: Miegunyah Press, 2003), 8, 24–28.
- 6 The extent of Cook's personal impact on the Pacific is controversial: while it is certainly true that his expeditions opened the door to colonization in the region, recent studies have argued that his immediate impact was limited, and that there is not enough evidence to make him personally "responsible for the exploitation and atrocities of the post-Napoleonic period" (McLynn, *Captain Cook*, 418). Thomas, *Discoveries*, 262–63.
- 7 Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, "Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire," in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 2. Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), xiii. For more on the tensions of this debate, see Ronald Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 15–16; and Robin W. Winks, "The Future of Imperial History," in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999).
- 8 Nicholas Rogers, "From Vernon to Wolfe: Empire and Identity in the British Atlantic World of the Mid-Eighteenth Century," in Frans de Bruyn and Shaun Regan (eds), *The Culture of the Seven Years' War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2014), 28. Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 6 and 3.
- 9 Wilson, "Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities," 11.
- 10 Kathleen Wilson, "The Good, the Bad, and the Impotent: Imperialism and the Politics of Identity in Georgian England," in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995), 241.
- 11 Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers, "Introduction: Georgian Geographies?," in *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 10. For more on cultural spaces in London, see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 56–69.
- 12 Ann Bermingham, "Introduction: The Consumption of Culture: Image, Object, Text," in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995), 15. For more on the relationship between commerce and leisure in eighteenth-century England, see Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 214–50; and J. H. Plumb, "The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England," in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (eds), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982).
- 13 Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter: Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 336–37. "STRAND EXHIBITION," *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 1 May 1773, Issue 1230. *The Gentleman's Magazine* 43 (1773): 305.
- 14 Gillian Williamson, *British Masculinity in the Gentleman's Magazine, 1731 to 1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 41–43 and 68; for Williamson's full discussion of readership, see 33–70.
- 15 Samuel Curwen reported a print run of over 6,000 per month in 1775 (Williamson, *British Masculinity*, 35).

- 16 Christopher Lennox-Boyd, Rob Dixon, and Tim Clayton, *George Stubbs: The Complete Engraved Works* (London: Stipple Publishing, 1989), 352. Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals, 1732-1955* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer Publishers, 1961), 522-23. Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1977), 117; for the popularity of almanacs generally, see ix-xviii. *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack* (1774) also featured Pacific illustrations, most likely adapted from the plate published in *The Westminster Magazine* in June 1773 (see Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, 89).
- 17 Geoff Quilley and John Bonehill (eds), *William Hodges, 1744-1797: The Art of Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 83-84, 111-12, 117-23, and 126-27.
- 18 For a full list of Webber's Royal Academy exhibits, see William Hauptman, *John Webber: Pacific Voyager and Landscape Artist* (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 1996), 69. Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages: Volume Three: The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), 184. *A Catalogue of The Genuine and Valuable Collection of Drawings and Prints, A Few Pictures, Books, &c. Late the Property of the Ingenious Mr. John Webber, R. A.* (London: Mr. Christie, 1793), 5.
- 19 Neil Chambers, "Joseph Banks, the British Museum and Collections in the Age of Empire," in R. G. W. Anderson, M. L. Caygill, A. G. MacGregor, and L. Syson (eds), *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 99 and 100. P. E. Kell, "Lever, Sir Ashton (1729-1788)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16530>, accessed 14 July 2016. For more on the Holophusicon, see Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Holophusicon: The Leverian Museum; An Eighteenth-Century English Institution of Science, Curiosity, and Art* (Altenstadt: ZKF Publishers, 2011).
- 20 Jennifer Newell, "Irresistible Objects: Collecting in the Pacific and Australia in the Reign of George III," in Kim Sloan and Andrew Burnett (eds), *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 256. *Sophie in London, 1786, being the Diary of Sophie v. la Roche*, trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), 109. For more on the display of Pacific collections, see John McAleer, "Exhibiting Exploration: Captain Cook, Voyages of Exploration and Cultures of Display," in John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie (eds), *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2015), 42-63, and Neil Chambers (ed.), *Endeavouring Banks Exploring Collections from The Endeavour Voyage 1768-1771* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016).
- 21 John E. Crowley, *Imperial Landscapes: Britain's Global Visual Culture, 1745-1820* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2011), 107.
- 22 Rüdiger Joppien, "Philippe Jacques de Louterbourg's Pantomime 'Omai, or, a Trip Round the World' and the Artists of Captain Cook's Voyages" in *Captain Cook and the South Pacific* (London: British Museum Publications, 1979), 84, 95, 99, and 94.
- 23 Iain McCalman, "Spectacles of Knowledge: OMAI as Ethnographic Travelogue," in *Cook & Omai: The Cult of the South Seas* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), 12.
- 24 J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768-1771*, ccliii. J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure, 1772-1775* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1961), cxlix. J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery, 1776-1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), I, cciv.
- 25 Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific in the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 59.
- 26 Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham, "Introduction" in Tim Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2007), 6.
- 27 For more on the power of ephemera, see Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, *Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2011).
- 28 John Lawrence Abbott, *John Hawkesworth: Eighteenth-Century Man of Letters* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 164, and 168-71. For a full account of Hawkesworth's involvement with the publication and the public response to it, see 137-86.
- 29 Hawkesworth's account was published on or around 9 June 1773 (B. J. McMullin, "Cook's First Voyage and the Strahan Quarto Editions of 1773," *Script & Print: The Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand* 11, no. 1(1987): 32. Parkinson's *Journal* was published on or around 14 June 1773 (*Daily Advertiser*, 14 June 1773, Issue 13253).
- 30 *The Westminster Magazine* 1 (1773): 342.
- 31 *General Evening Post*, 26-29 June 1773, Issue 6195.
- 32 *The London Magazine* 42 (1773): plates facing 264, 320, and 369.
- 33 *The Lady's Magazine* 4 (1773): plates facing 345 and 457. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 53 (1773): plates facing 72 and 113.
- 34 Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages: Volume One, The Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768-1771* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 208-09.
- 35 Thomas, *Discoveries*, 259.
- 36 James Cook, *A Voyage towards the South Pole, and Round the World*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777), II, plates 26, 45, 39, 48, 55, 58, and 32.
- 37 "Art. V. [Review of] *A Voyage towards the South Pole, and round the World*," *The Monthly Review* 57 (1777): 29.

- 38 *The New London Magazine* 1 (1785): plates bound facing 290 (in the second pagination series in the volume), 345. *The New London Magazine* 2 (1786): plates bound facing 24, 74, 249, 296, and 560.
- 39 *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 74 (1784): plate facing 357. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 75 (1784): plates facing 17, 169, 225, and 281. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 76 (1785): plates bound facing 168 and 281.
- 40 *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): plate bound facing 563. *The Lady's Magazine* 16 (1785): plates bound facing 59, 171, 283, and 507.
- 41 *The European Magazine* 6 (1784): plate facing 119. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 75 (1784): plate facing 281. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 76 (1785): plate facing 168. *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): plate facing 285. *Town and Country Magazine* 17 (1785): plate facing 433.
- 42 "To our Correspondents," *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): 338.
- 43 There were weekly periodicals in the mid-eighteenth century, but these were less likely to include plates.
- 44 Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), xvii. It should be noted that circulation numbers fluctuated unevenly, and that there are also contemporary accounts of much higher circulation figures, such as 11,000 per month for *Town and Country Magazine* in 1770, but these figures are sometimes attributed to strategic exaggeration by the publisher. (Williamson, *British Masculinity*, 19 and 35.)
- 45 Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines*, xvii. *The European Magazine* 1 (1782): iv. "Introduction [to the Volume]," *The European Magazine* 4 (1783): 3.
- 46 *Public Advertiser*, July 31 1773, Issue 11948. *General Evening Post*, 26-29 June 1773, Issue 6195. *General Evening Post*, 1-3 September 1785, Issue 8092. These prices indicate a year's subscription would usually have cost 6s. 6d. (magazines often published an end-of-year supplement in addition to monthly issues). Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 197.
- 47 James Raven, "From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements for Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries," in James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (eds), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 182. For more on the cost of circulating libraries, see Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 177-78. "Article I," *The Critical Review* 37 (1774): 1. "[Review of] *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*," *The Critical Review* 58 (1784): 1.
- 48 James Raven, *Publishing Business in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 223. Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740 - 1815* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1962), 2-3. Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, 198.
- 49 "To our Correspondents," 338.
- 50 Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, 197.
- 51 Iona Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9.
- 52 This range is provided in an attempt to make a conservative estimate. To estimate how many people saw a magazine illustration requires estimating how many people, on average, had access to a single copy; John Brewer has noted that when estimating readers-per-copy for newspapers and pamphlets, authors' and publishers' estimates ranged from twenty to fifty. Brewer described fifty as "undoubtedly optimistic", but even so, it is possible that some magazine images were viewed by over 100,000 people; see John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 148. In her discussion of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Gillian Williamson has argued that an estimate of at least 50,000 readers of each new issue is "entirely reasonable" (50,000 is a number put forth by the publisher in 1751) and noted that because magazines were often bound and preserved in libraries, readership would have increased as the years passed; see Williamson, *British Masculinity*, 36 and 37-38.
- 53 Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, 199 and 235. Generalist magazines did have slight differences in tone: for example, *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure's* emphasis on education and morality suggests it may have been targeted at young people, *The European Magazine* was unusually cosmopolitan, offering its readers coverage of cultural news across Europe and (occasionally) articles in foreign languages, and *Town and Country Magazine* incorporated gossip and fashionable scandals; see Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines*, 338 and 339; *The European Magazine* 1 (1782): iv; and Jan Fergus, "Women, Class, and the Growth of Magazine Readership in the Provinces, 1746-1780," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 16 (1986): 46.
- 54 Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, 200-09. "Cook's Voyage to the Pacific Ocean," *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): 339. "Cook's Voyage to the Pacific Ocean," *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): 456. James Cook and James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Undertaken, by the Command of his Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere* (London: W. and A. Strahan, 1784), I, 91-97.
- 55 *The Lady's Magazine* 15 (1784): 281.
- 56 Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), 60-62. For more on topics which were deemed suitable for women's magazines in the late eighteenth century, see Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), 188-89.

- 57 For more on politeness, see Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 101–13. For more on readers' active engagement with magazines, see Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 610 and 608; see also 142–44, for more on magazines' significance for aspiring authors. Thomas Turner and David Vaisey (eds), *The Diary of Thomas Turner* (Oxford: The Open University, 1984), 4, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=6125](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=6125), accessed 13 April 2017. Thomas Turner and David Vaisey (eds), *The Diary of Thomas Turner* (Oxford: The Open University, 1984), 103, [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record\\_details.php?id=6259](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=6259), accessed 13 April 2017.
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An abstract collage artwork featuring bold colors (red, yellow, black, blue, white) and fragmented text. The word 'go' is prominent in black and red, and 'est' is in red and black. Other fragments include 'est!', 'est!', and 'est!'.

# Art by the Many: London Style Cults of the 1960s

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Introduction by

**Thomas Crow**, Rosalie Solow Professor, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

The annals of art history can readily be reduced to a catalogue of names, but salient examples of group effort are never hard to find. In London, the example of the Independent Group (IG) need only be adduced, but its immediate successors are less obvious. Between the dissolution of the IG in 1956 and the founding of Art & Language (A&L) a decade later, there appeared one far less heralded alliance, its subsequent obscurity balanced by its remarkable prescience. Terry Atkinson, later an A&L founder, had earlier been instrumental in creating a collective artistic entity among fellow students at the Slade School of Fine Art—Roger Jeffs, Bernard Jennings, and John Bowstead—who called themselves the Fine-Artz Associates. By the time of the 1964 Young Contemporaries exhibition, the four submitted their work under this name alone, but their ambitions had already expanded beyond the studio into the orbit of radically more extensive collectives.

The group's published manifesto of that year begins with the defiant declaration that art-school faculties "are everyday sapping our brightest and most creative young minds", encouraged by their tutors to "toy with their own subjective meanderings and reduce the impact-laden images and ideas of the outside world to worn-out tradition-bound media." <sup>1</sup> In public, they were four "ex-painters", but they preferred among themselves to use the term "Stylists" as self-description, an intentionally anti-fine-art signifier that points to a larger project of research and reporting: excursions into what they called "the teenage Netherworld". In contrast to the IG's preoccupation with charismatic objects (their novelty, the intrinsic glamour of their design, and their potential as markers and devices of a new urban life), Fine-Artz Associates concentrated on the young people who were making the most of the potential latent in such objects: "highly fashion-conscious, environment-conscious, and music-conscious; in all these respects they are extremely selective and sophisticated compared with their predecessors." <sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1.**

Fine Artz Associates, *Miss Misty and the Tri-cool Data*, installation, 1966.

That template had been set in place by the Soho “Modernists” of the later 1950s, adolescent males marked out by a passion for “modern” American jazz (in contra-distinction to the atavisms of “trad”) and a refined mode of dress inspired by the impeccable turnout of black stars like Miles Davis and Lee Morgan. To call the Soho Modernists, and the Stylists who descended from them, an “identity formation” sounds a bloodless, social-scientific note, against which the Fine-Artz terms “netherworld” and “cult” seem preferable—not in spite of their gothic and mystery-mongering connotations but indeed because of them. Such terms acknowledge the fact that there remained much to be learned from these phenomena, that there were enduring enigmas in them. A sense of mystery attended the experiences of those within the netherworld as well, as sightings of strangers possessed as much significance as interactions among mates: a heretofore unknown Bluenote LP seen cradled under an arm, a new arrangement of pockets and vents on a bespoke suit, or a novel ornament on a Lambretta motor scooter disappearing round the corner. Cults constituted themselves by a shared predisposition to alert acuity and perpetual refinement of self-presentation in response to every input of new information.

In the eyes of Fine-Artz Associates, the advanced style cults were not (as Cultural Studies orthodoxy would have it) subcultures unwittingly acting out larger social phenomena beyond their ken; their “sophisticated and selective” leaders were perpetually processing by their own lights the possible furnishing of life and definitions of self. Decoding such moments of style creation can become more than clinical exercises by according the cults the same assumptions of intention, intelligence, fine intuition, and self-critique that one would bestow on any certified fine art—but spread across a

network far more extensive and democratic than even the most capacious avant-garde collective ever occupied. London ultra-leftists, in the 1960s, were fond of paraphrasing le comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) to the effect that art should be made by the many rather than by the one, but were blind to that phenomenon taking place all around them. Had they taken notice, the reflexive accusation would doubtless have been that the young Stylists were in thrall to some commodity fetish, a perpetually misused term that still persists in social theorizing like a zombie hangover from the joyless laments of the Frankfurt School. How, one can ask, does a bespoke suit tailored to a young Modernist's personal specifications fit under the heading of "commodity"—since the term applies to goods, like grains or metals, that are interchangeable with any other in the same category? The Stylists' favoured off-the-peg items likewise resisted interchangeability and extreme sensitivity to price, which are the hallmarks of commodity behaviour. Indeed there appears to have been an unspoken collective decision by the Stylists that anything marketed as trendy was to be scrupulously avoided in favour of certain distinctive items never originally intended for *their* use. These were invariably of a style that went back decades in key instances and persist unchanged to the present day.

The Fine-Artz project implicitly treated the style cults as a network of distributed intelligence, a kind of organic computer for processing the yet-unknown effects and possibilities for meaning latent in the economic machinery of consumer-product manufacture. In that spirit, my [2017 Paul Mellon Lectures](#) offered extended excursions into work by other recognized fine artists—among them Robyn Denny, David Hockney, Pauline Boty, Bridget Riley, and Bruce McLean—who partook in some way of the cultists' ethos of sharp concision, alertness to the lived moment, and sheer style. Nor is holding cults and fine artists in equilibrium unprecedented in art history. In 1956, Lawrence Alloway, reflecting on the pedigree of his own contemporary investigations, noted that "persistence of visual themes across lines of taste is well known to scholars of the Warburg Institute, of course".<sup>3</sup> Their namesake, Aby Warburg, had looked to the gesticulating mummers of the Florentine street processions as lying behind some of the most august rediscoveries of classical prototypes in art. For him, the figure in motion, derived from the direct experience of performers in the guise of ancient deities, constituted the true subject of advanced Florentine mimesis in the 1480s. His core idea was that the elusive rituals and props of local cults carried a vernacular charge necessary to the achievements of the most distinguished fine art, a potency that lay beyond any bookish catalogue of mythological stories and aesthetic canons. To have transferred the word cult to London in the 1960s, as the Fine-Artz Associates proposed, made possible a parallel project that seems to have barely advanced since their disbanding

in 1966. For everyone who feels the British Art of the 1960s merits greater stature in relation to its American and Continental counterparts, this could be the further quotient of genius essential to the argument.

Response by

**Lisa Tickner**, Emeritus Professor of Art History, Middlesex University, and Honorary Professor, Courtauld Institute of Art

Ken Russell's photograph of Iris Thornton and Pat Wiles, teenage Teddy Girls from Plaistow in East London, is one of a series taken in Notting Dale and Canning Town, some of which were published in *Picture Post* in June 1955.<sup>4</sup> Those from Notting Dale wore American denim bought on the Portobello Road, jackets borrowed from their brothers, neckerchiefs, and ballet pumps. The Canning Town group combined single-breasted, velvet-collared jackets, with cameo brooches, coolie hats, clutch bags, and Perspex-handled umbrellas. "It was our fashion and we made it up."<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2.**

Ken Russell, *The Party Line*, featuring Iris Thornton and Pat Wiles from Plaistow, January 1955, from the series *The last of the Teddy Girls*. Digital image courtesy of TopFoto / Ken Russell.

To stand in for the clothing choices of early Mods, a little later, here is the teenage narrator of Colin MacInnes's novel *Absolute Beginners* (1959): in "full teenage drag" with "grey pointed alligator casuals, the pink neon pair of

ankle crêpe nylon-stretch, my Cambridge-blue glove-fit jeans, a vertical-striped happy shirt revealing my lucky neck-charm on its chain, and the Roman-cut short-arse jacket.”<sup>6</sup>

This would have been an expensive outfit in 1959, even if the “short-arse jacket” was off the peg from Cecil Gee or adapted from Burton’s, rather than tailor-made. Wages were staggered by age and gender. Russell’s Teddy Girls were fourteen and still at school, or they were fifteen–seventeen-year-old shop assistants and factory workers. Mary Toovey said of shopping in Portobello that: “It was all second hand then, we couldn’t afford new.” Theirs were “the little tactics of the habitat”, in Foucault’s phrase, tactics of assemblage and *bricolage*.<sup>7</sup> Disposable incomes rose and retail options multiplied in the late 1950s. The Soho Modernists could order bespoke or practise fine discriminations among over-the-counter goods—most still lived at home—spending the greater part of their wages on the cultivation of a Baudelairean “cool”.<sup>8</sup>

Which brings us first to the question of “commodities” and then to “art”. I don’t myself see any need to reserve the word “commodity” solely to undifferentiated goods—oil, wheat, metal—traded in commodity markets. There’s a perfectly acceptable dictionary definition and everyday use of “commodity” as “something bought and sold”. That applies to second-hand goods from Portobello, made-to-measure jackets from Soho tailors, jazz records, scooters, amphetamines—whatever we furnish our lives with—including (with some exceptions) works of art.

Crow argues that the Soho Modernists provided the template for a “highly fashion-conscious, environment-conscious, and music-conscious” youth culture—a “netherworld” attractive to Fine-Artz explorers turning their backs on “subjective meanderings” and “worn-out, tradition-bound media” in 1964. In a looser sense, art world figures such as Lawrence Alloway and Robyn Denny in the 1950s, or Derek Boshier and Peter Phillips in Russell’s *Pop Goes the Easel* in 1962, shared a version of the snappy Mod “look”. But is this a one-way upwards transmission of street style, or a more general diffusion of some of the influences Crow identifies (American jazz, Italian tailoring) in an expanding retail and media environment? By what process, too, except through analogy (“sharp concision”, “sheer style”), do Mod cults provide a template for the *art* of Denny, Hockney, Boty, Riley, or McLean?

I leave aside here the tilt at “Cultural Studies orthodoxy” to ask—rhetorically—why the Teddy Girls did not provide the template for a more influential, widely diffused and, yes, commercially successful subculture (let alone a template for artists and art)? Presumably because there were fewer of them; they were younger, female, poorer, and more eccentric in their assembled outfits; and the social, media, and retail context

was not propitious (Teds were demonized in the press). Bridget Riley, to my knowledge, never sported a coolie hat and a Perspex-handled umbrella. Boshier and Boty, on the other hand, would dance with the Mods on the rock/pop music television programme, *Ready Steady Go!* The final point is perhaps that whatever its templates or resources, the art world transfigures them as *art* at border control (though they may look back). Crow, like Warburg, takes on the essential task of zooming out from an often-myopic disciplinary focus to the broader landscape in which a rich variety of sometimes-surprising gifts, thefts, and exchanges takes place.

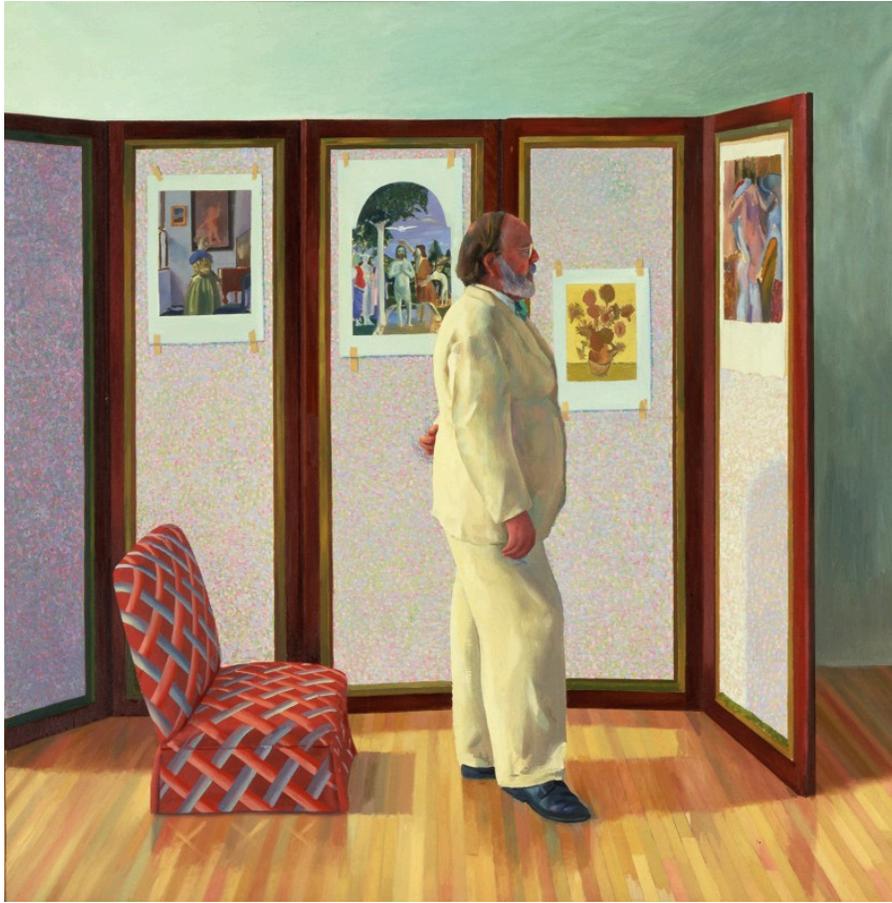
Response by

**Jonathan Weinberg**, Yale School of Art

I am impressed by Tom Crow's analysis of the importance of style and taste in the formation of British Art movements and subcultures of the 1960s. Throughout the entire modern period, the choices of dress, music, books, food, drugs, and alcohol were always connected to art production at its highest level. The mistake made by Clement Greenberg and his colleagues was to think that fashion and mass culture were somehow anathema to the making of great art.

I particularly love the way Crow's lectures make us take the Mods' name seriously in relation to modernism. And yet, I feel vaguely uneasy dwelling on how cool these artists looked. It may have been an anti-establishment gesture for young men to wear tailored clothes in the mode of African-American jazz musicians, but it also was cliquish, excluding those who didn't quite look the part of young rebels, no matter what their intrinsic talents.

My ambivalence undoubtedly arises from my own feelings of awkwardness and alienation in the 1980s, when I was in my twenties and trying to make it as a young painter in the East Village—another art scene all about clubbing and fashion. It was precisely at that time that I first met David Hockney at the very trendy restaurant, One-Fifth. I was introduced to him by one of my bosses, Henry Geldzahler, the famous curator and then Commissioner of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York, who I eventually came to know well. To a young nerdy-gay artist like me, these two men, who dressed in tailored clothes of extraordinary fabrics and colours, seemed intimidatingly glamorous, but also, I stupidly thought, superficial and decadent. I was threatened by how comfortable they were to be so visibly queer. In those days, the critic Robert Hughes homophobically called Henry a "popinjay",<sup>9</sup> but it was precisely the unabashed way this chubby, balding gay man strutted like a beautiful bird that made him so remarkable and such a worthy subject for the brush of Hockney and other painters. In Francesco Clemente's words, "he made of himself an image as good as a great painting."<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 3.**

David Hockney, *Looking at Pictures on a Screen*, 1977, Oil on canvas, 183 x 183 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of David Hockney, Inc.

Henry's image literally became a great painting in Hockney's *Looking at Pictures on a Screen* (1977). Resplendent in a dazzling white linen suit, he is more present than the reproductions of famous works of art from London's National Gallery that are pinned to the screen in Hockney's studio. The way Henry *looks* is as important as what he looks at. This is a painting that is all about the importance of taste. Who and what you look at and imitate is the artist you become. And so Hockney declares his realist forebears: Vermeer, Piero, van Gogh, and Degas. At the same time, however, by having Henry do the looking, he suggests that taste making is not a solitary activity—it is communal. As Hockney put it about going to museums with Henry, "to travel with an enthusiast seems to double one's pleasure."<sup>11</sup> We look to each other in the process of looking, appreciating, and making art.

Response by

**Lynda Nead**, Pevsner Chair of History of Art

The London style cultists of the 1960s sound like they were very cool: young art students at the Slade, the Royal College of Art, and St. Martin's, wearing the right suits, listening to the right music, glamorous but understated. I see the legacy of their art school chic in my own experience of art school style decades later, with the heady association of music and mode of dress that was finally savaged by the cuts in art school education of the 1980s. I would have wanted to be in their gang, to be one of them, willing to share their "ethos of sharp concision, alertness to the lived moment, and sheer style". But this was a very male cult; the style that it expressed through its bespoke suits and Lambrettas, defined a particular kind of post, post-war masculinity that did not yield easily or readily to female participants. Pauline Boty and Bridget Riley get a look in—a mention—but they were, necessarily, exploring different kinds of identity formation in relation to the particular demands of being a woman and an artist in a cult environment first shaped by young adolescent males in the 1950s.

The generation of young art students that followed in the 1960s did not serve in the war and would probably have escaped conscription (the last conscripted soldiers left military service in 1963). The war was in the past but it continued to define the present; continued, I would suggest, to define and to shape the looks, manners, and attitudes of the Fine-Artz Associates. As the London style cultists cradled the latest black music album from the United States under their arms, the British government was passing the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) restricting immigration from Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia—a legal enactment, it might be said, of the colour bar. To place the style choices and art actions of the 1960s' advanced style cults in the wider social, political, and cultural contexts of post-war Britain is not to be an academic killjoy or to deny their innovation, but it is to subject their positions to the social pressures that might explain better their choices and allegiances. Bespoke suits, Italian scooters, and black music are cultural statements that can only be understood as part of an incredibly rich landscape of style choices that opened up to the new generation that had grown up after the end of the Second World War—the "young meteors" who crossed the bombsites of 1960s London.

Response by

**Alex Seago**, Dean of the School of Communication, Arts & Social Sciences at Richmond, The American International University in London

As a veteran of both the University of Birmingham (where I was a somewhat awestruck undergraduate participant in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies seminars led by Stuart Hall and others during the heyday of CCCS subcultural theory in the early/mid-1970s) and also of the Royal College of Art's Department of Cultural History (where I undertook doctoral research into the cultural history of *ARK*), I feel suitably provoked by Thomas Crow's statement that: "the eyes of Fine-Artz Associates, the advanced style cults were not (as Cultural Studies orthodoxy would have it) unwittingly acting out larger social phenomena beyond their ken."

In issue 36 of *ARK*, the Fine-Artz Associates survey the "teenage netherworld" and empirically document aspects of the identity-obsessed Mod subculture driving pop/mass culture. In this milieu, they perceived a new kind of folk art emerging. Similar to their peers in contemporary Californian hot rod or surfing culture, they saw a few hip London Mod teenagers making sophisticated aesthetic decisions in shape and form as they customized their clothing in East End tailors, re-sprayed their scooters at Eddy Grimstead's custom shop, or perfected the latest dance moves to the new music they had heard at the La Disque club in South London. It is, however, important to note that by 1964, when *ARK* 36 was being published, the more commercial aspects of Mod aesthetics were being incorporated rapidly and very profitably into the British cultural mainstream. This is perhaps most starkly represented by the Queen awarding the Member of the British Empire distinction to the Beatles in 1965, but is also epitomized by the international fascination with the unisex boutiques of Carnaby Street and the "Swinging London" phenomenon of the mid- to late 1960s. By that time, the "fine art style of connoisseurship" of the teenage Mod "faces" celebrated in *ARK* 36 was rapidly losing its authentic "edge" as late 1950s/early 1960s Mod culture began to polarize between a more middle-class form of art school Mod (represented by the Fine-Artz Associates themselves), which would soon develop into arty-romantic hippy psychedelia and its nemesis, the more militantly proletarian "hard Mod" look which, by 1969, had morphed into the militantly lumpen Skinhead style. The photograph of early Skinheads menacing proto hippies in Piccadilly Circus captures this tension well ([Fig. 4](#)).



**Figure 4.**

Terence Spencer, A group of Skinheads walk past a group of hippies sitting on the steps of Eros in Piccadilly Circus, 1969. Digital image courtesy of Terence Spencer / Camera Press.

To imply that the CCCS perspective on subcultures regarded “the young Stylists” as being “in thrall to the ‘the commodity’” is a misreading and oversimplification of the CCCS approach, which while Marxist in intent, differed radically from more orthodox Marxist analyses in its appreciation of “agency” and the pleasures of consumption. While art school-based commentators such as Richard Smith, Toni del Renzio, and, several years later, Fine-Artz Associates were the first to appreciate the significance of youth subcultures’ creativity in the form of customizing and improvisation, rather than representing “a zombie hangover from the joyless laments of the Frankfurt School”, CCCS theorists such as Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, John Clarke, and Paul Willis supplied a much deeper sociological analysis of the youth subcultural phenomena than anything produced in art schools. While the CCCS theorists appeared to be unaware of the writing of art school-based predecessors, they understood and appreciated the creativity of subcultures, and, in the case of several key CCCS theorists, had actively participated in various working-class subcultural scenes themselves as teenagers. They also contributed something completely lacking from the Fine-Artz perspective—a broader appreciation and socio-economic analysis of the changes in British working-class culture from which a plethora of post-war British subcultural styles developed and the deeper subcultural meanings of Teddy Boy, Rocker, Mod, and Skinhead style evolved.

Response by

**Anne Massey**, Visiting tutor, Regents University London

I agree with Tom Crow that it is through the framework of collective effort and a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of consumer culture that we can reach a fuller understanding of the art of the 1960s. The Independent Group last met in July 1955, but its legacy reverberated throughout the following decade. The Pop Art patrilineage of the Independent Group has been claimed, reinforced, and contested over the past sixty years.<sup>12</sup> And the more this simplistic Pop Art legacy is critiqued, the more dominant the established claim becomes, though and as the Group remain the “Fathers of Pop”, the intellectual and professional lineage of the Independent Group is therefore less evident, and hence presents a rich case study for 1960s art history.<sup>13</sup>

The cover of the second issue of *Living Arts* from 1963 is best known as *Self Portrait* by the designer Richard Hamilton (Fig. 5). However, the photographer was Independent Group acolyte, Robert Freeman. This eulogy to American consumer culture was conducted as a professional photo shoot, with Betsy Scherman as the “Stylist” and props borrowed from various sources, including Shepperton Studios. This process of image making reveals something of the Independent Group’s approach to the charismatic object. The Independent Group regarded themselves as working within what would today be termed the creative industries. Lawrence Alloway was the PR contact for *This is Tomorrow*, Magda Cordell and John McHale ran a nascent communication design office, Frank Cordell was a noted music producer and Toni del Renzio worked as an art director in mass circulation women’s magazines. For the Independent Group, the shiny new world of consumer culture was a welcome antidote to predominantly traumatic wartime experiences.



**Figure 5.**

Richard Hamilton (designer) and Robert Freeman (photographer), *Self Portrait*, front cover of *Living Arts 2*, 1963. Digital image courtesy of DACS / Artimage 2017. Photo: Robert Freeman.

This attitude inspired the young Robert Freeman, whilst still a student at Cambridge University. He edited the magazine *Cambridge Opinion* in 1959, which brought together significant writing by the Independent Group. He was interested in the relationship between popular culture, art, and architecture, so the ICA was the obvious place to be with its avant-garde programme of exhibitions and talks, plus he got to hang out with Lawrence Alloway. One result was Freeman's work for the ICA publication *Living Arts*, which ran to three issues. He provided the covers for the first two, but also supplied a photo essay titled *Comment*, inspired by London street style, to the launch issue (Fig. 6).



**Figure 6.**

Robert Freeman, *Comment*, from *Living Arts 1*, Institute of Contemporary Arts in association with Tillotsons (Bolton) Ltd, 1963. Digital image courtesy of Robert Freeman.

The assembled group waiting at the zebra crossing evokes London in transition. The eight white men in the work uniform of suits, ties, and shiny shoes act almost as a backdrop for the two women. As Carol Tulloch has demonstrated, for black women and men to wear black at this time was a symbol of modernism and resistance.<sup>14</sup> The black woman at the left of the frame is elegantly attired, with calf-length dress and gloves, with a glittering brooch and a bangle. This, plus the stiletto heels and decorative belt denote evening wear; as it is still daylight, perhaps she is a performer, heading to a West End venue. The woman at the centre is dressed in French New Wave mode, complete with sunglasses. Her cool posture is accentuated by trousers— a radical feminine attire for the city at that time. Robert Freeman worked as a professional photographer throughout the 1960s, taking photographs for the cover of the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine* and album covers for the Beatles, including *Rubber Soul* in 1965. He inherited the Independent Group's professional approach to consumer culture, working with and within it, rather than simplistically critiquing it. By contesting the accepted reading of the Independent Group, the professional practice and intellectual heritage of its endeavour is brought more clearly into view.

Response by

**Kate Aspinall**, Independent Historian, Writer, and Artist

The importance of style cults in providing a vernacular charge to fine art achievements in the Britain of the 1960s, as argued for by Tom Crow's opening provocation, is compelling and raises further questions about how art markets and historians have handled and could handle collective activity, including re-evaluating collective identity. Such examination not only includes looking to style cults and those groups that exhibited under a single group identity (such as Fine-Artz Associates and Art & Language) but also looking to the important and enigmatic role of other forms of collective activity in keeping the faith for individual practitioners. Notions of originality and individuation demand reappraisal in this context, not only with respect to how we approach the distinctions between groups, communities, and networks but also to look at the historically specific pressures towards individuation during the 1960s.



**Figure 7.**

Cliff Holden, Photograph of (left to right) Dennis Creffield, *Dorothy Mead*, *Cliff Holden* in *David Bomberg's class at Borough Polytechnic (now London South Bank University)*, 1948. Collection of Cliff Holden. Digital image courtesy of Cliff Holden.

The concentric circles around David Bomberg present a multi-layered example of these issues. Bomberg taught a class at the Borough Polytechnic (1945–1953) from which a messianic adherence to his late-career core philosophy of channelling the “spirit in the mass” emerged. Within the widest circle, inclusion in what was known variously as the Bomberg Movement, or

the School of Thick Paint, among other names, involved the use of long, weighty strokes, accidental mixing effects, bold demonstrations, and sacrificed accuracy. These were adopted, mixed, and modified according to individual taste in order to signify rebellion against an increasingly professionalized world of painting. Paradoxically, the Bomberg Movement signalled uncompromising individuality. Bomberg styled his persona as a rebel: in his youth, he had defined the urban variant of the avant-garde, bohemian outsider; and in middle age, he represented the lone master of his craft, standing steadfast against critical neglect. While not a style cult as set forth by Crow, the Bomberg Movement did involve visual codes of persona as well as practice. Furthermore, it resists community and network theory analysis, which privileges person-to-person causation and thus cannot sufficiently speak to its operation. The concept of style cults (or some form thereof) offer a more productive means of engaging with this kind a diffused, yet recognizably unified, movement.

At the centre of Bomberg's concentric circles were two structured, student movements: the Borough Group (1946–1950); and the Borough Bottega (1953–ca. 1955). The Borough Group was a student faction founded and initially helmed by the painter Cliff Holden. It was predicated upon Quaker principles of a community providing strength in pursuing individual integrity. Its members positioned it consciously in rebellion against repressive notions of originality. Bomberg's conception of collective activity was more hierarchical. He took over leadership of the Borough Group in March 1948, and consolidated it as a more consciously hierarchical organization. When Bomberg later founded the Borough Bottega, he emulated a Renaissance-style workshop, where an original master oversaw the work of derivative followers. Both of these communities in practice, however, demonstrated that individuation and situation within a cultural field need not be antagonistic. It is notable, nonetheless, that history has favoured those students, such as Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, who adopted Bomberg's performance of individualism while understating the role of a communal energy.

It remains for us to contend not only with the historically specific tension between collective energy and individual achievements in the 1960s, but also to ask if style cults and their relations must be validated according to fine art achievements. Traditional concepts of originality, after all, have underwritten the art historical tendency towards a catalogue of names.

Response by

**John J. Curley**, Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Art at Wake Forest University

It sounds like a scene from a period spy novel by the British author John Le Carré: a young man is waiting on a platform of a train station at a London commuter hub, when he sees another man holding something that only he recognizes as significant. This object gives the first man permission to approach the other, serving as a surreptitious code that signifies that they are allies. This meeting—on a platform at Dartford Railway Station—did not involve Cold War spies but instead was an important reintroduction between Keith Richards and Mick Jagger in 1961. The objects in Mick's hands were two LPs that he had purchased, via mail order, directly from Chess Records in Chicago: one by Chuck Berry and the other by Muddy Waters. As Keith recalled, "I had only *heard* about Muddy up to that point."<sup>15</sup> This chance encounter between two "Stylists", to use the term of the Fine-Artz Associates, led to the formation of the Rolling Stones. A Stylist, then, was not that different from a Cold War spy: both figures are required to recognize meanings in signs that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Crow is right to locate the origins of the Fine-Artz Associates in both the Independent Group (IG) and Aby Warburg, but there is a specific figure, who can link these influences: E.H. Gombrich. His famous essay "Meditations on the Hobby Horse"—about, as the title suggests, a lowly child's toy—was first written as a commissioned response to IG member Richard Hamilton's exhibition *Growth and Form* (1951). Gombrich led the Warburg Institute throughout the 1960s, teaching scholars who would come to embed art among broader social practices, such as Michael Baxandall. But it is Gombrich's theory of the "beholder's share", first articulated in 1950 in *The Story of Art* and developed and expanded throughout the following decade, that perhaps is the most relevant here. Gombrich remarked that what a viewer brings to an image—including visual training, taste, and ideology—helps to dictate how that image is interpreted. To return to Dartford, Keith's familiarity with American rock and blues allowed him to view Mick's albums in a different way than anyone else there.

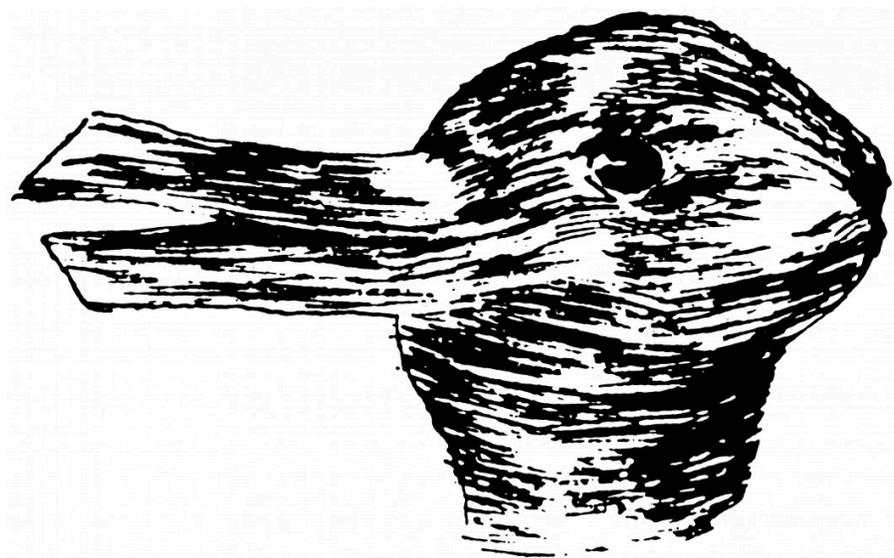
At least one work of art from this period, which Crow discussed during his first Mellon Lecture, can bring art history, the beholder's share, and the Stylists together: a Robyn Denny mural from 1959, which was commissioned to hang inside the clothing shop Austin Reed, located on the edge of Soho (Fig. 8). Austin Reed wanted to modernize its image, and the mural played its part; the Beatles posed in front of it for one of their first photo sessions in London, in 1962. However, the picture's large scale and its dynamic field of painted and collaged words and colour planes also speak distinctive art historical languages that attest to Denny's interest in Synthetic Cubism, as

well as Jackson Pollock and other American painters recently shown in London. Like Mick's LPs, *The Austin Reed Mural* signifies in distinct ways to different viewers. And it is only when those different messages—a Mod advertisement for clothing *and* a collection of art historical forebears—come together that the real importance of Denny's mural begins to emerge.



**Figure 8.**

Robyn Denny, *The Austin Reed Mural*, 1959, oil, collage & mixed media on panel, 190 x 305 cm. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Robyn Denny. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2017.



**Figure 9.**

Duck-rabbit illusion, from *Fliegende Blätter*, 23 October 1892, 147. Digital image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Considering that his work on the “beholder’s share” was evolving at around the time when Denny was completing his mural, might we argue that Gombrich was an intellectual patron of the Stylists? While certainly not hip in his appearance or manner, he wrote some pieces that could, in retrospect, be identified as Mod art history. For instance, *Art and Illusion* from 1960 reproduced a range of images—press photographs, cartoons, advertisements, as well as historical art—to demonstrate the ways in which all image-makers, including artists, use visual schemata from the past in new ways, not unlike the Stylists’ appropriation of older fashions and trends. But to close, I want to propose Gombrich’s “beholder’s share” as a methodological challenge: art historians, especially those working on Pop of any national variety, must, like Crow, seriously grapple with the vast quarry of popular material from which these artists mined their styles and imagery, as well as the art historical referents. While art historians have grown to understand just what it is that makes Pop art so appealing, many like it for the wrong, or at least incomplete, reasons. A strictly semiotic, Cubist reading of Denny’s mural, or one that solely discusses it in terms of youth-centred design and consumption, for instance, might both seem entirely appropriate, but each, on its own, misses the point. To state this challenge via one of *Art and Illusion*’s strongest metaphors, scholars must interrogate the duck and rabbit (Fig. 9) as a single interconnected, entity—shifting back and forth between art and commerce, the avant-garde and kitsch.

Response by

**Alexander Massouras**, artist and writer

I have chosen this car, the Mercedes SL W113 (known as the Pagoda) as an excuse to talk about (aspects of) chronology and authorship, particularly the kind of collective authorship Tom Crow discusses with regard to Fine-Artz Associates and all the influences, appropriations, and misappropriations which accompany distributed authorship. The historiographical prominence of the 1960s as a decade makes its relationship to the 1950s intriguing, especially when coupled with the associations of the latter with rebellion, a condition that demands something—prior and ideally stable—to rebel against. Thinking about vehicle design is one route into thinking about how the 1960s fit into the twentieth century. The Pagoda, so evocative of the 1960s in its shape and styling, is a third-generation iteration of the SL class, preceded by the W198 and W121 in the 1950s, and succeeded by another body style at the beginning of the 1970s, and by many more since. Like the multifarious eddies of the pop movement, its style was not a discrete phenomenon, but rather came from somewhere and turned into something. The Pagoda (also) embodied far older technologies: the combustion engine and the wheel, even. As such, it is a heterochronic object, despite its appearance, which, to our contemporary eyes, locks it into 1960s cool—like a prehistoric insect in amber.



**Figure 10.**

Premiere for the Pagoda with Béla Barényi (right) and Paul Bracq, Geneva, 1963. Digital image courtesy of Mercedes-Benz Classic.

Much like the group efforts attempted by collectives like the Fine-Artz Associates, the Pagoda also shows how complicated authorship can be. It was designed by Paul Bracq and Béla Barényi, both shown beside the car here at the Geneva Motor show of 1963 (Fig. 10), but it also spoke to the preceding SL—to that extent, its authorship is more diffuse, even before taking into account its components and engineers. The influence of context is more obvious with cars than with works of art, too. In a structural sense, cars divulge a system of oil supply chains and roads—a car like this had more

use value when larger roads started to appear, the M1 motorway having been opened in 1959; they speak to an ideological context. This was a West German car, which was enthusiastically imported into the USA: around 19,000 of almost 49,000 sold in this body type went to the USA during the Cold War. While these factors locate the Pagoda structurally and politically, they don't explain why it looks magnificent.

At first glance, an object as luxurious as the Pagoda seems out of place in a discussion of youth culture and its propensity for resourcefulness and reinvention—high-end consumption is often startlingly unoriginal and prescriptive. Fast cars have nevertheless always had a “young” brand, perhaps finding their apogee in the car crash as an emblem of youthful martyrdom. This was not lost on British painters of the period either. John Minton's last vast painting, *Composition: The Death of James Dean* (1957) tacked Dean's death onto the imagery of a painting originally about something else. Tony Messenger treated the same subject in his painting *30 September 1955* (the date of Dean's death), which he exhibited in the Young Contemporaries exhibition of 1958, the year after Minton himself died. We see this glamour, too, in the Pagoda's frequent appearance in cinema—it featured in three releases in 1965 alone: *Darling* (dir. John Schlesinger), *Fanatic* (dir. Silvio Narizzano), and *Life at the Top* (dir. Ted Kotcheff). Cars move physically, but the Pagoda also moved culturally, being cast in many films, photo shoots, and music videos in the half century since its creation. In many respects, cars were the great disruptors of the twentieth century, a role spotted in its first decade by Kenneth Graham in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), when he made cars Mr Toad's undoing. But the Pagoda's stylistic endurance has now made it something of a constant—a moving object now fixed in the cultural landscape.

Response by

**Becky Conekin**, Senior Lecturer at the MacMillan Center, Yale University

Elizabeth Wilson has argued that Cultural Studies spawned fashion studies, and that an exploration of this single fashion shoot from mid-1960s London can speak volumes about the creative energies and collaborations in that capital city.<sup>16</sup> In May 1964, the fashion illustrator and designer, Barbara Hulanicki, and her advertising executive husband, Stephen Fitz-Simon, launched a pink gingham dress with a hole at the back of the neck and a coordinated triangular kerchief in *The Daily Mirror* for their Biba Postal Boutique. The Fashion Editor for the *Mirror*, Miss Felicity Green, had invited Hulanicki to design something inexpensive for her readers to be featured in an article on “four career girls”.<sup>17</sup> The morning after the dress appeared in the *Mirror*, Hulanicki and Fitz-Simon discovered over 4,000 orders waiting for them at the post office on Oxford Street. After employing Royal College of Art students as seamstresses, and resolving the issue of finding enough pink gingham in the UK, along with some other hiccups, Biba Postal Boutique eventually filled the 17,000 orders for the ensemble.<sup>18</sup> The couple opened their first brick and mortar boutique a few months later on Abingdon Road in London’s Kensington. It was a great success, with customers such as Cathy McGowan from *Ready Steady Go!*, who wore their clothes on the popular television show on Friday nights. Other locations in Kensington followed, as well as their mail-order catalogue. Big Biba, as it was called, opened in 1973 in a seven-story building, combining Art Nouveau interiors with rock and roll music. Different floors catered to different clientele and there was a popular food hall, as well as a stunning Rainbow Restaurant on the fifth floor. For a time, Big Biba was not only a thriving business, but also a popular tourist attraction.

As well as showcasing a new collaboration between a fashion designer, an advertising executive, a fashion editor, and young fashion students, this shoot represents a new fashion marketed to an equally new younger consumer market. And behind the photograph was another collaboration—this one between the model and the photographer. The model was Paulene Stone, known as “Redbird”, thanks to her flaming locks. Although David Bailey is most known for his work with the model Jean Shrimpton, the quintessential bad boy’s breakthrough photograph was actually of Stone feeding a squirrel in an autumnal London park for a 1960 *Daily Express* fashion spread.<sup>19</sup> She had won the *Woman’s Own* model contest in 1958, and in 1964, she graced the cover of British *Vogue* twice.



by FELICITY GREEN

# Four girls prove that beauty and business ideas can go together



**THIS IS LETIZIA**

**SHE DESIGNS AND IMPORTS**  
Leticia, married to the designer Eric Adamson, illustrates the how-and-what of designing and the fact that she had made her own design in Italy, for instance.



**THIS IS SALLY**

**SOON SHE'LL HAVE HER OWN**  
Sally, who continues to have her own shop, has more before the camera, next to her own creation, "Vesta".



**THIS IS MARIE LISE**

**SHE'S OPENING A BOUTIQUE FOR**  
Marie Lise, who will be the first of her own boutiques in London, next to her own creation, "Vesta".



**THIS IS BARBARA**

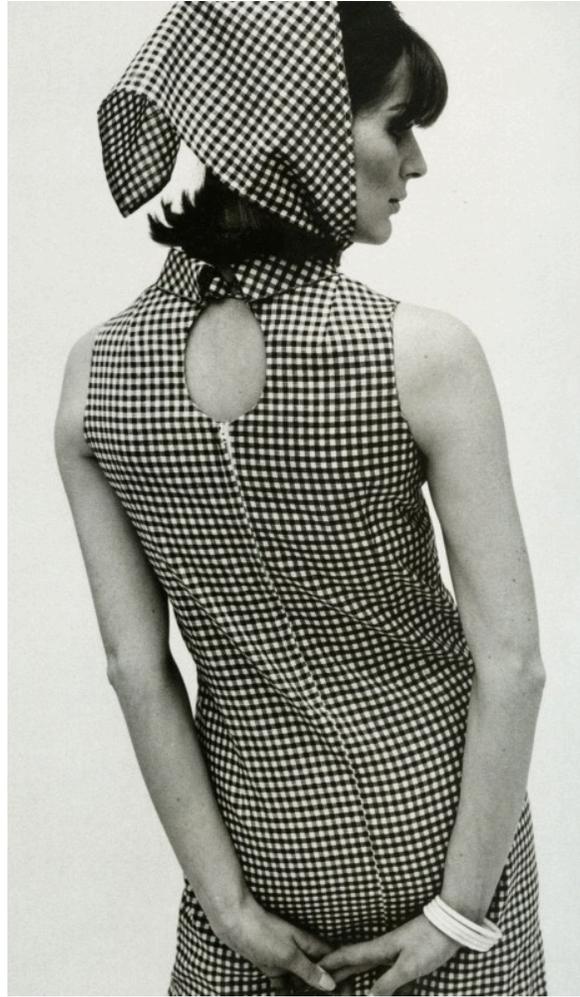
**HOW SHE'S A BEEHIVE MANUFACTURER**  
Barbara, who is a busy bee in a busy city, she had made herself a fashion editor and is, at the moment, a designer and a manufacturer.



... and this is one of her designs. Interested? It can be yours for 25s including the kerchief

If you're in the market for something cool and stylish...  
If you think gingham is an "in" fabric...  
If you like the idea of the headscarf by match...  
If you feel twenty-five bob isn't a fashion fortune—and it isn't...  
This is your dress, with its figure-flattering lines, gently swirling neckline and hazy blue back.  
It has been designed and made specially for the Daily Mirror by Barbara Hulanicki.  
If you would like one, send 25s, plus 1s, 6d, for postage and packing to Biba's Postal Boutique, 25, Oldend Street, London, W1.  
In pink gingham. Sizes: 10, 12, 14.

**Figure 11.** Barbara Hulanicki (designer) John French (photographer), Paulene Stone modelling a Barbara Hulanicki Biba pink gingham dress (front view), from *Four girls prove that beauty and business ideas can go together* by Felicity Green, *The Daily Mirror*, 1 May 1964. Digital image courtesy of Barbara Hulanicki Design / John French.



**Figure 12.**

Barbara Hulanicki (designer) John French (photographer), Paulene Stone modelling a Barbara Hulanicki Biba pink gingham dress (back view), from *Four girls prove that beauty and business ideas can go together* by Felicity Green, *The Daily Mirror*, 1 May 1964. Digital image courtesy of Barbara Hulanicki Design / John French.

Stone was also a favourite of the top London fashion photographer, John French.<sup>20</sup> French worked closely with his models, but never clicked the shutter himself; he would calmly command one of his assistants to do so, when the shot was ready.<sup>21</sup> Now known as a conservative gentleman, whose studio was “churchlike”, French was actually a pioneer in other respects. He is credited with taking “fashion photography to a mass audience with the elegant, graphic images he published, not only in fashion publications like *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vanity Fair*, and *The Tatler*, but also in newspapers.”<sup>22</sup> In particular, French developed high contrast black and white photography, achieving the resolution necessary for the photos to look elegant on cheap

newsprint by rejecting “popular direct tungsten lighting for softer daylight photography, bouncing light off reflector boards” in his London studio.<sup>23</sup> From new consumer youth culture to technological innovation, this single fashion shoot can tell us many stories of London’s Swinging Sixties.

Response by

**Chris Breward**, Director of Collections and Research, National Galleries Scotland

“Sharp concision, alertness to the lived moment, and sheer style.” In three short phrases, Tom Crow captures not only the ethos of the Fine-Artz Associates, but also the flavour of a cultural moment whose elusive character I have consistently tried and, sadly, failed to demonstrate through the material legacy of 1960s fashion in London over three curatorial attempts.



**Figure 13.**

Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin, Mini dress, 1966, linen, cotton, metal zipper, machine sewing. Collection Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.29-2010). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In 2004, the cream wool jersey dress, worn by Mary Quant to collect her OBE from Buckingham Palace in 1966 and a Union Jack printed cotton shirt of the same year from “I Was Lord Kitchener’s Valet” boutique in the Portobello Road stood in for modernist cult values at the Museum of London’s “The London Look: Fashion From Street to Catwalk”. In 2006, a 1968 Mr Fish printed corduroy suit in orange, lime green, and maroon stripes, worn by the interior designer David Mlinaric, a graduate of the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL and envious of his art school peers at the neighbouring Slade School of Fine Art for their “style freedom”, formed the poster image for “Swinging Sixties: Fashion in London and Beyond” at the Victoria & Albert Museum. And finally, in 2012—my favourite—a pop 1966 “Double D” white linen mini dress (Fig. 13) by Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin, who were fresh out the Royal College of Art, came closest to, but couldn’t quite stand in as a cipher for the fads of that “teenage netherworld” in “British Design from 1948: Innovation in the Modern Age” at the same museum. We tried our best to animate inert seams and fabric: a jazz and Mod soundtrack at the Museum of London, kooky film reportage in “Swinging Sixties”, and even an Issigonis Morris Mini Minor and a mocked up Abbey Road zebra crossing for “British Design”, but old clothes are cold clothes, revenants of lost environments.

I have some sympathy then, for the Fine-Artz Associates’ attempts to decode and ignite the culture of the “advanced style cults” as a call to aesthetic and social revolution, though the standard curatorial tools wouldn’t allow me to fully reconstruct it. And I share some of Crow’s distrust of the “cultural studies orthodoxy”, which has reduced the vibrant ephemera of everyday life, and fashion in particular, to joyless evidence of commodity fetishism. Fifty years on, the selfsame stuff often resists resuscitation on the mannequin and in the vitrine. That much, I know from experience.

But perhaps the most vivid record of the values suggested in the Associates’ manifesto lies not in the faded object itself, but in the innocent freshness of its original context and interpretation—understood so well as a cultish visual, aural, and sartorial code by the Associates. George Melly knew as much when he described the “deliberate impoverishment of vocabulary in spoken and written utterances” as a characteristic of Pop culture. Mick Farren (author of the later alternative tracts “Watch Out Kids” of 1972 and “Get on Down” of 1976) wrote about Pop’s “non-literal culture dependent on style, mannerisms and emotional response for its expression.” And Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969) claimed that much that is best in Pop culture “does not find its way into literal expression . . . one is apt to find out more about youth’s ways by paying attention to posters, buttons, fashions of dress and dance, and especially to the pop music.”<sup>24</sup>

In a special “Fine Artz” edition of the Royal College of Art student journal *ARK* from summer 1964, the editors concluded:

It is our opinion that the world of the teenager could well provide vital information for the new generation of professional culture propagators. What impressed us most about the kids was the way in which they seemed to understand modern styling, fashion and expendability so much better than the professionals. The admen and Wimpey Bar designers don't do badly in supplying the sort of thing that is required . . . but why should they have what amounts to a virtual monopoly in the manipulation of our visual environments? <sup>25</sup>

In the following year, Foale and Tuffin rose to the challenge, establishing their boutique in Marlborough Court, off Carnaby Street. In their own words, its sharp interior, designed by the jeweller Tony Laws,

put scaffolding poles right across width-ways and then hung the hangers on those ... And all around above those were the light bulbs, blue and red light bulbs ... And minimal wooden floor and minimal white desk ... Oh and a model of Twiggy in the window. <sup>26</sup>

Like the "Double D" dress, there is a directness about their expression, as stark and uncompromising as one of Stephen Willats' PVC dress sculptures of the same year. The dress itself may have failed to carry that weight of meaning in the later context of the design historical survey show, but there is something in its childlike literalness, and pure line that carries 'the quotient of genius' essential to Crow's argument.

Response by

**Elena Crippa**, Curator, Modern and Contemporary British Art at Tate, London

Portraits, at their best, as the art historian Linda Nochlin has noted, are not only social seismographs—psychological barometers and records of fashion and taste—but the result of an urgent need for contact, the meeting of two subjectivities.<sup>27</sup> The way in which they embody and make visible such a meeting is often through the representation of gesture, though not the grand gestures of history painting, which are clearly encoded acts of communication. Rather than relying on stereotype or sentimentality, the most captivating portraits employ individuation. They often capture the encounter of two people through the recording of the elusive mood of an enduring gaze, or the posturing that bodies perform as knowing sites of mediality and exchange.



**Figure 14.**

James Barnor, Drum Cover Girl Erlin Ibreck, London, 1966, printed 2010 Tate. Collection Gift Eric and Louise Franck London 2016. Digital image courtesy of James Barnor / Autograph ABP.

This is probably what attracted me most the first time I saw James Barnor's portrait of a nineteen-year-old Erlin Ibreck, taken in 1966. There is her young beauty: a striking mixture of sensuousness, grace, and self-assurance. Her colourful, self-made dress, customized jewellery, and lacquered fingernails show an awareness of the latest fashion combined with a desire to customize and make trends personal. There is the leaning against the shining, grey jaguar that, rather than objectify her, empowers her and seems to suggest that life will be equitable—her future, too, will be plentiful. And her gestures: one hand waiting patiently; the other moving, drawing that hypnotizing talisman, that “eye”, closer to her heart, to the centre of the image. Mostly, there is the shallow depth of the focus, the sight of the London street softened and the sound of the incoming car muffled, she and me cocooned, in a public but safe space, together but apart from the rest of the world.

This photograph was produced as a fashion shot for *Drum*, Africa's first black lifestyle magazine, based in Johannesburg, which had been an integral part of the resistance movement known as the Sophiatown Renaissance. The magazine combined campaigning journalism with light-hearted photo stories. It spread as a franchise across the African continent, including editions in Kenya and Nigeria, with the readership extending to communities in London. The photographer, James Barnor, moved to Britain from Jamestown, Ghana, in 1959. Over the following decade, his regular assignments were for *Drum*. As the art historian Kobena Mercer has commented, Barnor played a key role not simply in documenting the Black diaspora in Britain through the photographic image, but also in representing it in an affirmative manner: not as a dislocation defined by a loss of roots, but as part of the long history of movement and exchanges that gave diasporic experiences multiple cross-cultural “roots” and a truly cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>28</sup> At a time when Black communities in London, New York, and Johannesburg were increasingly connected through active struggle and solidarity, in the constant presence of racism's deadening threat, Barnor's portrait of Erlin Ibreck offers an intensely visual and tactile aesthetic experience, one that carries within it an ethical and political proposition on how we encounter one another, how we can be with one another, and how we might be able to live together.

Response by

**Bryan Wolf**, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University

We see them from the back: eleven young men in hooded coats oblivious to our gaze. One figure—on the far left—turns our way and smiles, as if inviting us, in coy fashion, to listen to what the others must hear. This sly suggestion of sound in an otherwise wordless image comes from the logos painted on the back of the men's jackets. They reference the Who, the British rock group formed in the mid-1960s by Roger Daltrey, Pete Townshend, John Entwistle, and Keith Moon. A circle with the name "WHO" and the group's arrow-like emblem—vaguely phallic in form—flashes from the back of one jacket, while the term "Generation" can be read on another. *My Generation* was the title of the group's debut album from 1965. Other jackets display variations on the Union Jack.

The black and white photograph is noteworthy for several reasons, each resonating with the arguments in Tom Crow's *Provocation*, from the young men's "cult"-like demeanour, to their collective concern with style, to their deliberate and provocative self-fashioning. The wink over the shoulder from the figure on the left, in turn, adds a note of self-consciousness and performativity to the image. These are individuals who, in Crow's language, could be said to display "intention, intelligence, fine intuition, and self-critique" in a manner parallel to what we traditionally expect from free-standing objects of art. This photo was used to illustrate a point about the edge being taken off the stylistic acuity of Soho Modernism as it became more widely adopted as a conformist style under the catch-all term Mod. No Modernist in about 1959 or "Stylist" in about 1964 would advertise devotion to English as opposed to Black American or Jamaican music. Crow noted in Lecture 5 of his Mellon series: "As one young female informant told [Fine-Artz], 'unlike the Stylists, the Mods dress alike', the latter group having evolved into a much larger and younger formation, with the Stylists being a smaller, trend-creating leadership."<sup>29</sup> When young men band together to become a "cult", they function simultaneously as a "network of distributed intelligence" and as a unique artefact with a unified sensibility.



**Figure 15.**

Unknown photographer, London Mods, mid-1960s.

There is a lot at stake here, from Crow's carefully argued effort to reimagine the power and historical significance of British art of the 1960s, to his equally compelling attempt to expand the parameters of art history—the range of its inquiries—by insisting that certain “cults” and “collectives” function in a cognate fashion to individual works of art. But here we need to hit the “pause” button, for the reciprocity between works of art and collections of people, between aesthetically conceived objects and cults like the SoHo Modernists (and later the Stylists), flows only in one direction in Crow's account. Crow's ambition in the Mellon Lectures was to remap the territory of art history by: (1) expanding its range (cults are works of art, too); and (2) returning art history, as a discipline, to its founding assumptions as laid out by writers like Aby Warburg. The latter staked his analysis of Renaissance painting on mummers' parades and popular culture—a mingling of “high” and “low” that Crow wishes to reclaim today.

But the catch is that low cultures (“cults”, in other words) qualify as aesthetic products in Crow's account because—and only because—they come to resemble objects of “high culture.” They demonstrate the sensitivity, self-awareness, and self-critical facility that have historically distinguished works of art. What has not happened in this argument, then, is the reverse possibility: that high art should disavow its traditional aesthetic claims—that it might in fact de-define itself—and, in the process, reimagine itself outside of the languages of intention, self-critique, and aesthetic merit. This would lead not only to cults behaving as art works, but also to art itself being reconceived outside of its habitual aesthetic categories.

A final note: the “enemy” for Crow is not mass or popular culture (at least not when well used), but instead consists of any systems (Marx, Freud, Cultural Studies) that relegate works of art to an illustrative level, to expressions of buried or invisible forces larger than any “surface” meaning.

This accounts for the importance of “intention” in Crow’s definition of both the London Mods and the Stylists. Both groups self-consciously invented themselves, appropriating freely from African-American fashion and music, and European avant-garde culture. But this, I suspect, is dangerous territory. Crow is at risk of curtailing art’s most powerful animating histories: if not class and social structure, then those undercurrents that evade the conscious intentions of the maker. Let’s phrase it in the language of craft: the hand speaks languages that the mind does not always understand. And those languages, those forms of expression internal to a work of art but not deliberately “chosen” by its maker, are often the voices of a more troubling history, a less amenable culture. These sedimented languages are often spoken *despite*—not because of—our best intentions.

## Footnotes

- 1 Fine-Artz Associates (Terry Atkinson, John Bowstead, Roger Jeffs, Bernard Jennings), “Fine-Artz?: What or who are the ‘Fine-Artz?’”, *Ark* 35 (Summer 1964), 40.
- 2 Fine Artz, “Fine-Artz View of Teenage Cults”, *Ark* 36 (1964), 40.
- 3 Lawrence Alloway, “The Robot and the Arts”, *Art News and Review* (1 September 1956), 1.
- 4 *Picture Post* 4 June 1955, 67(10): 37–40, alongside text by David Mitchell, “What’s Wrong With Teddy Girls?” Russell met one group through his future wife, Shirley Kingdon, and found the other by walking into the Mayfair Club in Canning Town. Paul Sutton reproduces several in *Becoming Ken Russell: The Authorised Biography of Ken Russell*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Bear Claw Publishing, 2012), 61–63, claiming them as “consciously Pop Art photographs”, even before the term existed (on 65).
- 5 Rose Hendon, quoted among those tracked down and interviewed by Eve Dawoud, <http://www.teenagefilm.com/archives/archive-fever/who-were-the-teddy-girls/>. They were sometimes younger than Russell thought (fourteen or fifteen rather than seventeen years old).
- 6 *Absolute Beginners* in *The Colin MacInnes Omnibus* (London: Alison & Busby, 1985), 31 and 32. MacInnes’s narrator was based in part on Terry Taylor, assistant (1956–1958) to the photographer Ida Kar (and her lover). She photographed him in 1961, in a “vertical striped happy shirt”, reading the *Jazz Journal*, or smoking a joint.
- 7 “A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*—which would at the same time be the history of *powers*. . . from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat”. Michel Foucault (1977), ‘The Eye of Power’, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 149.
- 8 See Richard Wollheim, “Babylon, Babylone”, *Encounter* 104 (May 1962): 25–36, an extended essay on the modern city inspired by *Absolute Beginners*.
- 9 Robert Hughes, “The Rise of Andy Warhol”, *The New York Review of Books*, 18 February 1982, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1982/02/18/the-rise-of-andy-warhol>.
- 10 Francesco Clemente, “Remarks”, Henry Geldzahler Memorial, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 3 October 1994.
- 11 David Hockney, Remarks, Henry Geldzahler Memorial, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 3 October 1994.
- 12 See Anne Massey and Penny Sparke, “The Myth of the Independent Group”, *Block* 10 (April 1985): 48–56; and, more recently, Catherine Moriarty, “Popular Art, Pop Art and ‘the Boys who Turn Out Fine Arts’”, in Anne Massey and Alex Seago (eds), *Pop Art and Design* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 24–47.
- 13 For example, Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter and Ruscha*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- 14 Carol Tulloch, *The Birth of Cool: Style Narratives of the African Diaspora* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). With thanks to Professor Alistair O’Neill for fashion history information.
- 15 Stanley Booth, *Keith: Standing in the Shadows* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1995), 14.

- 16 Elizabeth Wilson explained in 2003, in her new Foreword to her seminal book, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985), how the 1980s had seen scholars developing “new ways of understanding culture and cultural artefacts,” which focused on “the hidden injuries of class, race and gender” (viii). In what she sees as a “parallel move”, Wilson describes how Cultural Studies began at the same time to emphasize “the audience and the use groups and individuals make of cultural artefacts, not passively receiving them but actively re-appropriating and even ‘subverting’ their intended purposes” (ix). “Pleasures previously despised as ‘feminine’—the reading of pulp romances, the watching of television soaps, the enjoyment of ‘women’s melodrama’ in film—were now differently evaluated. Female pleasure was prompted, in the cultural as in the erotic sphere” (ix), according to Wilson. Wilson contends that fashion played a “crucial role . . . since it stood on the cusp of the feminine and the erotic, the cultural and the social.” Thus, fashion studies “exploded”. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, Revised Ed., 2003.)
- 17 Barbara Hulanicki, *From A to BIBA: The Autobiography of Barbara Hulanicki*. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Publications, 2007), 69.
- 18 Hulanicki, *From A to BIBA*, 68-72.
- 19 Lesley White, “David Bailey’s Irish Dream”, *The Sunday Times*, 3 August 2008.
- 20 Paulene Stone, Interview with the Author, Chelsea, London, 1 January 2009.
- 21 Valerie Mendes, *John French: Fashion Photographer* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum Press, 1984).
- 22 Penny Martin, Online encyclopedia entry: <http://arts.jrank.org/pages/10574/John-French.html>
- 23 Martin, Online encyclopedia.
- 24 Nigel Whiteley, *Pop Design: Modernism to Mod* (London: Design Council, 1987), 7-8.
- 25 *ARK* 36 (Summer 1964): 48.
- 26 Iain R. Webb, *Foale and Tuffin: The Sixties. A Decade in Fashion* (Woodbridge: ACC Editions, 2009), 137.
- 27 See Linda Nochlin, “The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law I”, *Art in America* 61 (September-October 1973): 29.
- 28 Kobena Mercer, “People Get Ready: James Barnor’s Route Map of Afro-Modernity”, in *Ever Young James Barnor*, exhibition catalogue (London: Autograph ABP, 2010).
- 29 Thomas Crow, “The Great Lost Look c.1969: Beyond Cultural Studies”, Lecture 5, 6 February 2017, *Searching for the Young Soul Rebels: Style, Music, and Art in London 1956-1969*, Paul Mellon Lectures, National Gallery, London.

The image shows two bright red funnels positioned on either side of the title. They are set against a dark, almost black background. The funnels are slightly angled towards each other, and their surfaces are highly reflective, showing some highlights and shadows. The overall composition is symmetrical and minimalist.

# Seeing Red

Glenn Adamson and Richard Caspole

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It is an invasion, of sorts: a legion of vases, each about five feet high, made of porcelain. Floridly patterned and scarlet red, they are placed throughout the Yale Center for British Art (YCBA), on every floor, in the galleries, in the library court, on the stairs. The installation, *Made in China*, is by the artist Clare Twomey. Its effect is most improbable, with a surreal, larger-than-life quality. It is as if caterers were about to deliver a banquet for thousands of people; or a factory floor had been teleported into the galleries; or as if ceramics were finally being recognized as a dominant genre in British art.

This last improbable thing has actually come to pass. While one could scarcely have predicted it a decade ago, the long-neglected medium of ceramics has finally come into its own. Edmund de Waal and Rebecca Warren are among Britain's best-known artists. Grayson Perry—who leapt to the front of the queue some years ago, partly by mocking his own status as a humble potter so devilishly—is now a widely beloved figure. It is true that there remains a distinction between functional pottery and ceramic sculpture, but the opposition has come to be an animating theme rather than an impassable barrier. Tate St Ives recently staged an offbeat exhibition titled *That Continuous Thing*, which traced an eccentric arc from Bernard Leach through modernist sculpture and on to self-consciously amateur experimentation. While the show did not have an argument, exactly, it left no doubt that status-based hierarchies have been fully dismantled.

Twomey's *Made in China* is only one (albeit a major) element within *Things of Beauty Growing: British Studio Pottery*, a comprehensive survey exhibition of the ceramic vessel form, co-curated by Martina Droth of the YCBA, Simon Olding of the Crafts Study Centre, and myself. The show's narrative includes past moments when potters had names to conjure with—Bernard Leach, William Staite Murray, Michael Cardew, Lucie Rie, and Hans Coper. The intention is to bring their accomplishments back to the fore, while also demonstrating the possibilities for ceramics in the present day.



**Figure 1.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 2.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 3.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 4.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 5.**

Clare Twomey, *Made in China*, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 6.**

Clare Twomey, *Made in China*, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 7.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole.



**Figure 8.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole



**Figure 9.**

Clare Twomey, Made in China, ceramic vessels, 2016. Installed at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 2017. Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art | Photo: Richard Caspole

There are many reasons for the recent embrace of ceramics, among them a general permissiveness regarding artistic disciplines, and a rediscovery of the instinctive, sensually gratifying nature of clay. Perhaps the most important, though, is that ceramics are good to think with—particularly regarding issues of labour. This topic is at the heart of Twomey’s work, which illuminates the asymmetrical nature of global economic exchange. The eighty vases that comprise *Made in China* were, as the title implies, manufactured in Jingdezhen, long the world’s greatest ceramics centre. The particular facility that produced them, though extraordinary in its capabilities, is actually quite typical for the city; Twomey identified it through a simple Google search. She purposefully avoided any direct involvement in the making, wanting the process to be at arm’s length, like any other order from a Chinese factory.

All but one of the vases were decorated in Jingdezhen with inexpensive decals, but the eightieth vase was shipped to the Royal Crown Derby factory in Stoke-on-Trent. There it was hand-gilt in 18k gold with a pattern of sinuous chinoiserie dragons. Amazingly, the cost of this decoration was equivalent to the entire production cost of the other vases combined (a fact that helps to explain why British ceramic manufacturing has cratered in the past few decades). Visitors to the YCBA are encouraged to wander through the maze of the work, searching out the one “special” vase. When they find it, perhaps they will recognize it as a portrait of Royal Crown Derby and other firms like it: the precious remnant of a once-great industry.

Twomey sometimes describes herself as a “post-studio” artist. Though a specialist in ceramics, she rarely touches wet clay herself, instead asking others to execute her ideas. This also applies to the installation of *Made in China* at Yale, which was quite literally the work of many hands. For a visitor, the vases may seem to have appeared by magic, but in fact, the museum’s crew devoted the better part of a week to the installation. This was highly skilled, delicate work. As each vase was carefully positioned, it was carried by teams of two, fixed in place with wax, and then weighted to prevent tipping. Ingeniously, the art handlers devised a bespoke system involving strings of small handmade sandbags, which could be dropped down the neck (a single solid weight would have been very difficult to remove at the conclusion of the installation). It is important to recognize this professional labour, which mirrors that of the Chinese fabricators, who created the vases.

As often happens with powerful works, *Made in China* has acquired additional valences of meaning since it was made. Looking at the work in 2017, a reality reshaped by Brexiteers and the paranoid rage of Trump, the antiquated racist phrase “red menace” springs to mind. Twomey’s work faces up to such emotional intensity. While in some sense “proper”, echoing as it does the garnitures of stately country houses (something that would have been even more apparent in a previous installation of the work at the Harley

Gallery in Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire), it also possesses an unmistakable aggression. The blood-red colour and the overwhelming quantity suggest ranks of soldiers, echoing the famous terracotta army of the ancient Chinese emperor Chin Shi Huang Ti. The undercurrent of threat is more palpable than ever in the installation at Yale, where the shining scarlet surfaces contrast dramatically with Kahn's muted palette of concrete, oak, and travertine. It so happens that John Cheere's imposing sculpture in lead, *Samson Slaying a Philistine*, towers above the vases in the grand entrance. The great classical figure, jawbone in raised hand, appears almost to be defending his sacrosanct domain against invasion.

Yet it is important to remember that for many viewers, particularly those who are from China or know something of its culture, all these associations may well be absent. Bright red denotes not violence in Chinese culture, but well-being. The colour of the vases is that of cinnabar lacquer, festive paper decorations, wedding dresses, and of course, the national flag. The peonies that ornament the vases are also auspicious—the flower connotes “wealth and honour” (*fuguihua*)—and the inscription on each conveys wishes for prosperity and good luck. Thus, what might be read as threatening or simply surrealistic, from a Euroamerican perspective, is from the Chinese point of view symbolic of abundance and generosity.

The point here is not that one of these readings is wrong-headed, and the other correct. Rather, we should understand *Made in China* as a meditation on global culture. The duality of the work, its emotional instability, and its sheer unexpectedness: all of these capture what it means to live with difference. In an age darkened by nativist politics, Twomey gives us an image of what it means to confront the “Other”. Even if cultural encounter is uncomfortable, even if it destabilizes whole ways of life, it is that dynamic movement—not static national identity—which truly defines us.



# The *Famous Women* Dinner Service: A Critical Introduction and Catalogue

Hana Leaper

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## **The *Famous Women* Look First Feature**

*One of the most exciting and unexpected objects in the 2014 Tate Britain exhibition Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilization was a prototype plate by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant for a dinner service commissioned by Clark in 1932. The completed set of 50 plates, which feature portraits of “famous women” throughout history, survived wartime bombing and several moves of house by the Clark family, but for the past 30 years its whereabouts had been unknown to art historians. In spring 2017, prompted by the Vanessa Bell monographic exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery, the owner of the dinner service contacted Piano Nobile art gallery. It soon emerged that not only was the set intact, but that the plates themselves, hand-painted on Wedgwood blanks, have been preserved in their original condition.*

*This Look First feature offers the first opportunity for close scholarly examination of a culturally and visually potent art object. The feature uses photography, archival materials, and film to explore the process of creating the set and its place in the history of art. The present article includes a catalogue with biographical entries for each of the women featured in the set, together with source images and preparatory materials. The article text establishes where this playful, yet ground-breaking work fits within the artists’ oeuvres, and within a feminist history of art. Further materials expanding the feature’s reach, including a filmed discussion with the artist Judy Chicago, will be released in early 2018.*

### ***Famous Women*: “the familiar, the friendly even the facetious”**

“...it turned out differently to what we had expected” <sup>1</sup>

In 1932, Kenneth and Jane Clark ordered “36 large plates, 12 smaller plates, 36 side plates, 12 soup cups & saucers, 1 salad bowl & stand, 2 junket dishes, 6 oval dishes at different sizes, 2 sauce boats & stands, 4 pepper pots, 4 salt pots, 4 mustard pots, 2 sauce tureens & stands & handles, and 3 Liverpool jugs” from the artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. The set that the Clarks received two years later challenged their expectations, and taste, in numerous ways. <sup>2</sup> Clark, an influential art historian, museum director, and patron, recorded:

As usual with commissions it turned out differently to what we had expected. Instead of a gay cascade of decorative art like the best Savona, Duncan and Vanessa conscientiously produced forty-

eight plates each of which contained the portrait of a famous woman (Bloomsbury asserting its status as a matriarchy). These are in effect forty-eight unique paintings by Duncan and Vanessa, for which they made innumerable studies, and which will give posterity a good idea of their style in the '30s.<sup>3</sup>

Expecting luxurious fine dining ware, they instead received the *Famous Women* set of fifty portrait plates, a provocative and humorous work of art that challenged both the standard orientation of history and the way in which it is recorded, as well as consolidating a call for social change, beginning in the domestic realm (Fig. 1). Despite making a claim for the lasting art historical importance of the set in terms of representing the artists' work of this period, Clark seemed disconcerted by these results.



[View this illustration online](#)

**Figure 1.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, *Famous Women*, ca. 1932-4, dinner service set of fifty portrait plates, 25.5 and 23.5cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited)

The set is one of the foremost works of a then nascent feminist field of art that contests the visual history of “Civilisation” presented by Clark throughout his career.<sup>4</sup> Often working in craft media, its practitioners continue to draw attention to hidden histories of inequality, including the lack of representations of women and minority groups. Recent examples include Lubaina Himid’s 2007 work *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service*, which uses dinner ware to examine Lancastrian involvement in the slave trade, and Jessica Lynn Whitbread’s performances of *Tea Time: Mapping Informal Networks of Women Living with HIV* (2011–ongoing), which uses a teacup to represent each of the women living with HIV who have participated in the project.



**Figure 2.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Catherine the Great, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).

Like many of these works, Bell and Grant's plates invite empathetic dialogues between subjects. In the case of the *Famous Women*, this has resulted in unexpected and joyful associations. In his autobiography, *Another Part of the Wood* (1974), Clark recounted that his initial inspiration for the service came from dining with the dealer and collector Joseph Duveen in New York in ostentatious splendour "on a blue and gold Sèvres service made for the Empress Catherine of Russia".<sup>5</sup> The **Catherine the Great** plate thus provides a fascinating point of connection between two paradigms: the artists' ambitious and dissident work to challenge both the gendering of history—with its boundaries between craft and fine art—and the prevalent culture of formal hospitality; and Clark's more conventional standpoint, both in terms of his inspiration for owning an artist-designed dinner service and the art historical models he popularized (Fig. 2). Including the original owner of Duveen's Sèvres service in *Famous Women* recognizes her role as a patron of the arts and a powerful female ruler—two legacies which inspired the set.

Further, in a curiously feminist twist, despite Clark's ambivalence towards the end product, letters between Bell and Jane Clark prove that Jane at least knew a great deal of information about the set during its creation, and seems to have taken charge of managing the project with Bell. A large group of letters between Bell and Jane survive—many more than between the artists and Mr Clark. They indicate a growing closeness between the two women. On 30 January, Bell wrote: “but don't you think we might use Christian names? It's so much less business like!”;<sup>6</sup> and over the coming months they discussed their personal tribulations (“One's children never leave one long in peace, do they?”),<sup>7</sup> as well as making many appointments to meet, usually over lunch, tea, or dinner.

Bell described the ideas for the plates in detail to Jane, and in return, seems to have been encouraged in them. In February, early on in the process, Bell wrote:

We have considered the whole question of treatment a great deal & I want to ask your opinion about our present plans. We think there might be some sort of [?indecipherable] idea running through the service to give it character & unity while allowing a good deal of variety also and our idea is to make it an illustration of women in different capacities—famous queens, actresses & so on—this would give me a great deal of choice. We could have classical figures or modern or anything. At the same time there'd be [me/more] general idea & interest to connect all. But please say if you or Mr Clark don't like the idea.<sup>8</sup>

This prompts a new reading of the set. Marginalized in accounts of Kenneth Clark's life and his avid collecting, we might claim a place here for Jane as a sensitive and discerning art lover, for whom the unusual concept of a celebration of victorious women in a format that subverts artistic and historical conventions held great appeal.

## **Radical Hospitality**

In the same year as Bell and Grant received the Clarks' commission, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a contemporary of the Bloomsbury Group and leader of the Futurists, also aimed to revolutionize Italian culture through reinventing the relationship between art and domesticity. *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) was a manifesto that reimagined dining as an artistic experience. Marinetti introduced the book, which contains recipes that combine ingredients based on aesthetic concerns rather than those of taste, as having the aim of:

changing radically the eating habits of our race, strengthening it, dynamizing it and spiritualizing it with brand-new food combinations in which experiment, intelligence and imagination will economically take the place of quantity, banality, repetition and expense.<sup>9</sup>

In England, the artists and writers associated with the Bloomsbury Group also utilized the dining table as an arena of radical hospitality, and their shared mealtimes were a gateway to the political, social, and spiritual reform of a nation. Like Marinetti, their forays into domestic redesign were riven with humour, and artistry; unlike Marinetti's, they were not intended to reduce calories or conversation to a functional minimum. Domesticity and home life—the culture of the table—were at the heart of the entwined lifestyle and artistic practice that this unconventional family pioneered. Their common passion for dining and conversation, collecting, and home-making transformed the strict Victorian homes and tables they had grown up with into creative, intellectual spaces full of colour and humour, where social norms were daily deconstructed.



**Figure 3.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, photograph of Lefevre galleries Music Room interior design with Grapes fabric, Yale University Press. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell courtesy of Angelica Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre.

In *Another Part of the Wood*, Clark called his dinner service commission “an attempt to revive his [Grant’s] interest in decorative art”.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Richard Shone has observed, both artists were already in great demand “when they squeezed in this commission to oblige new friends”.<sup>11</sup> The many decorative schemes they were individually and jointly involved in during the 1920s and 1930s shared both motifs and underlying values with the *Famous Women* set, underscoring their commitment to socially engaged domestic practice. Their “Music Room”, an “eccentric vision of the English landscape” exhibited at the Lefevre Galleries in 1932, did not prove commercially successful, but became the setting for a lauded cocktail party hosted by Bell and Woolf (Fig. 3).<sup>12</sup> In equal parts whimsical, sophisticated, and unconventional, it

showcased the Bloomsbury model of an engaging and comfortable social space that encouraged enquiry. The themes of the room celebrated arts and culture, and prompted conversation: the six floral still life panels each represent a different composer and share motifs with the piano, stool, and gramophone. According to Reed, the artists' liberal use of "cheerful pastiche and quotation" (for example, their images of swags and positioning of mirrors) expressed an "Amusing disdain for the rigors of high modernism".<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on pleasure over formalism clearly positions the artists as advocates of witty heterogeneity rather than overarching narratives, and undermines contemporary standards of taste.

Images of musical instruments, reading and writing materials, cuisine and cultural figures from throughout history and from around the world, together with *trompe l'œil* motifs delivered with a fluid jocularly also occur throughout the privately commissioned rooms the artists designed for friends. Particular examples are those created for John Maynard Keynes at 46 Gordon Square (1918); King's College Cambridge (1920–22); and Leonard and Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square (1924). They were amenable spaces for hosting meetings that often intertwined professional interests with friendships (key concerns for figures then at the height of their social, political, and intellectual influence) and were designed to reflect their occupants' creative and intellectual values.

Rather than the heroic austerity of high modernism or luxury of Art Nouveau, their rooms pronounced the aspiration, shared by both the artists and their clients, to shape a lifestyle that married pleasurable aesthetics with what Christopher Reed terms "humanism with deep historical roots".<sup>14</sup> The rural home that the artists created together in Charleston, Sussex from 1916 onwards exemplifies this ethos. Unexpected juxtapositions, such as kitchen cupboards decorated in 1950 by Bell with still lifes that look to seventeenth-century Dutch precedents, reveal a privileging of visual delight over functional or hierarchical propriety. Their seemingly irreverent, yet carefully curated juxtapositions of valuable antiques and avant-garde paintings with folk art and pottery from many places and periods show that "good taste", and etiquette were not valued as a reflection of creative capacity or moral propensity. Their respect for the domestic world of everyday pleasures and human relationships meant they invested huge amounts of energy in this realm, seen by few outsiders, and with no commercial value in the art market. The fabric of the home and the approach to hospitality inside it became an enduring artwork, eroding boundaries between high and low art forms, and allowing members of the household to live freely, supplanting gendered roles.

A more public contribution to this reimagining of the domestic order as a space of emancipated humanism and relaxed relationships was made by the mass-produced ranges that the pair designed for the 1934 government-sponsored *Modern Art for the Table*, an exhibition held at Harrods store in London to promote good design in the home. They contributed bone china wares for E Brain & Co (Foley China), alongside Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicolson, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, Albert Rutherston, Ernest Proctor, and Angelica Bell; and earthenware for A J Wilkinson Ltd. Known as the “Bizarre” range, this became synonymous with the name of Wilkinson’s artistic director and design leader, Clarice Cliff. Unlike the unique and exclusive high-end commission for Clark, the Clarice Cliff and Foley labels were emblematic of middle-class tastes and budgets, and belonged firmly to the territory of mass-produced collectibles.

By contrast, manufacturing the *Famous Women* service necessitated an involved process that took more than a year to organize and complete. It was facilitated by Billy Winkworth, a ceramics collector and connoisseur, who was a mutual friend of the Clarks and the Charleston artists and made introductions to Wedgwood. The artists travelled to Stoke-on-Trent as the guests of Josiah Wedgwood V, where they toured the Etruria factory, and spent a day “looking at all the different shapes, glazes & colours in the Wedgwood pottery.”<sup>15</sup> They selected a blank shape called the “concave pattern, that is a plain round plate with a slightly concave edge” for its “very practical” qualities; and a “grey body, which when it has a transparent glaze on it is a lovely cool white very like Delft.”<sup>16</sup> Their choices of a fairly chunky shape, similar to those used for Omega ware, with an iconic finish suggests a self-conscious recourse to the history of fine dining combined with an ever-present spirit of subversion—a marriage of tradition and modernism, craft and high art (Figs [4](#), [5](#), and [6](#)).



**Figure 4.**

Omega Workshops, Omega ware dinner plate, about 1914-16, earthenware with white tin glaze, 30.48 cm diameter, Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre.



**Figure 5.**

Omega Workshops, Omega ware desert plate, about 1914-16, earthenware with cobalt blue glaze, 25.4 cm diameter, Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre.



**Figure 6.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, reverse of plate, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).

Promoting their dissident design sensibility as appropriate for both ends of the market demonstrated the artists' enduring vision of radically transformed and transformational domesticity. From 1913-19, they had been co-directors at the Omega Workshops, a prototype social enterprise artists' collective, where work went unsigned. Director Roger Fry's prospectus for the Omega Workshops explained to potential customers and creatives their endeavour to "discover a possible utility for real artistic invention in the things of daily life", and to use a new aesthetic language conducive to the freedoms and equalities these practitioners were exploring and advocating for in domestic life.<sup>17</sup> Although the idealism ingrained in the foundations of the Omega Workshops was diminished by the war—and Bell later wrote how difficult it was in retrospect to believe they had been so optimistic about the political agency of home decoration on the eve of global, mechanized war—their playful, provocative, reimagining of home life became an enduring tenet of their shared practice and is evident in *Famous Women*.<sup>18</sup>

“If you could say what you like about art, sex, or religion, you could also talk freely and very dully about the ordinary doings of daily life.” <sup>19</sup>

There are many stories of meal times at Charleston, from the frugal to the fantastical. Food is mentioned frequently in letters, diaries, and memoirs, but the real feast the friends assembled for was primarily of ideas and friendships, and the tastes explored aesthetic. <sup>20</sup> Every stage in the developing relationships between this extraordinary group of individuals was marked with such gatherings. Their exploratory Thursday evenings in the social laboratory of Gordon Square formed the basis for lifelong friendships and overturned the conventions of polite hospitality and conversation. In contravention of the prescriptive rules under which they had been raised, where menus were elaborate, rituals entrenched, and men disappeared after dinner, Bell recalled:

I believe there was generally some whiskey to be had, but most of us were content with cocoa and biscuits. In fact, as everyone had had something to eat and perhaps drink at about eight o'clock, it did not seem to occur to them to want any more at nine or at any time between then and midnight. Then, perhaps, exhausted by conversation, serious or frivolous, they welcomed some nourishment. <sup>21</sup>

When Thursday evenings resumed after Thoby Stephen's death (1906) and Bell's marriage to Clive Bell (1907), they were hosted by Virginia Woolf, now a professional writer growing in confidence. New figures were brought into the fold—including Grant, who had already had sexual relationships with Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes, and talk ricocheted between figures from “a fluid and indeterminate matrix of individuals, associations and ideas” including artists, writers, classicists, philosophers, and intellectuals. <sup>22</sup> Bell records the energy and freedom, the intellectual exploration, and conversely the silliness, awkwardness, and ordinariness of these evenings:

I wonder what those who imagine a rarefied atmosphere of wit, intelligence, criticism, self-conscious brilliance and never any tolerance of ordinary dullness would have thought of the rather stiff young ladies to whom it did not occur not to talk about the weather; or of Adrian's dog, Hans, who insisted on entertaining the company by blowing out matches; of a great many rather

childish doings and discussions. When it is said that we did not hesitate to talk of anything, it must be understood that this was literally true. If you could say what you like about art, sex, or religion, you could also talk freely and very dully about the ordinary doings of daily life. There was very little self-consciousness, I think, in those early gatherings, but life was exciting, terrible and amusing and we had to explore it, thankful that one could so freely. <sup>23</sup>

This combination of the brilliant and the banal continued throughout many manifestations of this social circle: the Friday Club, the 1917 Club, the Memoir Club, and the less official visits, dinners, parties, and evenings in shared houses. When, as established professionals, they welcomed T.S. Eliot into their company on his first visit to Charleston with a dinner, Quentin Bell fondly remembered the occasion as “the night of the Great Covey” (a covey is a small flock of partridges) and “perhaps our finest hour”. Bell miscalculated the portions and over-ordered the food with the result that:

Eleven birds were brought in, resting on various dishes and platters. There was a good deal of astonishment when this covey made its appearance and some laughter; our guest of honour the poet was delighted. Eliot was funny, charming and still somehow impressive. It was a wonderful evening. <sup>24</sup>

The friends’ frequent sharing of hospitality led to the genesis of extraordinary ideas and manifested in repeated attention to dining utensils and food in their work. Bell’s *Apples: 46 Gordon Square* (1909–10), *Apples* (1916), and *Tea Things* (1920); Grant’s *Asheham*, *Still Life* (1912) and *Still Life with Jug, Knife and Onion* (1920) are all relatively early examples of themes that found purchase throughout each artist’s oeuvre. Together with Roger Fry’s many depictions of similar subjects, for example, *Still Life with Chocolate Cake* (1912) and *Biscuit Tin and Pots* (1918); and Woolf’s many rich and evocative descriptions of food and dining—**Madame de Stael**, is alluded to as confirmation of the rich intellectual discussion taking place during the beef en daube dinner in *To the Lighthouse*—this demonstrates the enduring importance of domesticity and everyday life as an artistic inspiration, and indeed, tool. The few objects that Bell retained from her childhood home were intensely evocative of the connection between family, memory, and mealtimes. They included “blue-and-white willow pattern serving dishes”, which now hang over the kitchen ranges, and the “Dutch walnut glass-fronted cabinet which was one of a pair that once belonged to

the novelist WM Thackeray”, which was placed in the studio and filled with “an eclectic range of ceramics” (it is now at Charleston and displays the four *Famous Women* test plates that remained there) (Fig. 7).<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 7.**

Duncan Grant, *Still Life in a Cabinet*, 1956, 53.5 × 53.5 cm. Private Collection. © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Paul Mellon Centre.

The artists’ recognition of the importance of get-togethers with their network of friends and the support, inspiration, conviviality, and joy they afforded, let them imagine a network of *Famous Women*—overlooked by history—dining together, sharing the experiences of their remarkable lives. Their ideas for populating the plates can be traced from a lively variety of sources. It is important to acknowledge that neither artist staked claims on being scholars and neither were historians with vast stores of esoteric knowledge about historical women. Their inspiration came from the personal interests they had cultivated over time and discussions amongst friends, women and men, several of whom promoted the work of women through their own businesses or practice.

## **The *Famous Women* and Feminist Fancies of the Bloomsbury “Matriarchy”**

Why did Bell and Grant invite this particular set of historical women to dine, so to speak, with Bloomsbury, and with the Clarks? A kindred zest for life and disregard for convention link many of the Famous Women to one another, and to the artists and their friends. Many were pioneers, either in a particular professional field or leadership role; but many had lived inspirational lives, carving out opportunities for themselves where precedents were rare.

Hints in Bell’s numerous letters to the Clarks on the subject of the plates indicate that a cross-section of well-wishers had known of the Famous Women’s genesis, and perhaps had helped them to identify suitable figures; also that, at times, it was a struggle to do so. On 9 June (probably in 1933, though the letter does not record the year), Bell wrote to ask her now good friend, Jane Clark:

We wanted to ask if you’d mind if we had a tea-party to show them [the plates] to a few people before you have them, as so many people have been curious to see them. <sup>26</sup>

The proposed tea party had the additional purpose of “attracting more orders too!”. <sup>27</sup> Bell was adept at organizing events that combined friendship and patronage with celebration and discussion, as at the Music Room cocktail party.

An undated and unsigned fragment from the same collection of unpublished letters outlines some of the difficulties the artists faced with manufacturing the plates and deciding on women to include:

There are still 7 plates to be done. Two (Virginia Woolf and Ellen Terry) were failures & will be done again. Three actresses are wanted to make up the dozen & we propose to do Mrs Jordans, Pavlova & Greta Garbo. Two beauties are wanted & we propose Lady Hamilton and 1933. Would any others be preferred? <sup>28</sup>

The forty-eight portraits eventually create an impressive depth and breadth of field—geographically and historically. Diana Wilkins, who worked with preparatory sketches in the Angelica Garnett Gift archive at Charleston and has contributed to the catalogue in Section 2 of this “Look First” feature, has analysed that while 40 per cent of the women are British, just over another 40 per cent of the women are of European, Scandinavian, and Russian in

origin. As far as we can tell, two are African, one Japanese, two North American, one from Asia Minor, and two from the Arabian Peninsula. This transhistorical sorority encompasses women from the realms of ancient history to the present moment—contemporary women like **Miss 1933** (Marian Bergeron, the winner of the Miss America beauty pageant of 1933), **Virginia Woolf**, and **Greta Garbo**, to several from Before the Common Era, like **Helen of Troy** and **Sappho**.

This range demonstrates an extraordinary scope of reference, indicating the magnitude of the research that lay behind the service. Each portrait appears to have had an existing basis. Some are well known and have numerous manifestations; others are more mysterious, and we were unable to find a source for **Murasaki**. Several show striking similarities to famous portraits from Western art, and were, in all likelihood, consciously based on these works—for example, Piero di Cosimo's **Simonetta Vespucci** (ca. 1480), Peter Lely's **Nell Gwynn** (ca. 1675), Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's **Marie Antoinette dite "à la Rose"** (1783), and Thomas Gainsborough's **Mrs Siddons** (1785) (Figs. [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#)). The artists also looked to a wide range of media, such as the mosaic of **Empress Theodora** from the Basilica San Vitale, Ravenna; the sculpture of **Sappho** by Pierre-Nicolas Beauvallet (1813); and the engraving of **Pocahontas** by Simon van de Passe (ca. 1616) (Figs. [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#)).



**Figure 8.**

Piero di Cosimo, Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, about 1480. Oil on board, 57 x 42 cm. Musée Condé, Chantilly. Public domain. Digital image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



**Figure 9.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Simonetta Vespucci, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 23.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 10.** Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, Marie Antoinette dite "à la Rose", 1783. Oil on canvas, 113 × 87 cm. Palace of Versailles (MV 3893, INV 3063, AC 1948). Public Domain. Digital image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



**Figure 11.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Marie Antoinette, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 12.**

Basilica of San Vitale (built CE 547), Mosaic of Empress Theodora, Ravenna, Italy. Digital image courtesy of Petar Milošević.



**Figure 13.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Theodora, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 14.**

William Wetmore Story, profile view of a sculpture of Sappho, 1863, marble, 137.5 × 85.1 × 84.1 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Digital image courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



**Figure 15.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Sappho, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 16.**

Simon van de Passe, Pocahontas, about 1616. Engraving, National Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Accession Number: NPG.77.43). Digital image courtesy of National Library of Congress.



**Figure 17.**

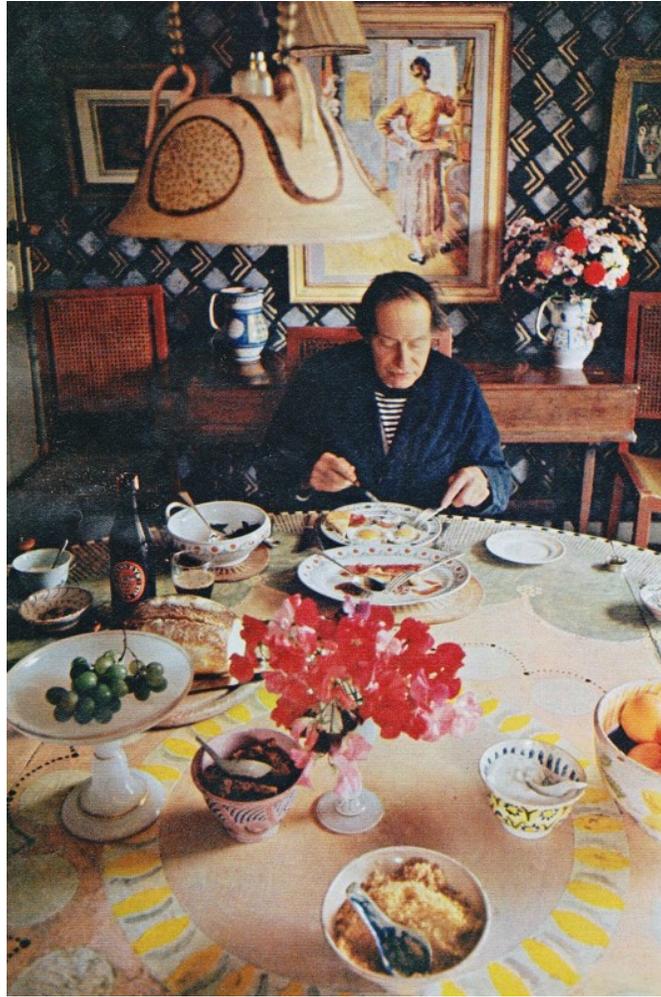
Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Pocahontas, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).

Whilst there are a number of surprising omissions from the artists' immediate circle, such as Annie Thackeray Ritchie, Julia Margaret Cameron, Vita Sackville-West, and Elinor Ewbank (Grant's distant relation, childhood companion, and the first woman to gain a First in Chemistry at Oxford), a number had precedents in Bell and Grant's previous work demonstrate an abiding fascination with these figures. The **Queen of Sheba** and **Empress Theodora** appear in Grant's 1912 pointillist painting *The Queen of Sheba* (shown in the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* of 1912) and Bell's 1912 *Byzantine Lady*. Test plates featuring La Princesse Mathilda, and Bell's ancestor Mme la Marquise de Caux (Adelina Patti), show that the artists' research extended further than the women who made the final cut (Figs. 18, 19).



**Figure 18.**

Duncan Grant, Mme la Marquise de Caux (Adelina Patti) test plate, about 1933, ceramic, 25.5 cm diameter, Charleston CHA/C/136a. © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Charleston Trust.



**Figure 19.**

Unknown photographer, Duncan Grant in the dining room at Charleston eating from the Mme la Marquise de Caux (Adelina Patti, 1964, photograph. © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of David Herbert.

The set belongs to the broader context of the quest which Bell shared with her younger sister, Virginia Woolf, to fashion appropriate ways to commemorate women's histories. Many of the authors commemorated in the set were women that Woolf had written essays about, including **Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Emily Barrett Browning, Dorothy Osborne, Sappho, Madame de Staël, Sarah Churchill, Ellen Terry, and Christina Rossetti**. Whilst Woolf wrote famous polemics about the absence of women from history and literature, and produced commercially and critically experimental biographies of family, friends, and women she identified as creative forebears in the form of *Orlando*, *Flush*, *Freshwater*, and *Famous Men and Fair Women*, Bell's practice weaves together multiple generations of the women of her own family with canonical and religious imagery.

Bell also wrote several short pieces about their female relatives. In recounting the little she knew of her French great-grandmother, Bell mourned that it “isn’t enough”, and railed: “Why didn’t some of her innumerable descendants scribble something, silly and illiterate perhaps as this, but first-hand and real?” Far from a passing flight of fancy, her longing for intergenerational connection fundamentally affected her creative processes: “My wish to know more about her drives me on.”<sup>29</sup> Echoing this keenly felt sense of injustice at being robbed of her female ancestry, in her enquiry “Women and Fiction” of 1929 Woolf noted:

very little is known about women. The history of England is the history of the male line, not the female. Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, what remains?<sup>30</sup>

Yet the sisters were encouraged in their artistic pursuits by their particular—and it must be noted, exceptional—family history. Their great aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron, is now recognized as one of the most important practitioners in photographic history, and their elder half-sister, Stella Duckworth, had been a keen and encouraging photographer. Cameron’s practice provided, both literally and figuratively, a “lens” through which her great nieces were able to view their family, past and present. It also informed their own work, providing them with inspiration, a touchstone to affirm their identities as female artists, and a model for experimental and creative means of recording likenesses. Although Cameron does not have a dedicated plate in the set, her artistic influence is visible through the **Ellen Terry** portrait which was based on her 1864 photograph of the actress—an appropriate homage to her role in shaping visual culture from behind, not in front of the camera (Figs. [20](#), [21](#)).



**Figure 20.**

Julia Margaret Cameron, photograph of Ellen Terry, negative 1864; print about 1875, The J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum.



**Figure 21.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Ellen Terry, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 23.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).

The artists' emphasis on uncovering forgotten women and finding new modes for women's and non-heteronormative histories can be located as a forerunner of feminist art projects of the 1960s: yet it is equally important to acknowledge its roots in the networks of practitioners that the artists belonged to.

**“the lives of the obscure—in those almost unlit corridors of history where the figures of generations of women are so dimly, so fitfully perceived”**

The artists subdivided the set into four sections: Beauties, Dancers and Actresses, Queens, and Women of Letters. The title “Beauties” is a clue to the historical antecedents of this section. Peter Lely's series of portraits known as the “Windsor Beauties”, and Sir Godfrey Kneller's “Hampton Court Beauties” depict aristocratic young women of the Stewart Court of “the

merry monarch' Charles II". <sup>31</sup> Information from the Royal collection notes that whilst some held official court positions, others held less official posts as "noted courtesans". <sup>32</sup> The first series of eleven works were "apparently commissioned or at least assembled by Anne Hyde, Duchess of York, probably around 1662-5"; the second were painted for Queen Mary II and "described by Defoe . . . as 'principal Ladies attending upon her Majesty, or . . . [ladies] frequently in her Retinue'." <sup>33</sup>

It is indicative of the subversive tenor of Bell and Grant's selection that none of these official Court Beauties, whose portraits were crafted for the pleasure of the indulgent courts of the late seventeenth century, appear in the *Famous Women* set. Instead, they included figures like low-born actress and royal mistress Nell Gwynn, who is a member of the "Dancers and Actresses" section. Charles II lasciviously kept his private portrait of Gwynn "displayed behind a painting of a landscape. He enjoyed swinging back the panel to reveal her to his friends, so that they could all enjoy looking together." <sup>34</sup> Yet despite receiving no titles and far less money than her aristocratic rivals, Gwynn's name is better known to history than the more refined, discrete, and clothed women of the "Beauties" series. In these seventeenth-century portraits, beauty signalled virtue, chastity and obedience, and conversely, sexual desirability. Bell and Grant's portraits subvert these qualifications of feminine appeal, venerating ambition, achievement, and autonomy—sexual as well as intellectual. Their "Beauties" do not form a passive category, but an inspirational history of women who gained celebrity status from their involvement in intellectual, political, artistic, and social elites—often from outsider positions. Some, like artist **Elizabeth Siddal**, had talents that went sadly unrecognized in the twentieth century. Others like **Helen of Troy** and **Pocahontas** are romanticized as the heroines of love stories that omit the bloody and brutal racial and colonial conflicts that characterized their lives. Many protested, or overcame sexist constraints by challenging expected behaviours.

Their women have been selected for their talent, power, and occasionally sheer bloody-mindedness, whilst the gentle grace or connections to royalty that were Mary II's criteria for commissioning the "Hampton Court Beauties" have little role to play. Gwynn, like numerous of her fellow Famous Women straddles sections, defying simple categorization. Whilst cataloguing the women, sections shifted: **Mrs Langtry** moved between "Beauties" and "Actresses and Dancers"; **Rachel** from "Actresses and Dancers" to "Beauties"; **Mrs Kemble** from "Actresses and Dancers" to "Women of Letters". Most had complex personal lives as interesting to feminist art history as the public roles that brought them fame. Many vigorously crafted identities and statuses at odds with the mores of their historical epochs. Some were professionals; lots were lesbian, bisexual, or had unconventional

sexual relationships; not a few had numerous titles, or used pseudonyms. With few exceptions, the lives of a majority of these women reflect the new sexual politics at the heart of the Bloomsbury understanding of humanism.

By making household utensils into a provocative medium of discussion and debate, and invoking the traditionally feminine space of the dining table to—paraphrasing Clark—assert Bloomsbury’s status as a matriarchy, Bell and Grant created an artistic and discursive platform for sexual politics and women’s histories. They created this feat in a work commissioned by an extremely influential, and well-connected collector, curator, and critic, in the knowledge that it would be documented within the annals of twentieth-century history and biography, and possibly publically displayed. They devised an innovative and outré project that, despite its idiosyncrasy in terms of form and subject, is no mere novelty item.

The service is a systematic and sustained gambit that contributed to an early movement towards recording women’s achievements alongside other projects the artists would have known about. As previously mentioned, these include Virginia Woolf’s writings, from which they selected many of the women of letters. It encompassed Francis Birrell’s editorship of the “Representative Women” series, for which Vita Sackville-West wrote *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea* in 1927. The “Representative Women” series contained several figures that overlapped with the set, suggesting that it was used as a source, including **Sarah Churchill: Duchess of Marlborough** (Bonamy Dobree, 1927), **Elizabeth B Browning** (Irene Cooper Willis), **Rachel** (James Agate, 1928).

Another source for the plates may have been the “Pears Palace of Beauty” at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. Actresses were hired to personify ten famous historical women in a series of rooms designed to reflect the appropriate epoch and souvenir postcards were created to commemorate the pageant. Seven of the Pear’s Beauties also received *Famous Women* plates. These were **Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Beatrice, Mary Queen of Scots, Nell Gwynn, Mrs Siddons,** and **Miss America 1924** (updated to Miss America 1933 for the plates).

Edith Sitwell’s *English Women* (1942), a collection of mini-biographies accompanied by images was published a decade later with numerous overlapping figures including **Ellen Terry, Queen Elizabeth I, Virginia Woolf,** and **Christina Rossetti**. Published during the Second World War, this series seems to auger the growing acknowledgement of and appetite for women’s histories.

The dearth of painters in the *Famous Women* set is slightly disappointing, given the profession of its makers. However, the fortunes of the dictionary of women artists that art historian Daphne Haldrup began to compile in the

1960s gives us a sense of how difficult it was to find published materials relating to women painters. The archive of her research was deposited with the Paul Mellon Centre library in the 1970s, and contains a whole file of material detailing rejections of the proposed dictionary by publishers. Centre archivist Frankie Drummond Charig records that: “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>35</sup>

The recovery of the *Famous Women* set makes clear its principal place in a feminist artistic tradition that continues to accrue in the twenty-first century—a community of pioneering women artists and feminist collaborators that echoes the lineage between the Famous Women on the plates. Working together in collaboration without signing the plates, Bell and Grant rejected the usual claims to authorship and instead embraced the creative dynamic of a partnership of equals. Collective work, frequently engaging domestic imagery and “low art” materials and techniques, became a cornerstone of much feminist practice.

Though the *Famous Women* set remained largely hidden from view in Clark’s collection, tantalizing hints of its existence emerged from time to time: an article in *The Sketch* in 1934, four test plates at Charleston, two preparatory sketches at the Ashmolean and one collected by the V&A, as well as the portrait roundels that occasionally appear for sale. It is impossible to ascertain, and ultimately unproductive to speculate whether other artists, critics, and writers knew of their earlier efforts. However, comparative analysis of Bell and Grant’s set with the numerous projects that also combine collaboration and conversation to celebrate radical hospitality and women’s histories promises to offer rewarding outcomes and lead to new avenues for research. To begin this process, we have invited Judy Chicago, creator of *The Dinner Party*, and members of the Feminist Art Collective, whose recent work *China Vagina* responds to Chicago’s work, to film a conversation about the *Famous Women* set and their own projects together, which *British Art Studies* will publish in early 2018 (Figs. [13](#), [22](#), [23](#)), (Figs. [11](#), [24](#), [25](#)), (Figs. [26](#), [27](#), [28](#)), (Figs. [29](#), [30](#), [31](#)).

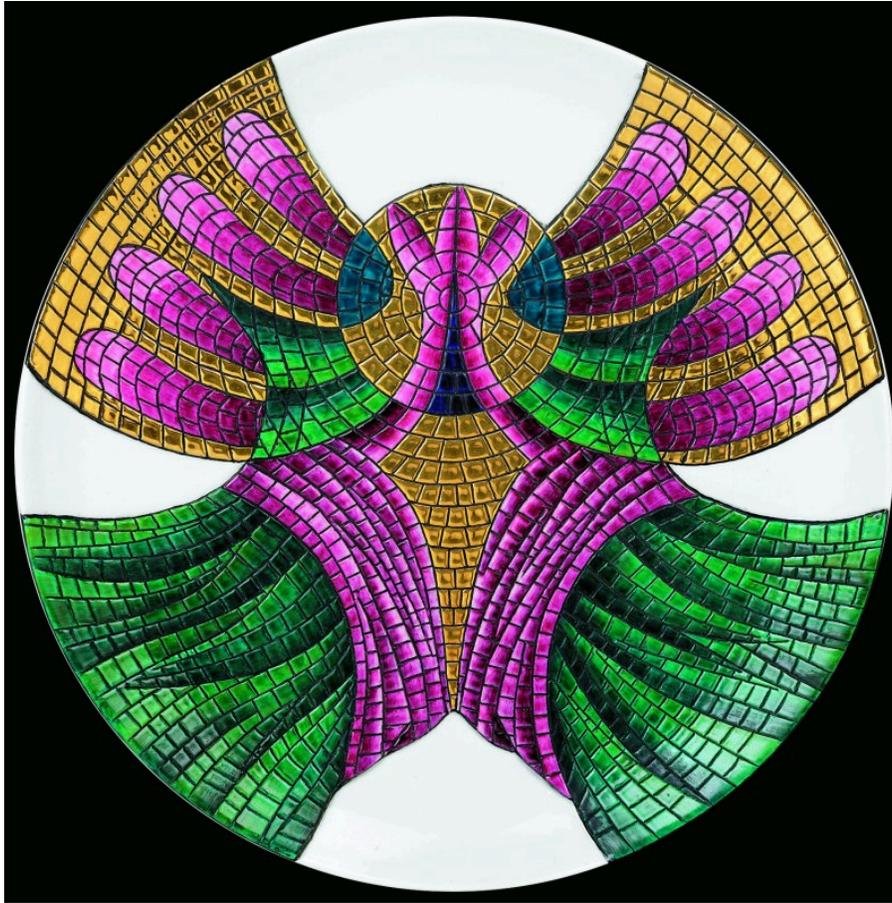


**Figure 22.**

Judy Chicago, Sappho Plate, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, China paint on porcelain, 35.5 cm diameter. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



**Figure 23.** Judy Chicago, Sappho Placesetting, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, mixed media. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



**Figure 24.**

Judy Chicago, Theodora Plate, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, China paint on porcelain, 35.5 cm diameter. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



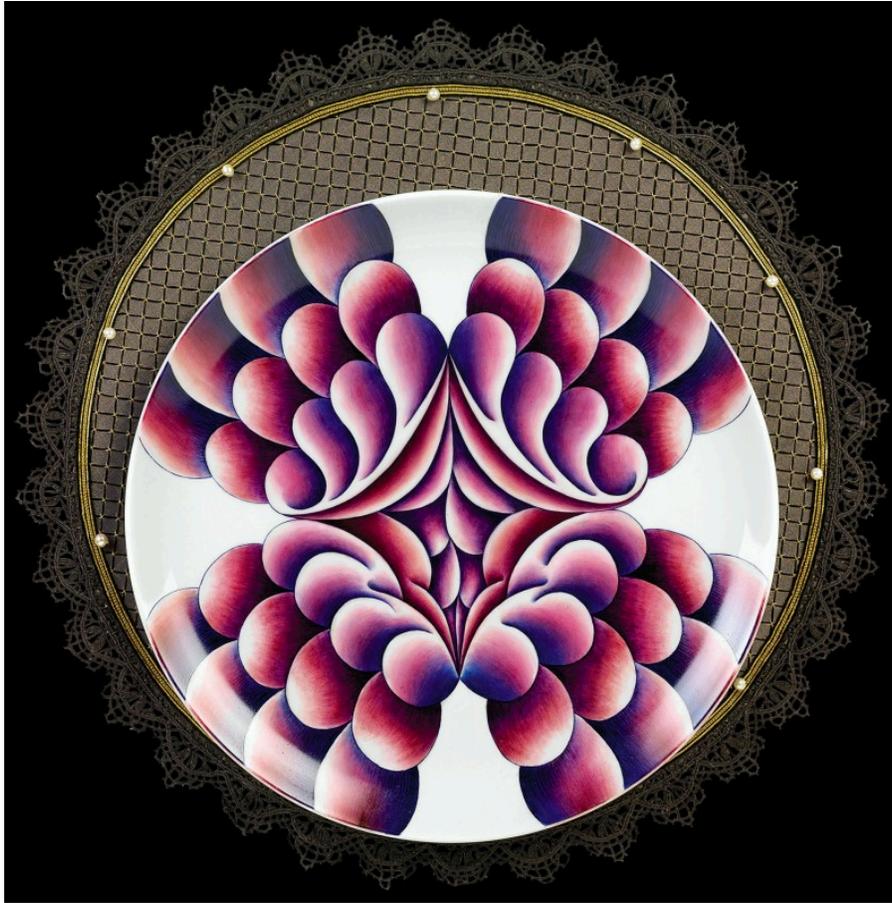
**Figure 25.**

Judy Chicago, *Theodora Placesetting*, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, mixed media. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



**Figure 26.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Elizabeth Tudor, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 27.**

Judy Chicago, Elizabeth R Plate, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, China paint on porcelain, 35.5 cm diameter. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



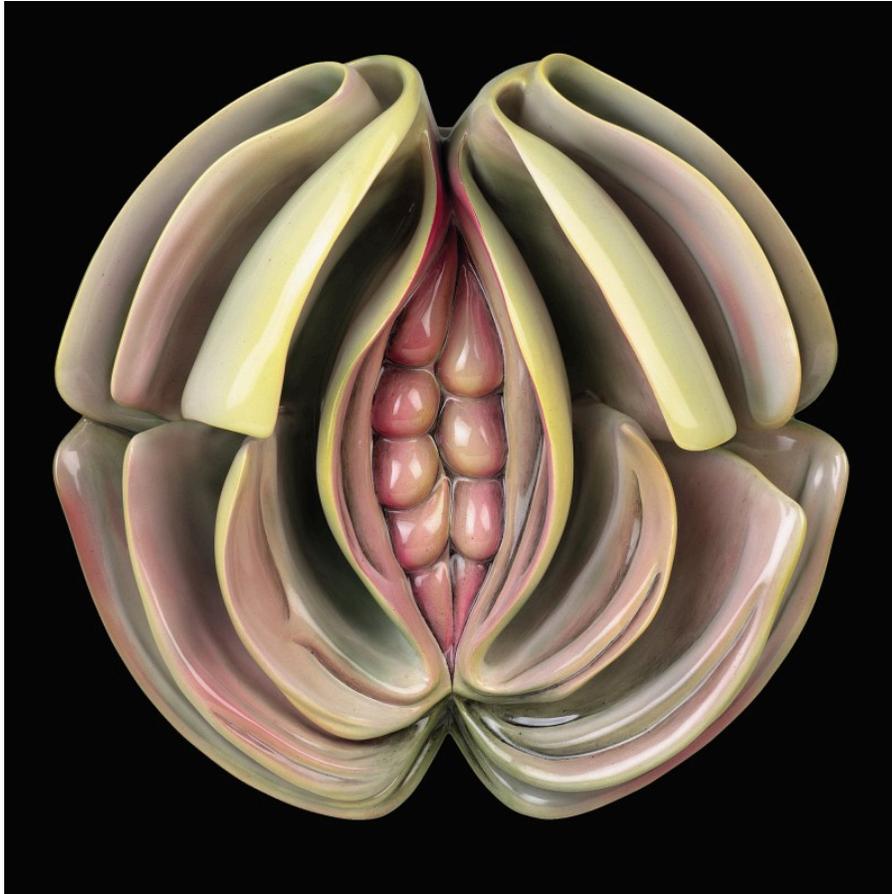
**Figure 28.**

Judy Chicago, Elizabeth R Placesetting, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, mixed media. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



**Figure 29.**

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Virginia Woolf, detail from *Famous Women*, circa 1932-4, 25.5 cm diameter, ceramic. Copyright the Estate of Vanessa Bell, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett, and the Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS 2017. Digital image courtesy of Piano Nobile (Robert Travers Works of Art Limited).



**Figure 30.**

Judy Chicago, *Virginia Woolf Plate*, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, China paint on porcelain, 35.5 cm diameter. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.



**Figure 31.**

Judy Chicago, *Virginia Woolf Placesetting*, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, mixed media. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Copyright Judy Chicago. Digital image courtesy of Donald Woodman.

We hope that the *Famous Women* set will go on to ignite many more conversations about the characters emblazoned on the plates, and the role of this set and its creators in altering the paradigms of art history, from unquestionably accepting traditional narratives to honouring “the familiar, the friendly even the facetious”. <sup>36</sup>

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood: A Self-Portrait* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974), 248.
- <sup>2</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Order Book*, manuscript, unpublished. PDF copy courtesy of Piano Nobile gallery.
- <sup>3</sup> Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood*, 248.
- <sup>4</sup> It is telling about Clark’s relationship to feminist art history, or rather feminist art history’s evaluation of Clark’s mode of scholarship, that Griselda Pollock records: “the arch-enemy, or rather the first object of critical analysis in the Women’s Art History Collective . . . was a book by Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art*.” Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21.

- 5 Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood*, 245–46.
- 6 Vanessa Bell to Mrs Clark, 30 January [1933?], sent on paper headed “Charleton, Firle, Lewes, Sussex”, collection of Yale.
- 7 Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, July 1926 [1933?], sent on paper headed “Charleton, Firle, Lewes”, collection of Yale.
- 8 Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 21 September [1932?], sent on paper headed “Charleton, Firle, Lewes”, collection of Yale.
- 9 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, trans. Suzanne Bell, ed. Lesley Chamberlain (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 11.
- 10 Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood, A Self-Portrait* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974), 248.
- 11 Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon Press, 2005), 231.
- 12 Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 272.
- 13 Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 271.
- 14 Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 230.
- 15 Vanessa Bell to Mrs Clark, 3 June [1933?], sent on paper headed “8 Fitzroy Square”, collection of Yale.
- 16 Vanessa Bell to Mrs Clark, 3 June [1933?].
- 17 Roger Fry, ‘Prospectus for the Omega Workshops’, in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 198–200 (199).
- 18 See Vanessa Bell, “Notes on Bloomsbury”, in *Sketches in Pen and Ink: A Bloomsbury Notebook*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: Pimlico, 1998), 95–114 (111).
- 19 Vanessa Bell, “Notes on Bloomsbury”, in *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 105.
- 20 See Jans Ondaatje Rolls, *The Bloomsbury Cookbook: Recipes for Life, Love and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014) for 384 pages of recipes, anecdotes, images, and quotes connected to the centrality of dining within this friendship group.
- 21 Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 100.
- 22 Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900–1918* (London: Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2010), 35.
- 23 Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 104–105.
- 24 Quentin Bell, “The Dining Room”, in *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 1997), 40.
- 25 Bell, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 42 and 77.
- 26 Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 9 June [1933?], sent on paper headed “8 Fitzroy Square”, collection of Yale.
- 27 Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 9 June [1933?].
- 28 Undated and unsigned fragment pertaining to the Famous Women dinner service. Vanessa Bell or Duncan Grant to the Clarks. Sent on paper headed “8 Fitzroy Square”, collection of Yale.
- 29 Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink: A Bloomsbury Notebook*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: Pimlico, 1998), 49.
- 30 Virginia Woolf, “Women and Fiction” first published in *The Forum*, 1929 and reprinted in the collection *Granite and Rainbow*, 1958, in *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing*, ed. Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 44.
- 31 Maev Kennedy, “Hampton Court Exhibition Reveals Damned Beauties of Stuart Era”, *The Guardian*, 7 March 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/mar/07/hampton-court-portraits-stuart-women>.
- 32 Sir Peter Lely, *Frances Stuart, Duchess of Richmond*. Royal Collection Trust, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/404514/frances-stuart-duchess-of-richmond-1648-1702>.
- 33 Sir Godfrey Kneller, *Diana De Vere, Duchess of St. Albans*, Royal Collection Trust, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/404722/diana-de-vere-duchess-of-st-albans-d-1742>.
- 34 Lucy Worsley, “Foreword”, *Beauty Sex and Power: A Story of Debauchery and Decadent Art at the Late Stewart Court 1660–1714*, Brett Doman, David Souden, and Olivia Fryman (London: Scala for Historic Royal Palaces, 2012), 7.
- 35 Frankie Drummond Charig, “Daphne Haldin’s Archive and the ‘Dictionary of Women Artists’”, *Still Invisible*, ed. Robyne Erica Calvert and Patricia de Montford, doi:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-02/still-invisible/p93.
- 36 Letter from W W Winkworth to Vanessa Bell, 3 March 1932: KCC, quoted in Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 321–22.



# The *Famous Women* Dinner Service: In Conversation with Contemporary Art

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**Figure 1.**

The Famous Women Dinner Service: In Conversation with Contemporary Art, 2019. Digital image courtesy of Film by Jonathan Law and Hana Leaper for British Art Studies journal, published by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Yale Center for British Art.

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