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1964: A Year of Exhibitions, Stephen Bann
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Cite as

Introduction

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

This trajectory demonstrates the way in which art criticism has been brought into the fold of art history, to some degree as a direct outcome of new publishing ventures. But it is no accident that the foregoing examples relate primarily to the study of French art history and criticism. A rather different argument needs to be followed with regard to the case of British art criticism, though it is equally clear that the task has been recognised as timely. At least from the outset of the nineteenth century, the most significant art criticism is coloured not so much by the influence of a critical discourse embedded in past theory as by a direct and acknowledged acquaintance with artistic practice. William Hazlitt is doubtless the first clear example of an English critic who embeds within his writing the recollection of his own, admittedly quite limited, experience as a painter. John Ruskin needs no defence as an artist of exceptional talent in his own right. Indeed, the current popularity of Ruskin, which is manifested in the many events of his bicentenary year, sends a strong signal that criticism and creativity need not be divorced. It is surely significant that Tate Archives have already developed
research projects on the papers of two critics who were also well recognised as artists: Adrian Stokes, whose critical output mainly took the form of book-length studies with a historical component; and Robert Melville, whose critical practice took the form of regular articles for *The New Statesman* and *The Architectural Review*. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art has recently struck out in this direction by acquiring the archive of Brian Sewell. The combative critic of the *Evening Standard* surely had more column inches at his disposal than any of his colleagues, and however debatable his conclusions, his arguments were invariably well informed and challenging. Such an acquisition is a striking way of proving the Centre’s commitment as “the only archive repository in the UK formally acknowledged by the National Archives as a collecting institution for the papers of art critics”.  

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

This focus on exhibitions brings to the fore another respect in which recent art history has successfully incorporated a previously little studied, yet vital, aspect of historical reception. Some of this interest may be traced to the posthumous publication of Francis Haskell’s book, *The Ephemeral Museum* (2000), subtitled “Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition”. Haskell had been assiduous in reviewing art exhibitions for various periodical publications from the mid-1950s onwards. The unprecedentedly broad display of French painting, *De David à Delacroix*, which opened at the Grand Palais, Paris, in November 1974 provoked what was perhaps his most vivid response. As he rightly noted, this was an art-historical milestone: it gave “the first opportunity for a large European public to see some of the results
of this radical reappraisal of one crucial period of French art.” But the effect was more momentous than that. As Haskell suggested in a striking phrase, viewing such an exhibition was “an experience comparable with trying on a new pair of spectacles”. It is surely significant that Haskell chose to define the change in perception in terms of a specifically technical modification. When putting on a new pair of spectacles, we not only see new things—we see everything differently.

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

This present exercise in “animating the archive” is, of course, far more limited in its scope. It is by comparison a minimal project, dealing with the exhibitions of hardly more than one year and the writings of one critic. But it will hopefully prove a stimulus to other exercises and experiments which are suited to the possibilities of online commentary and display. The justification for making these writings available is that they were indeed “eye-opening” for me, and hopefully they still communicate something of the excitement of my experience. I was at the time a graduate student at King’s College, Cambridge, moving from Cambridge to Paris in autumn 1964, when I began my second year of postgraduate research in the history of historiography. The publications that offered me a platform as a critic were precisely those that had welcomed Francis Haskell’s early reviews in the first years of the 1950s: the undergraduate literary magazine *Granta*, and *The Cambridge Review*, published by Heffers (the university printer and bookshop), and edited by a succession of postgraduates and younger fellows. By comparison with professional critics writing for national newspapers and magazines, I was allotted a generous amount of space, and managed to work out some of the main parameters that would define the approach of my first book on
contemporary art, *Experimental Painting* (1970). The unpolished character of the texts perhaps makes it easier to discern the variety of stimuli that I derived from my eclectic reading, as well as registering the impact produced by the sight of so much exciting new work. My movement from the figurative art of Bacon and Giacometti to the interpretation of Ian Hamilton Finlay’s *concrete poetry* could be seen (quoting the words of one peer reviewer for this feature) as “the story of a transformation in thinking”.

No attempt will be made to reproduce the many works of art that are cited. What will be shown are reproductions of the catalogue illustrations. Since this is essentially an archival project, the focus is placed specifically on the role that these images played in accompanying and contextualising the critical writings. With this end in mind, the successive compositional stages of a review—involving a handwritten draft and a typescript—are also brought to the fore. Extracts from a contemporary journal are shown in their original form (and dramatised in a spoken recording) while samples of my own visual work at the time are included. The form and design of the respective exhibition catalogues will be a further feature that comes into prominence in a particular series of images. As a necessary concomitant to the study of exhibitions, the study of the extensive history of exhibition catalogues is now attracting an increasing amount of attention. My own concern with the aesthetic and technical aspects of typography dates back to my school days. My interest in the varieties of lettering was rekindled in the period covered by this display. In their overall design and in their typography, the catalogues that greeted the spectators of the 1960s can be understood to enshrine a definite message of their own.
X was my point of entry into the world of art by way of little magazines. With its generous format and list of contributors outlined in bold capitals, it caught my eye among the periodicals displayed in the Winchester branch of W.H. Smith. I was still at school in the autumn term of 1959, though my forthcoming entrance to Cambridge had been confirmed by Christmas. Having myself edited a school literary magazine, titled *Ariel*, I was intrigued by the promise of this new publication. I subscribed to it for all of the subsequent seven issues. X ceased publication in 1962.

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

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

Giacometti and Bacon were, however, the two artists whom I found most challenging in the period leading up to 1964. This was unquestionably because of their intense preoccupation with the issue of figuration, and the radical approach they adopted to their respective media. In Experimental Painting, I classed the works of both under the rubric of “Destruction”, together with the “Autodestructive” art of Gustav Metzger. The other directions that I chose to follow there were “Abstraction”, “Construction”, and “Reduction” (a category that contained Johns and Rauschenberg).
Figure 2.

Early Readings

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

I bought Stefan Themerson’s *Kurt Schwitters in England* in 1960 with prize money from my performance in the Hawkins English Literature competition at Winchester College. Published in 1958, this was an extraordinarily ambitious experiment in book design, which faithfully mirrored the anarchic versatility of the artist himself. Themerson himself later accepted our invitation to come and speak on Schwitters to the Cambridge Society of Arts, whose programme I organised jointly with Philip Steadman in 1962/1963. The talk was notable for the fact that Themerson handed round some of the collages and small, improvised sculptures that were illustrated in his book. I
reviewed some of the new publications by Themerson’s Gaberbocchus Press in *Granta*, which was then still a student-run publication in Cambridge, picking up on the point that “Gaberbocchus” was a translation of Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” in order to exclaim: “Gaberbocchus still burbles as it comes!” Themerson later became a friend, and would contribute to a thematic issue on “The Boundaries of the Humanities”, which I published as Editor of *20th Century Studies* in 1974.

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

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

I attached great importance to both Schwitters and Duchamp in interpreting the art of the early 1960s. Both of them came to the fore in the first paragraph of my review of the *1964 Rauschenberg exhibition*. Both of these books also called my attention to the infinite diversity of letter forms, and the potentiality they held for expression, as well as communication. They helped to inform my developing interest in concrete poetry (as signalled by my essay of November 1964 in *Image*). Hansjörg Mayer was the first to publish one of my concrete poems, in a portfolio of work by English-speaking poets, which appeared in 1965.
Figure 3.
Figure 4.
Figure 5.
Hosting Larry Rivers and Discovering Gombrich

My reaction to the exhibition of R.B. Kitaj at the Marlborough Gallery in 1963 was one of complete bafflement. I was entirely unprepared for the iconographical complexity, bearing as it did on historical figures whom I barely knew like Rosa Luxemburg and Walter Benjamin. Although I was struck by the originality of his technique, I could not relate it to what I was beginning to appreciate about the contemporary development of American painting. Though I must also have noticed his presence in subsequent exhibitions like documenta, where he was represented by his figure drawings, I had little to say about them.
By contrast, I was responsive to the work of the American painter Larry Rivers. This was probably because his profile was particularly high in Britain at the time. He had given talks on the BBC under the title, “Larry Rivers: A Self-Portrait”, which were published in The Listener (11 January and 18 January 1962). Of course, the talks themselves has been delivered without visual illustrations. But Rivers had employed a striking verbal image to convey the intended impact of his paintings. This clever vehicle of self-promotion was probably what led us to invite him to give a talk to the Cambridge University Society of Arts in autumn 1963. Rivers described the shock effect that he wished to instil in his paintings as comparable to that of taking hold of a deer by its antlers, and having the antlers break off unexpectedly, thus remaining fixed in one’s hand. Rivers certainly did not disappoint us on his visit to Cambridge, having mysteriously picked up a woman companion on the train. In the middle of the modest meal which we had prepared for him in our garret in Green Street, he exclaimed: “Now I’m going to give myself away. Have you any Teachers?”

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

Gombrich’s actual subject matter impinged hardly at all, at that time or subsequently, on any direct treatment of the varieties of contemporary art, let alone on the work of Rauschenberg and Johns, with which I was confronted in 1964. But he drew on references to domains such as experimental psychology in order to present a coherent and compelling theory of representation as such. This soon appeared to me to be an indispensable tool in coming to terms with the art of Rauschenberg in particular. The essay that provided Gombrich with his memorable title was uppermost in my mind when I wrote my essay on Rauschenberg for The Cambridge Review.
A second essay from the same collection by Gombrich, titled “Expression and Communication”, was no less important in stimulating the new ideas on the interpretation of concrete poetry. These were developed for the first time in my essay for Image, published in November 1964.

Figure 7.
Englishness and Book Design

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

Anglia TV, situated in studios in Norwich, chose to invite me as an art critic to a couple of televised round tables on contemporary themes held in spring 1964. One topic on which I was asked to speak was the contemporary
exhibition of Rauschenberg at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Also under
discussion between the participants in these broadcasts was Ernest
Hemingway’s vivid memoir of his experience of Paris in the 1920s, which
involved reminiscences of many of the outstanding artists living there at the
time.

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

The design of the book jacket of the Hemingway memoir commissioned by
Jonathan Cape was by the German-born artist Hans Tisdall, who had begun
working with them in the 1950s. Rather than adopting a specific typeface,
Tisdall devises an overall composition out of his hand-drawn lettering. His
distinctive letter forms were, however, ultimately converted into a typeface
by the epigrapher and letterer, Michael Harvey, a pupil of Reynolds Stone
and, as a stone-carver and letterer, one of the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay’s
most important long-term collaborators.
Figure 9.
Figure 10.
Nikolaus Pevsner, The Englishness Of English Art,
A Visit to Munich

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

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

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

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

The two sketches are illustrated here to underline a point which also becomes clear in my journal. At the same time as I was pursuing my German reading agenda, I was painting my own topographical watercolours of the city and its surroundings. I had been accumulating similar studies for several years, and so was able to make retrospective comparisons, for example, between the subject of the Frauenkirch seen from the “English Garden”, and a previous view of the Edinburgh skyline seen from Inverleith House. I expressed the feeling that these Munich studies were the best that I had ever done. Not surprisingly, this enthusiasm over my own paintings spills across into my commentary on the art that I was discovering at the same time in the Munich galleries, from Dürer and Altdorfer to Erich Heckel. And it is evident in my empathetic description of some of the architectural monuments around the city, such as the Nymphenburg Palace and the rococo Theatine Church.
As regards my art criticism, the journal makes a prediction that was not fulfilled: “My articles on Delacroix and Giacometti are just about ready to write.” My prior experience of the major Giacometti exhibition at the Beyeler Gallery in Basel was indeed, as can be seen in my entry, the first vivid recollection that was prompted by the writing of this journal. But the point remains that both Giacometti and Delacroix continued for a while to be central points of reference for my critical work. This is made very clear in my subsequent article on Francis Bacon for *Granta* (17 October 1964), which takes the work of both artists as points of reference for understanding the historical significance of his art. My short “Note from Paris” (*Granta*, 28 November 1964) also picks up on “recent remarks” by Giacometti in favour of “Pop art”. Finally, in my *Experimental Painting* (1970), I once more approached the work of Bacon by way of Giacometti and Delacroix.

**Figure 12.**
Figure 13.
View this illustration online

Figure 14.
Figure 15.
Friday, September 13th.

I continued to read Baudot's Journals in the morning & afternoon, reaching the end of 1847. There is a magnificent passage about the 1837 entries. The two acts of Le Balæus are belated. A man who admired d'Aubigné's 'Amor', (as he admits in the letter after 1846) isn't enticed by his manipulation of the stage—his concern with actors who must play the part of men who are themselves driven to casting themselves in dramatic roles—general, judge & bishop.

I had lunch & tea at a small cafe opposite the gates of the English Garden. Where I walked for a short time in the late afternoon. It really has an English air & recalled first watercolors, which I hope to see on Sunday, then the garden at Thorpe Orangery, which always remains in my memory in the same very evening glow & silence. Montemartini's office came into my mind. The Theater—just visible from the garden, with its small exquisite tower behind.

Saturday, September 14th.

I climbed to the top of the south tower of the Frauenkirche, but as it was very muddy, the mists had hardly cleared & I saw no Silesian hills. After much watercolors, etc. in a nearby gallery. Magnificent watercolors from 1910, with great widths of color. I spent the afternoon in the English Garden, it possible were more perfect than yesterday. I had a watercolor of the city from
Figure 17.
Figure 18.
Figure 19.

Figure 20.
Figure 21.
Figure 22.
Figure 23.
background for the chair. But if this evidently absurd belief is entertained, the whole notion of a piece as an image for the identification of objects becomes untenable. If we now see the work of art as a real product, existing in its own right, the phrase ‘representation’ becomes meaningless. There can be no literal object homologous to the stack of rubbers, or to the stack of blocks, or to the actual chair attached to the painting. The latter would be much more exciting. Only if it is assumed that the premises of reproduction in post-Constable were unwittingly correct can the image be an image of something in the same sense as the original, and not in the sense of an illusion.

The problem of reproduction in post-Constable was taken up at the end of the last century by an anonymous writer in The Times, who held that the reproduction of a picture was a new element. There is some truth in this, but the new element is, in fact, a new degree of identity and projection. This new element centres around the use of photographic material. Rauschenberg is perhaps the first contemporary artist to realize the degree to which modern photographic reproduction is in many respects to the ordinary one. This seems to me to be the significance of the name which Linker uses in his most recent paintings, a conventionally drawn geometric line with an arrow pointing towards the top of the picture. For this is not only an illusion of the fact that we are projecting ourselves into such a figure, but a projection of the fact that the image is an illusion. Rauschenberg aims to make us see the difference between two notable elements to such an extent that it is apparent that the image is an illusion.

Rauschenberg’s constant juxtaposition of these two points results in a series of photograms of the same subject. Rauschenberg uses this method of projection for this reason. It attempts to give a new sense of the fact that we are projecting our own image on to such a figure, and not simply imagining it in our own minds. Rauschenberg’s use of this method of projection is therefore a new sense to such an extent that it is apparent that the image is an illusion.


View this illustration online
relation to the position of the observer? In other words, Rauschenberg’s final solution to the problem of representation is that the picture exists in its terms of its relation to the object at special conditions of the real world, but in terms of its distance from the spectator. To have answered this through the use of inventive, indeed photographic material, was for Rauschenberg a framework and makes the prior unity of surface, is a very real achievement.

Rauschenberg therefore wade in this unique way the truths about representation of which I spoke at the beginning of this essay. Representation is not the imitation of the external form of an object. It is not concerned with working real objects and providing vicarious experience of the everyday world, but with that creation of a substitute. The creator makes the audience itself the place of the occurrence. The picture can be interpreted as a new experience. These two things must not be understood. For magic does indeed lead to illusion and ritual sense is a man a better human than he was before.

Figure 26.
Robert Rauschenberg’s work has been of key significance for young artists in Europe and America during the past decade. For young artists especially, because they are on the cusp of their careers, they speak his language, and although they do not always share his American experience they understand his references. And the point of view which animates and gives fresh meaning to this experience is universal. Rauschenberg has in fact, evolved a new vocabulary, a new sentence construction even, that has permanently enriched our language. But it is probably only now, in the early sixties, that the general public is beginning to appreciate his contribution to recent art. And to see that when one has looked beyond the stuffed goat and the tyre, the winding light bulbs and the built-in radio sets, Rauschenberg is in fact, a classical artist with a fantastically sound structure and a hyper-sensitive understanding of space.

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

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

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

Bryan Robertson

Figure 27.
Figure 28.
Arts in Cambridge

Cambridge was an excellent place to be in the early 1960s, as far as modern and contemporary art were concerned. The resources of the Fitzwilliam Museum had been supplemented by the initiative of Jim Ede, who from 1956 had reconstructed the cottages of Kettle’s Yard and filled them with his personal collection of British and International Modernist art. I was a frequent visitor. The Faculty of Architecture, under whose wing the History of Art was blossoming into a degree subject, was headed by Sir Leslie Martin, architect of the London Festival Hall, and the former collaborator with Naum Gabo and Ben Nicholson in the Circle group of the 1930s. It was in the newly built faculty lecture theatre at Scroope Terrace that the Society of Arts, organised by Philip Steadman and myself, held many of its meetings with invited speakers over the years 1963–1964.
Cambridge also possessed, at the time, the only exhibition gallery outside London which was directly sponsored by the Arts Council. Its programme included important shows of contemporary British artists such as the “Situation” painters (so named by the critic Lawrence Alloway), which held an exhibition there not long after their first manifestation as a group in September 1960. I myself began to publish reviews of current exhibitions in 1962–1963 as an editor of Broadsheet, the roncotted magazine edited by students, which covered the full range of artistic events taking place throughout the city. Though I took time off to praise the occasional London exhibition, such as Kokoschka at the Tate in October 1962, I was mainly focused on covering what was shown at the two commercial galleries in Cambridge (Heffers and the King Street Gallery) and, in particular, the Arts Council Gallery itself. It was through Muriel Wilson, the custodian of the latter and wife of the architect and collector Colin St John Wilson, that I then began, in 1964, to contribute very brief notes on the occasional Cambridge shows to the London-based magazine, The Arts Review.

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

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

The final quotation from Ernst Fischer’s The Necessity of Art.
provides a somewhat incongruous conclusion in emphasising the “magical quality of representation”.\textsuperscript{13} But as an enthusiast for the critical writings of Michael Fried, I look back with interest on my development of the proposition that “the Rokeby Venus ... remains magnificently self-absorbed”.\textsuperscript{14}

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

Figure 30.
Letter from Anton Ehrenzweig to Stephen Bann, 22 April 1964.
Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.
Dear Mr. Bann,

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

22.4.64

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the canvas & appearing as 3-dimensional objects. I like your comment on the value of the chair as a real object and as an adjunct to the painted surface; also your reference to real objects as parts of the decor. In a Reinhart production of Goldoni’s “Der Diener Freier Herren” (The Servant of two Masters) chairs were painted on to the backcloth. The servant brought in also a “real” chair, but proceeded to sit down on a “painted” chair (which involved a gymnastic feat as there was nothing to support his behind). Reinhart thus insisted that the painted chair was more real and promising of rest than the 3-dimensional chair. What I mean to say the use of 3-dimensional objects in theatre decor must be designed by an artist of Rauschenberg’s calibre who can – sometimes at least – annihilate the difference between 2 and three dimensions. I am sure that after modern Bayreuth (without real objects like the dragon) there will be a return to Rauschenberg. May I say that the manipulation (or annihilation) of commonsense space belongs to the core of all visual art and – in a different sense – even to music. You have certainly tackled a vital problem in an original and instructed way. With my best wishes Yours Anton Ehrenzweig
What, after all, is this to Cambridge? There has been little shortage of late in the number of candidates for the Classical Tripos since 1914, but the future supply may be affected by what is happening now in the schools, and by any move away from extreme scholarship. Amidst pressure to discriminate, the relative emphasis on literature in Part I has led to current proceeding that "the more the better." We must not forget that this might encourage the adoption of an academic method of writing. Instead of an attempt to isolate any feature or group of phenomena, and to argue from the evidence to support its thesis, we may have to be somewhat more ruthless. As the Greek philosopher who led the way in 1908 (though he certainly failed in what he then set out to do) remains (for a very different reason) no better known than he, so no wonder they are few. Yet if full cultural studies were to become more numerous, L. P. Wickheams's "Bomberg, Picabia and the New Generation", The Cambridge Review, 85, no. 2075, 9 May 1964: 402.

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**Figure 32.**
The New Generation

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

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**Figure 33.**
Granta had already pinned its colours to the mast by inviting one of the “New Generation” artists, the painter Anthony Donaldson, to design a series of front covers for the magazine, based on a grainy black and white photograph of a nude.

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

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

I can think of no obvious reason for my decision to bring in the concept of “psychical distance”, which had been published just over fifty years prior and derived from the work of the Cambridge aesthetician, Edward Bullough. Probably my reading of Gombrich had alerted me to the need for a conceptual, and even scientific, base to judgements involving aesthetic appreciation.
Figure 34.
Art in London and Kassel

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

My essay on Francis Bacon was, in effect, the culmination of my project of writing on Delacroix and Giacometti, which had hung fire since the previous year. I invoked both of these artists in order to provide a broader historical context for Bacon’s mode of figuration. My reading of another of Gombrich’s works, in this case *Art and Illusion* (1960), provided a theoretical point of departure for an examination of Bacon’s “specifically painterly method”. I
had become interested in Bacon’s work as a result of my visits to the Beaux Arts Gallery and my early subscription to X. I gave my copy of the issue of X featuring Bacon to Michael Peppiatt, then a Cambridge undergraduate. At the time, Peppiatt was editing an issue of the occasional magazine, Cambridge Opinion, on British contemporary art. He later became the major authority on the life and work of Bacon.  

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

Bacon, however, was also represented by five paintings in the large exhibition, Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54–64, which was held at the Tate Gallery in April–June 1964. I did not review this exhibition, no doubt partly because of the Cambridge publishing schedules, but also perhaps because I found my visit to be a frustrating experience. Beyond any doubt, this was the richest and most comprehensive British showing of contemporary art to date. Yet my reactions coincided precisely with those of a review I later discovered by Patrick Reyntiens: “twice as many works of art apiece as they should, each work being twice as large as it should be for comfortable viewing and as capriciously lit as any South American baroque church.”  

These works had been selected, at the invitation of the Gulbenkian Foundation, by Alan Bowness (shortly to become Director of the Tate), Lawrence Gowing, and Philip James (Director of Art at the Arts Council). But the introductory “notes” to the catalogue were anonymous and (to me) appeared somewhat alienating: “Abandon the philosophic guides. The idea of expression and the idea of the artist as someone in communication with us through some code that we can decipher are inadequate to the situation.”  

This was not a sentiment that I was inclined to take seriously. But it was the “impression of cluttered riches” generated by the layout of the exhibition that perturbed me most, and provided the greatest possible contrast to the subsequent experience of documenta. I had witnessed a rather hasty exposition of the previous documenta in 1959, since our enterprising school art teacher, Grahame Drew, showed us without comment the vast number of slides that he had taken there. But documenta III was a much more
considerable event, consolidating the position of this Hessian city on the fringes of the Western bloc as the foremost showcase for contemporary art in the post-war world. The rationale of the exhibition, carefully explained by its director, the art historian Werner Haftmann, was certainly “more didactic than anarchic.” But its success was due, above all, to the resourceful way in which this didactic rationale was underpinned by an inspired utilisation of the city sites.

As my review testifies, the achievement of documenta III was to set new standards for the very concept of an exhibition of modern and contemporary art. In part, this was a matter of financial resources. Reyntiens assessed the budget of the Gulbenkian show at £35,000 whereas documenta III cost “roughly £150,000” by my estimate. But it was also a question of visual realisation. Kassel provided several commodious and traditional spaces: the Museum Fridericianum, which had indeed been at its origin one of the first publicly accessible museums in Europe, and the later Alte Galerie, which was chosen by Haftmann to house an unprecedentedly broad display of modern and contemporary drawings. The Orangerie and the park surrounding it were devoted to the theme of “Painting and Sculpture in Space”, giving unstinted spatial provision to large pictures as well as to major items of sculpture. In short, ideal conditions were provided for close attention to detail, as well for exciting environmental effects. I continued to return to documenta in subsequent years, noting in particular the exhibitions of 1968 and 1972.
Figure 36.
which the shaded face seems to be marked by a series of pointed and rounded forms in the face that even a painter who is passionately addicted to the old masters must admit has tragic impact through a partial connection to the serious intensity of the material. Bacon’s achievement is a specifically positive method—a use of paint which is positive through the whole function of the picture, the spatial adjustments in the overall planning of his works. Much has been written of the unobtrusive “form” of certain elements in his work. St. John Hope, in his introduction to the recent book on Bacon, suggested that it has declined to a minimum. But it seems to me that the entire appearance of Bacon’s picture has in fact been entirely, or almost entirely designed to shock. In his interview with David Sylvester, Bacon spoke of his ‘glass boxes’ as being designed as concrete information on the figure. All his oblique devices can be explained in this light. They are not intended to stimulate the figure with specific memories, but to evoke attention—so to make it easier into the theme of events. But in contrast to a parallel method when he fills the area around the prominent figures with a material grey atmosphere—sometimes with a lined trame—and thereby makes more vivid the central figures, then where Bacon’s surrounding surfaces are negative—serving to evoke a spatial setting—Bacon leaves his surface definite and material. They are, in order to gain a central figure with intense singularity, the same in that they are not in Bacon’s background or any other part of the painting. The development of his art can be traced in a general sense in terms of a movement from pictures in which these incipient sign—colors, lines, etc.—are eliminated to those in which they clearly manifest. In the ‘Figure’, for example, the problems are brilliantly managed. The left hand figure, in which the figure seems away and drawn his knees towards him, remains clear connections to this manner—the hanging bulb, the sketch of joined across the face and the sun, while fixed towards the bottom of the picture. The figure contains a vertical tension to balance the tension horizontal of the beach, the sun, in some measure centres the indistinct glance of the figure, the three implications the reverie there. In the middle picture, none of these are recovered. The figure possesses a strong vertical as the middle of the picture, faces towards us and has his feet on the floor—no props are used. In the right-hand picture the body returns to at least the figure of the figure. If the pressure that Bacon uses these devices presumably to focus our attention on his figures—to direct our attention to the human elements in the picture and situation present it from overlapping the centres of the picture—are more or less the focal point. What is the reason for this direct presentation? What is the face of the figure to which Bacon so skillfully leads our attention? This I can more clearly answer by means of an analogy from literature. His ‘Figure’ or ‘Figure’ uses a device very close to that of Bacon. The foreground has a scattered, busy appearance that conveys dramatically to the main characters, like the rough purple foreground in Bacon’s three studies. When we see in the ‘Figure’ a man in white...
of arrested action—the presentation of a dramatic conflict—an which racing horse and captive gazer are juxtaposed. There is no hint of moral preoccupation, as would be found in Delacroix’s predecessors David. The impression is of a painter who is frustrated by action, and by the possibilities of mental choice, but who finds himself unable to achieve an accustomed sense of dramatic conflict.

It is this quality that seems to me central in Bacon’s work. But where Delacroix represents dramatic conflict—a direct suspension of action, in which action and passiveness are poised beside one another—Bacon represents a fixed state of the individual. The motion, disturbing quality of his work results not from a more manipulation of our emotions but from the fact that is presents the possibility of action, which by the very nature of pictorial representation is stifled. This seems to be the significance of Bacon’s fascination for photography. The single photograph nearly attains its intentions, not because of its literary quality, but precisely because of its insubility—its absurd isolation in the flux of events. Bacon’s pictures deal with this same impossible moment between past and future, Helen Lestor is right in claiming that—‘Walls of pictures’ (1997) and the recording Van Gogh series mark a great step forward. This is true in the most literal sense, since they are concerned with the visual figure—abstracted only in head and hands—of his earlier works, but with self-purposed movement. Since these pictures, Bacon has returned to quieter, less obvious or reorganizing forms. Now, and especially in this Triptych, he moves again from the realm of expectancy. The two facing figures now confront an unknown future. The central figure is nonetheless oriented towards action and destiny.

This question of subject matter is integral to the understanding of Bacon’s work. Even though it is always possible to record the search of an artist for self-discovery, it is much more meaningful in Bacon’s work, it is quite a different matter for an artist to choose the direction of his work with virtually no determination. Instead of working through a diversity of genres, Bacon now gives all his energies towards portraiture, and, as he has stressed, more so for a style of painting that will subsume all his attempts.

The position of a figurative artist who can endlessly open himself new possibilities from social requirements, and like Bacon, is able to create a substitute market rather than working to protect him from social pressure. Perhaps it is an almost autarky without parallel in contemporary art. Bacon appears to work in a vacuum, a more or less gravitational pull from the society which exists around him. It is significant that a new generation of his creative portraits have been concerned with two artists—Lichtenstein and Frank Auerbach—both whose own portrait tradition of figurative painting. An image of Bacon the artist has been built up which represents his work almost solely in terms of sensitive and destructive—in terms of whole series of paintings being attempted at the same time, and how which fail to show a certain quality being desired elsewhere. Like his Renaissance peers, Bacon proclaims his search for unity of expression—“I want to see” not another one single work that will exemplify finally a single principle—on the make of chaotic diversity. He exemplifies as much as any other European artist what Aby Warburg calls “form—an element of dissolvent process” in the public persona of European as perceived in American series.

Now, however, . . . a really good artist . . . would need to make a game of the same situation. Bacon’s public statements tend to give the impression of a disinterestedness of generation, absorbed in an elaborate ‘game’ for the sake of sensory excitement. He quotes with approval Velázquez remark, ‘What we want nowadays is the situation without the emotion of its conception’. He claims that the artist must really develop the game to be a good at all, so that he can make like a hound and catch it. Yet, this concern with the elaboration of the game, and with the creation of the series does not lead him away from the traditional subject of artists, who worked to record. Man is haunted by the memory of his own existence, he said in Cambridge Question, and it is therefore much more obsessed with the remaining and reminding of his own image in his work than with the beautiful form of the best abstract art.

Although Bacon continually explains his adherence to the human image in terms of obsession and anxiety upon the nervous system, this concern is ultimately inextricable except in relation to the values which define human action.

In a recent note, on the Italian painter, Morandi, Andreas Fürst suggested that an apparently reactionary painter was surprisingly advanced in the sense that his work is situated in an age in which the direct portraiture of objects is linked to a defense of conventional standards of painting. In a similar way, Bacon’s work becomes comprehensible with the concept of an age in which the function of the painter is being radically altered. To quote Bacon once again: ‘Photography has caused such a shock in a painting that it even worth looking at the image must be doubted . . . it is to make a renewed attempt upon the nervous system . . . . and that is the peculiar difficulty of figurative painting today’. The availability of new materi...
Figure 39.
Figure 40.
Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.
Figure 41.
Figure 42.
Figure 43.
Figure 44.
Figure 45.
Figure 46.
Figure 47.
Figure 48.
Figure 50.
Figure 51.
perceived. It is seen that the rhythmic punch does not quite connect, the
ostensible description fails apart. In fact, Lichtenstein is portraying, as it
is a moment of insight, something unhinged, unfeeling and automatic in
the graphic image of the strip, and so in the imagery and the sexual
connection of the whole image-ridden environment.

What help can one give, when all is said and done, to anyone who has
real difficulty with the art of these years?

One can say, forget the art-appreciation talk and in particular the apolo-
gies for modern art. Abandon the philosophic guides. The idea of
expression and the idea of the artist as someone in communication with
us through some codes that we can decipher are inadequate to the
situation. The idea of the relationship between artist and spectator as in
any way analogous to a verbal relationship is totally obsolete, and
obsolete not only for Albers and Kline but equally for Appel and
Giacometti. All that we know is that the maker of art felt the need of a
certain kind of object in his life—in his studio—and proceeded to make

Figure 52.
Exhibition catalogue, Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 54/64,
46. Digital image courtesy of Michael Blissett Photography.
Figure 53.
Figure 54.
Kinetic Art and Concrete Poetry

My “Note from Paris” in *Granta* (28 November 1964) was hardly more than a footnote to my earlier essay on Francis Bacon, which had been misprinted without its final sentences in the magazine the month before. But in citing the names of Vasarely and Schöffer in opposition to those of Bacon, Giacometti, and Rivers, I was reflecting a significant shift in my own critical focus which had begun to take place during the summer months. Reg Gadney, the editor of *Granta*, whose “note on Agam” (the Paris-based Israeli artist) occupied the remainder of the two-page spread, had introduced me to the milieu of Parisian kinetic art over the summer period. In company with Philip Steadman, we had visited Paris and enjoyed the hospitality of Gadney’s friend, Frank Malina, an American rocket scientist who had...
relocated to the city and was pursuing his own variety of kinetic painting. Our immediate mission that summer was to compose a special issue of Image. This was a new magazine published in London by Kingsland Prospect Press, with production values superior to Granta, for which Steadman was editor and art editor. Its planned focus was on kinetic art and concrete poetry. My own part in this project was, in the first instance, to compile two short articles on artists with South American connections: José María Cruxent, a noted Venezuelan archaeologist who spent part of each year in Paris developing his exquisite light boxes; and Gregorio Vardanega, an Italian-born sculptor in perspex whose artistic career had begun in Argentina before he took up residence in Paris in 1959.

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

Of particular importance to my critical writing, and my artistic life, at this time was the connection that I began to establish with the Scottish concrete poet, Ian Hamilton Finlay. Mike Weaver had invited me to travel with him and his wife on a visit to Edinburgh to meet Finlay in late August 1964. This meeting resulted in a correspondence which would endure almost to the end of Finlay’s life in 2006. Weaver was by this stage well advanced in planning for a Cambridge venue the First International Exhibition of Concrete, Phonetic and Kinetic Poetry (28 November–5 December 1964), whose catalogue formed an insert into the late November Granta. As I was resident in Paris for the autumn months, I was not able to assist in the mounting of the exhibition. However, I contributed an additional essay on concrete poetry to the special issue of Image, which was available by the time of its opening. I must have been dubious about the way in which the Introduction to the exhibition Painting & Sculpture of a Decade, held at Tate Gallery that spring,
had dismissed the “idea of expression and the idea of the artist as someone in communication with us through some code.” At any rate, my chosen guide in the interpretation of concrete poetry was indeed Gombrich’s essay on “Expression and Communication” (from *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*). I employed Gombrich’s analysis (and more particularly the notion of “semantic space” borrowed from the psychologist C.E. Osgood) as a means of exploring the manipulation of typography for semantic purposes that occurred in the poems of Finlay and other concrete practitioners.

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

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

**Figure 56.**
Communication and structure in concrete poetry

The way in which concrete poetry makes use of the spatial possibilities of the printed page in design and structure is, in the words of Pierre Giner, a matter of "articulating the word to take up the space". Or it may be a case of separating the letters of an individual word in order to describe new concrete and semantic possibilities. But what is more difficult to assess in the relation between the two is the use of space on the page and the structure of the poem. This is the question which must be clarified, since a merely decorative use of letters would seem to imply a new way of poetry.

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

This essay is not intended, in any consideration of concrete poetry, to be concerned with a wide range of expressive techniques. Words are not simply arranged in lines and verse; they are fragmented, printed in varying colours and sizes of type. Yet concrete poetry is not a form which the reader has to be treated like a text in harmony with the atmosphere of the poem. Every poem might therefore be used to have a particular climate: often it is the shape, there being no physical and semantic properties, that determine this climate. Gombrich's poem "Ginger", taken from a "Calendar" created in 1955, contains a poem which is a single example of this feature. The words are arranged in vertical blocks of differing sizes which proceed across the page. One of the shorter blocks reads:

**ACHIR**
**B anzeigen**
**AE
d**

The poem shows the cumulative effect of space and the use of space on the page and relationships between blocks are not based on ideographic similarities but on imaginative ones. Yet if these ideas remain within our comprehension because they fill out the mental space, they will not be exclusively confined to this form and space. The reader's response to a concrete poetry may raise the question of structure in concrete poetry. Gombrich regards another aspect of the poem as the "material momentum of formal poetry in favour of "perspective"; that is to say, a unified structure depending on the reciprocal relationship of whole and parts. The reader does not begin at the top left-hand corner and work his way directly to the bottom right-hand corner, but from one of all sorts of the details of the poem and its formal arrangement. Then the relations of words in the "perspective" of the poem is the elimination of a skeletal form with flat and blood. Parallel to the reader's exploration of the actual space of the poem is the discovery of the "perspective" space of the poem.

For elucidation of this "perspective" space we turn to Gombrich's article and particularly to his discussion of the work of C. E. Ogden. Concrete space is a geometric structure not a form of representation of words among themselves. Ogden used informal equations like "the black more than the red", and constructed a simple model in which words were arranged according to their position in one or another of three alternative categories. This model, which is a kind of "perspective" in which words can be arranged according to their position in one or another of three alternative categories, is demonstrated in the following poem by C. E. Ogden. Gombrich appropriately introduces the idea of "perspective" with which this essay finishes and demonstrates a relationship of the work of concrete poetry. Ogden's poem ends with the conclusion that the "perspective" of concrete poetry is an extension of the work of concrete poetry. Ogden's poem ends with the conclusion that the "perspective" of concrete poetry is an extension of the work of concrete poetry.
words or blocks of words relate to and modify an established atmosphere, and Gormley's poem of the function of attention (a binary system) within the semantic structure of concrete poetry that it can utilise a more diverse range of possibilities without confusing the expectations of the reader. Gormley points out now how the simple alternation of 'sigh' and 'song', in small type and in large, and it is complicated if we are using 'kong' in small type and 'kong' in capitals. The reader now is that the reader of concrete poetry is aware of the scale of alternatives open to the reader in choosing all words, in size and colour of type and in positioning of letters. But, although he knows the material and the format, he cannot in any way predict the combinations of blank notes and the wordblocks of precise structure, in different positions within the structure of the work. Occasionally a poet will experiment with discovering a new possibility, as in a poem by Denis Pyper, and Keith Windell, for example, the letters T, L, F and E in bold black type follow each other on a succession page. In each case the requisite lines are added to form the next letter and the intensity of the black ink is such to make any such accessible letter appear through the eyes above, emphasizing the structural link between the letters by a method usually in recognizable into the form of the lines.

The question of the complex balance between visual elements of composition in the concrete poem is well illustrated by Ian Hamilton Finlay's poem. Since it is composed of successive pages of a small pamphlet. The first shaded page, 1.2, read 'The first field,' and to the right 'long horizon'. Although the relation of all the lines in the field is identical to that of one of the pages, where the lines are different, and it is a reflection of the fact that both parts of the poem are identical lines at the same level. On the field double-page pages the lines are in the same field and each line comprises a 'hymn'. The lines from the first page to the second page does not differ from this because it belongs to the work on the other page.

The fact that we shall write of meaning because it presents itself. Long lines are automatic, and rhythm sets the connotations of the sentences. In this possibility of different systems—corresponding or challenging, but always interesting—that makes the structure of concrete poetry so fresh and new. Sometimes they remain one entity, as when a word of wide resonance and importance is in the sequence. This is not development of different systems which results in what Gormley refers to as 'monotony', in other words, the different systems reinforce one another. It is relevant to conclude with Gormley's judgment that: What we call form in art, symmetry and intelligence of structure, might be connected with the same end pleasure of unexpectedness that goes with well-planned relationships. All the metaphors of these features, the poetry as such and no form, the unique feature of concrete poetry is that the work of possibilities are sufficiently distinct from other, though included in the final poem, for us to perceive the mysteries of structure at a conscious level.

Stephen Bann

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

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

Figure 60.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.
Figure 61.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.

Figure 62.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.
Figure 63.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.

Figure 64.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, Telegram, 1964.
Figure 65.
Figure 66.
Figure 67.
Figure 68.
Figure 69.
Jasper Johns at Whitechapel

An inscription on the first inside page of my catalogue indicates that I saw the exhibition of Jasper Johns at the Whitechapel Gallery on 12 December 1964. I soon wrote enthusiastically about it to Ian Hamilton Finlay. I had returned from Paris to Cambridge at the beginning of the month, and was to spend Christmas at my parents’ house in Yorkshire. It was over the holiday period that I wrote the first draft of my review of the exhibition in longhand. The revised and typed version was then produced, very probably with the aid of one of the Cambridge typists who specialised in theses and other academic copy. The text was then sent to Alan Ross, Editor of the London Magazine. He had published my essay on the novelist, Robert Pinget, in the issue of October 1964. I must have had some intimation that a review of the
Johns show would be welcomed, but it was not published. I returned to Paris in the New Year. The typed version must simply have been filed, until I discovered it by chance in the archive of the *London Magazine* in the Harry Ransom Library, University of Texas.

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

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

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

Given that critical judgements necessarily proceed by comparison, I then elucidate what I acknowledge to be Johns’ achievement as a “master of the pictorial surface”. The judgement first of all involves dismissing comparisons with other “adjustments between surface and material”: namely those of Max Ernst and Francis Bacon. It was doubtless my recent stay in France that led me to invoke the name of Jean Fautrier, a painter whose work did not feature at all in *documenta III* or in the Gulbenkian show, but whose last mistress I met at a dinner party given by Parisian friends. In the draft, I pass
rather too quickly over the definition of the “ontologic” quality as suggested by Michel Conil Lacoste, stating simply “it is there because it is there”. In the typescript, I am rather more explicit, using the more careful definition of the term to prepare for the seeming paradox that Johns associates “vegetable fluency of pigment with the introduction of subject matter”.

There is one section of the manuscript where a slight reinforcement of the rhetoric clearly betrays another oblique reference to my own contemporary experience. A propos of Johns’ use of stencilled letters, I suggest in the handwritten text: “If a certain conjunction of signs goes to make up the word ORANGE, then the spectator is likely to transpose it into terms of colour.” This sentence gains a greater immediacy when it concludes: “then the spectator leaps at once to consideration of the colour”. As far as I can see, Johns had confined himself in the Whitechapel show to referencing (and painting in formal rectangles) only the primary colours, RED, YELLOW, and BLUE. But I must have been bearing in mind the very recent manifestation of my ORANGE poster poem.
Figure 71.
Figure 72.
Figure 73.
View this illustration online

**Figure 74.**
Figure 75.

View this illustration online
Figure 76.
and target净水，where our first impressions convey an image that appears to float beneath the surface of the picture. Where is the subject? This preliminary question resists real for long without an answer. It slowly grows to expand our acquired assumptions. Yet the dissolved of folded marks in the picture, and the flag in its surface, where is the subject? The answer is this is it. Another example of the way in which Johns enforces what we infer from what we observe lies in the use of scattered letters. If a certain conjunction of letters goes to make up the word coupl, then the spectator leaps at once to consideration of the order. If the word appears against a background of grey, black and white, he realizes the incongruity and returns to the subject.

Here it must be emphasized that Johns does not, at the least, subvert our habits of reading, any more than he could prevent us from identifying a certain combination of shapes as stripes or the narrative flag. The point is that he should subvert the implications of our conceptual habits in the aknowledgement of the world of the picture, that he should establish is as an area free from the necessities of illusion. Johns’ enforces this to directed towards this end. If we are presented with a sculptural object based upon an object from the everyday life, we instantly leap to comparison and view the work on these terms. For the artist there are two ways of modifying this reaction. Either he can make his sculpture so exact that the hallowed organism from it unnecessary to refer to objects within his own experience – the sculpture itself is so vital that it can be thought about the way, or he can make the sculpture so significantly distinct from the various objects that the student of significance becomes once again, indispensable. Both of these methods are used by Johns. The method is illustrated by his silver and gold leaf, which then becomes the object’s gilded silver leaf, finally having their identity only by their successive weight.

I shared this account with a member of Robert Lessnberry, and, since he and Johns represent the two modes of the modern American painting and sculpture according to be “the”, as it is remarkable to say exactly where they differ. In we arrive to the “Cambridge method.” For March 7, 1964, I pointed out the difference between Humpty’s use of the land and that of Lessnberry, between the metaphorical parity of the “talking” words, and the object which Lessnberry combines into a sculptural meeting. Lessnberry works with objects and fragments of objects which we would not immediately

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**Figure 78.**
Figure 79.
a non-entity. He is engaged in the endlessly changing context task: the imitation of nature in her mass of specificity. If copy art implies the choice of a certain type of subject matter, then it corresponds to no doctrine with which Johns has concern. Johns’s progress as a painter was conceived originally with the imitation of structures. Here we reach the resolution of the apparent distancing between subject and surface. Distance the notion of a subject since that implies the involvement of an alter entity. The surface in the midst of the structure, not the structure therefore comes to life only in terms of the picture or it appears. Yet, as Jasper suggests, “The art has moved away from the generic structure of the earlier works.” Finally, with nothing in it to group, the work becomes, as an atmosphere in which nothing is present and especially, in assassination which is so fixed toward one ultimate plane: one, gray, distant, still.

I wrote earlier of the element of concealment in “Depersonalization Social, 1962.” The atmosphere of silence which pervades this strange picture has become the dominant feature of Johns’s work. In “Experience 1961” there is still a strongly implied unity structure. In successive stages this element has disappeared. The space and forms which appear suspended in several works of this period seem, by their incongruity, to validate the notion of a central, commanding structure. In “Tie the Barnes incl. 1965” there is contained an overwhelming pervasiveness of depth and darkness. Stains of the stippled word YELLOW, on the right cornered by a swirl of dark ash, appear on the left totally isolated against the gulf of the painting. The ruler, with its smell of literal measurements, forms the lower edge of an area of blurred paint. The line-composed spaces create a grey shadow, exactly above, upon the isolated center, while the blurred area is also reflected in the blank left hand bottom corner. All these elements of existence are engulfed in the still-inducing atmosphere of the painting. The ruler, a line with the exact measurements of the physical world, is at the same time presented as an aspect of chance which, by engulfing the surface according to a written direction, obliterates any feeling of structure. In contrast to other earlier works, these later paintings (with the exception of “Map 1962”) give the impression of an almost accidental origin. This is not to say that they suggest a mechanical involvement of the subject. The subject with active painting is entirely inhabitable, for the work is never presented as the result of the subject’s activity. In the contrary, we are reminded of the range of possibilities lying within the sphere of the painting, between content and chaos, between virtual solitude and darkness, between fitted form and vulnerability. Every picture appears on a stage between those extremes and makes an occasion of the degrees which have been avoided.

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**Figure 80.**

In contrast to the "weariness" of earlier works, Johns seems to stress the smoothness of the forms within the picture, suggesting that, though Nicholas, these are virtually inseparable to change. In "White Paintings" (1953-60) the total letters stand at various angles along a central drift in the frame, with brushes and brushes attached to them so as to look like "paper" forms. The space between is slightly illuminated by a brush in the corners of the room, which appears thin from the same sequence of letters arranged in reflection. This stereolikelihood reproduces the Banbury Yarn of the mirror in order to emphasize the self-made forms, but the picture stands apart from the symmetry and simplicity of the physical world. In this sense of "monochrome" a column of carefully stacked columns - circles within squares - stands to the ends of elementary disorder. From the left hand lower corner, a spiked column projects, meeting on the floor, the stems, empty atmosphere conflicting only with the narrative character of the projection. Now, at the top left hand corner, there is a sort of chair with vertical line and frames. The crude sort of a hand in "Trinity (First Grade)", this trace of direct home involvement seems to signify the withdrawal of the artist in a context still adjusted to human dialogue. Some words from Johns: "An object that tells of the place, declaration, dependence of objects, form the essence of itself. We of others. Will it invite itself? Bridge.

To an object that does not speak of itself, Jasper Johns accepts the meaning of the work of art to the necessary dimension from the syntax of landscapes and interpretation of the situation. He does not claim this meaning by the introduction of the object, by including other figures in the work which he has made, and by putting the question of their status. Will the work of art take them? In his current works, Johns has laid emphasis on the presence of the object, but on its total withdrawal. But he still maintains a written balance between the real object and the work of art - and these problematic objects which form their reference to the work or leave their traces in its atmosphere. While his concern for the work of art as an object involves a relation to the ultimate expressions of object, this element of self-observation assumes a different context from the "Trinity (First Grade)," his dream of self-expression: in the everyday world. As a result of this blending, Jasper Johns succeeds in presenting the meaning of the work of art as a condition set only of parts but also of bodies.

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Figure 81.

Typography and Exhibition Catalogues

So many of the publications included in this feature are notable for their innovative and expressive uses of typography. I can date my own interest in typography and book design back to my schooldays in the late 1950s. A printing press was discovered in the Museum at Winchester College and my seniors industriously put it to good use in printing a Book of Prayers for Evening services in the Chapel. The book was printed in Eric Gill’s Perpetua typeface, with Romulus Initials. My own achievement at the press was an excessively elaborate personal bookplate. I became more familiar with the mechanics of book production when editing the school’s literary magazine, Ariel, in 1960. Here, there could be no question of influencing the layout or
typography to any great degree, since the process was controlled by the printer: “Warren & Son Ltd, General and Commercial Printing and Publishing”. An original design for the cover allowed each issue to have a certain degree of visual impact. But, for the most part, visual interest was confined to the display of advertisements that appeared throughout the pages of the magazine, which were supplied in the form of ready-made blocks. For the issue of summer 1960, I managed to acquire full-page adverts from sources that ranged from the Royal Navy to Olivier Fine Virginia Tobacco and Madame Prunier’s Restaurants (London and Paris). Though graphically undistinguished in the main, these adverts enabled the school magazine to cover its costs more effectively than others with which I have been subsequently associated.

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

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

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

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

The Gulbenkian catalogue was produced by Shenval Press, a small printer mainly located in Harlow, Hertfordshire, which was advertising itself at the time as “specializing in typographic design and fine colour reproduction”. Another regional printer, Tillotsons of Bolton, Lancashire, had already produced in 1963 what must surely have been the most sophisticated catalogue to date for any one-man exhibition at a London commercial gallery. Gordon House (1932–2004) was an artist and member of the London “Situation Group”, as well as working as a graphic designer. His design for the Kitaj one-man exhibition, *Pictures with Commentary*, shown at Marlborough Fine Art in February 1963, is an impeccable exercise in
deploying the new typography, which does not compete for attention with the excellent photographic illustrations of Kitaj’s work (themselves produced from blocks made by Engravers Guild Limited).

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

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

1 In his Introduction to the first volume of the series, Bryson commented: “all art history needs to do is [...] take from literary criticism everything of service to itself”, see Norman Bryson, Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).


5 PMC NOTES, no. 6 (May 2016), 5.


12 My source for this material was Marie-Antoinette, Allévy, La mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, (Paris: E. Droz, 1938).

13 This book by the veteran Austrian Marxist Ernst Fischer had first appeared in an English edition in 1963, and attracted some criticism for its insistence on the “magical” antecedents of art. It was republished in a paperback edition in 2010, with an Introduction by John Berger.


15 Granta 69, no. 1236, 14 May 1964, 1. Reg Gadney was one of three editors, but was concerned particularly with the coverage of matters relating to the visual arts. It was Gadney who commissioned Anthony Donaldson to design the series of covers which would notionally have added up to a complete nude figure.

16 Cambridge Opinion 27, a special number titled “Modern Art in Britain”, came out in 1963. It contained contributions from a remarkable range of artists, including the “Situation” group, the school of Bomberg associated with the Beaux Arts Gallery, David Hockney, and Anthony Caro. The critic Lawrence Alloway also provided an essay.


18 Painting & Sculpture of a Decade 1954–64, Tate Gallery, April–June 1964, 46.

19 I relied for my quotations from Dr Haftmann on an English translation of the Foreword to the catalogue which was provided by the Press Office.

20 The verdict of the press on the day following this uproarious occasion was “some seats broken, one attendant slightly wounded”.

21 See Midway (2014) and Stonypath Days (2016).

22 A proof of this edition was accepted as a gift to the national collection at the Tate in 2018. It joined a selection of my other ‘poem-prints’, produced with the aid of different collaborators, which date from the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

23 This company, based in Winchester, did however advertise a connection to Taylor & Francis of London, which has over time become a printer and publisher of major international importance.

24 See the advertisement on the back cover of The London Magazine 4, no. 7, October 1964. This magazine was also printed by Shenval.


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- Identification of the resource for consideration of removal. Providing URLs in your communication will help us locate content quickly.
- The reason for the request.

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