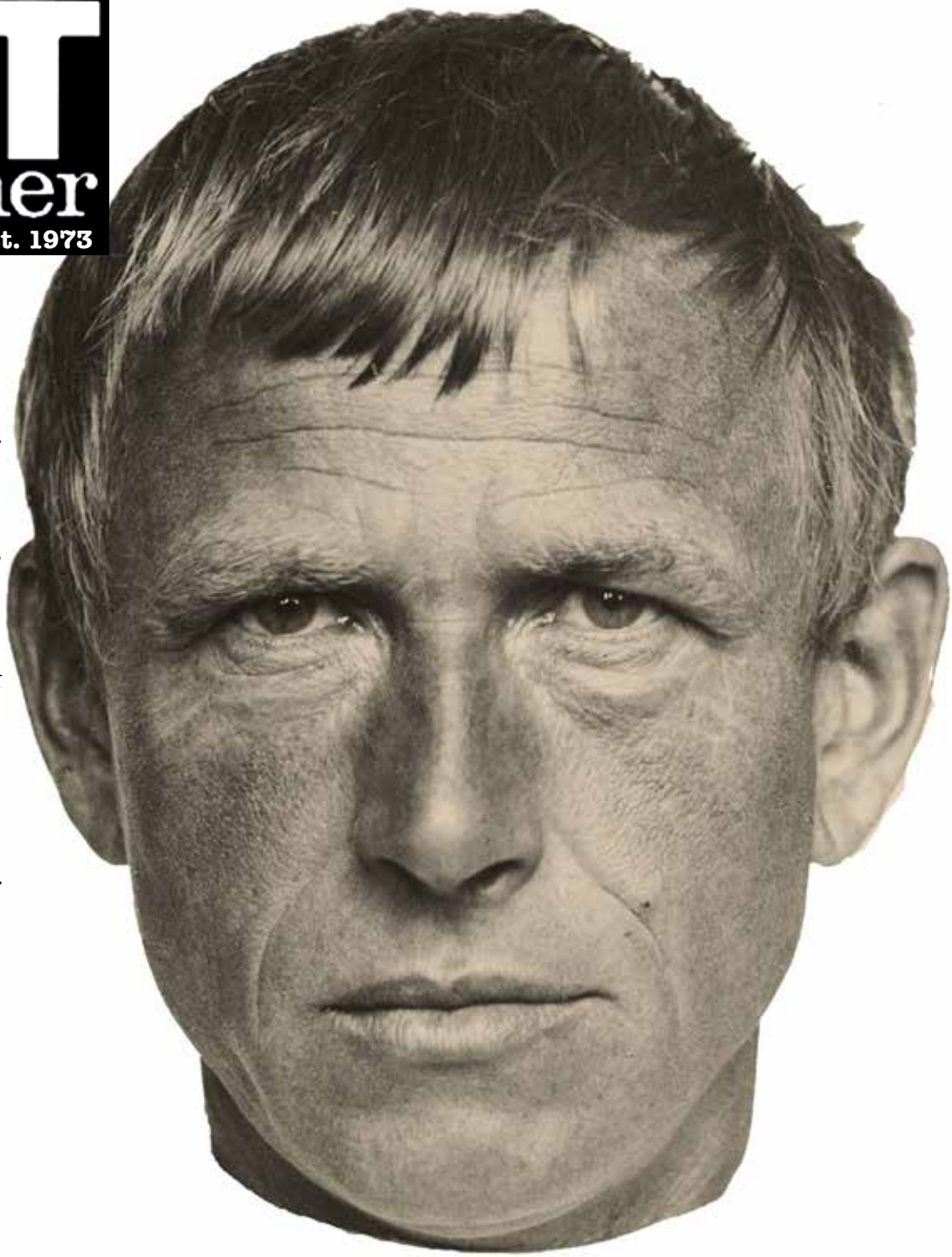
ISSN 0886-8115

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Volume 35 No.3 Jan/Feb 2021 £4 / $6.00 / €6.50

NEW ART examiner

Est. 1973



IN THIS ISSUE

OTTO DIX: OBJECTIVE PAINTER OR ACCIDENTAL PROPHET?

Darius Magada-Ward

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.
If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.
The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.
You can participate directly by sending letters to the editor which are published unedited.
All editions include the digital issue sent via e-mail.
Subscription rates for 6 issues print and digital:

UK	£39.50	postage incl.	Subscribe at http://newartexaminer.net
Europe	€45	postage incl.	Our offices addresses:
USA	$42	postage incl.	UK Office: The Managing Editor, Penzance. UK
World	$78	postage incl.	Chicago Office: 7221 Division #5, River Fores, IL 60305 USA.

Subscriptions to the New Art Examiner in 2021-22 are £40 ($46) for six issues
Digital subscription $3.50 annually (£2) - more a donation than a subscription
Individual copies are £4.00 ($6) plus postage £2.50 ($1) or $2 each as a download from www.newartexaminer.net

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The Attentive Artist

In 1964, the year of the 'Mythologies Quotidiennes', 'L'Art et la Révolution Algérienne' was shown in Paris, then in the Ibn Khaldoun exhibition space in Algiers. There, Arryo, Cremonini, Lapoujade, Ferro (Erró), Monory and Rancillac, artists linked with Narrative Figuration, joined the older surrealists André Masson and Roberto Matta and communist artists such as John Lurçat and Boris Taslitzsky. Forty four years later, in the spring of 2008, the Musée National d' Art Moderne et Contemporain in Algiers opened with Les Artistes Internationaux et la Révolution d'Algérie, showing Taslitzsky's *Woman of Oran,* works by Mireille Miahle and Rancillac's *Woman of Algiers 2*, (1998) which he gave to the museum: it represented an Algerian woman almost camouflaged with lattices of wood and thorny branches.
The conversation continues.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

LIVIANA MARTIN was born in Northern Italy and lives in Milan. She has a degree in philosophy and she taught for many years. She is keen on ancient and contemporary art, because she is absolutely confident that "the beauty will save the world".

BARBARA ROSE (June 11, 1936 – December 25, 2020) was an American art historian, art critic, curator and college professor. Rose's criticism focused on 20th-century American art, particularly minimalism and abstract expressionism, as well as Spanish art. "ABC Art", her influential 1965 essay,defined and outlined the historical basis of minimalist art. She also wrote a widely used textbook, *American Art Since 1900: A Critical History.*

DANIEL NANAVATI is the European Editor of the *New Art Examiner* and an author.

FRANCES OLIVER has published seven works of fiction and self-published three memoirs. She was born in Vienna, grew up and married in the USA, and has since lived and travelled in a number of countries. After her husband's death she and their daughter settled in Cornwall, where she devotes much time to environmental campaigns.

MIKLOS LEGRADY is a visual artist, writer, anti-hero and protagonist who's expecting trouble. He steps out of the art world's blind spot, uncovering myths and deconstructing fictions.
He has a B.Sc. in visual studies workshop from Rochester, N.Y and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

GRAZIELLA COLOMBO lives in Milan, Italy. She has a degree in foreign languages and literature and has taught for many years. She is a volunteer and guide at the Diocesan Museum of Milan. She has always had a passion for art, one of the things in which Italy excels.

PENDERY WEEKES is the publisher of the *New Art Examiner,* together with an extraordinary worldwide team.

SCOTT WINFIELD SUBLETT is a screenwriter, playwright, film director, professor at San Jose State University in California, and author of *Screenwriting for Neurotics.*

MARY FLETCHER is a multimedia artist Flaneur: www.axisweb.org/p/maryfletcher. She has an MA in contemporary visual art and writes the blog: 4mary-fletcher.blogspot.com. She is a humanist, feminist and socialist, influenced by psychotherapy. She lives in St Ives, Cornwall, UK.

DARIUS MAGADA-WARD is a Chicago-based writer and photographer who received his BA in Philosophy from the University of Tennessee. He can be reached at dmagadaward@gmail.com

DON KIMES has worked extensively in western New York State and Umbria, Italy. In a 1996 catalogue essay for an exhibition of his work in Munich, he wrote about the relationship between nature and culture, saying Italy affords the opportunity to think about culture, nature and the passage of time . . . In the end nature takes everything back.

LORETTA PETTINATO was born in northern Italy. After her humanistic studies, she specialized in physiopathology of infantile development. She taught for years. She lives in Milan; she is an art lover and is one of the ONLUS Volunteers For Museo Diocesano. She is involved with their artistic and cultural initiatives proposed every year.

ANTHONY VINEY is based in West Cornwall. His work uses images and words to explore themes of transience and evanescence. In lockdown he's been developing these themes in hand-bound artist's books featuring drawings and haiku.
www.anthonyviney.com

SUSANNA GÓMEZ LAÍN is a practicing artist and lawyer or vice versa. In her works she tries to conciliate both worlds using concepts and experiences extracted from her daily study and practice, using art as a legal language and weapon to subtly voice universal human concerns and dilemmas, trying to bring a ray of light wherever she finds darkness.

JOSEPHINE GARDINER has spent most of her working life as a journalist. Born in Oxford, she has lived in London, Barcelona, and Brighton (among other places), and is now based in Penzance, Cornwall. She has recently started writing fiction and her first novel will be published in October 2021.

If you have ideas for articles or are a writer please get in touch:

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LETTERS

MOCA, Toronto: The Trendy Thing

Miklos,
What a very surprising series of pictures! Congratulations!
David Hlynsky, 02/01/2021

Editor,
Nice to see that someone finally gets it, and that the emperor is, in fact, wearing no clothes. Not only does Legrady denounce the flagrant flim-flam that presently defines the city's contemporary art scene, but he also has the courage and intellectual authority to denounce and condemn this intellectual flummery for what it is: pure and unadulterated BULLSHIT. Well-done Sir, and let's add our voices to those who object – and reject the MOCA's pretentious nonsense after which the museum's curators should have the responsibility to clean up this mess and do the right thing as in pack it up, tape it into appropriate bundles and toss this onanistic nonsense into the recycling box where it belongs.
Pierre-Albert Sevigny 30/12/2020

Utah Can be the Arts Center of the West

Editor,
This submission deserves a Post Script addition. I wrote this piece back in March as the Covid-19 pandemic was on the rise. Many unknowns were still at hand and I could not have guessed the current state of affairs we now exist in. The hierarchy of priorities has shifted, crumbled, and is still under construction for the future. Many individuals in the Arts community in Utah believe that stability is a glimmer, but a return to prosperity is years away. As Utah begins to plan for the post-pandemic rebuild process, and it will be a long journey, it is the perfect opportunity to reassess what it truly values. Will the Arts, an industry that has suffered greatly, be given the support and vitality it needs to return and flurish? Or will it continue to receive the scraps of consideration from Utah's elected body?
Alexander Stanfield 27/12/2020

Time to End the Whitney Biennial

Editor,
Totally agree with Al Jirikowic. When a major exhibition consistently promotes artists from the most powerful New York and L.A. galleries then the museum is a marketing ploy for those galleries and not an attempt at an objective look at the art of today.
Miklos Legrady 05/12/2020

Editor,
Where does the art we consider really important come from and why.? .... Do we dare bother to ask these questions? Apparently we seem not to in terms of major museums and galleries ….. or do we?
Anon: 02/01/2021

(We never mind honest comments but we do request that people leave a name. Ed)

How Artists Get on in the World

Editor,
How do artists achieve success and why has the subject been so little explored? Mary Fletcher is shining a spotlight on an uncomfortable subject, feelings may get hurt, every artist will question what they've achieved, just how successful they are compared to their youthful expectations. And yet it is about time someone asked such questions. One take-away away from this article is how a connection with one influential curator or artist was a career path for so many.
Miklos Legrady 25/12/2020

Intimate Art

Editor,
Sex as one element of a career path may be an evolutionary test. The universe says you need not only talent but charm – I've noticed that successful artists and curators are often charismatic, at times that's more important than their mastery of their field. Mary Fletcher's Speak-easy, How Artists get On, tackles the question from a different angle, leading to speculation that to succeed one must meet all the requirements of success. One needs charisma, talent, financial stability and network connections. This demanding and discouraging foundation for success is thankfully offset by chance, by luck, and chaos, so hopefully all of us have a chance. But in the long run for any one of us cultural workers, it feels like the work itself is the greatest reward.
Miklos Legrady 25/12/2020

Ernest Griset

Daniel
Fascinating work. Thanks for bringing him to our attention.
Miklos Legrady 25/12/2020

Miklos,
I was given a book by him from my sister 40 years ago. Glad you enjoyed him.
Daniel Nanavati 29/12/2020

letters@newartexaminer.net

QUOTE of the Month:

"But whenever I came anywhere near to winning, he'd find a way of temporarily modifying the rules."

Eric Atkinson (on playing table-tennis with Ben Nicholson)
(*The Incomplete Circle,* Scolar Press, 2000)

NEW ART examiner CiC

January 2021
Volume 35. No.3

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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

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WEBSITE: www.newartexaminer.net

UK Distributor: Central Books, London

Cover: Portrait of Germain painter Otto Dix by Hugo Erfurth, Dresden (Gelatine-Silberabzug. 8,2 x 22,8 cms) (Wiki commons)

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The New Art Examiner is indexed in:
Art Bibliographies Modern, Art Full Text & Art Index Retrospective and Zetoc. It is in the British Library, Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford, Cambridge University Library, The National Library of Scotland, The Library of Trinity College, Dublin,The National Library of Wales, The Smithsonian, Washington DC.

UK Office: The Old Studio Panters Bridge, Mount Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 4DP

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The New Art Examiner is published by The New Art Gazette CiC, registered in the UK.

EDITORIAL

An Invitation

When the roaring Twenties finally do arrive, as predicted after the rerun of the Spanish flu era comes to an end, we need to be ready to embrace the changes that will have taken place during our absence from society and make way for new scenarios. It could be positive, and it could bring great renewal, also to the art world.

I look forward to cancelling the following words from my vocabulary: lockdown, quarantine, virus, mask, vaccine, bubble, social distancing. These words represent some of the misery we have endured during the lockdowns, also the non-lockdown lockdowns, as our writer Katie Zazenski calls the less restrictive moments. I also look forward to going out and meeting people and seeing how our world will have changed. Most of us have suffered at times from some sort of depression during these long months, though few of us have openly declared their sense of sadness or misery. Apparently, misery and unhappiness are connected to creativity. Karol J Borowiecki, professor of economic history of the arts at the University of Southern Denmark, analysed Beethoven's letters and found "that creativity does spring forth from misery." Professor Borowiecki used a negative emotions index of "anxiety, anger and sadness" and "found that sadness is particularly conducive to creativity. Since depression is strongly related to sadness, this result comes very close to previous claims made by psychologists that depression may lead to increased creativity. This constitutes an important insight into how negative emotions can provide fertile material upon which the creative person could draw – an association that has fascinated many since antiquity."

Going back in time, Aristotle found that "all men who have attained excellence in philosophy, in poetry, in art and in politics, even Socrates and Plato, had a melancholic habitus; indeed some suffered even from melancholic disease." With this premise, thanks to our lockdowns, endless restrictions, deaths of so many people, and so much despair and sadness, once it's all over, we should be seeing an incredible revival.

Back in March 2020, Mike Booth from MJ Hudson, investment fund and trade management solutions, suggested the UK might have a Roaring Twenties return after Brexit. Unwittingly, this has been picked up again by others; Spiros Malandrakis, "head of research – alcoholic drinks, Euromonitor International" said he expects the trade to recover sooner than 2024, and forecasts a party era as revellers celebrate freedom following months of lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19." Bob Fisch from Forbes with his article "Are You Ready To Rock The New Roaring '20s?", says that "Much of the "roar" of the 20th Century's '20s came from the younger generations of the time. Their hormones fueled the nation's pent-up energy, and their modern outlook encouraged freedom of expression and creativity." Using the same paradigm of the recovery from the pandemic in the twenties, and considering that Dada, Surrealism, Expressionism, and Art Deco had their origins then, I think we're in for a wave of creativity and expression. I expect to see and read about new visions.

Continued on page 34

SPEAKEASY

William Wordsworth by Benjamin Robert Haydon

Each issue, the *New Art Examiner* will invite a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest. Daniel Nanavati is a writer who lives and works in Cornwall, UK. He was appointed European editor of the Examiner in 2018.

The Eye That is Not an Eye

"... I look upon that inward eye
That is the bliss of solitude…"

A famous quote, though some scholars believe the sentence of which this is a part was actually suggested by Dorothy, not William, Wordsworth. But the inward eye, that part of our brains that plays with images and re-imagines what we have seen, has been the topic of conversations among poets and thinkers for the entirety of our attempts at nationhood. It is precisely because we have thought so long and hard about what it means to 'think' about things that we can see so many instances of cross-over similarity between cultures, across the ages, and into contemporary art which hungrily seeks out older traditions to feed its insatiable appetite to bring to market anything that can be sold as 'not having been done before'.

This inward eye that is wholly informed by the five senses and nothing else, that intuits almost nothing while believing itself capable of intuiting just about everything if given enough sensitivity to the metaphysical as well as the physical; an eye that deludes itself that what it experiences is, therefore, known while even Plato could understand that we know very little about the world around us through our senses. Our knowledge is at best a workable hypothesis that is good enough to get us by. An inward eye that is more attuned to the survival of the animals that we are in a hostile world, than in deriving universal meaning. For our senses are designed to get us through the moment, the hour, the day and not there to plan ahead 80 years. Science has been teaching us all we have missed and never known before and as Einstein so perfectly outlines, the more we know the more we discover we don't know.

And this almost fabulous facility is all we have to engage in creating commentary on our existence, something we call the arts. All of them. For on this ground they are all equally hamstrung. So what can we make, what can we create, with senses that are limited to the visible world, the audible world, to the 'safe-to-touch world? If each individual defines the world differently, however small those differences are in terms of colour perception, hearing, smell, touch and taste, where can we find anything that is truly universal and even if we could, is the attempt worthwhile? After all we are getting by and creating an immense series of cultures that have enough meaning to pass onto generations, so why do we want more?

Obviously we can attune to some extent to each other, for the differences in our senses are not a million miles apart, but atomic size differences tend to make all the difference. For while Greenberg asserted that paintings are two dimensional, they are, given the thickness of paint and paper, actually three dimensional and that makes a deference to how photons bounce off them into our eyes. And if we truly are walking around in our heads, creating our unique universe, separated while close to everyone else, how can we define the 'experience of art' that includes us all, and would an attempt at a definition have any purpose?

Actually, it doesn't. Having written art criticism for only five years and read a century worth of thinking, the first fact to note is that assumptions have to be made before one even starts to talk about art and those assumptions, like all assumptions, can always be challenged. In addition, art has been played as a political and financial game for so long we may well have lost sight (forgive the pun) of anything in it that is not faked to some degree. The only honest thing we can say, without fear of being shot down, is that we have an appreciable impulse to create that some of us cannot, and don't wish, to disadvantage.

But all art is a piece of foolishness. Because it is human it commences as a flawed conversation that can never be wholly understood or fully communicated. Like all our ways of thinking it is, at best, our attempt to create and pass on meaning while knowing we cannot be accurate. Unless we create within such restrictive assumptions as those of the Academies, that universal meaning instantly vanishes.

So we come down to knowing that any work of art is a personal message, skilled or not, that never gets out of its bottle. The inward eye always stays inside and is, as Wordsworth goes on to say '... the bliss of solitude...'

We carry galleries in our heads and I can be certain of one thing, mine is not yours and neither of us can see Rembrandt's.

Otto Dix: Objective Painter or Accidental Prophet?

Darius Magada-Ward

Few artists have captured the sheer violence, absurdity, and chaos of the phenomenon of war better than Otto Dix in *Der Krieg* (1924), his series of etchings visualizing his experience of World War I. This series is unique in terms of just how alien and unrecognizable both the earth and humanity become on the battleground. In his etchings, living faces become hollow as if they have lost their human spark, flares light up the night sky like earth-bound stars that display a moon-like cratered-out landscape, while soldiers' corpses are scattered about as if they're growing from the blasted ground. Upon first examination, Dix's work seems to be a clear condemnation of war and the folly of arbitrary violence at the hands of nationalistic impulses. These artworks additionally provide an examination of the consequences of that Great War, and how a country and people greatly wounded by the postwar shame of defeat and economic collapse became a breeding ground for fascist ideologies. Some of the markers of incipient fascism seen in Dix's work of the 20s and 30s are similar to the behavior found in ultra-right groups in the United States today. His work in comparison to our contemporary situation in the United States begs the question: was Dix a documentarian or an accidental prophet? The aim of this essay is to attempt a provisional answer to this vital question.

Let us examine one of Dix's numerous self-portraits, the 1924 self-portrait. In the drawing *How I looked as a Soldier*, Dix depicts himself in the role of hardened masculine hero to a tee. He stares toward the viewer with a furrowed brow and piercing gaze. The stubble on his face and the wear and tear in his uniform suggest he has been fully entrenched in combat as he clutches a massive machine gun. All of these visual cues help the portrayal of him as an efficient killer for the German homeland. Another self-portrait, the 1915 painting *Self-portrait as Mars* places the artist as the eternal God of War, standing resolutely as monstrous forces of energy wreak death and havoc around him. His pose reminds us of a warrior from antiquity; there is something deeply elemental about this painting, as horses burn and buildings crumble while the stars align to repeat life's cycle of rebirth and destruction.

Dix was heavily influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche and Nietzschean mythology, and he was part of a body politic that considered entering into World War I to be a divine blessing that would reshape the arc of history. Themes of life's inherent tension between and the will to power are recognizable in all of his works. Dix was both horrified and fascinated by his experience as a soldier: "There was an almost addictive quality to the hyper-sensory input of war" (Karcher).

What is so interesting about Dix's works from this period is that they are clearly a condemnation of war to some extent, yet still Dix seems to be valorizing the things that led to war to begin with. The artworks, showing war in all of its ugliness, still contain a Germanic romanticism that is reminiscent of old masters such as Caspar David Friedrich. His etchings allude to the post-war shame of the era, but he still romanticizes the heroism of the German soldier as the ultimate morally superior being, the man of iron-will, impervious to weakness and "prepared to meet any eventual-

Otto Dix, Self Portrait as Mars*, (1915). Oil on canvas*

Another self-portrait, the 1915 painting *Self-portrait as Mars* places the artist as the eternal God of War, standing resolutely as monstrous forces of energy wreak death and havoc around him. His pose reminds us of a warrior from antiquity; there is something deeply elemental about this painting, as horses burn and buildings crumble while the stars align to repeat life's cycle of rebirth and destruction.

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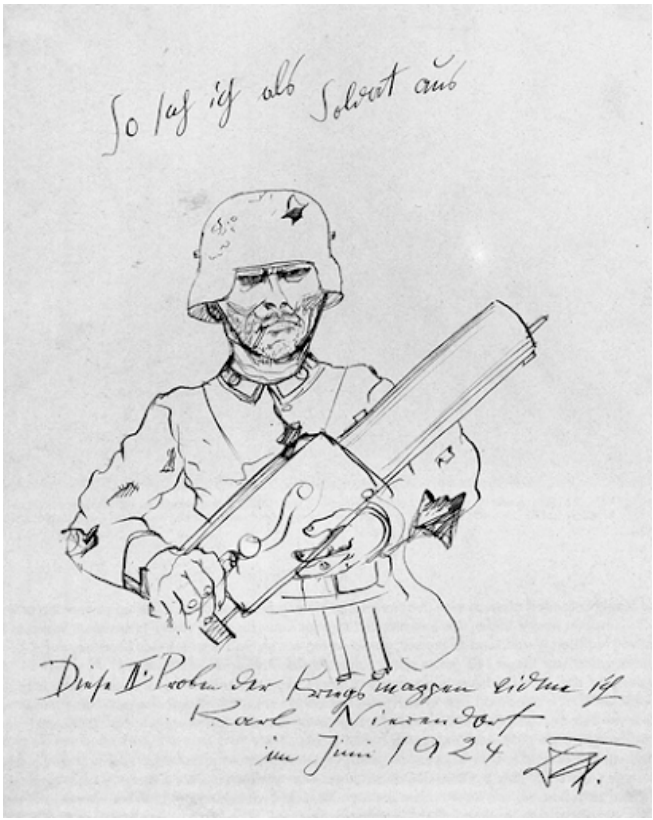


Otto Dix, How I Looked as a Soldier*, (1924). Drawing*

ity" (Fox). This identity, coupled with the shame of global defeat and the rise of many rogue paramilitary organizations, led to a wide belief in the degeneracy and deterioration of cultural and moral norms.

Rogue paramilitary organizations trying to thwart and undermine the efforts of the state, a belief in the deterioration of conservative social mores and ethics: the parallels to our reactionary political climate today are ominously similar. The mythologizing of the heroic persona seems to fit directly into our own nation's extreme right-wing rhetoric. Swaths of men, young and old and heavily armed, occupy our country's capitals and public grounds in attempts to bully and intimidate. The allusions and misinterpretations of Nietzschean mythologies, whom white supremacists such as Richard Spencer have labeled as their inspiration of 'spiritual awakening' are direct legacies of pre-World War II fascist behaviors. Make America Great Again, the slogan itself, inciting the myth of a once Great America - "simultaneously magnifies the young reactionary's shame while being called to action" (Illing).

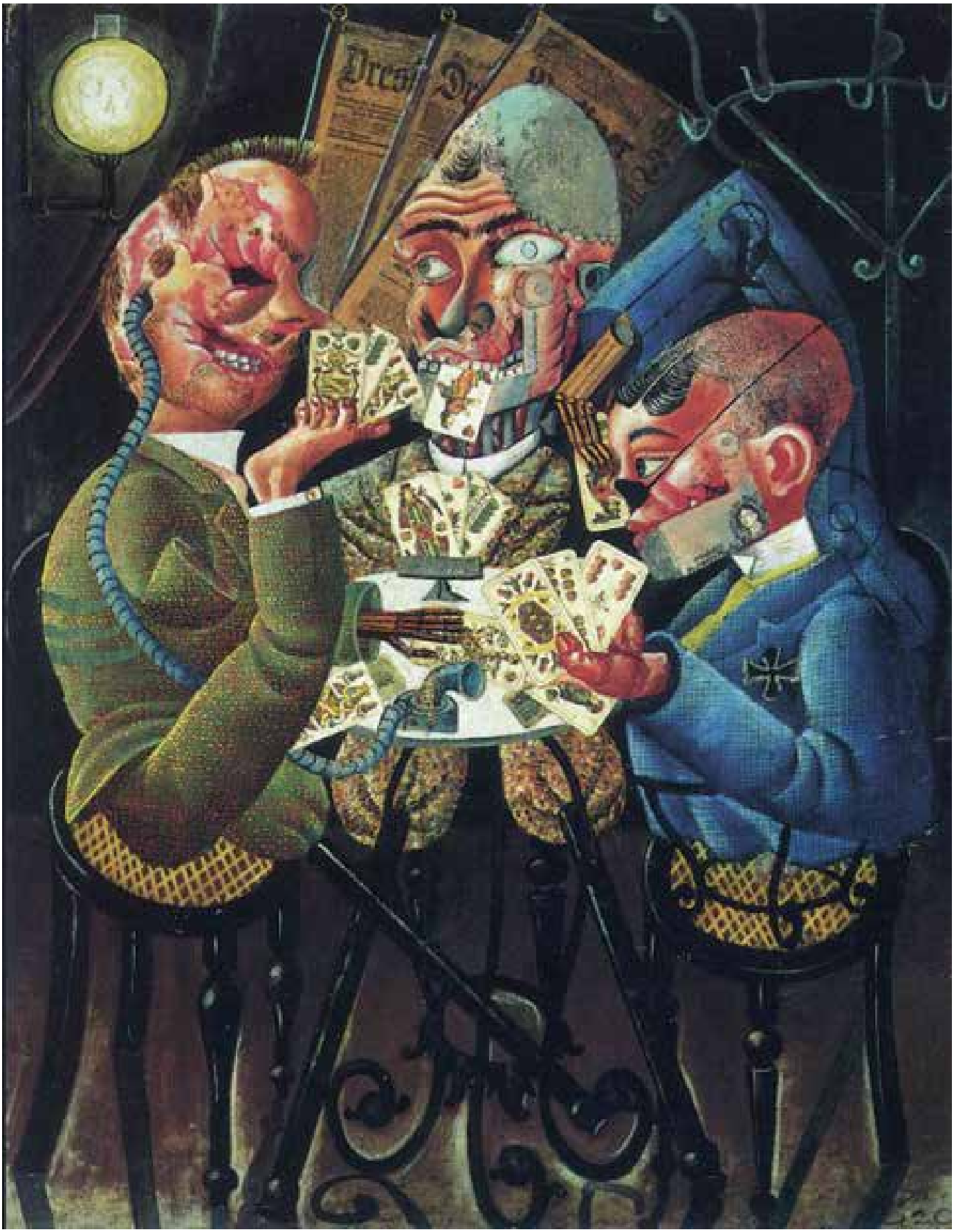
In works like *The Skat Players* and *Prager Strasse*, Dix portrays some of the causes of this growing national resentment. The card players, cast aside and presumably unemployable in a newly destroyed German economy, sit and come to terms with what has become of their lives. The prosthetic limbs and robotically figured bodies notify us of the war's unique place as the first truly industrialized war. These men can't assimilate back into society, they have nothing better to do, so they play cards. Their wounds and bodily sacrifices in an ultimately purposeless war have left them without a sense of ultimate purpose.

In *Prager Strasse*, deformed and wounded veterans try to peddle cash on the side of a fashionable street. A woman in a pink dress rushes by and pays them no mind. Their mangled bodies are magnified by the shop selling fake human extremities behind them. One of the men carries a brochure entitled Jews Out! The implications are clear, and the seeds of nationalism have begun to grow out of the soil of wide-scale economic hopelessness and disillusionment. How similar is this to our own world? Purposelessness and economic loss inevitably lead to those affected searching for someone on whom to place the blame. The fears associated with these conditions are then exploited through recruitment strategies for far-right extremists that are based around the notion that "white men are losing power in an ever-changing, multicultural landscape" (CTED). These men, the "losers of modernization," (Chatzoudis) seek to destroy the other, the ones to blame. Who these 'others' are is irrelevant; during the pre-WWII era it was predominately Jews, today it is largely defined as a strange mixture of anti-Semitic, racist, and violently misogynistic sentiments. "The desire to kill by right-wing extremists around the world is driven by inferior bodily states: the fragmented body's fear of disaster, of being devoured by the realities that surround it" (Chatzoudis).

The year is 1923. A crowd of demonstrators, poor, sick, and feeble, march in protest. A mustached man carries a picket sign exclaiming their reason for grievances, We Want Bread! Inside a nearby cafe a group of elegantly dressed patrons sip champagne with grotesque looks on their faces. The men of the cafe carry a look of amusement at the sight of the demonstrators. The fat cat of the group puffs a cigar; nearby his Swastika-donned comrade holds his bubbly flute while the third man gazes at our crowd with a contemptuous grin. The women, smartly dressed in the latest fashions of the era, carry somber faces. They do not interact with the crowd nor their company. They exist to serve their duties as subservient to their husbands.

Almost a hundred years later, patrons drink beer outside of one of their favorite New York haunts. They carry a look of exasperation and embarrassment as directly behind them march a wave of protestors, one carrying the pan African flag, unifying in support of reform of systemic American police brutality. In this photograph these patrons may not be the sole beneficiaries of an oppressive system, but they perfectly represent that role here. They have taken it upon themselves to deliberately ignore the current realities of our sociopolitical climate. They fail to address a world and a nation that is facing joblessness, inequality, death, and social unrest on a massive scale in the midst of a global pandemic.

Here you have a remarkably similar image repeated almost exactly



Otto Dix, The Skat Players, *(1920). Oil on canvas*

In works like *The Skat Player*s and *Prager Strasse*, Dix portrays some of the causes for this growing national resentment. The card players, cast aside and presumably unemployable in a newly destroyed German economy, sit and come to terms with what has become of their lives. The prosthetic limbs and robotically figured bodies notify us of the war's unique place as the first truly industrialized war. These men can't assimilate back into society, they have nothing better to do, so they play cards. Their wounds and bodily sacrifices in an ultimately purposeless war have left them without a sense of ultimate purpose.

one hundred years apart, history literally repeating itself. The descriptions posted of these images, one from Otto Dix's 1923 drawing We Want Bread! and a now viral Twitter photograph are disturbingly alike in their content. Did he ever expect that history would indeed begin to repeat itself nearly a century later in such ways? Dix's idiosyncratic account is most certainly an amalgamation of then current events imagined into one composition, while the photograph is at this point simply recorded history. In both, the fight for basic human rights is on display. It is important to note that the beer drinking women in the photograph do not exist, and are not represented, as subservient to the men of the image and thus the parallels between the two images are not entirely alike.

Dix's masterful 1927 triptych *Metropolis*, takes a different approach and draws attention on the growing resentment toward Berlin's heady cultural elite. In the center panel, the rich and beautiful dance and mingle in Berlin's decadent nightlife, their attention focused towards an uproarious brass band. The bourgeoisie of the center panel are flanked on the left and right by the consequences of their rampant consumption. In the left panel the crutches of a wounded veteran trample a man lying in the street, a dog barks at him as prostitutes look on contemptuously. In the right panel more high-class prostitutes dressed in furs walk carelessly past another crippled war victim. The triptych evokes the same resentment found in the contemporary disdain for American billionaires and today's growing economic inequality gap.

Dix's portrayal of women throughout nearly the entirety of his oeuvre lends support to the understanding of the young (potentially extremist) male's psyche of the Weimar Republic era. Dix mostly painted women in roles subservient to men, and oftentimes in the role of prostitution. In some of his paintings, each woman's individual characteristics has little importance - they are prostitutes through this lens, a commodity to be taken, owned, or bought. Dix's 1923 *Sailor and Girl* perfectly captures this idea, as a young sailor salaciously imposes himself onto a young nude woman in a brothel. His expression juxtaposed with her wariness and hesitance suggests "a transfer of military violence into brutal sexual aggression" (MoMA). The work also evokes the depravity of the age and strengthens this obsession with social and moral decay.

Consider Dix's famous 1926 *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden*. The astute and prolific woman of letters wrote for a multitude of publications across Europe. She is painted as pale and gaunt, and in the fascist's eyes as a symbol that represents the chaos and fall of the glory of the Weimar Republic. Her long spidery hands dominate the composition, as one tugs on her fashionable dress and the other clutches a lit cigarette. On the table near her rests an array of her vices - a supply of tobacco and a half-drunk cocktail. The painting is at once both grotesque and cosmopolitan in its depiction of von Harden. She is painted as the modern woman, disobeying the conventions of old.

It also seems appropriate to consider the effects that the sexual liberation of the 1920s seen world-wide must have had on these proto-fascists. Berlin's lively social scene and the redefining of womanhood through the flappers surely must have had some damaging psychological effect, as what these men were ultimately most fearful of is the autonomy of the independent woman. This liberation for the then modern woman, and the fear and repudiation of this liberation, seems in many ways similar to today's world and the inverse responses cited from far-right groups. The Proud Boys, the 'it' extremist group of the moment, describe themselves as "champions of western chauvinism." They oppose women's liberation through condemnation of changed sexual and economic mores involving inter-racial relationships and sexual freedom, and advocate for stay-at-home roles for women spouses. The erosion and decay of longstanding feminine sexual mores is listed as one of the primary reasons for the Proud Boys' unification. In their eyes, women are beginning to overtake men's rightful place in roles of high-paying jobs and higher education. The sexually liberated, economically independent woman has no need for these men, the 'losers of modernity.' This metaphorical emasculation enrages the extremist, calling him into action and uniting under the guise of some higher nationalistic calling - very similar to the fascist phenomena seen in the age of the Weimar Republic.

Dix is still a man of his time and place, given his unreflective embrace of the gender ideology of his time. It would be remiss to analyze his work without calling to attention his problematic portrayal of women and the female body. This is the caveat; he was prescient in his response and observation of his views regarding everything. But his uncritical embrace of these gender roles is unfortunate. Dix is not celebrating or promoting these roles, it is more as if they're simply glossed over and do not receive their critical due.

Still, pay attention to him, he has something to say that resonates a hundred years later. These paintings offer a glimpse into the mechanisms that led to the rise of Nazism and fascist behaviors - and, perhaps potentially, an examination of why something similar may be happening to us now.

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Death is Black and White

Anthony Viney

If you have ever printed from a black-and-white film negative, you will have experienced seeing a photographic image gradually appear on white paper and, if left in the chemical bath long enough, disappear into darkness. To see something appear out of nothing and evolve towards nothing is to experience transience.

Feelings of transience are a significant presence in the work of some 19th and 20th–century European artists, especially in their drawings and etchings. For example, the black-and-white drawings of Georges Seurat or the etchings of Samuel Palmer. The interplay of light and dark, shadow and highlight can, on longer contemplation, become the main subject of their work. Palmer wrote: "It seems to me the charm of etching is the glimmering through of the white paper even in the shadows so that almost everything sparkles or suggests sparkles." And Seurat observed: "The means of expression is the optical mixture of tones ... of the lights and of their reactions (shadows) following the laws of contrast, of gradation, of irradiation."

Both artists lived at a time when Japan was opening up to the west, and when its radically different sense of art and philosophy was influencing European artists. One of the key concepts in traditional Japanese culture is transience, with its powerful imperative to celebrate and enjoy the moment (the cherry blossom festival is the obvious example). In the West, the traditional response to the reality of human transience, while less positive, is nonetheless an important theme. Consider, for example, the concept of et in Arcadia ego (I am even in Arcadia) in European art (which suggests that even in the most beautiful of places, death is still found). On the whole, classical European culture was much closer to eastern beliefs than to those of Christendom. "Nothing retains its form; new shapes from old," wrote Ovid. "Nature, the great inventor, ceaselessly contrives. In all creation, be assured, there is no death – no death, but only change and innovation; what we men call birth is but a different new beginning; death is but to cease to be the same. Perhaps this may have moved to that, and that to this, yet still the sum of things remains the same."

While not lightening the European mood completely, the Japanese sense of the human condition did perhaps start to engage and challenge some of the West's more exclusively melancholic attitudes to death. And these beliefs gradually filtered through into the work of contemporary artists who had a natural affinity with transient moods and atmospheres.

What Seurat called 'irradiation', that delicate nuance of light and shadow, is beautifully captured in his finest drawings. Sometimes he dissolves the form of the subject (e.g. *Child in White*), at other times forms disappear into shadow. But there is always the sense of things evolving out of something or dissolving into something. The mood can be joyful or darker depending on the artist's approach – but he was very well aware of what he was doing. He wrote: "Gaiety of tone is the luminous dominant, of tint, the warm dominant, of line, lines above the horizontal. Calmness of tone is the equality

Giorgio Morandi: Still Life Drawing, (1963)

of dark and light; of tint, of warm and cool, and the horizontal for line. Sadness of tone is the dark dominant; of tint, the cool dominant, and of line, downward directions."

Seurat's drawing *The Gateway* has a frozen 'out of time' sense that encourages us to linger and consider the fleeting moment. It feels rather like a photograph, in that it captures a brief moment, but at the same time it is unlike a photograph because it's a drawing that took quite a long time to create. Sensing, simultaneously, two different passages of time gives us space to contemplate, while also experiencing the fleeting moment with its sense of impermanence. Seurat drawings are often complete works in their own right, rather than just compositions and sketches for his wonderful paintings. And it's the mood in those drawings, that, for me, comes closest to capturing transience.

The etchings of Samuel Palmer are, likewise, imbued with a sense of transience – albeit of a very English, pastoral kind. Take *The Herdsman's Cottage,* in which the rays of the late sun illuminate the cottage and the dark woods. The energy and atmosphere expressed here are not those of sadness but of transformation and hope. To look into Palmer's small etchings is to experience uplifting feelings, although the artist never allows us to forget for one moment the fundamental evanescence of his shadowy works. As he writes: "When less than four years old I was standing with my nurse, Mary Ward, watching the shadows on the wall from branches of an elm behind which the moon had risen. She transferred and fixed the fleeting image in my memory by repeating the couplet, 'Vain man, the vision of a moment made, Dream of a dream and shadow of a shade.' I have never forgot those shadows and am often trying to paint them."

Another kindred spirit among western artists is Giorgio Morandi. While on first sight his etchings and drawings may seem very different to those of Seurat and Palmer, the moods and atmospheres

of transience are nonetheless pronounced. His drawings from the 1960s appear to dissolve his still-life objects – those treasured artefacts he'd been painting for most of his life – into a network of negative spaces that hover between the jugs and bowls. Faint suggestions of shadows, and the dissolving movements of his line into the whiteness of the paper become the main focus of these late works. The sense of transience is captured precisely, but once again there is little feeling of melancholy here and instead a sense of an artist striving towards something and completely aware of what he was trying to achieve. As Franz Armin Morat has observed, the point of these drawings "... is of course not to recognise the objects, but to experience through contemplation the antagonism between dissolution and reconstitution".

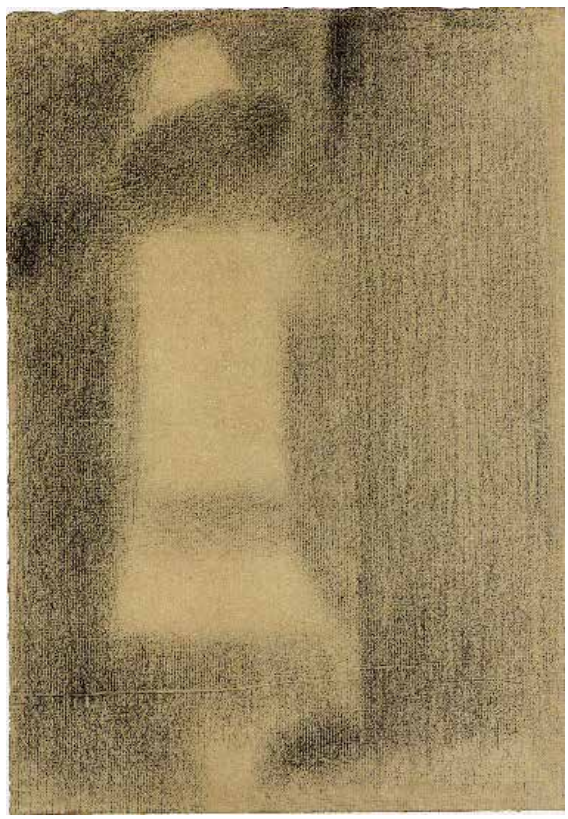
What do all the works mentioned above have in common? They are created in black and white and are drawn or printed on paper. And, as with black-and-white photographs, is there something about the absence of colour that creates space for feelings of impermanence to take hold? I'd like to suggest that black and white in particular allows the viewer enough emotional distance for contemplation and the feelings associated with the passing of time.

And while paper can survive for centuries, the knowledge that it can be easily destroyed gives it an ephemeral quality. This makes it a good medium for conveying impermanence and may help explain why, more than canvas or wooden panels, it supports the expression of feeling that everything must pass.

Of 20th–century European, and especially American, painters whose works can be seen as a celebration of transience, Mark Rothko and Sam Francis are just two who come to mind. And in the sphere of photography, the quiet works of Paul Caponigro celebrate the magic of impermanence. His *Woods, Redding, Connecticut* photographs first caught my eye while I was at art school, and made me want to understand better what his work is really about. Caponigro wrote: "At the root of creativity is an impulse to understand, to make sense of random and often unrelated details. For me, photography provides an intersection of time, space, light, and emotional stance. One needs to be still enough, observant enough, and aware enough to recognise the life of the materials, to be able to 'hear through the eyes'."

The dialogue between west and east remains an important way for contemporary western artists to discover a wealth of alternative responses to mortality. Indeed my own experiences and artistic practice parallel those of some of the artists mentioned above. Over the last year I've been working on a series of black-and-white paintings in gouache produced on handmade paper. They are a response to the increased sense of mortality I (and so many others) have been feeling in these times. But they are also about the energy of the creative process and the desire to allow something new to come into existence. These works often include a haiku – the play between the words and image giving the clearest expression of the energy and transient mood I'm seeking. It has taken me a long time to recognise the quality of evanescence in my work and find the simplest way to express it, but, looking back, I can see that the paintings and drawings that work the best are those that have a strong sense of transience about them. And I freely acknowledge my debt to the many artists who have explored this territory before me.

Anthony Viney: Sad Sunflowers*, Black pigment and graphite on Khadi paper, (2020)*



Georges Seurat: Study for A Sunday on La Grande Jatte - known as The White Child, *(1884); Conté crayon – Guggenheim Museum*

Barbara Rose Talks with Don Kimes

Republished with permission from Artscope, December 11, 2020

This is the last interview Barbara Rose conducted.

I met Don Kimes in the Nineties and have watched his work develop and change over time in response to both personal and artistic challenges. We have had an ongoing dialogue ever since. Recently I saw the work he is including in his exhibition at Denise Bibro Gallery in New York City and we had a chance to talk about how he views his own work and the contemporary art scene in general.

Barbara Rose: How Do you feel your work is related to current practice?

Don Kimes: Current practice is wide open. Anything, anywhere, without fixed judgement and dependent only upon personal circumstance and acuity. I still tend to wince at the word "practice", like it's an out of place interlocutor in the lexicon, though it became commonly used overnight. But it sounds like a nod to the professions, like being a dentist or an attorney, like I should hang a brass shingle outside my studio door with the inscription "Don Kimes' Artist's Practice, hours 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.". Or maybe I wince it's because it sounds like getting ready to do something, but not actually doing it. Like I'm practicing for the day when it is finally figured out. I remember the painter George McNeil once talking about the Fauves. He nearly shouted that they weren't "getting ready" to do something. They were just doing it. It may be odd, but every time I hear the phrase "my practice" I hear George saying "Quit getting ready and just do it!"

So perhaps my response to the word itself is a reflection of how I feel my work relates to current practice. It's apples and oranges. There is the art world and there is the world of art. These are two entirely different beasts. The art world is a momentary thing, the place where business happens. It's amoral. It blows with the wind and shifts as quickly as high frequency traders on Wall Street. It's not bad. It's not good. It's simply a fact, like the color red. It is where "current practice" exists and that's all. The world of art is something else. It is where there is a connection to who we are as human beings. It's the place where art actually happens, sometimes in the wind on the surface, but more often than not it happens far removed from that superficial surface layer. It's the world where everything of significance takes place: from the cave paintings at Chauvet to the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii; from Chardin to the most meaningful artists working today. These two worlds are constantly being confused in the media, in the art schools, and on the street. But for me they are two entirely different worlds that once in a while bump into one another. I think of what I do as participating in the world of art. "Practice" belongs to the art world. I hope that what happens in my studio, in my work, occasionally bumps into the art world. There are financial and other rewards when that happens. It can be a long, sometimes dark time between moments when those bumps occur, so a little attention feels good. But at the center I am interested in the world of art, and my relation to current practice is one of an occasional, slight bump. It's not about fighting against the art world or anything like that. My relationship to the art world is as amoral as the art world's relationship to the world of art is. If one is lucky enough to have them overlap, that's great. But if the work is to have any root in authenticity, the ability to last longer than the next change of weather in the art

Don Kimes in his studio in Washington D.C.
Photo: The Studio Visit

The artists I've respected and admired seem to have two major phases in their evolution. The first is the evolution of a language. That language is not the same thing as art. Being able to speak French doesn't make one a French poet. It takes a long time, a certain amount of humility combined with an equal part of ego, an awareness of the larger world, and the ability to be in a moment without controlling it. If you are lucky and you work a lot, you may fall backwards into something and wake up one day saying "oh – that's it!"

Abstraction falls off when it becomes categorized or formulaic. That's the point where it can be explained. I'm not talking about quality here. I'm talking about rules, formulas, and the ability to "get it". That's where it turns into nice decoration – furniture. That's where abstract art goes to die...

world, then it must be rooted in the world of art, not in relation to what is perceived as current practice.

BR: Do you think of yourself as an abstract artist?

DK: I think of myself as an artist. It's impossible to understand anything holistically. We understand the world through fragments, partial images, layered pieces of information. We put those fragments into a pile and from that we abstract meaning. As soon as we enter the world of thought everything is abstract. I never really understood the whole abstract/not abstract thing. If I look at a Lucien Freud I don't actually see a person. It's flat. It's made out of oil and dirt mixed together. It's a combination of colors, tones and line. My dog would not bark at it if it showed up in my living room. Once the photograph was invented and took over the niche focused only on depiction, abstraction became essential because that was all that remained to drive content beyond "likeness". Titian, Rembrandt, Piero – these are some of the greatest abstract artists ever to have walked the surface of the planet. They're full of light, drama, tension, spirituality. In that sense they share the world more with say, Mondrian, or Hilma af Klint, than they do with "likeness" in photography. Yes, they happen to have "likeness" and nameable subject matter in their work, but they're highly abstract as well. One doesn't have to know the words to a song in order to respond to its emotive power. The reason Goya is powerful isn't because of the story he tells. It's because of how he tells it. It's because the form, the color, the light and the surface all come together in an inexplicable way that elevates the emotive quality of the image beyond the story itself. Is Beethoven telling a story? Do lyrics accompany Miles Davis' horn so we can feel it? Abstraction is who we are.

BR: What are the problems confronting abstraction today and do you think it has a future?

DK: Abstraction falls off when it becomes categorized or formulaic. That's the point where it can be explained. I'm not talking about quality here. I'm talking about rules, formulas, and the ability to "get it". That's where it turns into nice decoration – furniture. That's where abstract art goes to die, but that can be said of anything. Jerry Saltz calls it Zombie Abstraction. He gave a talk at American University and one thing I remember is that he quoted Oscar Wilde: "The moment you think you understand a great work of art, it's dead for you." That's true no matter what kind of work we're talking about.

BR: How does an artist create a personal style in the face of globalism?

DK: By being genuinely aware. By that I mean don't limit yourself to the last fifteen minutes. Yes art is global, and it's important to look at everything you can. But so many artists are caught up in trying to strategize their next move in the context of their current

Barbara Rose, whose writings and exhibitions changed the way historians told the story of postwar art in the US

bubble that they can't see past the end of their own noses. This effort is about the course of lifetime. It's not a strategy. If you set out to create a personal style, which seems to be what a lot of current graduate education is, you come up with an academic MFA thesis statement and a superficial imitation of what you think is a personal style but is really just an illustration of a combination of things you already know, usually things that are in vogue. Art isn't about what you know. It's about taking a chance on what you don't know.

It isn't a sprint. It's an extended, long distance marathon. The artists I've respected and admired seem to have two major phases in their evolution. The first is the evolution of a language. That language is not the same thing as art. Being able to speak French doesn't make one a French poet. It takes a long time, a certain amount of humility combined with an equal part of ego, an awareness of the larger world, and the ability to be in a moment without controlling it. If you are lucky and you work a lot, you may fall backwards into something and wake up one day saying "oh – that's it!" When I look at early and late Titian there's clearly a kind of style that emerged over the course of his life. He didn't decide to do that. It happened because the language that he developed early in his life allowed him to become Titian late in his life.

BR: How do you deal with the fact that we live in a media culture, inundated by images?

DK: First, it's important to acknowledge that fact. The shift in terms of visual media that has happened over the past couple of decades is as tectonic as Guttenberg's printing press. Maybe this is an argument in favor of expanded visual education. More than sixty years ago Matisse wrote an essay called "Looking at Life with the Eye of a Child". In it he laments the fact that everything we see is affected by acquired habits and he cites the proliferation of cinema posters and magazines that "are to the eye what prejudices are to the mind". If posters and magazines are an issue, can you imagine what he would say today? Matisse talked about the importance of seeing everything as if you are seeing it for the first time, like a child, and that without this ability an artist can't be personal or original. I used to agree with Matisse, but I'm not as certain today because there is a limit to how much visual information a human being is able to process at one time. The ability to make choices is what saves us. We have to decide whether to look at the sculpture, to look at an

John Frederick Herring Sr: Pharaoh's Chariot Horses
Oil on canvas (1848)

image of the sculpture on our phone, to read the press release about the sculpture, or to listen to the person who is talking about the sculpture. But we can't do all four of these things at the same time. So in the end it becomes a matter of discernment. It still takes effort to make the most effective choice, but ultimately we are still creatures of free will. It may even be that the more images and media inundate our world, the more meaningful that singular choice becomes.

BR: What do you feel are your biggest challenges in terms of developing your work?

DK: The biggest challenges are the same as they are for most people. The exigencies of day to day existence. Dealing with health issues in my own family. Paying the bills and so forth. And the other challenge is to find ways not to do it in isolation. To get the work seen. To talk with other artists about the work. To participate in the art world without being swallowed up by its more vacuous propensities.

There are a lot of artists I feel quite close to as friends and individuals whose opinions I respect. Some have been friends for decades. Others have been younger artists who have become close friends and co-conspirators. Others have been my mentors. But with all of them it's not about the work as much as it is about the sensibility. They are artists with whom I never find any transactional, game playing superficiality. They have a deep belief in what they do when they walk into the studio. What it comes down to is that these are the people who I can talk with about art and life for hours, and never once mention the art market, galleries, art fairs, careers or real estate.

We can get a lot out of talking with other artists whose work is very different from ours, and that dialogue, which interestingly enough has become more frequent in this Covid age of lockdowns and the cloud of wannabe fascism, is incredibly important to me as an artist. It helps me question my own preconceptions

The painting was called *Pharaoh's Chariot Horses*. I said I remembered looking at that print every weekend as a child when I visited my grandparents. I stared at it for years, fascinated every time. Their manes were flying and rippling, and a storm appeared to be approaching. They seemed to be racing against time. The swirls and rhythms of their manes and the movement of their heads had an incredible flow wrapped in a dramatic light. The eyes of the horses had everything in them – power, fear, uncertainty, beauty. I copied that print many times, starting at the age of about five and drawing it for the last time when I was still in high school.

BR: Do you feel close to any painters working today?

DK: Not in terms of being a direct influence on my work. The influences I think of tend to be in the distant past. Maybe that's because I know that I can be influenced by say, Rubens, or the frescoes in Pompeii, but it would be impossible to mimic them since I live in a different time. When someone does work that reflects a hot contemporary artist that they admire (and there are thousands who do this) too many are either unaware of it as the reinvention of someone else's wheel, or too willing to give it a pass. The truth is, I don't think we are able to see our own time because we are immersed in it. Maybe it's just that the influence of some of these historical artists has more to do with the reality that I get more from spending a few hours with Piero than I do spending a few hours with "you fill in the blank".

BR: What did growing up near Pittsburgh in Western Pennsylvania mean to your work?

DK: Yes, I am from that foreign nation called the Midwest. Living in Western Pennsylvania I grew up thinking that I lived in the east. Having spent most of the rest of my life on the east coast, I've realized that Pittsburgh is actually where the midwest begins. It's a mindset completely different than say, Philadelphia. I remember (before the virus) having dinner with Julie Heffernan when she asked "what's the first artwork you ever saw that really knocked your socks off?" After talking with Julie for a minute about Cezanne's rocks I suddenly remembered the first piece that really pulled me in, much earlier than Cezanne. My grandparents had a small cottage on the Allegheny River. In their living room, across from the deer antlers mounted over the rocking chair, was a black and white print of three horses running ferociously. It was a copy of a romanticized 19th century painting by John Frederick Herring, who in 1845 was appointed Animal Painter to the Duchess of Kent in Victorian England. The painting was called *Pharaoh's Chariot Horses*. I said I remembered looking at that print every weekend as a child when I visited my grandparents. I stared at it for years, fascinated every time. Their manes were flying and rippling, and a storm appeared to be approaching. They seemed to be racing

Villa dei Misteri *wall fresco*

When we visited the *Villa of the Mysteries* in Pompeii and saw those magnificent walls, the frescoes, the remnants, I nearly had an out of body experience. While standing in the courtyard of that marvelous two-thousand-year-old house I was reminded that painting is painting. Whatever has happened since the walls were painted doesn't do anything to diminish them. They still talk to us across language, across cultures, across more than two thousand years.

against time. The swirls and rhythms of their manes and the movement of their heads had an incredible flow wrapped in a dramatic light. The eyes of the horses had everything in them – power, fear, uncertainty, beauty. I copied that print many times, starting at the age of about five and drawing it for the last time when I was still in high school. Julie, who had seen my last show at Bibro, said "you've just described your most recent work". I was shocked, as I hadn't thought about that print in 40 years. But she was right. The work I am doing now comes from a very dark place, a flood and a depression that nearly destroyed me. There is fear in that, but the work is also about rhythm and light and is unafraid of beauty and drama. It's *Pharaoh's Horses* all over again.

BR: Andy Warhol, whose parents worked the assembly lines in Pittsburgh, turned his studio into a factory. Why didn't you?
DK: There were many factories in Western Pennsylvania but there were also forests. Andy's ancestors were Czech peasants, factory workers and carpenters. Some of mine were from the Seneca Nation. Maybe that's why my art is basically rooted in nature just as his is in the machine. I spent all my time out of school, even in winter, in the woods or on the river. Most of my friends' parents worked in factories or mills, but everyone hunted and fished. In fact the first two days of deer season were official school holidays. There is a combination of raw energy, a need to respond to things one can't fully control, and contemplative silence in the woods and on the river. So while the world around my youth was mostly "rocks and hills and mines and mills", I preferred the first two, probably because of that sense of the contemplative in response to nature.

BR: You have lived and worked in Washington, D.C, the origin of stained color field painting, for years. Why didn't you become a color field artist?
DK: To be quite honest, although I've lived here for more than three decades, I've never found any traction in DC. Almost all of the good things that have happened for me have happened in New York and oddly enough, I still feel like an outsider in DC. My sources originally grew out of nature, and maybe that's why I was later drawn to some of the earlier generation of abstract expressionists instead of the color field painters, who I simply found to be too tame, too polite. I mean they may be great, but they just didn't enter into my thinking. Later I was living in Italy half the year and looking at the walls in Pompeii, and the monumentality of Piero, and the ruins in Selinunte and Taormina. And the Etruscans, Raphael, the frescoes in Napoli and the Villa of the Mysteries, Roman ruins, Caravaggio, Byzantine cathedrals in Ravenna and Monreale and, well, when that is what you are looking at, Morris Louis just doesn't cut it.

BR: What experiences have affected your work?
DK: As a young artist in my twenties living in New York I began teaching and also set up the lecture/visiting artist program at the New York Studio School on 8th Street. Each week I met, and in some cases came to know, a who's who of the post-1950s New York

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: Houses in Dresden (*1909-1910)*
(Image: Wiki commons)

art world. Everyone from Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner and Dore Ashton to Christo and Jean Claude, John Cage, Alice Neel, Greenberg, Marden, Joan Mitchell, Nam Jun Paik – the list goes on and on. If they were active in New York in the 1970s, they visited the Studio School and I was the person talking to them to arrange their visits, introducing them, and listening to all of their lectures and critiques. Being a kid from Pittsburgh, I was star-struck when I listened to the artists themselves, rather than a teacher talking about something that someone else had written about that artist. For most young artists recent art history is at least three or four steps removed. For me it was often directly from the source, and what I now read often conflicts with what I've experienced. That period of time was extremely important to me.

BR: I remember when you lived in my house in Umbria during your sabbatical. How did living and working in Italy change your work?

DK: That experience living in Italy the first time was seismic. I went with my wife, Lois Jubeck, three kids and a ninety pound dog. We didn't speak the language. There we were, living in that tiny agrarian hill town where no one spoke English. We had no cell phone, no Internet, no television. I'd never realized how American I was until I spent that year in Camerata. It's impossible to be that isolated today, but there is a parallel sense of contemplation made possible by the pandemic, the great pause.

When we visited the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii and saw those magnificent walls, the frescoes, the remnants, I nearly had an out of body experience. While standing in the courtyard of that marvelous two-thousand-year-old house I was reminded that painting is painting. Whatever has happened since the walls were painted doesn't do anything to diminish them. They still talk to us across language, across cultures, across more than two thousand years. How far has pictorial space "progressed" since the frescoes on the walls at the Villa of the Mysteries were painted? The experience of living in Italy that year taught me that it's possible to make serious art even with the most stringent restrictions. Living in Italy with great art also teaches you that that concept alone isn't enough. It also teaches you that craft alone isn't enough – next to every Caravaggio there are usually a couple of Piero del Crappo's which are every bit as well-crafted as the Caravaggio, but we'll never remember them.

BR : I know that your flood caused a major shift in your work, and that you have had other calamitous junctures in your lifetime. We are living in the midst of world crises on many levels. Can you talk in a general way about what you did to recuperate memory, to transform tragedy into a creative turning point?

DK: The biggest experience in terms of an impact on my work was the flood. Nine years after our first year in Italy, I answered the telephone at our cottage on Chautauqua Lake in western New York State. Water was coming out of the front door of our home 400 miles away in Washington. My studio was on the floor underneath

t hat door. That flood washed away twenty-five years' worth of works on paper as well as the contents of five filing cabinets containing nearly all of my correspondence with artists and friends I'd k nown and cared about, everything that I'd ever written, and everything that had ever been written about my work. It was before the Internet, so I also lost most of the slides documenting my work as a painter, most of our family photographs of my children growing up, and many other elements of my life. I was fifty at the time, and it felt like the record of my existence had been erased.

This was my interruption. I was lost and it was devastating. I went into a three and a half year depression, but I kept painting, out of habit more than motivation. It was the worst experience of my life. Eventually the depression lifted and all of the work I have been doing since then has been based on those destroyed images. I think it is the strongest work I have ever done, and I now look at that flood as a kind of gift that set a lot of things free. It's not what happens to you that defines you. It's how you respond to what happens to you that defines you.

BR: Outside the Italian experience, the flood and this pandemic, has anything else been crucial for your art?

DK: I left Western Pennsylvania shortly after graduating college and moved to New York. While there I decided to teach myself more about painting. I started driving an hour north of the city, hiking down into a valley and climbing up onto a rock in a stream bed to paint what I could see around me. I was quite aware of the art world, and I knew this kind of work would do little for my career. In the end I went back to that rock several days every week, and it became infinite. I painted, standing on that same rock for three days each week, for six years. Eventually I began to feel it wasn't feeding me anymore, that the paintings were just turning into nice likeable pieces, so I stopped going there. Somehow it's in the struggle with what we don't understand that we begin to find a sense of what it means to be alive. By then I had a job as a janitor at the NY Studio School on 8th Street and I took classes there and they gave me a studio. I started doing collages thinking about the space, the movement, the light and the sense of time that I experienced when I was

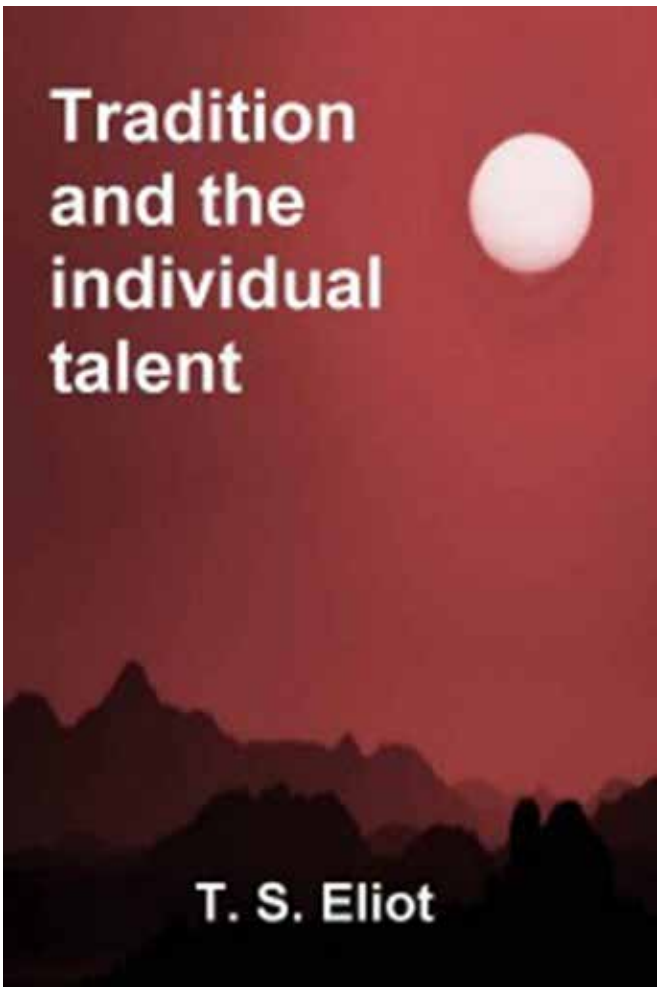
Carroll Sockwell: Untitled *(1973)*
(image: Wiki commons)

I'm teaching students in China from my basement right now. It's true that New York is not the same dominant force that it once was, but from my perspective, there still is no other place that I know of where the topsoil is so thick and so fertile.

standing on the rock. That was the beginning of a long journey toward the work that I have been doing since the flood. After 9 or 10 years, I had a residency at Yellowstone National Park. There was nothing but the studio, the buffalo, and the thermal features. My work started to calm down. The color slowed down. After six weeks I came back to my studio. There was a small piece of steel on the floor that I had drawn on a bit and spilled something on before I'd left for Yellowstone. It had rusted and it now had the blacks of the charcoal mixed with the siennas and umbers of the rusting steel, and it made me think of the thermal features in Yellowstone.

I packed everything up and started working only on steel. It seemed like the door opened up again. That was the spring before we moved to Italy on my first sabbatical. In Italy the sculptor Beverly Pepper helped me find cheap steel and I began using the refrigerator in the house as my supply cabinet. I layered things on the steel, poured on red wine, vinegar, tomato paste, whatever. I embedded found materials in stucco on the steel. I left it out in the rain to see what would happen. I talked about the way that nature interacts with things, saying that in the end nature takes everything back. I talked about not knowing what would happen and how that was a good thing, and how Thoreau said that the only people who ever get any place interesting are the ones who get lost.

And then the flood happened. Those ideas about nature taking everything back, about not knowing what would happen next, and about getting lost being half the fun, had come around and bit me in the throat. Losing 25 years of work, along with the history of your family, is crushing. It wasn't just a crisis. It was the crisis. Nothing meant anything to me anymore. I began peeling the destroyed photographs apart trying to salvage something, but nothing was salvageable. After about three months I suddenly realized that these destroyed images contained everything I'd spent the preceding two decades looking for. I began blowing them up digitally to make them huge. I didn't know what they had once been, but they had transformed into something else. My daughter thinks I was saying "you can't get me that easy". They had the color of the collages and the density and sense of time in the steel pieces, but they also had my life and the life of my family embedded in them. The underlying structure from destroyed images allowed me to go back to painting in a new way. I could retain everything that I loved about painting: light, form, color, content, without reinventing somebody else's wheel. It wasn't just raw paint being poured on a canvas, or mild acids in a process-driven attack on a sheet of steel, or a digital blow-up of a smaller image. The image is now discovered and submerged, refined but not finished, through the act of painting and, I hope, is touching on the metaphysical in some sense. What I am doing now is something that I can't define, but I know it is work that I could never have done before. It took everything that had happened in my life to bring it to this point, as well as a willingness to let it happen.



BR: You talked about moving to New York in the 1970s. Do you still have to live in New York to have a presence?

DK: Before I left New York I asked a much older artist, George McNeil, if he thought I should accept a teaching job in DC. He answered absolutely not – "You will disappear if you leave!". Then he started talking about people he knew who had left, mentioning one artist after another. At the end of the conversation he said, with a surprised look on his face, "you know, I think almost everybody I know left New York as soon as they could afford it". When I moved to DC from New York in the late 1980s I got to know two artists who had moved there from New York before me: Jacob Kainen and Carroll Sockwell. Jacob was of the AbEx generation and a big deal in DC, and Carroll became a good friend. We felt an immediate connection as artists. Carroll was on a quickly ascending career trajectory. Sadly he committed suicide by jumping off a bridge into Rock Creek Park. Early on they both told me I should leave Washington as soon as possible and get back to New York. I couldn't really afford to leave my DC job supporting my family, but I kept my studio in New York for several years. I have always returned to New York at least once a month. We talk like virtual interconnectivity diminishes the need for real life space, but something always seems to happen when I physically go to New York that doesn't happen in other ways. I found my current gallery because I happened to walk into a show where a gallerist I knew had just hung up the phone after being told that one of her artists wouldn't be ready for her scheduled show. I got my first teaching job there because I was sweeping a stairway, standing between two people who were trying to figure out how to fill a teaching slot. Those things would never have happened online. It's like they say, "95% of success is showing up". It's hard to show up if you're not there. There are other cities that have some of that same kind of presence. We do live in a global context, and technology continues to change things radically – Zoom alone has eliminated distance in an unimaginable way. I'm teaching students in China from my basement right now. It's true that New York is not the same dominant force that it once was, but from my perspective, there still is no other place that I know of where the topsoil is so thick and so fertile.

For a hundred and fifty years we have been presented with this binary choice: Complete rejection of tradition or mindless deference to tradition. But Eliot's essay talks about the difference between novelty and originality; that originality doesn't negate tradition. Instead it takes everything that precedes it and builds on it and in so doing alters how we perceive everything that preceded it. Originality, as opposed to novelty, requires the synthesis of a lifetime of acquired experience.

BR: You've previously mentioned T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Can you talk about that in terms of your own work?

DK: Today, if it is read at all, it is criticized because of its Eurocentrism. But he says much more in that essay. It has to be read in its historical context, and interpreted through our own contemporaneity, which will also one day need to be understood in a historical context. What that essay gave me was a recognition of the rampant confusion between novelty and originality in the contemporary art world. For a hundred and fifty years we have been presented with this binary choice: complete rejection of tradition or mindless deference to tradition. But Eliot's essay talks about the difference between novelty and originality; that originality doesn't negate tradition. Instead it takes everything that precedes it and builds on it and in so doing alters how we perceive everything that preceded it. Originality, as opposed to novelty, requires the synthesis of a lifetime of acquired experience. This one of the reasons that, as an artist, teaching has been important to me – Not because I have an agenda to impart, but because when I am talking with students I am forced to synthesize ideas and a lifetime of acquired experience in a way that is not possible when I'm standing alone in my studio. And the synthesis of those ideas, experiences and relationships follows me back into my studio work. We're all just vessels. Experience is poured into us and if we can build on that, then meaningful art has a chance to emerge.

BR: What can artists learn from studio art programs?

DK: I was at the Studio School when Mercedes Matter was running it. I remember one of my teachers, Esteban Vicente, conducting a Tuesday afternoon critique seminar. He once was fired (not by Mercedes). In his thick, elegant Spanish accent he said to me "Who

Rembrandt van Rijn: Titus as a Monk
(Rijksmuseum Amsterdam: image: Wiki commons)

are deeze people? Dey can't fire me!" and the following Tuesday Esteban just showed up at his usual seat and continued to teach his seminar anyway. He just kept coming back. He wasn't being paid, but it wasn't a matter of money anyway since the school was always on the edge of bankruptcy. You know, "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose". Esteban outlasted everybody. So I learned you have to keep coming back, no matter what.

The summer studio art program I built at Chautauqua is another case in point. We were always tight for money, but as the artistic director I had freedom and flexibility that just doesn't exist in a university setting. It wasn't a democracy. There were no committees. In over thirty years the administration never asked me to explain why I did one thing or another. They often told me "you're out of money", but they never questioned the rubric that I set up. In many ways, during the three decades that it was my school, it was modeled on the Studio School as I'd experienced it –pretty much a benevolent dictatorship. The phrase doesn't sound good, but throughout history I think the best art programs have been influenced by a particular individual's vision. I was able to cherry pick phenomenal faculty every summer and never once had a meeting about who would be picked. Former students consistently say it was the salient catalyst in their early evolution. That wouldn't have been possible if we'd run it in a more democratic way – in other words, another thing that I've learned from studio art programs is that the lowest common denominator is not the best way to realize vision.

BR: What do you think about current MFA programs that seem the sine qua non as a jumping off point for a "career"?

DK: I was already teaching at the Studio School when I got my MFA. I got the degree because I was starting to see that some older, established artists were being turned down for teaching positions because they didn't have a degree. It was as simple as that. I did it for the wrong reason: I got a degree so I could get a job. At the same time, through my own earlier experience I came to believe that the real purpose in going to art school is the community, your peer group. That has driven all of the programs I have been involved with since then. In an MFA program the faculty have a new group of students every year, and they eventually forget most of their names. They have hundreds, if not thousands, of former students. But as a graduate student you only have the one or two dozen people with whom you went through school. If it's a good program they become your community, the artists you still talk to twenty years later when no one is looking at your work, you just lost your gallery, your adjunct position was cancelled, the studio rent just doubled, and the abyss is looking ominous. At their best MFA programs can create a community that gets you through the dark times.

Today MFA programs are in crisis. Too many people think it's a ticket to a career. If you believe an MFA will get you a career or a tenure track teaching job, you're dreaming. There's a lot more to it than that, and most artists aren't cut out to be teachers anyway. It's popular to say that there aren't any jobs any more. But there never were many jobs. The biggest problem for MFA programs isn't the lack of jobs: It's the corporatization of education in America. The academics, from the French Academy to the contemporary academy, like to have everything clearly laid out. The academy loves to have it planned, justified and explained, balanced and pigeon-holed: a structure that basically is at odds with the entire creative process. Corporatized academic power structures look to other universities for validation and justification. Everybody wants to feel secure in the struggle to emulate the next guy up the food chain in order to replace him. That creates uniformity. It's disconcerting to see a lot of the same work being done by different people in different places as young artists struggle to find a way to function in the boxes that have been created by the institutionalization of graduate level art education.

Then there is the fact that faculty who came of age at the height of the deconstruction theory wave of the 1990s are teaching what is naïvely called "cutting edge", in other words a formula for looking radical, when radicality, which is the invention of something new, can't be taught. The notion of progress by eliminating / deconstructing / appropriating / denying / disempowering that which precedes you was originally intended to be the antidote for the 19th century academy. Now this idea has itself become the 21st century academy, every bit as full of dogmatic navel gazing as any of the 19th-century European academies. There's a lot of novelty but not much originality.

If I were looking for an MFA program today I would look for one that is as radically different from the others as I could find. I would look for a place that has something extraordinarily unique about it, a place that engages participants not just with the last 15 years but one that also includes everything from the cave paintings to the present. I would try to find a way to spend time with the history of my discipline in a first-hand manner by actually situating myself in other cultures. My ideal program would take place in a different country every semester. And there would definitely be no final the-

Don Kimes: Equality, 1988-2020
Acrylic and ink on paper collaged onto canvas

sis statement, because let's face it, no one becomes an artist in two years. Rembrandt said about painting that you can't separate a perfect conclusion from a perfect beginning. Coming up with a final thesis statement and exhibition in two years is just an academic security blanket. Working out a good beginning is all that can be expected in an MFA program.

BR: Who did you study with? What did you learn?

DK: One is very lucky to have one or two great teachers. For me the stars were aligned and I had many more than that. I went to five different schools, but as I've said, the place that had the greatest impact was the Studio School of the 1970s. There I met dozens of artists, but the ones who had the greatest impact were the ones who had a strong conviction that art was the most important thing in the world, that the location of a mark on a piece of paper was a life and death struggle. They weren't teaching me how to do what they did. Yes, they spoke a lot about form, space, pressure, structure – all modernist ideas, but they weren't thinking of these things as art. They were each giving me a language. Gretna Campbell taught me a lot about light and movement, the endless battle that takes place in the chaos of nature. Nicolas Carone introduced me to the world of metaphysics. From Ruth Miller and Andrew Forge I began to understand something about the possibilities of form and content but even more about a belief in oneself, even if you are alone. Leland Bell was all about the pulse of color and movement (and I also learned a lot about jazz from him). George McNeil helped me to refrain from trusting my first efforts because "they are almost always too conscious, too literal, and too shallow." He pushed me to understand the importance of delving deeper into a place where things can't be conceptually explained. Peter Agostini talked about the power of concept and the ability to marry it to a form. And then there was Mercedes Matter who in her unyielding passion and total incorruptibility, taught me not to acquiesce to anything – that the slightest change alters everything else in a way that makes painting go on forever, a Sisyphean struggle which ultimately gave me permission to never stop exploring. And all of them taught me about the difference between the art world and the world of art.

Barbara Rose was a prominent American art historian and critic. Her first book, American Art Since 1900, published 1967, was followed by more than 20 monographs on artists, and many more books, exhibition catalogue essays and pieces of art journalism. She has previously been a contributing editor at Art in America, Vogue, and Artforum, art critic for New York Magazine, art editor at the Partisan Review and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Art.

Don Kimes' work is on view 12/03/2020 – 01/09/2020 at Denise Bibro Gallery, 529 W 20th Street, New York, NY. He has given over part of the gallery to one of his former teachers, Gretna Campbell (1922-1987) in addition to his own exhibition.)

The Marvel-ous Future of Cinema: How One Corporation's Pseudo-Mythical Universe Will Control the Rest of History

Scott Winfield Sublett

With Marvel's products increasingly described as serious and important, the Marvel Universe has become in art what the church once was in society: an all-encompassing cosmology that gives meaning to your life. The watershed moment in the genre was when Batman became dark. Suddenly, silly kid stuff had philosophical import.

Earlier this year I bought as much as I could afford of pandemic-depressed Disney stock at $101. I'm a university professor, so… not much. But if it gets down to 101 again, which it won't, buy, buy, buy, because the future is written and Disney owns it. Their domination of world culture through gobbling up folk tales and excreting them as song-y, drippy cartoons is, however, no longer the A-story. The new thing is that they're busily making Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* into the postmodern (yet, ironically, ancient) answer to Aristotle's *Poetics*: a new-old template for all dramatic narratives from now on—and this new mythology will still hold sway, gentle reader, when you have left your Disney shares to your ungrateful children, who will laze poolside discussing the deficiencies of your parenting style.

If you're like me, you dimly recall first hearing the term 'Marvel Universe' a few years back, and feeling faintly threatened and annoyed. Marvel is, of course, the comic book colossus behind the superheroes Iron Man, Hulk, Thing, Daredevil, Deadpool, Fantastic Four, Guardians of the Galaxy, Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, The X-Men, and The Punisher (which is also the name of a popular bedroom toy). Arrayed against the superheroes is a phalanx of super villains including Green Goblin, Red Skull, Kingpin, Ultron, Magneto, Mandarin, Thanos, Annihilus, and a pair of villains who have apparently been granted evil PhDs, Doctors Octopus and Doom. See what you've been missing with your nose buried in snooty galleries, dusty museums and illuminated manuscripts of Dante's *Inferno*?

The superbeings inhabit fictional spaces that overlap and are cleverly knitted together into a beyond-epic fictional whole: hence, without irony, the term 'Marvel Universe'. It's ever-expanding, like the real universe, but ever so much more profitable and meaningful for Earth. And, as in newfangled, whizbang astrophysics, there's more than one universe, because another thing Disney bought is Lucasfilm, which is Star Wars. Disney failed to acquire Harry Potter, but has high hopes for the Catholic Church, which they literally can afford if the Pope is willing to sell. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, is well beyond even Disney's means.) The universes comprise comic books, movies, video games, TV shows, theme parks, cruise ships and merchandise. They will potentially influence more human beings than all the rest of art made through all the millennia because, unlike all that tatty, old art, these unified universes are so huge and offer so many hours of slick, seductive content that you can live in them all day, every day of your life … if only Mom can be persuaded to leave the grilled cheese sandwich outside the door. And here's the kicker: it's so comprehensive that it shoulders aside all other content. Once they've got you, there's no time to consume anything else. Think Amazon.

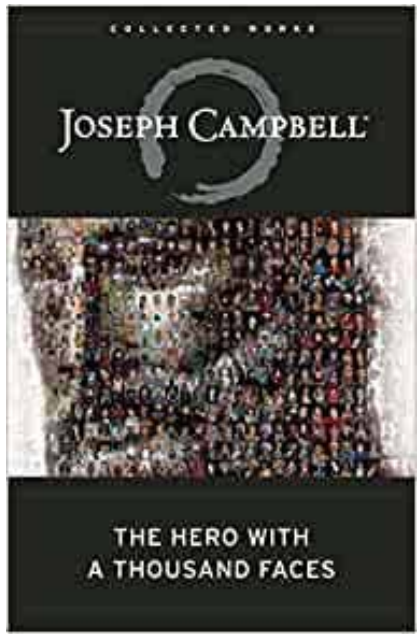
But is it cinematic art?

Marvel Universe (Civil War)
(Image: Wki commons)

A little before the turn of the 21st century, I started informally polling my undergraduates as to whether video games were art. The answer then was no. Now, it's yes, and has been yes for several years. With Marvel's products increasingly described as serious and important, the Marvel Universe has become in art what the church once was in society: an all-encompassing cosmology that gives meaning to your life. The watershed moment in the genre was when Batman became dark. Suddenly, silly kid stuff had philosophical import.

Someone must be blamed! Postmodernism? Warhol? J'accuse George Lucas. The seminal moment was when he announced that Joseph Campbell was his Yoda and that Star Wars was an onion skin tracing of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* That was probably the moment that the pseudo-mythical narrative became the future of cinema—the power of myth co-opted by pseudo-myth. But really, they're both made-up, so in what meaningful way does pseudo-myth differ from myth, apart from who gains income from them? In any case, it was probably Lucas who made pseudo-mythicism the dominant style of American (and therefore world) cinema: comic books, superheroes, and wizards. In addition, for the seduction of what American retailers delicately term the urban market, the patronizing, culturally-appropriating tokenism of Black Panther, which has the added benefit of appealing to woke members of the chattering classes. The cultural relevance of Black Panther conveniently justifies elevating comic books to serious literature, which is useful if these woke members want to keep their jobs. Comic book mythology is a boy-dominated style but girls are welcome if they're pretty, as was Princess Leia, the first erotic object for a particular generation of males that is now pushing 60. There she was, handily imprinted on the bedclothes. Where did I put that Punisher? Today's lads have the beauteous Storm, one of the X-Men but quite clearly an X-Woman, va-va-voom. Of course she's not just hot, she's also empowered, which makes her acceptably feminist. Maybe that's why, despite the male gaze, many girls seem almost as into this stuff as the boys. Nobody doesn't want a superpower.

The students in my screenwriting classes are instructive examples of the consequences of all this. A surprising number of them have become detached from reality and dominated by magical thinking—the fantasy that they're born special rather than just nothings manipulated by elites. My erstwhile rule that a writer's first screenplay should be drawn from life, just as a painter starts with life drawing, became unenforceable, oh, maybe five years ago, because a lot of the young people had no real lives to draw upon. All they ever had done was play video games. They wanted to write speculative fiction in which one discovers that one is the Anointed One, predestined for greatness and secretly possessed of a superpower, or that one is really a princess and didn't know it. The elevation in skill and status that comes with those discoveries is achieved without the drudgery of hard work and practice. Superpowers are nice because you're born with them or bitten by a spider. Oh, it comes with responsibilities, it's not all it's cracked up to be—it's deep and philosophical. Anyway, there I was, in my quaint way, telling students that writers write better, faster and truer if they write what they know, not yet realizing that what they knew no longer came from life, or even good books. They wanted to rehash the conventions of the Marvel and Star Wars (and Harry Potter and DC) universes.



Joseph Campbell:
The Hero with a Thousand Faces

You might be saying, "It's only a movie, Ingrid," but it's bigger than that. The international market includes China, with a billion-and-a-half customers and a government touchy about content that threatens its power. Just as Hollywood during its golden age had to soft-pedal its racial liberalism to placate southern theater owners, questioning dictatorial regimes will be out of the question in a cinema that depends on worldwide distribution to make back its nut. They'll be hard on Dr Doom, but soft on the real villains. In other words, while sci-fi may be in, dystopianism is out. And it's worse and deeper even than that—bad enough to wreck the world and here's why. The human mind makes sense of life through stories, and the pertinence of the cinema's stories is being systematically degraded with childish, magical thinking. When the stories stop making sense, so does the world. The proof is QAnon.

People outside the US might not know what that is. QAnon is a crazy, ongoing, ever-expanding mythical online universe in which liberal politicians are secret satanists who molest and cannibalize toddlers, and a superhero named Donald Trump goes on secret missions to stop them. You can't make this stuff up—only, apparently, you can. Uncounted millions of Americans believe it. There's nothing your puny painting or sculpture can do to stop them, any more than you can stop your neighbor from being a Methodist, a Mason or a Scientologist with a statue, unless of course you smite him with the statue.

CUT TO: MAN with automatic WEAPON, entering pizza parlor in Washington. He obtained secret, special clues from the internet! He's special. A hero.The Anointed One.

CUT TO: BASEMENT. Hilary Clinton screeches, "Hail, Satan!" and sheds her white pantsuit, revealing the glistening alligator hide that covers her body as she molests babies and eats them. George Soros is there, too, and Angela Merkel, AKA, Hitler's granddaughter. Life and cinema merge as you cock your automatic weapon (do guns still cock?). You'll figure it out. Ready…aim…

The Virtual Outdoors

Pendery Weekes

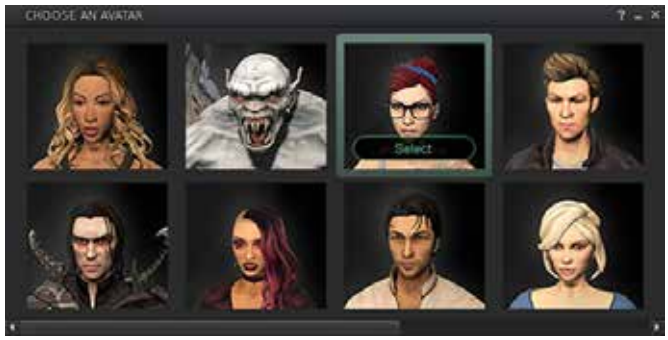
Just as depicted in the virtual life platform Second Life (https://secondlife.com/), launched in 2003 and still going strong, today we too are living our own second lives online, doing just about everything imaginable in front of our screens. In Second Life people can "discover incredible experiences, fascinating people, and vibrant communities in this vast virtual world". Second lifers use an avatar to be creative, find entertainment, have social relationships, buy and sell real estate, take courses and also run a business, both real and pretend. Oh dear, it sounds just like what we have been doing since March 2020. As the days go by, I feel like I'm losing brain cells to this flat, germfree existence. In a moment of lucidity, I wonder how much longer we can take all this virtual living. Is it living? Are we all little avatars darting about our screens?

It also makes me wonder what is happening to our art world. Are we supposed to get excited about works of art that we can zoom into and see in all the fine details, in the void of ethereal space?

Out of desperation I find myself accepting an invitation to the Abu Dhabi Art fair; curiosity and visual boredom got the better of me. I was going to the 12th edition of this enterprising art fair with Liviana Martin, our Milan editor, and Daniel Nanavati, our European editor. Somehow it didn't work out for Liviana or Daniel; they didn't quite make it to this virtual event, not surprising, as I barely made it myself. Flying into Abu Dhabi from London, with a view of the turquoise coloured sea, I looked down with wonder at all the beauty and vast expanse of buildings on this desert kingdom with its reclaimed land of coastal salt flats, quite a contrast to the lush Cornish landscape where I live. The day before the press review was due to start, the management of the art fair wrote that it had been postponed to the following day, perhaps for unknown technical issues? The press review before the fair's opening was reset for the following day at 10 am GST. Unfortunately, GST isn't Greenwich Mean Time as I had erroneously thought, but Gulf Standard Time. Such ignorance on my part meant I definitely missed the starting event, impossible to attend four hours late, though I could go and listen to the talks that had taken place, also other talks happening during the fair. If it was all online, why did a specific listening time matter anyway?

Having recently turned down a virtual Christmas carolling event in Zoom, and after attending numerous meetings in Zoom, Skype and other meeting platforms that I haven't appreciated greatly, I accepted the invitation to Abu Dhabi Art, even though it was another virtual event. Since the beginning of the lockdown, the *New Art Examiner*, like everyone else in this sector, has received many invitations to virtual exhibitions in galleries and museums across the world. I have avoided most of these shows, while I respect the great effort people are taking to try and create the effect of a real visit somehow, online.

However, notwithstanding the fact that I truly hate virtual anything, lately I've been pining to go just about anywhere (I had



Choose your Avatar

wanted to say, go virtually anywhere, in the classic use of the word virtually); I was hoping Abu Dhabi might help satisfy this unfulfilled desire of mine. Wondering if I might have to cover my head for the webcam, I thoroughly researched this aspect of my appearance and found it wasn't necessary.

Before even attending the fair, I imagined the benefits of not having aching feet from walking hours and hours around art pavilions; perhaps this is the best part of an art fair being held virtually. I would also miss meeting people, seeing old friends, art dealers, gallery owners, artists, hearing people's comments and most of all, seeing the artworks in person.

Going through the exhibition pages of online viewing rooms, I click in and out of exhibition booths, but skip many; enough is enough. I can't take the sterile, lifeless artworks on display on my screen in a pseudo representation of an art fair. Sadly, before really going anywhere in the show, my finger is already tired of clicking, zooming in and zooming out of the displays. I am left feeling empty and dejected, discouraged at what our lives have become.

As a follow up the offices of the fair sent an email asking for feedback: "How likely is it that you would recommend Abu Dhabi Art to a friend or colleague?" I told them that if it's virtual again, I

Part of the virtual exhibition

wouldn't recommend it, not because of anything they did wrong or did not do, but because virtual just doesn't cut it for me, while as an attendee in person, I would definitely recommend it. I can't wait to go next year.

Tim Schneider from artnet writes, "A new report brings quantifiable proof to a feeling that has shuddered through the art market since the darkest depths of the spring shutdown: that the online-viewing-room industrial complex is collapsing under its own weight, and that everyone is suffering from it." After my visit, or rather non-visit, to Abu Dhabi, I felt like a failure; I wasn't able to go through with the online viewing room experience. Gone was the poetry, the magic and beauty of what I can sometimes see in an artwork. Even when I don't like a painting, I might have a strong feeling of dislike. Abu Dhabi was totally devoid of any feeling or passion.

Instead, back in Devon in the UK over Christmas, while anti-socially distancing during a walk on the moor, I met Nick Anderton. Without gallery shows or a well-positioned studio, he makes it as a virtual artist and sells real paintings widely around the world. He has no need for the in-presence people; it's enough for his buyers to see a flat photograph online to appreciate his work and to click, make a purchase. I find this way of promoting artwork lifeless and unexciting, but what I find extraordinary is that Nick is successful. Leaving criticism apart, I admire anyone who is able to make a living as an artist online in these times. It sounds like he has chosen the right vehicle to make it all work for him. The social media play their part, with Instagram being his major platform. It makes me wonder how people get the urge to own and fall in love with a painting, seen only online. Are people conditioned by the reviews on Instagram that are taking the place of reviews in traditional spaces like the *New Art Examiner*?

Our lives have taken on such a virtual dimension today that almost everything we do in our lives can be done online, or can it? Eating a meal out with friends can now be eaten on our own, safely at home while chatting together with our friends in Zoom, visiting an elderly relative in residential care, likewise with work, shopping, birthday parties, school, art galleries, or even going on a trip to Bali or to Cuba. It no longer makes any sense to me. Perhaps I need to be reprogrammed or given a new avatar, so that I can fit into the new mould required of us today or even better, function as a hologram. The contrast between what is now virtual and the memory (now fading) of what real art is like in person is humbling. It's all a fake now and we're all little avatars, hiding behind our masks where we can no longer touch, smell, feel or see from different perspectives, but can only see and imagine life as a series of photos tastefully shown in carousel.

Nick Anderton: Moonlight Mooring

Looking at artwork from a distance, like looking at a beach from a plane, is not like being on the beach and touching the water, same for a painting, a sculpture, a performance. I'm aiming to go in person next year to Abu Dhabi Art, and to as many in person shows as I can possibly go to; then I will have something real to write about, as I realize that I have lost nearly one year of my life in this abyss and paralysis of activity.

Abu Dhabi Art, 19 – 26 November 2020 and Nick Anderton on Dartmoor, December 2020

Four Epidemics

Frances Oliver

There have been several epidemics in my lifetime – among them SARS, Ebola, AIDS, Swine Flu, Bird Flu – but here I will mention only those that, though they did not make me ill, in one respect or another changed my life.

The first was polio. When I was a child there was as yet no vaccine and polio was 'endemic' – it came every summer, bringing disability and death in its wake. I have a cousin who caught polio as a small child; it left her with a paralyzed leg, and game and enterprising though she always was, in her 70s she is now in a wheelchair. My own direct exposure to polio was in a long-ago Vermont summer when my little sister and I were campers and our mother a 'psychological counsellor' at a rather flaky and eccentric camp run by fellow European refugees, the summer camp that inspired my novel *The Ghosts of Summer.* Near the season's end, our pool was temporarily closed for cleaning, and for swimming the camp sent us to the municipal town pool. A few days later, a boy at camp became suddenly very ill. One of my room-mates, Dotty, who was his 'girlfriend' (in those innocent days all this meant for pre-teens was that you were partners at the camp square dance on Saturday night) sneaked into the sick-room to visit him and sat down on his bed before she was sternly ordered out.

The next person admitted was my mother. Seeing the poor boy at-

Child recovering from Polio, USA:
(Image: NPR)

tempt to drink cocoa, which at once came back out through his nose, she guessed what was wrong with him – and that quarantine would be imposed next day, as soon as the expected doctor had come. My mother, who had lost three babies out of five, was taking no chances on the remaining two. Dotty and I were told to secretly collect our things and go around midnight to my mother's room. A taxi took us to the station – my mother, sister, Dotty's mother and me – and we went to stay with friends of Dotty's family in Connecticut. What only Dotty and I knew and did not mention was Dotty's sick-room visit. We were quite possibly bringing polio with us.

Dotty's mother's friends had two children of their own but seemed quite unconcerned about our germs, though Dotty and I both developed slight fevers in the following week, which might well have been light polio cases. We will never know. Among the quarantined campers left behind, three did come down with polio. One was left paralyzed. Dotty's boyfriend died.

We never went back to the camp. Already disliked by the town which mistrusted foreigners, especially German speakers, the camp was blamed for the town's own polio cases, and it moved to Massachusetts. From then on we rented houses in Vermont, together with friends, and eventually bought one. Far from being persona non grata with the camp directors, my mother continued her friendly relations with them. The school she later founded in Detroit was run by members of the progressive but scatter-brained family.

It was only I who ever felt vaguely guilty for jumping the quarantine.

The next epidemic I remember well was cholera, in Turkey in 1970. We had lived there on and off for several years, first going to climb mountains and then to hole up and write, and lastly because my husband was commissioned to write a Turkey guide. His book was nearly finished and we were thinking of a Greek island for the winter when cholera arrived – it was said, from Bulgaria. In Istanbul, the first sign – our flat overlooked the Bosphorus – was a Bulgarian ship flying yellow flags; the flags that for centuries struck fear into hearts at international ports.

Cholera is curable if treated in time; the critical thing is to keep the

We violate natural barriers at our peril, and we don't learn; just as we don't learn that ever leaner public services, penny-wise and pound-foolish, leave us when emergency comes, as it does, and there is no slack – spending infinitely more than we saved; just as we don't learn that our globalized, giant corporations, rapid-turn-around economy with its intensive farming and vast movements of goods, animals, and travellers is out of tune with nature altogether.

body from dehydrating. Farther East, cholera was frequent, but Turkey had had no cases in about 50 years and the medical profession was at first at a loss how to cope. We had cholera vaccinations – luckily, if I remember rightly, the vaccine soon ran out. Istanbul was flooded with rumours, among them that one person afflicted was the cook at the Hilton. Newspapers published horror stories; villagers who had found jobs in the metropolis rushed back to their villages. We stopped going to restaurants but continued to socialise with friends.

Winter in Greece was no longer on the cards, and my ever-anxious parents sent money for our three-year-old daughter and me to fly back to Austria, where my late grandmother's empty villa was our temporary European base. My husband had to stay on as the borders were closed to motor traffic and he could not abandon his Land Rover, vital for his work.

When our daughter and I arrived in Vienna, we had just enough money for a train to upper Austria, for which we were too late. In a shared taxi I blurted out our woes to a friendly man who turned out to be an opera singer, performing that night and staying in a posh Vienna hotel. He immediately offered to share his room with us. At first (being then the kind of young blonde who is subjected to stares and whistles) I was a little suspicious; but he assured me he didn't at all mind sleeping on chairs and my daughter and I would have the bed.

And that was how it was. We set off for Gmunden in the morning after a luxurious and peaceful night. Kind opera singer, I don't remember your name but you are not forgotten and have my eternal thanks.

Re-hydrating a patient with cholera

My husband arrived safely in Austria some weeks later but without his almost completed manuscript – the briefcase holding it disappeared during intensive customs searches at the Bulgarian border. Fortunately he still had his notes and the book was only delayed a few months, but as the commission was a lump sum payment it had to cover those months as well. Our winter was spent in the freezing cold villa on the Traunsee and – here again lucky – we were able to get a small Istanbul flat from departing friends in the spring.

Cholera in Turkey did give rise to some cases in Western Europe, Italy, as I remember, being the worst affected. I don't know how Italian health services were then but one UK tabloid published an article by an English tourist who did get cholera and was treated in an Italian hospital. Her tale of horror was front-page stuff. However, as cholera spreads only through food and water, with decent hygiene and sewage systems European cases remained few, and this epidemic was soon forgotten.

Then in 2000, when I was living in Cornwall, came Foot and Mouth. All movement of cattle was banned, and Europe banned imports of British meat. Foot and Mouth is a livestock disease not fatal to cattle who generally recover, but EU and British regulations demanded the slaughter of all animals affected. This is not universal; some countries opt for vaccination and testing. The Blair government went for a policy of 'contiguous slaughter'; the killing of not only infected herds but all others within – according to many experts, an unjustifiably wide – distance of the sick ones.

The results were appalling. Rare breeds did get some exemptions but many carefully bred and beloved herds were wiped out, perhaps never to be replaced. By August 2001, over five million animals, most of them healthy, had been slaughtered. Killing on such a scale could not be anything but cruel; and the loss was devastating to many farmers and those whose jobs depended on them. Others also suffered; the corpses were burned in giant pyres, creating pollution, dioxins, and a fearful stench. Some commentators observed that the policy favoured large farms which got generous compensation, while destroying many small ones, and that it may have been inspired by sheer brutal economics; after recovery cows are less productive.

Tourism was hit as well, not least in Cornwall. The summer before the epidemic, friends of mine had embarked on a promising project, an ecological English language school, with a program including nature walks, WWOOF-ing, etc. I was to be one of their B&B hosts. The first three students I hosted, one Spanish and two Swiss, were easy and very interesting guests. Two I saw again later and could I have seen them more, would have become friends. I looked forward to many more such summers. Then, with the cattle disease, footpaths were closed, volunteer farm work out of the question. The school could not afford to lose two or three seasons. My friends soon moved up-country and went on to other careers.

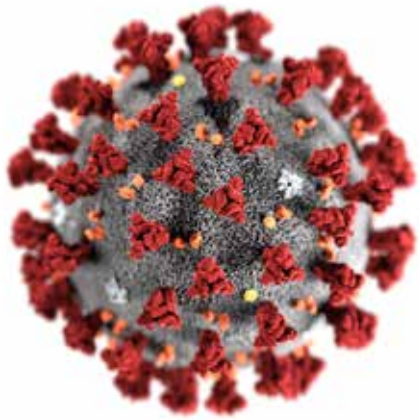
And now there is Covid which affects us all, with its cancellations and lockdowns and, of course, its deaths.

In four epidemics, what have I observed? First, the unexpected should be considered and prepared for, and is not. From the camp directors who might have thought that sending a hitherto mostly isolated group of children to a municipal pool in polio season was asking for trouble, to the Blair government whose failure to control cattle movements early and insistence on the gruesome, wasteful

Image: Ben Gambel (Wiki commons)

and destructive contiguous slaughter policy, authorities show themselves wanting. It was only good fortune and not good sense (remember that famous picture of John Gummer feeding his daughter a hamburger?) that we were spared what would have been the worst epidemic of all, CJD, or Mad Cow Disease, which humans can get from infected meat. CJD is a formerly rare illness which began to spread when sheep offal was incorporated into cattle feed. The huge number of cases feared did not, mercifully, materialize; but among my newspaper clippings from that time is a heart-breaking list of 80 deaths from that incurable and lethal premature dementia; they were aged 15 to 54.

We violate natural barriers at our peril, and we don't learn; just as we don't learn that ever leaner public services, penny-wise and pound-foolish, leave us when emergency comes, as it does, and there is no slack – spending infinitely more than we saved; just as we don't learn that our globalized, giant corporations, rapid-turnaround economy with its intensive farming and vast movements of goods, animals, and travellers is out of tune with nature altogether. So now there is Covid. Have we learned anything? Or will we? I leave it to the reader to guess.



This CDC illustration reveals ultrastructural morphology exhibited by coronaviruses.
(imaging: Alissa Eckert and Dan Higgins)

"Invitadas - Invited", Miss-steps Taken in Vindication of Women Artists

by Susana Gómez Laín

After having my temperature tested, my hands washed in hydro-alcohol and my mask well adjusted I entered, full of joy and hope after a series of lockdowns. The exhibition "Invitadas" (invited) at the Prado Museum is an event procrastinated and yearned for, wrongly expected to be of a radical feminism. It not only showcases the works of important unknown women painters from the 14th and first half of the 20th century in Spain, but also exposes their general significance as muses in art, mothers, wives, workers, companions and even rulers. The curator also highlights their continual fight for recognition in all fields of society. Their attempt (the curators add a touch of modern reconciliation) at fair criticism, sarcasm, simplicity and even humour in the final exhibition can be extended to almost all women of the time and the majority today. The exhibition is an outstretched hand, an offer of friendship, a truce. This approach is achieved.

Most of the magnificent works shown have been rescued from the cellars of the museum, or other cellars, demonstrating, as a metaphor, that the supposed victory of women is still far from being achieved and that even in such an iconic and universal place as The Prado we are still just invited to have a moment of glory and then, probably, led back to the cellars. I hope it is not going to be like that anymore and that this sublime exhibition serves to open eyes and minds and inaugurate a new salon in the museum where the invited can stay for good.

The honesty of the curator in choosing the title was for me the most important distraction because it is probably going to be misunderstood. I would have preferred a pious lie like Missed or a declaration of mea culpa like Discovered, but this is just a personal preference.

But it seems that in this annus horribilis everything goes wrong for all and misunderstandings do not stop here. The show was launched with another mistake in trusting the Reina Sofía Museum's classification of *La Marcha del Soldado* (A Soldier's Departure) as a woman's painting because the subject matter was condescendingly considered a family scene. In fact it is a canvas by a male painter, Adolfo Sánchez Megías, and was immediately retired as soon as the expert Concha Díaz discovered the error, though it had already hit the art headlines. Errors are human and, a bad that might do some good, this dance of identities and roles maybe serves as a proof that the difference in gender in art is not as visible on the canvas as it is outside of it.

The second error was the choice to put a reproduction of the oil on canvas *Falenas* by Carlos Verger Fioretti (1872-1929) on the publicity poster. Painted in 1920, it depicts a glamorous vamp of the

Falenas *by Carlos Verger Fioretti (1920). Publicity poster for "Invitadas"*

time whose occupation is to escort a sugar daddy. A Falena is entymologically a moth of slim body, long legs and weak wings. Great comparison. This stereotyped version of a woman, added to the male authorship of the work, puts this choice at the apex of inadequacy. Why did the male curator choose this specific canvas among all the feminine wonders? Until we know, the choice stands as indefensible.

A third mistake is to show, in an exhibition promoted, or supposedly devoted, to women painters, the works painted by men, even though they are excellent works from famous artists like the Madrazo brothers, Ignacio Zuloaga, José Gutiérrez-Solana or Antonio Fillol, among others which, at least, depict women or female

Franciso Ortill : Queen Juana La Loca confined at Tordesillas with her daughter, the Infanta Catalina (1906)

Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta: Woman from Madrid
Oil on canvas, (c. 1913)

scenes. This focus has been highly criticised in the papers and on forums, with good cause.

For the rest, you will see magnificent art works in different media, painted on different surfaces: sculptures, footage, miniatures, photographs and decorative arts such as embroidery showing exquisite technique, delicate detail and great sensibility, many of them recognized as important pieces in exhibitions of the period or shown in the National Exposition 1887, or in the First Exhibition of Feminist Painting in the Salón Amaré in 1903 in Madrid, but still unknown. You will discover that most of the female artists came either from the nobility, aristocracy from outside Spain. Even Queen María Cristina was a remarkable oil painter, as were daughters, wives or close relations of male artists; this was the only way they had to get into the artistic realm, considered outlandish for them, like the French Euphémie Muraton, Cécile Ferrère and Hélène Feillet, protected by the Spanish Queen in exile in Paris, Isabel II, who was as bad as a queen as she was a good and rare fervent supporter of female artists.

I particularly liked the great oil painting depicting flowers and fruits by María Luisa de la Riva, the tiny miniatures painted on ivory or metal by María Tomasa Älvarez de Toledo y Palafox, and the oil on panel *El Príncipe Imperial Napoleón Eugenio Luis Bonaparte a caballo* (1880) by the Spanish-Italian painter Francesca Stuart Sindici - exquisitely painted and unusual for the equestrian subject matter, banned for women at the time.

Others I have to mention are the oils and pastels of Rosario Weiss (goddaughter and pupil of Goya), Julia Alcayde o Lluisa Vidal, and the sculpture of Helena Sorolla.

Many thanks for rescuing from oblivion and doing historic justice to the pioneer filmmaker Alice Guy-Blaché, the first woman to direct a fiction film and a creator of magical short films. The best of all, for its topicality, originality, freshness, boldness and hilarity is the one called *Les Résultats du féminisme* (1906) where men and women change ordinary roles in society, giving rise to hilarious situations with a harsh critical subtext. Just brilliant and hidden for decades, it reminded me of some of the later Chaplin sketches. Please don't miss it or any of the others screened.

A note: The pandemic, with the capacity restrictions, has allowed us to have a more intimate and quiet experience of the artworks and the spaces. Take advantage, it won't last.

Amazons of the Avant-garde

Liviana Martin

The quote "Women are the vine around which everything revolves" by Leo Tolstoy welcomes us at the entrance. It is the leitmotif of the exhibition, which is divided into two parts. The first concerns the way in which the woman was represented in Russia as an artistic subject, the second exhibits the artists who were part of the extraordinary development of the avant-garde currents of the 20th century.

In the section entitled *The Sky*, the precious icons of the Mother of Christ and some saints, which were placed in homes as well as in churches, testify to the importance that religion had for the Russian people. From heaven to earth, majestic, almost sacred, the portraits of some of the tsarinas who reigned from the end of the 17th century to 1917 stare out at us: Catherine the Great is portrayed both in official clothes and in travelling clothes, the incarnation of a very powerful woman who often travelled within her empire. The first to paint the peasants as well as royals was Alexei Venetsianov, who taught drawing to the children of serfs. His work *Morning of the Lady of the House (1823)* depicts, for the first time in Russian art, a scene from the daily life of masters and peasants: in a room full of light, the painter's wife distributes the daily tasks to the young servants.

After the October Revolution, workers and peasants became the protagonists of many paintings by Kazimir Malevich, one of the greatest exponents of suprematism. His subjects are unreal, majestic and impersonal, like the saints in the icons. The proletarians become heroes and martyrs, giving birth to a new religion, the socialist state. *Girls in the field* and *Harvest* express the artist's vision, which gives an air of universality to the stylized human figures, taken out of time and space to represent the collective portrait of an ideal society.

While in Tsarist Russia the citizens were divided into nobles, clergy, bourgeois and peasants, 1917 swept this hierarchy away, but the distinction between workers, peasants and intelligentsia remained. There are images of poets, such as the beautiful portrait of Anna Achmatova, of musicians and workers: *Textile Workers* by Alexander Deyneka has an almost epic tone: the war had brought poverty and hunger, and the strike of the weavers of the Filo Rosso factory for the increase in wages and food rations started the October Revolution. The women, from mothers and wives (two chilling paintings on display: a young woman forced to marry an elderly man cries desperately before the wedding; a naked young woman is examined by the groom's family to make sure she has no imperfections), become the protagonists for the new order.

The colours of the installation change from grey to red as we enter the heart of the exhibition: the *Amazons of the avant-garde*, according to the definition of the Russian futurist poet Livsic, describes those artists who between 1910 and 1920, a short but dazzling period, contributed to the birth of avant-garde movements.

Vera Mukhina: L'operaio e la kolkotsiana, (The Worker and Kolkotsiana) (*1936)*
Sculptural group in bronze

In Russia women had always been involved in art: they embroidered, painted toys, made pictures, but until the 19th century they had not had access to training. Only at the end of the century, with the struggle for women's emancipation and periods of study spent abroad, were some women able to show their work in exhibitions, and these women generally belonged to the bourgeoisie. The decade 1910 to 1920 was crossed by an extraordinary wave of female creativity, before being crushed by communist power as degenerate art.

Natalia Goncharova was an example of a free and revolutionary woman. She lived most of her life in Paris, absorbing the influence of futurism and cubism, but merging it with the feeling and depth

Alexander Deyneka: Textile workers (1922). *Oil on canvas*

of the Russian soul. Peasant Women is a work created according to the neoprimitivist style, but the artist, painting the scenes of harvesting the fruits of the earth or shearing the sheep, inserts a deep symbolic meaning, in which the characters seem motionless, portrayed in a kind of ritual timelessness. Even in *Harvest* the bright colours and simple silhouettes, as in the children's drawings, reveal a close link with Russian folk art.

Olga Rozanova, in her short life (she died at 32), was, according to Malevich, one of the original interpreters of suprematism. Initially close to the Italian futurists, she emancipated herself from both this style and cubism, to arrive at pure abstraction. Her paintings, which the artist called 'non-objective paintings', are full of colour, energy, and geometric shapes that are wedged into each other.

A refined and intense work is *City of Night* by Aleksandra Ekster, in which cubo-futurism, orphism and abstraction are combined, with bright colours and an almost musical sense of composition, enriched by a simplicity of popular taste.

Zinaida Serebrjakova belonged to a wealthy bourgeois family, which after 1917 was reduced to poverty. The artist, after a trip to France, was censored and unable to return home or see her family for a long time. Her paintings demonstrate a classicism in the poses, an exaltation of the simple life of the fields, and the joy of living. In *Self-portrait* the painter pulls us inside the painting as if she had been surprised at a moment of her day. *Bathers and Dancers* reveals the opulence of the female physical forms, the statuesque protagonists.

In 1932, the CPSU banned all styles that referred to the West, in favor of socialist realism, chosen as the official expression of Soviet art. The most striking example of the new trend is the sculpture that closes the exhibition, *The Worker and the Kolkotsiana,* a work by Vera Mukhina, symbol of Russia at the Paris Expo in 1937. The two figures, holding the scythe and the hammer, made of steel, faced the German pavilion represented by the Nazi eagle.

Here ends the short but glorious adventure of the extraordinary Amazons of art. Only in recent years, after the thaw in relations, has their art been rediscovered and re-evaluated by the western public.

Divine and avant-garde; Women in Russian art. Palazzo Reale, Milan, October 28, 2020 - April 5, 2021. Admission € 14

Treecreeper

Time leapt from the poles
Sparked in black air,
Raced with the current
And moaned on the wires,
Trying to frighten
A petrified forest.

The present is tense

Trees move in time
To the beat of oceans
On rocks out-skirting the universe,
Where a lamp flashes emerald
Once every light year,
And there might be a radio
Waving on shore.

The cradle rocks, the branch snaps off,
Your gingerbread house blows down,
One girl was lost on a footpath
And a thousand wolves have died.

But the hours still sleep under roots,
And minutes creep up the bark,
Singing their loud song
From a white throat
In a brown cloak,
Looking for a spare moment
(Before they forget)
To press pages of leaves
Into resinous rings
That scent the whole wood
With the sound of bells.

Josephine Gardiner

Giambattista Tiepolo: the Painter of Fantasy

Graziella Colombo

Udine (Italy), Archbishop's Palace - The Sacrifice of Isaac

Giambattista (or Giovan Battista) Tiepolo was born in Venice in 1696 and died in Madrid in 1770. The exhibition of his work in Milan is a large and important show that will last until March 2021, unfortunately presently closed due to coronavirus infections stubbornly remaining at high levels.

In the 18th-century Venice, the cradle of many Italian artists,was no longer the powerful and rich Republic of the past, but a city in decline from a political, social and economic point of view. Yet it was still very lively culturally. It is the Venice of Canaletto, of his nephew Bernardo Bellotto and of Francesco Guardi, whose sister Tiepolo will marry. It is the Venice of the so-called *vedutisti*, painters who with their magnificent landscape and cityscape paintings recalled the lost grandeur of the city and were able to produce countless small pictures, which were the 'postcards' of their time, sold as souvenirs to tourists who came from Europe to Italy to discover and admire the countryside, her cities, monuments and artworks.

A precocious talent, Tiepolo fits into this artistic world. He developed a painting style far from the tradition of 17th-century chiaroscuro and dark backgrounds, and was full, instead, of colours and iridescent shades, of light, of fantasy, of rich environments that represented historical and mythological events and figures, sacred scenes, allegories of vices and virtues.

Having quickly become famous and sought after by noble families and European courts, Tiepolo worked extensively in his city, Venice, in Northern Italy and in Milan. The starting point of his work were the small oil paintings, or 'sketches' (small works of art), some of which are included in this exhibition, which he then used to create the great compositions that would become characteristic of his style: the frescoes and paintings for the walls and ceilings of the great halls in the palaces of the nobility and clergy, created to suit the taste of the patrons. A work that might at first glance seem superficial would then reveal the artist's theatrical and scenographic talent for making stories, as well as his pictorial ability. An

example is the sumptuous painting *Cleopatra's Banquet*, now preserved in the National Gallery in Melbourne, which clearly evokes the art of Veronese and Palladio, from whom Tiepolo often drew inspiration. His paintings, his frescoes and the stories are revealed and easily digested as you walk along the walls of the large rooms or while, with your nose up, you observe the large painted ceilings. This is the only way to admire the vivacity of the colours, the vital energy of the artist and his frequent use of *trompe l'oeil* to attract and involve the viewer.

Giambattista Tiepolo was a tireless painter with many commissions. Thanks to his flourishing and well-equipped workshop and many collaborators (including two of his nine sons, Lorenzo and Giandomenico, who would also become important painters) he was much in demand. A versatile artist, he also created portraits, altarpieces and sacred compositions for churches, especially in Venice. In Milan some of his frescoes in the noble palaces were unfortunately lost during World War 2 bombings, but others remain such as in Palazzo Clerici, a noble ancient residence, where the vault of the gallery hall shines with light and colour with the running of the Sun chariot, between white and pink clouds, mythological characters and allegories of the then known continents. Some works are also kept in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum, one of the most interesting and richest museums in Milan.

Tiepolo was also popular in the rest of Europe, and in 1752 he went to Wurzburg, Germany, to decorate the Rococo-style royal hall and most importantly to execute his most spectacular work: to paint in fresco the vast surface of the ceiling above the entrance and the main staircase of what was then the residence of the Prince Bishop the triumph of the god Apollo, surrounded here again by his interpretation of the four continents in a riot of animals, plants, historical and mythological figures. Truly a marvel.

Called by Charles III to Madrid, Tiepolo went on to decorate some rooms of the Royal Palace. And it was in Madrid that he died in 1770. By now the art world was changing, with the rise of the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism, of sober and rigorous forms, of the scientific method, ordered and precise, and of the cataloging of the world of nature in such works as Diderot's Encyclopédie. Tiepolo remained faithful to himself, to his luminous creativity, to his pictorial 'disorder'. This was his greatness and perhaps his limit. In any case, he tiptoed off exactly 250 years ago.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo: Self portrait*, (1750-1753), detail*

The Etruscans

Loretta Pettinato

Spring 2020 was an abnormal and far from ideal season. Certain spectral atmospheres resembled Hieronymus Bosch's paintings, while also being comparable to the pandemics that disrupted societies in the past, such as the 17th-century Black Plague described by Alessandro Manzoni in *I Promessi Sposi*. We have been isolated, forced to interrupt physical contact, gripped by boredom and, at times, depression. In order to pass the long hours at home, some writers suggested keeping a diary; other artists, such as David Hockney, encouraged people to buy pencils and brushes and dedicate themselves to painting. Still others believed that the best thing to do was to let our minds wander. The spark that began my own thoughts was reading the article *The Etruscan Cowboys – Owners of the South*. This was about a show organized by the Archaeological Museum of Naples, which will remain open until May 31, 2021. More than 600 artifacts, mostly from necropolises, show us what objects accompanied the departed through their journey in the afterlife, while also asserting their social status.

One can admire clay balsamariums shaped like crouched deer, decorated urns, precious jewels, cladding slabs, and small bronze statues, such as the *Bronzetto di offerente (The Offering Bearer)*

Bronzetto di offerente (The Offering Bearer)

from Elba (6th-5th century BCE). According to the director of the museum, Paolo Giulierini, the exhibition aims to reconstruct a frontier history, in which Etruscans can be considered the cowboys of their times.

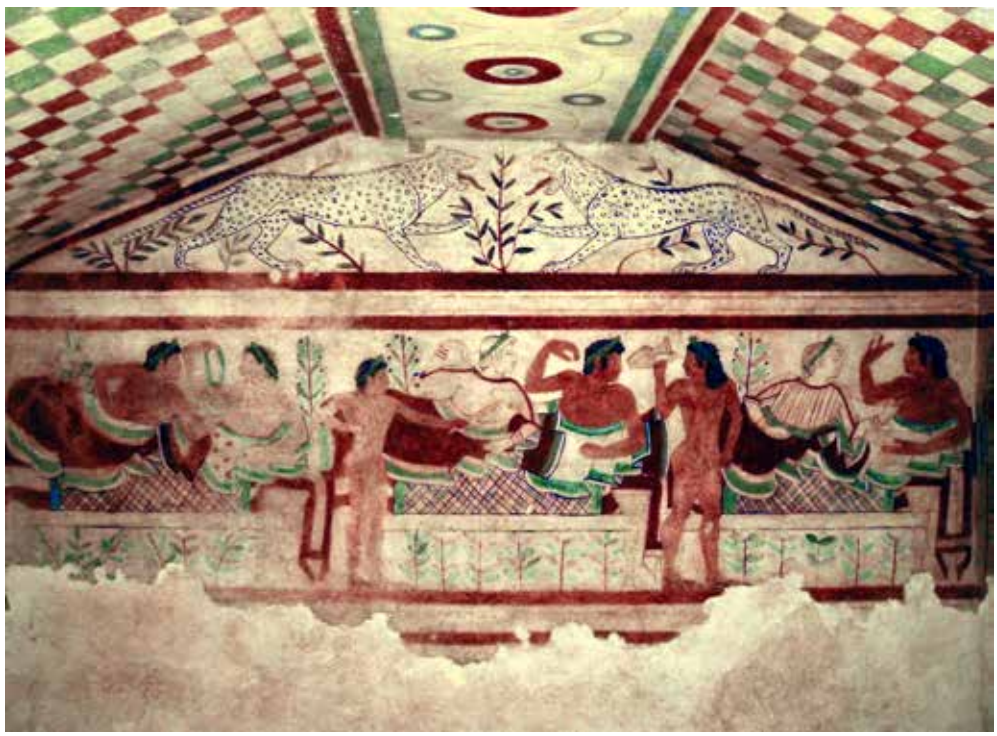
The origins of the Etruscans are unknown, they came either from the north or the east and were already settled in Italy by the 8th century BCE. They expanded to the south into the Campania region, where they ruled for many centuries. As I was reading this article, I remembered a journey made years ago in central Italy to explore the lands populated by the Etruscans and their necropolises, the majority of which are in Tuscany and Lazio. I recall the necropolis of Monterozzi in Tarquinia, where mounds of earth indicated the presence of hypogeums, holes dug in the turf, and very narrow stairs leading into burial chambers. I found myself in front of marvellous frescoes with brilliant colours: red for the masculine figures, white for the feminine ones, and then light blue, dark green and ochre. The walls are filled with musicians, dancers, and acrobats who bring delight to the banquets; hunting and fishing scenes, sport competitions and memories of heroic deeds. I can bring to mind the burials that particularly thrilled me: a hunting and fishing one (520 BCE), with its flying red and blue birds that filled the ochre sky, and its twisting fish that jumped in the water while being watched by the three characters; all surmounted by a joyous banquet in which the deceased is also present.

Another example is the Tomba dei Leopardi, representing a small group of feasting men guarded by two gorgeous leopards on a golden background, surrounded by colourful festoons and frames. Alongside these merry representations one can also find scenes of desperation in response to death. In the Tomba del Barone (510 BCE) the wife and children of the departed express all their pain for their loss; in the Tomba degli Auguri (530 BCE) two figures stare at a door symbolising the gateway to the underworld. Their static position seems to represent death's inevitability, to which everybody will succumb.

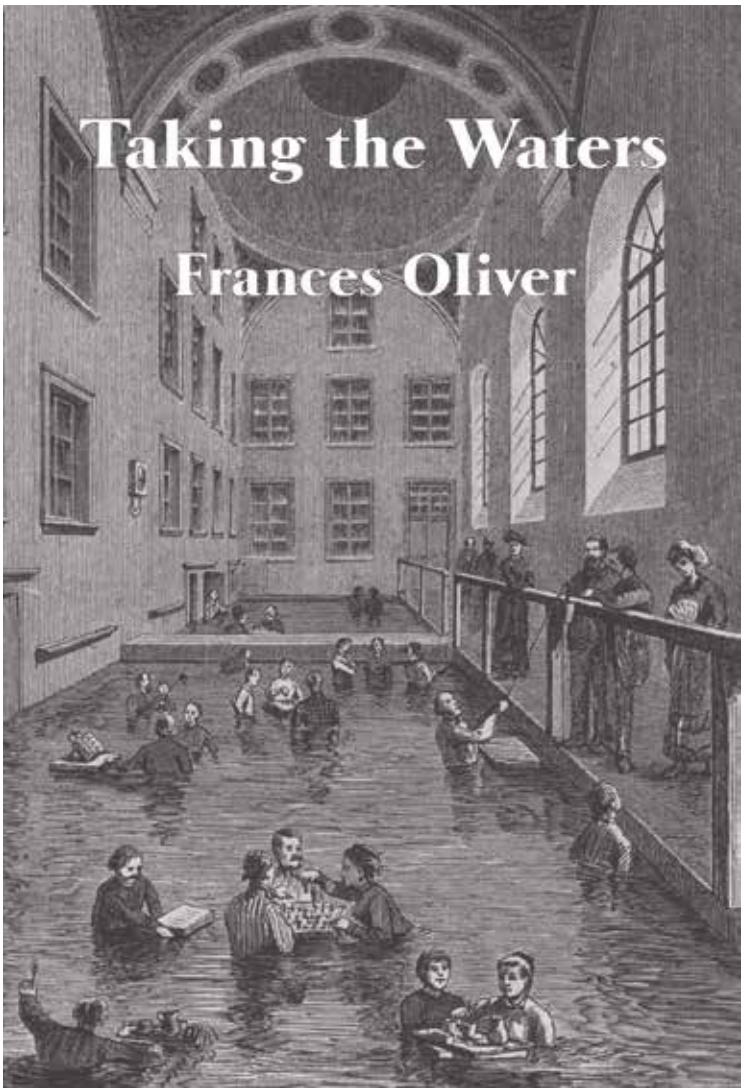
My memories then take me to Volterra, whose museum holds one of Italy's most important collections of Etruscan artifacts: alabaster urns, pottery, and several small statues such as the famous *Ombra della sera* (meaning 'shadow of the night'). It is a little bronze statue with an elongated and filiform shape, which recalls long sunset shadows, hence the name given to it by the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio. It portrays a masculine figure which, in its beauty and elegance, could have been handcrafted today, while in reality it is the creation of a brilliant craftsman during the 3rd century BCE. Many contemporary artists have taken inspiration from it for their own work, such as Alberto Giacometti. Among his many pieces, we remember *L'uomo che cammina* (1961).

The Etruscans didn't leave any written material. The objects used for the cult of the dead are the only means we have to study that part of their civilisation (subsumed as it was by the Romans), dedicated to art, love of life, and family relations. The archeologist T.E. Lawrence once said that *"the Etruscan cities vanished as completely as flowers. Only the tombs, the bulbs, were underground"*.

Translated by Laura Pettinato



The fresco on the central wall of the Tomb of the Leopards



What is being said about Taking the Waters

This is a remarkable fiction work that brings back all my satisfying memories of reading the great Frances Oliver from years past — the evolution of this new work becoming a poignant, idiosyncratic, yet traditional, novel, companionably observed, comprising four separate but interconnected stories as centred on a healing Magic Mountain of a Swiss spa, stories taking place over centuries, involving a compelling pattern of characters with tantalising ghostly auras as well as rounded real personalities.

D F Lewis (Editor, Publisher and reviewer at Real Time Reviews)

"I loved this book for many reasons: the fascination of the Swiss setting, the delineation of the social mores of each period, the subtle way in which the time shifts were accomplished, the descriptions of the natural world, the characters and their stories. I could not bear to put Taking the Waters down"

Gillian Bouras (author of Foreign Wife, Aphrodite, A Fair Exchange and others)

Editorial continued from page 4

We would like to know what has become of our artists around the world and how they have been living these months. We invite artists and writers alike to share their thoughts with our readers and let us know if these lockdowns have changed their expression in any way and how they envision the future, possibly with one image of what they see coming. Please send maximum 500 words to: managingeditor@newartexaminer.net

https://theconversation.com/beethoven-250-analysis-of-the-composers-letters-proves-that-creativity-does-spring-forth-from-misery-149771

https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2020/10/22/are-you-ready-to-rock-the-new-roaring-20s/

https://www.mondaq.com/uk/money-laundering/906100/will-the-roaring-twenties-return-what39s-new-in-money-laundering-regulations

https://www.thespiritsbusiness.com/2020/12/roaring-20s-will-return-post-pandemic/

Miklos Legrady

Kapwani Kiwanga of Canada

To me, Kapwani's work does not overtly appear to "address hidden authoritarian structures, institutional devices, and power imbalances that help us see the world differently". While a bright mind can see the world in a grain of sand, it's not obvious what insights the jury employed to come to those conclusions.

John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume gave us empiricism, the theory that all knowledge comes primarily from sensory experience. It is one of several views of the nature of human knowledge, along with rationalism and skepticism.

I am going to employ rationalism and skepticism. There's a chance the jury's words are hyperbole, meant to satisfy our expectations for trendy, academic jargon. Words that are meant to signal this is a piece of postmodern political art. It's not. If you're desperate to fit within superficial trends, you could stretch analogies and overlay a very forced political interpretation. Even if the artist started from a conscious political idea, the end result went far beyond, to arrive at a more sophisticated content. Kiwanga's work is aesthetic, numinous, certainly supernatural…no natural hallway has ever looked like that.

Kapwani Kiwanga succeeded in making supernatural art and it's time the jury felt comfortable with that. This work is non-verbal, and the primary content is aesthetic. In the arts, aesthetics is a system of value judgments, of comparisons and evaluations that provide us with wide ranging data-sets by which we organize our empirical knowledge. Art and aesthetics are not just cheesecake for the mind nor are they simply decorative. They are an evolutionary adaptation of the highest order, creating and processing subtleties of knowledge and complexities of thought.

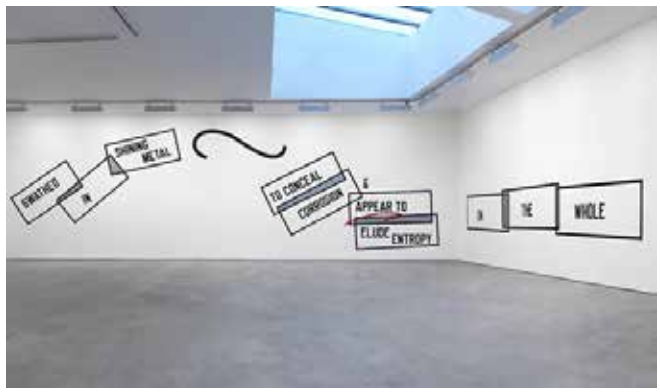
Lawrence Weiner's non-art

Art historians consider Lawrence Weiner a forerunner of conceptual art. Weiner is best known for setting text directly onto walls. As viewers read the piece, they complete Weiner's projects - conjuring their own mental images of what he describes. Weiner attained fame when everything became art. At the age of 19, young Weiner astounded art critics across the nation by blowing up a stick of dynamite in the desert. His work today is done by assistants, so it's not his work, only his concept; Weiner calls himself a non-artist, calls his work non-art - so it's not art.

These distinctions are important according to Denis Dutton. In his youtube video "The Art Instinct, a Darwinian Theory of Beauty", Dutton argues that aesthetic awareness is an evolutionary trait, and is shaped by natural selection. It's not, as most contemporary art criticism and academic theory would have it, 'socially constructed'. The human appreciation for art is innate, and certain artistic values transcend cultures. It seems that an aesthetic perception has in part ensured the survival of the perceiver's genes. What does that mean for the entire discipline of art? Dutton argues, with forceful logic and hard evidence, that art criticism needs to be premised on an understanding of evolution, not on abstract theories.

Weiner's work isn't art, it's interior decoration. "Faking depends on a measure of complicity between the perpetrator and the victim, who together conspire to believe what they don't believe and to feel what they are incapable of feeling…" (Roger Scrutton). Science says real art is specific; it's no longer anything you can get away with. Weiner's art, what he got away with, consists of networking, marketing, selling the emperor's vintage clothes. In surviving academia that's acceptable as a legitimate art strategy.

Activism



"A festival in the Bronx organized by the New Museum was cancelled … less than an hour after it started. IdeasCity Bronx, which was supposed to feature a series of discussion panels, artist talks, performances, and workshops, was shut down after Bronx-based activists disrupted the event's first session, held at Concrete Plant Park on the Bronx River. A number of local Bronx grassroots organizations that were slated to participate in the festival announced their withdrawal before the events commenced… New Museum has never invested anything into the Bronx… They are not contributing any long term financial backing or support into any of the

Activist Tiara Torres at an anti-gentrification protest in the Bronx in March 2019
(photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

ideas that come from today." Hypoallergenic, Sept. 2019.

Here is the New Museum investing in the local community, engaging local artists, so Hydro Punk activists shut it down because the New Museum is not investing in the local community or engaging local artists. Doesn't Hydro Punk sound like Rudolph Giuliani?

There are also accusations that the museums and art galleries are driving gentrification. Forcing out the poor who can no longer afford the rent. But not all of this is as it seems.

We need to beware the fascist right wing, and we must also beware the fascist left wing. They exist, yes. They are professional justice warriors fuelled by 'anger with benefits'. Having decided that the New Museum doesn't put anything back into the community, they shut down the New Museum putting back into the community. But why?

"We have encountered a new type of predatory censorship, a desire to take offence, that patrols the world for opportunities. As with the Puritans of the 17th century, there is the need to humiliate and to punish" (Roger Scruton). I think there are other benefits: the power and spotlight that draws the Justice Warrior to their public acts of injustice.

Let's note it's not the New Museum or the art galleries causing gentrification. The artists themselves are responsible for that by being poor. Artists are the ones who move into poor neighbourhoods because that's all they can afford.

The solution is to stop artists moving into poor neighbourhoods and gentrifying them, otherwise there'll be no slums left in New York. Since artists gentrify hoods and raise commercial values, that means there are also other people who can slumify hoods and lower their commercial value, creating slums. Take junkies or street thugs. If hoods are gentrified, where will the junkies go? For the sake of social justice, take a junkie home with you tonight. Help end the suffering.

CORNWALL

Grayson Perry: The Vanity of Small Differences

Mary Fletcher

These six large tapestries show the Hogarthian progress of a male character on a 'Class Journey', using research the artist carried out when he developed his 2012 TV series *All in the Best Possible Taste*.

There were more people in the gallery than I have ever seen there apart from pre-covid-19 opening parties. All were masked and spaced and carefully examining the wealth of detail in the narratives and the way the fabric had a variety of textures. There was also a film running about the weaving of the work. Grayson has produced a commentary on contemporary British life and class which can be witty and ingenious - focused on white characters.

I enjoyed seeing the show. Using lengthy written captions, Grayson points out the art-historical influences on the compositions. I don't like the horror vacui and the rather monotonous tones and textures, but I admire the accumulation of observations which relate to class and taste.

When Grayson makes a pot there is a satisfying beauty in the symmetry and form, which then contrast alarmingly with the applied narrative content that can only be seen from a close look. That strange combination doesn't apply to the tapestries because although there are fascinating details to see up close, you can also see everything from a distance.

It's been a mammoth task to compile all the images, but the all-over complexity I find lessens the impact.

It's well worth seeing nevertheless and admirable in its satirical contemporary relevance.

The Vanity of Small Differences: The Exchange, Penzance, Cornwall, October 3, 2020 to January 2, 2021

Brexit Teething Problems for shipping art

Art shippers say they are experiencing "teething problems" transporting works to European countries since the UK ended its transition period and completed its separation from the European Union on 1 January.

Victor Khureya, the operational director at the London-based art logistics company Gander & White, says the main issues are "additional costs, administration and time". Since the Brexit deadline, the firm has sent one shipment to Germany, which was delayed by a day after customs officials in France "appeared to have not been trained for the new procedure", Khureya says.

He adds that Germany has, for now, reduced its import rate for collectibles from 7% to 5.5%, on a par with France, "to attract business".
Art Newspaper 11th January 2021

Al Jirikowic in his home
(photo: Paul Schwartzman)

How to spend the Pandemic:

... Or, say, the leather chair that Al Jirikowic, 68, an art critic and former Adams Morgan bar owner, now sits in five hours a day because there's nowhere to go. The Churchill, as his throne is known, is where Jirikowic meditates, contemplates the end of civilization and figures out what to eat for lunch.

Whatever the case, he's comfortable.

"I'm thankful I can sit here and space out," he said. "You learn to like your solitude. If you don't, you go nuts."

Washington Post, by Paul Schwartzman, November 24, 2020

NAE's GREAT SUCCESS

This month we passed 1 million and 200 thousand unique visitors since the website went live in 2017.

According to Google Analytics we are visited by readers from over 75 countries.

A selection of our widely read articles:

Rebellion and Art in Hong Kong, Leung Suk Ching, Volume 34 no 3 January – February 2020, pp 10-11 – 26,400 readers

Museum of Modern Women, Katie Zazenski, volume 34 no 1 September – October 2019, pp 7-9 – 22,400 readers

Dutch Avant-Garde Fashion Designer Brings a Technological Shock to Daxiliu Museum of Art, Li Liting – (online content only) 16,000 readers

Volume 32 no 6 July – August 2018 – 14,900 readers

Matthias Grünewald's Pain and Suffering, Dr Sheng-Yu (David) Peng, Taiwan – (online content only) 10,800 readers

Living with Hopper, Lynda Green, Volume 34 no 2 November – December 2019, pp 7-9 – 10, 300 readers

If You're a Recent MFA or PhD You're Not an Artist nor a Curator, Miklos Legrady – 10,000 readers

Aliens in Our Own World, Katie Zazenski, Volume 34 no 2 November - December 2019, pp 28-29 – 8,700 readers

The Legacy of Apathy – Derek Guthrie in DC, Volume 34 no 2 November –December 2019, pp 17-18 – 6,400 readers

Art in America, the Critical Dustbowl, volume 33 no 5 May – June 2019, pp 7-11 – 5,700 readers

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