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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.
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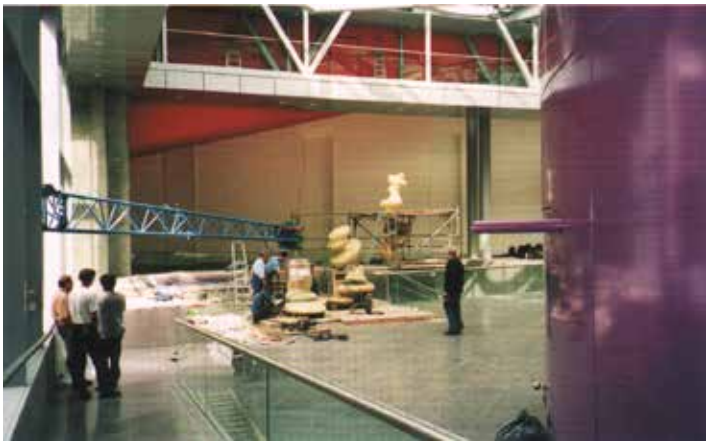
The Attentive Artist



Towards the end of 1995 I received a telephone call from the director of the Government Art Collection. The purpose of her call was to sound me out: if asked, would I be willing to serve on the Government Art Collection's advisory committee on works of art? In those days I knew a great deal about Wendy Baron's work as a formidable art historian but nothing at all about her day job running the Government Art Collection. She had to explain that the advisory committee consisted of a chairman (the journalist and broadcaster John Tusa, who was then managing director of the Barbican) and the respective directors of the National Gallery, the Tate and the National Portrait Gallery. In addition to people from the art world, including at least one art critic, they served for a fixed term of three years, but the appointments could be renewed. The advisory committee met three times a year and Wendy assured me I'd find the discussions interesting. 'Interesting' turned out to be an understatement. In the 10 years I was to be associated with the Government Art Collection it was the ideal vantage point from which to observe the profound shift in British attitudes towards the visual arts, which were nowhere more visible than in the workings of the Government Art Collection. (Richard Dormant).

Art, Power, Diplomacy: The Untold Story of the Government Art Collection – Penny Johnson, Julia Toffolo, Richard Dormant, Cornelia Parker, Andrew Renton, Adrian George, forward by Nicholas Serota, Scala publishers Ltd 2011

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:

DAVID CARRIER is a philosopher who writes art criticism. He has published books on art history, world art history, and on Sean Scully. He is writing a book about the artist-philosopher Maria Boosmann.

COLIN FELL read English Literature at the University of St Andrews, pursuing postgraduate research before moving to Cornwall, where he lectures in Further Education.

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CHRISTIAN HAIN studied philosophy and literature in Germany before moving to Paris for a postgraduate course in art history/art market, then working in a gallery and as an independent curator/art dealer. Since returning to his native Germany, he's been editing the bilingual blog www.wartsmagazine.com

JOHN HABER started haberarts.com in 1994 as the first website ever dedicated to art criticism and art education. It makes possible longer-form reviews that arts magazines and daily newspapers do not, but with an accessibility that academic magazines cannot offer. It has grown to thousands of reviews, covering most major figures in art history and contemporary art, with an emphasis on diversity.

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.

DANIEL NANAVATI is the European editor of the *New Art Examiner*, author of many children's books and sometime poet. He runs www.footstepsbooks.com.

ELEONORA SCHIANCHI was born in Sassuolo, near Modena, and graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna in didactic and communication of arts. She is currently an AMaC student at the University of Bologna, and an art mediator at Musei Civici in Reggio Emilia. She has cultivated a passion for photography through travelling widely across Europe. Art is a powerful communicative tool and she explores its inclinations with passion and curiosity.

SHÄNNE SANDS is a poet and author. Her non-fiction work *Bombay City of Sands* was reviewed as one of the most lyrical books ever written. She was the first writer to deal with drug addiction in the UK in *Is Rosemary Your Daughter?*

ROBERT SHETTERLY is best known for his portrait series, *Americans Who Tell the Truth*, a project begun in response to U.S. government actions following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York City. Shetterly undertook the project as a way to deal with his own grief and anger by painting Americans who inspired him. He initially intended to paint only 50 portraits, but by 2021 more than 260 portraits were included in the series. Portions of the series tour widely across the United States, being shown in schools, museums, libraries, galleries and other public spaces.

ALEXANDER STANFIELD is an art historian, writer, critic, and commentator with a BFA in art history and an MA in art history and criticism.

SAM VANGHELUWE is a Belgian painter, art historian (specialising in African arts), critic and translator. He questions preconceived notions in art theory and criticism, and what Samuel Beckett called 'academic dementia'.

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

Did Marcel Duchamp pave the way for Donald Trump?

Editor,
This is such a well researched and thoughtfully written article Miklos! I have been saying that since Trump's election we have entered into an era of dis-enlightenment. I think you've done an excellent job showing how we have evolved into this kind of society.
Virginia Eichhorn, 01/10/2021

Virginia,
The best is yet to come.
Ian Russo, 03/10/2021

Editor,
I've begun looking into the intersection humour + visual art + writing this past, unfunny COVID year. M. Legrady's well-supported think-piece (bolstered by his teasing artworks) is a bracing counter to shaky academic precepts about facture and diligent practice. Putting air-quotes around a proposition doesn't automatically elevate it to the status of art. Now added to my insight-trove is the final quote from Oscar Wilde to the effect that honest, combative artists must keep 'em laughing to avoid being squashed like a bug. Wondering about Maurizio Cattelan…
Betty Ann Jordan, 30/09/2021

The Moorhouse Fish: Heirlooms and History

Editor,
Love the article. Contact Canadian Indigenous people to get info on who can repair the fish. I know someone who repaired soapstone statues and lost touch with them when they moved to New Brunswick. So there are people who can repair the fish. Good luck.
Miklos Legrady 10/10/2021

Miklos,
Thank you Miklos!
Martha Benedict, 12/10/2021

Martha Benedict,
Fascinating and well written. Learned a lot.
Bill Sinclair, 06/10/2021

Picasso Ibero

Editor
Yes, I agree wholeheartedly. It is distressing to find that some great talents were horrid people. Charlie Chaplin was so abusive to his own son that Marlon Brando, who was directing the film, threatened to have him kicked out of the Hollywood studio.
Miklos Legrady 15/10/2021

Coming in the next issue

Darren Jones and his team focus on the Baltimore arts scene

Scott Winfield Sublett gives us another perceptive spin on the moving picture industry from his new vantage point in New York

Liviana Martin and her team bring us the latest from Milan, Italy

Letters, Reviews and more ...

We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say.

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QUOTE of the Month:

"You don't take a photograph, you make it"

Ansel Adams

NEW ART examiner CiC

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EDITORIAL

Oratory is the art of persuasion and is taught over decades. And today, all over the world, politicians are taught how to act, dress and hold themselves in public. Those with fewer skills than others work hard to acquire them. Part of the skill is knowing your audiences and giving them all something.

Newspapers work hard to reinforce the image of their candidates. Soundbites that become the shorthand for everything about the candidate. From the bare-chested Putin on horseback, reminiscent of a Cossack, to Trump in his room surrounded by gold to remind us of his wealth, it is all one.

But more than these methods of skilful manipulation of our perceptions in the public sphere has been the abuse of artists and their work in the employ of this industry of persuasion.

Think of a country. Any country. Name three things to yourself that sum that country up. Have you done it?

Now wonder how it is possible to sum up a country with just three things brought to mind? The complexities of history, millions of people, a language and culture … it is impossible to sum up any country in this way. Don't ever do it again.

But these shorthands are the mainstay of modern politics. Decision are made on segments of the problems and every politician fights harder for their version of the state against considerations of fairness or equality. But they will dress them up as fairness and equality.

Today states use artists with abandon to portray the version of their country they want to promote. They invest in government–backed sponsorship – with all the concomitant rules and targets – in a perverse kind of patronage. The image has become paramount in the same way it was in the time of Kings.

So what we find is the state promotes artists it agrees with. *Cool Britannia* in the 1990s and the YBA (Young British Artists) were born from and for each other. The YBA received the publicity it did because it accorded with the government of the time, not because it was interesting art. In fact this is the greatest curse of state subsidy - that second and third–tier artists, who would never turn their hand to the work they do without the grant system, are elevated to positions of eminence they do not deserve. But rules and target based grants have become our version of the Academies by another name.

So next time you read or see something on a screen remember it is shorthand. It is the simple message taken from the complexities of society which, like baby food, is easy to swallow and digest, but we are supposed to grow out of it. Art is not a diversion, it should be a more profound and deep contemplation of the human condition than any politicians ever give us, but sadly it seems politicians and artists have, like the pigs and farmers in Animal Farm, become indistinguishable from each other.

SPEAKEASY

Each issue, the *New Art Examiner* invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

David Carrier is a philosopher who writes art criticism. He has published books on art history, world art history, and on Sean Scully. He is writing a book about the artist-philosopher Maria Boosmann.

THE SUDDEN RECENT DEATH OF OUR ART WORLD

David Carrier

Just a year ago, without any warning, with no one prepared, our art world died. For four decades, for as long as I have been publishing art criticism, long–distance travel has been easy and relatively inexpensive. And so it was not difficult to see a great deal of art both in the United States and in Western Europe. In New York City alone there were four major museums, numerous smaller ones, and many art galleries. In those days, it simply was not possible for one reviewer to view all of the interesting exhibitions. There was a lot to see. Of course, there was a great deal of mediocre art. And so the challenge was finding the few works that mattered.

Making and judging art has long been a social activity. Denis Diderot, the first great art critic, reported on the Louvre Salon in 1767. He would be astonished by almost all of the art at the recent Venice Biennales, and surprised at how much of it there was, but he would understand the ways in which it is displayed. And he would grasp immediately the role of art critics, whose judgments aspire to guide public response. After all, his role was similar, though admittedly he wrote for a much smaller audience. Under the old regime, in France as elsewhere, art displays were governed by a top-down system. Then with modernism, the public was invited to see and judge new art, and their shared response determined success. Contemporary art has repeatedly changed drastically, but this system remains.

Now, however, the coronavirus has destroyed the social roots of our art world. Some major American commercial galleries are closing, all of them are restricting attendance, our museums have massively laid off staff and limited their hours, and international travel is impossible at least for the time being. At present almost every country is having these problems. Breakdown of social institutions is often traumatic. This happened in 1918 when the Great War destroyed three great, long-lasting states, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia, and created the preconditions for German and Soviet totalitarianism. And it happened in Communist Europe in 1989, when state socialism unexpectedly completely disappeared. Now maybe it's happened again. Like those changes, this death of our art world was completely unpredicted, which makes dealing with it more difficult.

Now, however, the coronavirus has destroyed the social roots of our art world. Some major American commercial galleries are closing, all of them are restricting attendance, our museums have massively laid off staff and limited their hours, and international travel is impossible at least for the time being.

Many galleries and museums are creating remote exhibitions. You can go on-line and view the artworks, sometimes even remotely walking through the galleries. But no one is very satisfied with this situation. To properly see artworks, you need to be physically present. And looking at art is a social experience. In a gallery or museum, you move freely and overhear the response of other people. It's impossible to judge art adequately sitting alone by your computer. Even if you have a large monitor, and can Zoom with your friends, the experience is essentially different.

Capitalism has always thrived and usually depended upon expansion. And since its origin during the French Revolu-

tion in 1793, or a little earlier in Rome and Vienna, the art museum has always expanded. Art from everywhere has been added to the collections, and there has been the addition of a great deal of novel contemporary art. And the inclusion of art from Africa, Australia, the Islamic world, and China in our museums of world art history has greatly enlarged those institutions. Every ambitious American museum has regularly rebuilt its galleries and expanded its collection. And in the past half century, the number and size of commercial art galleries devoted to contemporary art have increased drastically. The quantity of newly made art displayed and collected leads, also, to a belief in its absolute importance, and to a dramatic increase in both the numbers of art students and the quantity of writing devoted to this work. Ours, it was thus implied by this vast economy, is an important creative epoch.

This West European art system has had an amazing international success. In mainland China, as in Africa and almost all parts of Asia, similar art worlds have been developed. In the People's Republic of China and in the Gulf Arab States there are many ambitious new museums. Art viewing has been an important business internationally. Now the Western economy has not collapsed, but the part of it that supports the art world has. And right now the totally legitimate, long-unmet demands by women and African-Americans that their art be fairly presented could not have arrived at a worse time, when these institutions are struggling to survive. Change is easier when the system was expanding. It's much harder to revise the canon when the resources are becoming scarce.

Now the Western economy has not collapsed, but the part of it that supports the art world has. And right now the totally legitimate, long-unmet demands by women and African-Americans that their art be fairly presented could not have arrived at a worse time, when these institutions are struggling to survive. Change is easier when the system was expanding. It's much harder to revise the canon when the resources are becoming scarce.

What then will happen? Perhaps when most of us are vaccinated, the art world will come back. Travel again will be possible. And maybe, in the meantime, Western governments will support the art world. Or it may be the case that new systems for viewing and selling art will evolve. Perhaps videos, which already are an important form of contemporary artworks, will become of increasing importance. And maybe, just as great American collections were formed during the depression of the 1930s, some prescient collectors will take advantage of this situation. I suspect that while the major museums and largest American galleries will survive, many of the small institutions are in serious trouble. If they have to shut down for a couple of years, it won't be easy for them to start up again. It's easier to sell masterpieces remotely than attract attention to younger artists. And yet, if the art world is to continue, it needs to add such figures.

Ideally I would hope for a gallery system that supported more judicious aesthetic judgments. But I don't know that the present crisis will produce that result. Perhaps, rather, the belief that this is a major period for artistic creativity will disappear. In this swiftly changing situation, it's impossible to reliably imagine the near future. But what can be said with certainty is that the present situation cannot long continue. Our art world institutions have proven to be surprisingly frail. And so this is a challenging moment. The entire world economy was vastly overextended, in ways that reflected vast political problems. And so the booming art world was certainly not sustainable. But I didn't ever expect it to die like this.

A Selfie with Godot

The Rarefied Reality of New European Painting

Sam Vangheluwe

I need a new office chair. My current one tends to start descending slowly as soon as I sit down. As the distance between my nose and the tabletop sustainedly decreases, confidence in what I write diminishes, and insecurity grows. At the lowest point, I am more liable to mess about with the stationary than put concrete thoughts to paper. Just try to formulate an intelligent idea with your chin on the table's edge: it is fairly impossible.

Requiring utmost concentration, this position forces the writer to stick to what is essential. That is why, especially for this contribution, I have decided to refrain from pumping up the gas lift every minutes or so. Also, I am writing this by means of a stub of a pencil, to enhance humility and conciseness.

Recently I read an analysis of the last decades of European painting. Apparently, European painting since the 1980s is called 'New European Painting'. You don't say. Allegedly, it is characterized by 'new figuration'. As a reaction against American abstraction. I didn't know that. Neither was I aware that the modernism of Abstract Expressionism 'rejected our own history and tradition'. Our 'own history' seems to refer to the European post-war (and colonial) period.

In contrast, I am very aware of the 'postmodern archive fever' of the New European Painter (NEP) - the 'flood of images, new media and its effects on image theory and therefore on painting'. The NEPs feverishly collect second-hand imagery, a child knows that. At the start of day, the New European (or, by now, New Figurative) Painter enters his studio, takes a deep breath, and opens an image folder on his laptop. Searching for Godot. What I do not get is the link between this kind of figuration and the multiple references to the tradition of Northern European Painting, quote: the "Old Master like manner".

The author (Julien Delagrange) concludes that:

[…] the foundation and character, rooted in the first two generations of this movement [sic, NEP] remains true with the current generation of European painters building upon the works of their contemporary predecessors [sic]. This foundation is based on their historic connection of the tradition of European naturalistic painting and (recent) European history [sic, sic].

Very quaint, all that. History Painting revisited? *Retour à l'ordre* all over again?

As a young 'un, at the Academy of Fine Arts, I vaguely expected that I would learn to paint. Boosted by an unwavering belief in my innate talent, I set forth to conquer the art world. Through hard work, good intentions, patience, insight and inspiration, I would prove my indubitable worth, and stake my claim among countless rivals, small and big, young and old, living and dead - and prevail.

Hieronymus Bosch: Christ Carrying the Cross *c1560*

The Academy had taught me nothing except how to convince a jury. Any presumed talent got me nowhere. Wholly redundant. Neither how nor what had been answered, nor why, for that matter, and I began to suspect that they never would. And reality was rapidly receding out of reach.

If I remember well, I was quite cavalier about the how – after all, what is talent for? As to the what, I must have obscurely presumed that the raison d'être for my world-conquering oeuvre would be informed by the outside world – my endless supply of subject matter. My painting would acquire significance from a tasteful or clever choice of subject, and my virtuoso yet somewhat enigmatic depiction thereof. Done. In the can.

After oodles of still-lives with baskets and copper lamps, legions of nudes, landscapes, interiors, portraits, cats, dogs and ducks, worry set in. Soon, concern grew to torment.

The Academy had taught me nothing except how to convince

#secondhandimagery as #readymadereality

a jury. Any presumed talent got me nowhere. Wholly redundant. Neither how nor what had been answered, nor why, for that matter, and I began to suspect that they never would. And reality was rapidly receding out of reach.

In the meantime, the art world became increasingly unfamiliar, and painting was in crisis. The last large painterly upsurge I was aware of as a student was that of the *Neue Wilde*. Conceptual art was at a high. Alternatively, graffiti and graffiti-inspired painting was gaining terrain. As a rule, art criticism was either dumb or quintessentially abstruse (mostly both). Once again, painting was at death's door, or already deceased.

The era of amateurism had kicked in. As ever fewer painters made the grade, the interest of society at large awakened. Everyone is an artist. *La Rivoluzione siamo Noi*, as Beuys had wanted it.

It did not occur to my grandfather, a Sunday painter, bless his memory, to put some flowers in a vase and paint them. He too was infatuated with the second-hand image. But, whereas once a diligent amateur painter had to copy the second-hand image (a postcard, most often), by means of grid-lines, or worse, messing about with a pantograph, for a good decade now art supply shops have been well-stocked with various brands and models of 'art projectors' – latterly being superceded by the digital beamer. Every soul now owns a smartphone and is connected to the Web. Any moderately gifted simian has access to this deluge of images, and can fancy having a grasp o*f reality.*

Only insofar as my granddad could not rely on the archive of second-hand images, i.e. in his 'errors': crooked anatomy, erratic perspective, etc., his painting was true, and closer to the 'Old Master-like manner' than he could ever have grasped.

Northern European painting – the Old Masters - did not

Gustave De Smet: Kinderkopje *1916*

copy or represent pre-existing reality, but constantly reinvented reality, and we seem collectively to have forgotten this. NEP certainly has. Medieval painting embodies the profound unity between man and the world. Centuries of rationalism have divorced man from his universe; he no longer participates in it, and thus he becomes a naturalistic painter. In the late history-and-tradition-denying Modernist painting, there was at least the opportunity of questioning reality - indeed, of creating it.

Only because painting refuses to acknowledge a single, giv-

en, conventional reality, is it able to thwart the many announcements of its (impending) demise. Painting creates reality, whereas photography captures 1/125th of a second or so, of a type of monocular reality that is subject to conventionally engineered optical materials and (now) digital software. Yet hundreds of thousands of amateurstogether with a handful of 'professionals', prefer to rely on the second-hand image as an 'objective' view of a singular, frozen, exclusive reality. 'The contemporary equivalent of drawing,' as it is said to be. The outside world remains safely outside, with everything securely in its designated place, and the painter can claim to 'express' his deepest feelings, or worse, thoughts, based on a snapshot. In the same breath, the painter has relinquished his bond with the world, with the elements, in exchange for a long-term infatuation with optical technology.

It is enough to convince one that painting has indeed finally expired. Painting is constantly being degraded to image. Images are worshipped, whereas paintings, more often than not, are overpowered, threatened. Set upon with words, reduced by reproduction, subdued by exhibition concepts, tainted by restoration. The world has an insatiable appetite for images, but it dismisses painting. Painting is unwieldy, not easily digested, too disorienting, confronting. It is too free by far, and then some - despite all appearances.

That is why painters burden their works with 'messages' (if they don't, someone else surely will). It explains why museum visitors read texts or listen to a (recorded) guide, rather than contemplate the painting one-to-one, guilelessly. It is why painters try to prove something with their painting (if they don't, they will be called to account). It explains why painters fret about the historical relevance of their work. It is why they spurn unpredictable nature in favor of safe, reassuring second-hand imagery that releases their disquieting ties with the world that is in and around them. It is why there are currently only two accepted ontological states of painting: either (1) a 'representation' of pre-existing reality (Godot); or (2) a decoration or adornment (denial of Godot). These are hard times for renegade European painters. Nowadays, quorums of artists are conceived and launched as investment products, distributed among the haves by a handful of supercilious galleries, promulgated by and glorified in museums. There is no healthy art market: 'ordinary' people make do with wall decorations from Ikea. And the middle-classes unquestioningly adopt the prevailing discourse.

In its heyday, (European) painting grew out of inability, absence, the impossibility of painting, non-virtuosity, as acknowledged with more or less frankness, and sometimes with insistence, by painters such as Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Alberto Giacometti, Jean Bazaine, Bram van Velde.

Claiming access to Godot is futile, indeed risky, as is the insouciance sought for by means of wilful ignorance. Reality is not outside, not given, not singular, not a stockpile of props, an archive of second-hand images from which to choose at leisure. It is within and beyond us. A painter must not think of his era. He must not fancy himself embedded within any historical tradition. Painting does not equal bearing a message. A painter must stay within his painting, as it leads him and not the other way round. Painting has nothing to prove. It must merely exist. Painting is utterly impossible, and therefore one must paint. Unarmed, defenceless, vulnerable. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. It is our birthright.

For the CAI article by Julien Delagrange (himself NEP, and CAI Gallery director), see:
https://www.contemporaryartissue.com/post/new-europe-an-painting

Grass

Shall we move on -
As the dry, dying grass moves on with the wind.
To where only the last living particle can follow -
Before or after all, which brings only emptiness of mind and soul,
Which even great Plato could not master -
On with the dying grass -
Moving faster and then faster.
Always still -
Yet in the stillness of the moving wind and dry, dying grass -
Life breaks away and seeds fall and damage their skins upon the callous earth -
The earth desperate for life, yields only that which must grow deformed and die -
From its beauty into dry ugliness of shape -
This intercourse of life and death speaks of waste.
Too many great minds have suffered - too many small minds have thrived on a dead man's curse.
Let us move -
Escape with the now decayed grass
On, on to find the right conception of that, of which we know so little -

Shänne Sands

(The Opening of 'Grass' finished in 1952 when the poet was 18 years old)

A Toast to the Reclusive: "Companions in Solitude"

John Haber

In the year 405, a Chinese magistrate made a bold move—not to seize still greater power, but to step down. He chose, as the Met puts it, to 'remove [himself] from the flow,' apart from the courtroom, the court, and their worldly concerns.

Not that a modest life meant a life without pleasures. He tended chrysanthemums, overflowing even his artistry, and he had plenty of time for drink. Nor did life as a recluse mean a life alone. He may or may not have raised a toast when he drank, but others did, and Lu Han made nature the setting for an entire pavilion for an ageing drunk in 1659. Among other famous recluses were the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. They and the magistrate were just two foundational myths in *Companions in Solitude*.

You might attend any museum for companionship in solitude—and I do not mean the ugly crowds at blockbusters barring the way to Vincent van Gogh. You can always find privacy amid friends and strangers alike in the Met's Astor Court, which recreates a Chinese scholar's garden. Still, the very idea of a public space for contemplation underlies centuries of Asian art, give or take an occasional demon or a dragon. Contemporary Asian art has its urgency and its chaos, and global diversity has its terrors, as in African art, but this wing stands apart. And the Met has rehung much of it for what a subtitle calls 'Reclusion and Communion in Chinese Art.' It avoids crowding the art at that, with works in two instalments.

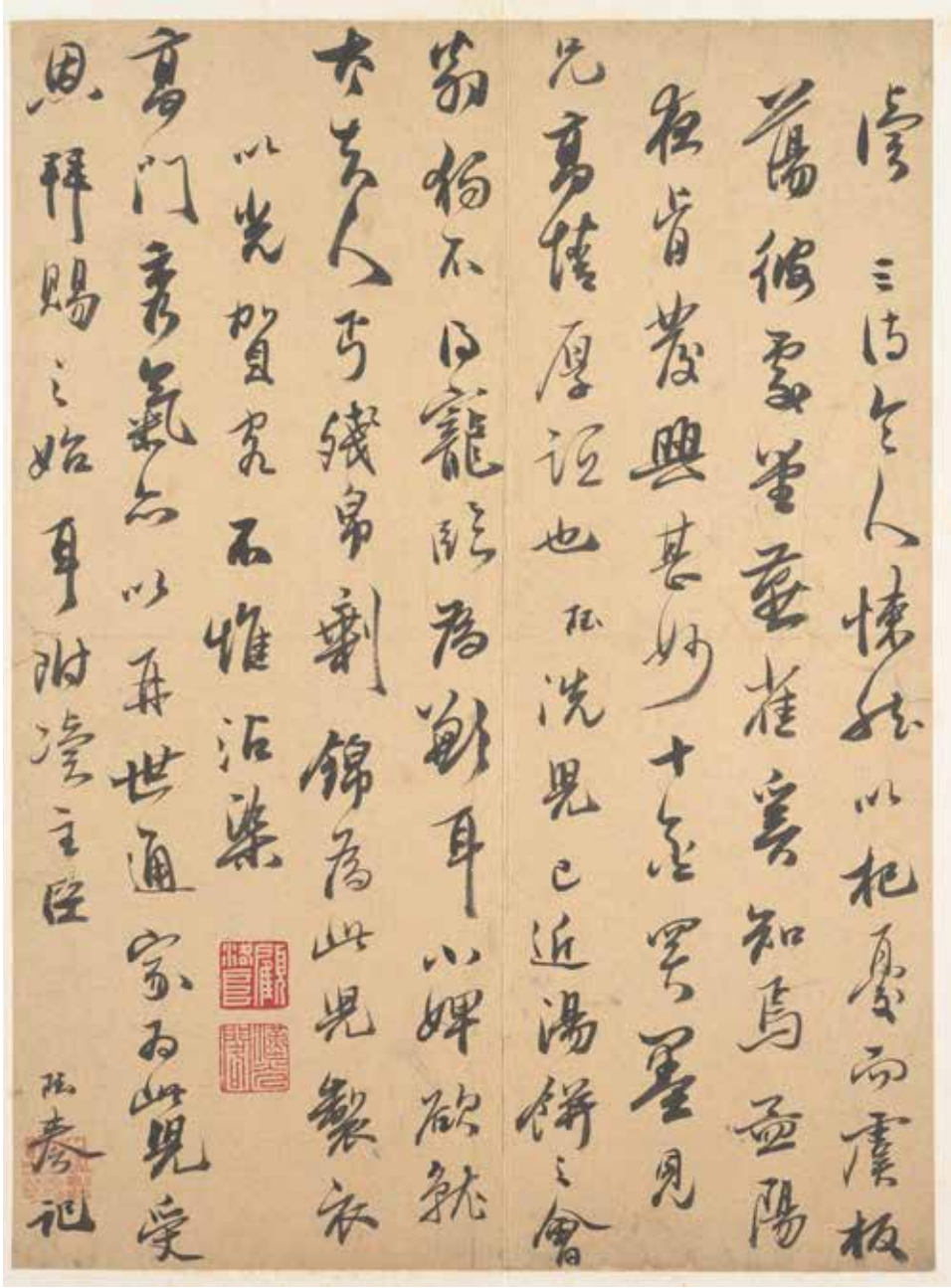
It could serve as a guide to an entire tradition. Chinese art has its evolution, often toward harder edges and a clearer sense of distance, although I am in way over my head to offer much of a guide. Still, artists kept looking back to earlier myths and earlier styles, for a deceptive unity. One can count on blank areas of paper, for gaps between near and far, as with Shitao in 1702, and sudden shifts in point of view from the sky to the ground. You may think of this painting as akin to calligraphy, but that hardly explains the fine detail of reeds and architecture for Liu Songnian in the 12th-century, or the brushy drama of mountains and clouds for Fu Baoshi in just the last hundred years. Mere shadows in the rocks may be the most calligraphic of all.

They are united, too, by being in touch with others through nothing more than subordination to nature. Finding the recluse can resemble a game of Where's Waldo. Still, the human presences keep mounting the longer one looks, along with hints of human artistry and intervention. For starters, if one cannot renounce the city and community, one can al-

Dwelling Among Mountains and Clouds
Attributed to Gong Xian (1619–1689)

ways create a garden. One can, that is, with sufficient means and a fashion sense, and the Met speaks explicitly of the 'elegant garden'. Wu Li shows a proper gentleman enjoying his garden, as *Whiling Away the Summer* from 1679.

Even in nature, subjects need not give up their occupations, no more than their pleasures. The museum speaks of the recluse as distinct from a traveller or a labourer. Yet recluses here can be fishermen at work or, with Zhang Lu, with family. They count as scholars because their very existence depends on nature. Sure enough, the Met describes a fishing village for Li Jie around 1170 as "one of the earliest depictions of a scholar's country retreat". Most of the show, though, dates from four centuries, starting with Wen Zhengming under the Ming dynasty, shortly before 1515. He, too, painted a summer retreat, and one can always count on an end to vacation.



Song Jue: Letter
(1576–1632)

Human preoccupations appear, too, in images of women. They pose much like men, but often together, and more than one appears on a fan, a female accessory. More generally, human arts appear in the mix of painting and such crafts as ceramics and actual calligraphy. One need not distinguish art and design - not when ceramics bear some of the most vivid landscapes in white and blue. They can also be censers, for a religious ceremony, or a place to rest brushes for paint. Calligraphy can function as a colophon, the page identifying an artist's book, or as poetry or letters for an artist to illustrate.

Not coincidentally, recluses in art may use the time to write poems or letters. They do so alone, but to share their discoveries and to stay in touch. Nature, in turn, can be the subject for contemplation or its enabler. In two of the most common motifs, a scholar marvels at a waterfall or finds shelter beneath a tree. Gentle or turbulent, nature's motions will continue long after the painting is gone. But then, art's stillness will persist long after the exhibition has ended, too.

Companions in Solitude – The Metropolitan Museum of Art
July 31st 2021 - 14th August 2022

Requiem for a Burning

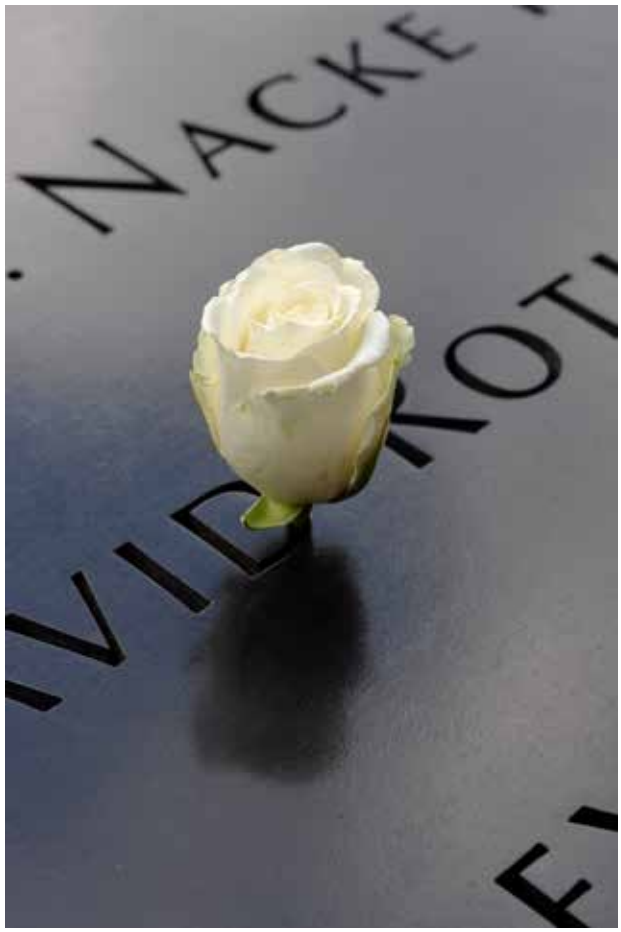
Frances Oliver

They burned our house in Vermont. Burned it to the ground, every joist and timber, new floors, new roof, newly painted walls, a house that had cost a fortune to build and maintain and had stood, boarded and isolated in the long winters but bursting with life in the short lovely summers, for the best part of a century. The house was the paradise of our childhood, the place my father and mother had dreamt of, that they worked for and escaped to, that healed their exiles' grief and welcomed their friends for almost as long as I can remember. Burnt to the ground, only the fireplace left standing.

It was what we had always dreaded, especially after the break-ins started (in our early years, there were hardly ever break-ins in rural Vermont). It was why my parents refused to consider posting their land, even after our beloved beavers were trapped and their lodge destroyed. Annoy the local hunters and poachers, annoy the thieves who find not enough to take because after the third burglary everything worth taking was stored elsewhere in winter, annoy them and they might burn your house. A thin-walled all-wooden house at the end of a lonely dirt road, more than a mile from the nearest neighbour – it would go up like a tinderbox, and who would ever know?

And if people did suspect the culprits, who would tell? Not only were we city people, outsiders, but the ones with strange accents and strange habits, the foreigners. We did not do the things the former city people had done. We did not hunt, we did not fish, we did not even really drink (our first caretaker told us with great nostalgia of his drinking bouts with the New York stockbroker who built the place as a sort of glorified hunting lodge not long before the crash that wiped him out). We attended one square dance in 40 summers. A friend we shared the house with once asked a local woman to leave the berry patch in our land where we'd started to pick. "I planted these berries," said the woman with a dignity I shall never forget. Embarrassed to tears, I begged her to stay, and we all picked together in nervous peace.

We were outsiders and remained so. Refugees from Nazi-occupied Vienna, my parents turned their bit of Vermont into an oasis of pre-war Europe. Over the summers, the cast of characters saw little change and the accents, the old country customs, remained the same – the main meal at noon, the sacrosanct afternoon nap followed by espresso, the evening stroll followed by chamber music, live or on records, the single cognac before bedtime. Nice customs but surely puzzling to the deer-hunters or fern-pickers who sometimes



White Rose at Twin Towers memorial
Photo: Wiki Commons

We were outsiders and remained so. Refugees from Nazi-occupied Vienna, my parents turned their bit of Vermont into an oasis of pre-war Europe. Over the summers, the cast of characters saw little change and the accents, the old country customs, remained the same – the main meal at noon, the sacrosanct afternoon nap followed by espresso, the evening stroll followed by chamber music, live or on records, the single cognac before bedtime.

wandered by. We did nothing in the community except buy our groceries. The community was anyhow a good eight miles away and ignored us, I suppose, as easily as we did them. My parents did not come to be sociable, except with their nearest and dearest companions; they came to Vermont to get away.

But it was not thieves or poachers, nor resentful local poor, like the cottage-burners of Wales, who burned down our house. It was burnt, with local township permission, by the new city people who own it now. With my mother dead and my father a bedridden, paralysed stroke victim, needing money for constant skilled care, the house had to be sold at once and the house, with its flimsy walls and rambling extensions, built only for summer, was too hard to winterize. The house, we always knew, was something of a white elephant; that was why my parents and their friends had been able to buy it for a song. But to burn it? Not even dismantle it, use the timbers for building, at least the boards for firewood? I forget that anyone who can afford a large isolated property would probably only want birch logs in the fireplaces and would not think of using second-hand beams. Recycling, reclamation, costs too much. Burning is quicker, burning is cheaper. Until we count the the true cost of things – the cost of waste, pollution, loss - destruction will often be the choice way out.

To me, who loved the house, it is still an act of vandalism. There are many vandalisms, the vandalism of envy and ignorance and rage, and also that of improvers and developers, the legitimised vandalism of the rich. My family too were vandals, small-scale, unknowing vandals, but vandals just the same. They had dozens of trees chopped down simply to improve the view, they sold timber to cowboy cutters, without a thought for their forest's health. They never learned anything but a bit of local legend about their tangled mountain slopes and abandoned, crudely stonewalled fields. And the most exciting and rewarding pastime of my Vermont summers, creating foot paths and bridle paths, reopening overgrown wagon roads and joining them with new-cut trails, was what gave later access to motorbike races and the murderous snowmobiles that wake hibernating animals and doom them to die of cold. Not to mention the poachers. It was because we loved the poetic quality of the wilderness around us that the damage we did was moderate. No one, in my childhood, thought much about ecology. It was central European romanticism that preserved 300 wild acres in an empty township that had once contained 50 families of farmers and charcoal burners, who early in the last century moved down to easier lives in the valleys below. A few old cellar holes, stone walls, the rusty remnant of a wheel or a stove, the apple trees and berry bushes gone wild, are all that attest to their long hard years.

And these early settlers were vandals too in their way. The once great Eastern Forest, with trees the pilgrims described as so huge and canopied you could ride a horse through them freely without a road, that forest went forever, in their lumber mills and charcoal kilns.

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So, what matters about this particular act, this burning, is what it represents. We are now at a minute to midnight and beginning to pay for our waste and poison and clearings and burnings, for our ravaged lands. The earth does not belong to us as houses do. We belong to the earth, and the earth will not forgive us our greed. And how, when we have made a society in which it pays to burn intact houses and build again from scratch, can we ask the world's poor to keep their forests to protect our climate, our health?

Once in a while my sister and I go when no one is in residence – which is nearly all the time – to see what the place has become. The new owners have done some good, posted the land, planted more trees – sadly, however, regular, plantation conifers. A second house has been built, a stone's throw from the ugly new big one that now stands on our old foundation. It was built for the caretakers; only someone that near can give adequate protection to the mostly empty property. The perfect Olympic-size swimming pool has been scrapped for one of those kidney-shaped jobs beloved of resort hotels, and given a 'pool house' in Florida style; a baffling extravagance, since the pool is hardly three seconds downhill from the back door. The old beaver pond has been landscaped and is to be used for skating, with yet another building to shelter from the cold. Wilderness, all over America, is becoming the manicured parkland of the rich.

So why, years later do I want to tell this story now? It is 20 years since another, a great and tragic conflagration, the terrorist Twin Towers destruction of 9/11. The executive who bought, burned (I must repeat, with local government permission) and rebuilt our beloved Vermont house had an office in the Twin Towers but escaped the conflagration that day. One in that office who did not was the security guard, Rick Rescorla, a man from Cornwall where I live now. He got everyone he could to safety and died in the flames. He will be long remembered there and here. I need not repeat the truism that life makes strange connections – which now, having said I won't repeat it, I have.

Acts of War: Afterlives and Nazi-Looted Art

John Haber

It was just another act of war. No, not the world war that had ravaged Europe and threatened freedom everywhere. Not the war in which the Nazis had captured Paris and entered the firm of Georges Wildenstein.

Not an act in their wider agenda, which killed six million Jews and obliged Wildenstein, a Jewish art dealer, to 'Aryanize' his practice. Not an act of an entire art-looting task force, or Einsatzstab Reichsleiter, which seized much of his collection and made him sell still more at nominal rates. No, it was the subject of just one of those works, centuries before. Claude Lorrain painted *Battle on a Bridge* in 1655, and it appears once more in *Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art* at the Jewish Museum. It shows a battle in an unnamed war, from an artist better known for his golden light. This, too, is first and foremost a landscape painting, and his serenity extends even here.

Still, it looks far less serene in light of the terrible present. War, it seems to say, is inescapable, even for Claude. And yet the mob on the bridge has little to do with this or that army, and the families herding animals in the foreground outshine the battle lines. These are not combatants, witnesses, or bystanders but survivors, and they have become a reminder of so many Jewish and other refugees to this day. The painting has had an afterlife. In the course of time, the lost stories can only multiply.

Max Pechstein: Landscape, *1912. Oil on canvas*

Estate of Hugo Simon. © Pechstein Hamburg / Tökendorf / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; image provided by CNAC/MNAM, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, New York. (Photo by Philippe Migeat)

Marc Chagall: Purim, *c.1916-1917.* Oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Looters and martyrs

It would be a hard story to tell even in the singular. The Nazis looted something like a million works of art - and millions more books and other precious objects. The looting has led to conflicting stories as well. The very week the show opened, competing interests debated an American museum's obligation to return art that it had obtained legally, for a price, long after the crime (almost anyone would say that it must). Often as not, the debate concerns the spoils not just of World War II, but centuries of colonialism as well.

At the Jewish Museum, the stories are still harder to number. The show begins as an exhibition of looted art, and it opens with its largest and most powerful work. In *Large Blue Horse* by Franz Marc, the coiled animal barely fits on the canvas or within the red, green, and yellow landscape. Its intensity serves as a rejoinder to those who confiscated it as 'degenerate art'. But then in no time "Afterlives" moves past painting to cultural objects, personal stories, and historical records. It ends with four artists who revisit the looting now.

Still, for all the numbers, the curators promise a close count. For Darsie Alexander and Sam Sackeroff, the stories boil down to two, of looting and recovery. Oh, and a third, of what happened to all that stuff along the way. Any one of those stories is worth recovering. They are larger and more complicated than you may ever have dreamed. Take, for one, just how the looting took place.

George Grosz: The Approaching Storm, 1940. *Oil on canvas board*

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. © Estate of George Grosz / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; image provided by Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala / Art Resource, New York

The sheer enormity of the crime is worth repeating. The Nazis confiscated work on the spot, as from Wildenstein. They broke into a bank vault in Bordeaux to seize the collection of the most renowned Jewish dealer, Paul Rosenberg. They took still more after its owners fled or were arrested and killed. They took 2,000 items from one collector alone, David David-Weill. A still-life with roses here is just one of more than two dozen of his by Pierre Bonnard.

Take, too, why the looting took place, and again there is no one answer. The Nazis took some work because they hated it and what it meant to others. They exhibited 'degenerate art' as an object lesson, including a celebration of Purim by Marc Chagall, and they meant still more to be quietly destroyed. But then they took some, too, because they liked it and saw an opportunity. Hitler set Claude Lorrain aside for a planned Führermuseum, and Hermann Göring eyed a reclining nude by Gustave Courbet for his estate in Bavaria. And who's to say when they took Jewish antiquities to suppress it and when out of lust for precious silver?

What happened next is more frightening still, in its cold calculation and naked ambition. The Jeu de Paume in Paris, tennis courts that later became a museum for Impressionism before the d'Orsay, held plenty, as did a salt mine in Austria. Munich housed a central collecting point. Echoes of the Nazi handling of human beings are impossible to ignore. The looters numbered the spoils, just as tattoos tracked and reduced the humanity of those slated for death. Art had its transport trains, just like the concentration camps, and the storerooms at the Jeu de Paume became known as its Hall of Martyrs.

A happy ending?

In time comes restitution. In an overwhelmingly text-heavy show, almost every wall label can speak of it. It comes so

Franz Marc: The Large Blue Horses, 1911. *Oil on canvas*

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1942

completely and so often that the museum seems downright desperate for a happy ending, but then you may be, too. Two late paintings from Rosenberg by Henri Matisse, long separated, came together again at last, redoubling their joy in color. Many a collector survived as well. Wildenstein's gallery carries on in New York to this day.

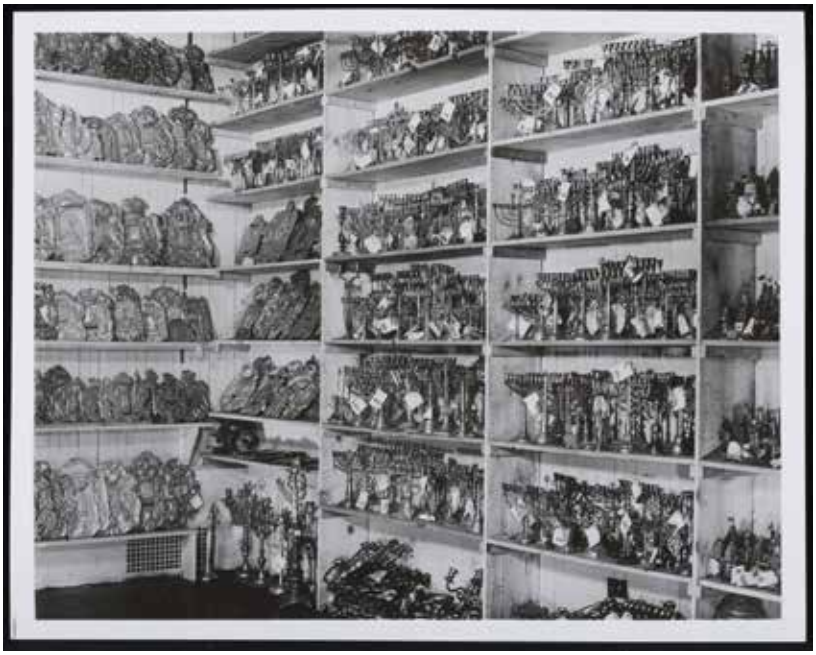
Just as impressive are the institutions behind recovery, and there, too, the stories multiply. They commence even before war's end, when French soldiers captured a transport, and they have not ended. The Nuremberg trials considered looting a war crime, and the Offenbach Archival Depot stepped in to help, from 1945 to 1949. The Jewish Cultural Reconstruction project issued reports, with Hannah Arendt as director. The Jewish Museum played a role, and it is not shy of boasting. The Jewish community in Danzig (now Gdańsk) arranged for shipments to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

The work may have other happy endings as well. Those shipments brought art to new eyes. The original owners may have sold their work after restitution, too. Claude's battle scene found a home in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. I confess that the return of work looted by Napoleon and imperialism can make me nostalgic for its place in western museums (just as I miss Guernica, which Picasso always intended for Spain, at the Museum of Modern Art). Still, now others can see it as their heritage.

For all that, not every story has a happy ending. You may know Arendt better from her scathing portrait of Adolf Eichmann at Nuremberg and 'the banality of evil'. Nor does the show's opening text mention a shift in theme, to Jewish artists and their fate. A whole wall has sketches that they made in hiding, in prison, or in the camps. The show recovers Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart and Otto Freundlich, both of them Jews, for the history of abstract painting. Dark tracery by Fédor Löwenstein recalls stained glass and makes his colors shine.

And then there are stories that the curators never acknowledge but cannot help putting on display. As any reader of this magazine will know, a work of art has many. It reinvents itself, constantly, in the hands of the artist and the eyes of the viewer. Chagall's *Purim* speaks to tradition, but with floating forms informed by his work in Soviet art, united by a red background informed by Matisse. Bonnard's still-life has two acts of creation 25 years apart. They take him from the feathery style of Post-Impressionism to something more fully modern.

Works speak to one another as well, exchanging stories, from the moment they enter an exhibition like this one. A stick figure by Pablo Picasso comes to resemble an abstract sign nearby by Paul Klee. One of the show's first works, by Max Pechstein, appears in context of the Nazi hatred of German Expressionism and Pechstein's movement, Die



Materials recovered by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. in storage at the Jewish Museum, c.1949. Archives of the Jewish Museum, New York

Brücke. Yet its acid reds and yellows reappear with Matisse, and its flaming trees become that much more vivid compared to Matisse's flowers—and its nudes that much more sensual and morally ambivalent. A massive bather by Paul Cézanne stands apart, but then Cézanne was never all that social. When you come to Camille Pissarro, for a portrait of Pissarro's daughter, you may wonder how their friendship lasted as long as it did.

Not even past

Still other work changes its story just by being here, among the looted—and among the afterlives today. It is not just Claude. Bernardo Strozzi in the early Baroque painted an act of mercy, a woman bringing water to the thirsty, and you can only ask why mercy is in such short supply. Henri Fantin-Latour paints himself in 1861 as rebellious and brooding, and there is much here to brood over and to rebel against. Freundlich paints *The Unity of Life and Death* as a virtual traffic jam of colored squares. Could he have seen death coming in 1938?

The play of pasts and presents extends to artists close, painfully close, to the scene. George Grosz pictured an *Approaching Storm* in 1940, as a swirl of brushwork, and now it had arrived, with an impact that he could never have foreseen. Kurt Schwitters had seen enough to include Nazi customs stamps into his collage, *Opened by Customs*, and now customs had done everything it could to seal his lips for good. August Sander photographed friends and neighbors who fled their homes, as *Persecuted Jews*. In his portraits, people tend to look less like individuals than types, defined by their dress and occupation. Here he finds instead a compelling dignity.

The show ends with four contemporary artists, continuing the dialogue. They are reflecting on the stories before them and bringing their own. But which story is which? Maria Eichhorn comes first, adding to the records of Arendt and her project with documents, reproductions, and spoken text. You may mistake it for the curator's work immediately before. You may not even consider that a mistake.

After a partition, the remaining three speak for themselves, but again by looking back. Hadar Gad renders the impoundment centers on canvas, in an amber that recalls metalpoint and the sepia tone of early photographs. Piled books look like mountains and a hall of martyrs like the grand interior of a European train hall or the old Penn Station. Dor Guez places objects on pedestals, much like the display before it—but humble, disposable objects from her grandparents, who escaped death in Nazi-occupied Tunisia, and her Jewish and Palestinian parents. Lisa Oppenheim tries to identify a looted still life in photo-collage, with shifting views of the work and close-ups closer to clouds. Of course, she never does.

Each has its drawbacks—all the more so given the show's shifting contexts. Oppenheim's chosen still-life is nothing like any of the paintings on display. Guez's objects, accompanied by fragmentary printed letters, have stories still waiting to be told. Gad's paintings need their labels to connect them to the looted, and Eichhorn's are hardly the show's most telling and terrifying records. Still, they are all gorgeous enough, and the more compelling question is simpler: should they appear at all?

So many stories make for a rich exhibition, richer than the curators could have intended—and richer, too, than they can accommodate. How can 19 paintings stand for a thousand, and why just those four contemporaries? They could have had a separate, fuller show of new art, leaving more room for the looted. Yet they bring home how far the stories extend into the present. Here the past really is never dead. As William Faulkner put it, "It's not even past."

Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art
The Jewish Museum, NY, August 20, 2021-January 9, 2022

The Faces in Whom we Trust

An interview with Robert Shetterly

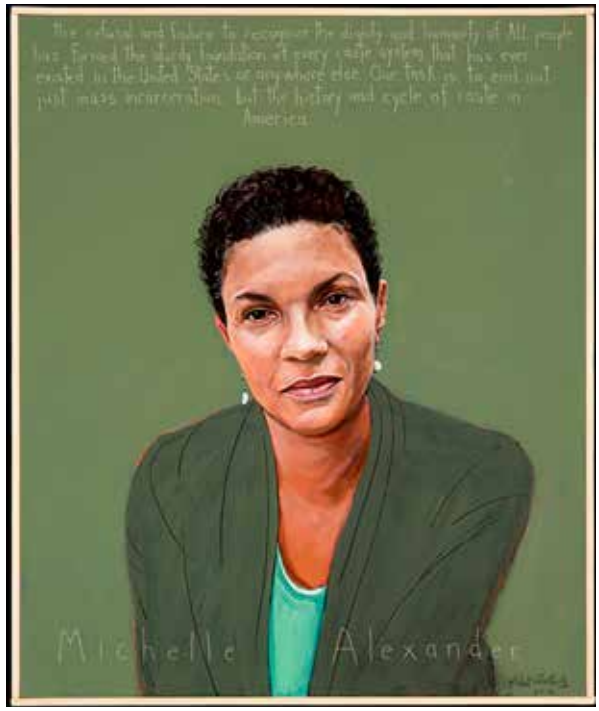
In 2001, as part of his own healing process, Robert Shetterly taught himself to paint portraits of the leading civil rights figures across American history. His ambitious target of 50 potraits has grown to 260, regular teaching events and a new book.

DN: I was quite interested to see that when you started the project before the book came along, you did it after 2001 as a form of coming to terms with what had happened, but it has mutated very strongly into an educational project and has garnered a lot of interest. Did you start thinking you were going to be teaching and educating people about the civil rights movements over the centuries?

RS: Absolutely not. This all began really as an art therapy project for myself. I was so distraught both with anger and grief over the propaganda that was being used in this country to enable the Iraq war, which was an absolute outrage, a war crime. I needed to find some way to reconcile myself back with this country, in a sense, not by accepting what was happening, but by embracing people who have stood up against it since its founding; people who actually believed in the ideals of the country and were not willing to compromise them. And of course the founding of this country involved just a blatant betrayal of its own ideals, and so we have, to the extent that we have them today, we have them because of the people who have stood up against it and insisted on them. And so that – it was my wanting to be in that company that made me want to make these paintings, but at first it was really just a for myself and it wasn't until I had begun to show them that other people said to me 'wow, you could use these for education, would you come into my classroom and talk about who these people are?' And all of a sudden I began to realise first that the paintings themselves were an education project and then we could use them to build a curriculum which we could then take to schools,

DN: So I imagine when you started and you thought you would do roughly 50 and they blossomed into nearly 200 now, that you've been on a learning curve as well over the last 20 years?

RS: Huge. I mean I was an English major in college and then self taught as an artist. I was never very profound even though I had been an activist around civil rights issues off and on for a long time. I had never been a really committed student of history. Interested in it, but not, you know, deeply – not deeply enough to really have studied it. You know painting portraits has required learning an enormous amount of history; first about each person and then around their time and what it meant to be who they are. So that's

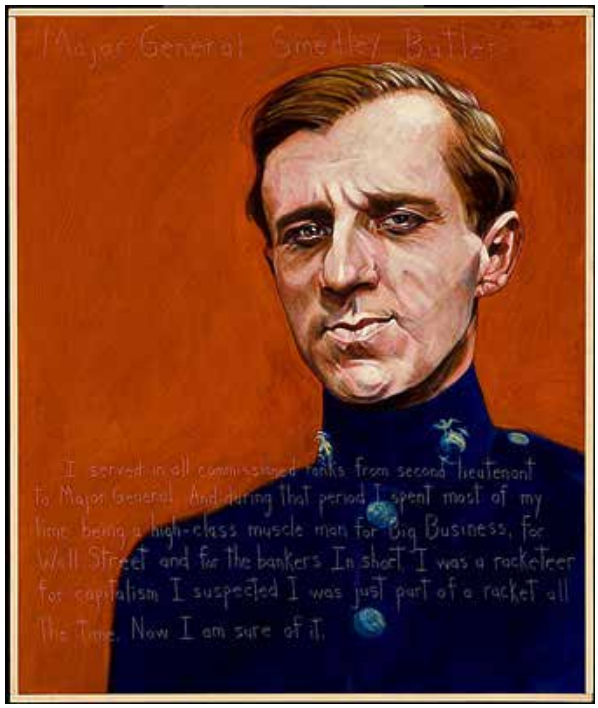


Michelle Alexander, Professor of Law, Writer, Historian, Civil Rights Advocate

one of the most exciting things about this for me ... is the history I'm learning and the stories I'm able to tell when I go into schools and colleges and talk with other groups of people. I can tell stories of the people I paint and I can also tell the context, the historical context in which they operate. It's been actually fascinating.

DN: Do you find the art produces a more immediate response and more engagement from the young students than if you just went and gave a lecture?

RS: Absolutely. That's a really interesting question Daniel. There are a lot of aspects to the art part of it. First of all, I chose to do this ... to make my political and moral statement through art because art is the best thing I do, as it has the most ... it is the strongest voice I have and so when I show these paintings to other people they respond to the art of it, you know, and they respond to ... they can see that I have aspired to make something you know, not just a political art but a real ... I've tried to make paintings that aspire to be real



Major General Smedley Butler
US Marine Corps, Antiwar Activist: 1881-1940

art, lets put it that way. And I think when real art is successful it validates its own message in a way, I mean it shows a commitment by the person making that to the highest standards that person can attain which is what I try to do with every painting. I tried to do the best I can to honour the person I'm painting and do it in a truly artistic way. I don't want to sound like I am doing cartoons of people and scratching with a magic marker, it is much more ... much deeper and more intense than that – and people respond to that even people who disagree with the politics of what I'm talking about are or disagree with the history. They respond to the art and then I'm able to make ... the statements I make – what I wanted to say– because of the art.

DN: America is still a young country and I'm wondering when you look at the history, because you've gone back to the 19th-century, as well as being able to sit with modern civil rights activists and people of various natures, if you see a continuity of thought between them over the last 200 years or if you think there have been substantial changes in the way Americans view themselves?

RS: Well that's interesting.

DN: It's a tough question, you don't have to answer.

RS: No No No, of course I want to answer it as best I can. Well first of all this is in a number of years a young country, but the flaws, the compromises, the sins are the same as any old ... much older country where we place our inner desire for power and profit ahead of our own morality or ethics. I mean that's an old problem. The people who are activists today ... yes they're not dealing with the more dire and obvious things like chattel slavery or lynchings, but some of the things that being done today ... you know, the police brutality ... the killings are not that far removed and because racism is so tightly woven into the fabric of this country, the class separations to the distribution of wealth in this country ... the problems are still very similar. It is it still there and it probably will be there for a while because even though the events of the last few years have enabled a lot more open discussion about, say, white privilege and systemic racism ...things like that we're still a long way from really facing the extremity of what it has meant in this country and what it still means going forward.

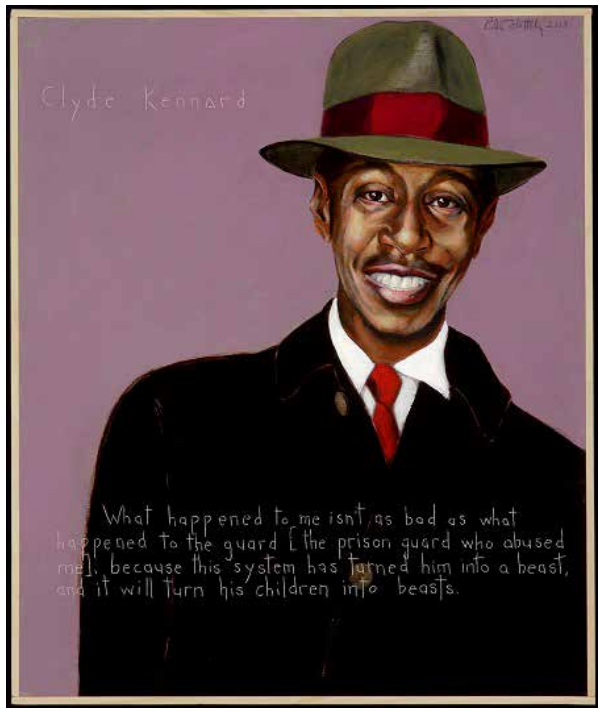
DN: You're not alone. Robert, I mean England is pretty much the same place; we don't have as much gun violence, obviously, but we are very much in the same place with Brexit and everything else. We are still coming to terms with the loss of empire.

RS: Well the United States still wants to be an empire and expand it ... which is terrifying.

DN: As a magazine we come from the idea that we can comment on art and that makes a substantive difference in the typical pragmatic way on how culture views itself and how people learn about themselves and you come from art and you're taking it into the political sphere to try and mirror almost what we are doing but, you're doing it in a very specific way, which I found very refreshing and very interesting. Who first approached you to actually put this all into a book?

RS: Yes, the publisher of New Village Press, which is a non-profit press in New York City ... a woman named Lynn Elizabeth talked to me about the possibility of making a book of the portraits, but not just one book because there now actually almost 260 portraits and they cover many different themes in American history. She suggested a series of books, the first being racial justice, being so pressing and urgent at this moment and the second being climate justice or earth justice, as we may call it, because that is perhaps even more pressing but, you know, something that would come second. If those two books do at all well, we will go on and do books about war and militarism, and books about other issues, press and education ... because I've covered so many different topics. It was her idea and I am very excited because back in 2005 the publisher Dutton made a small book for children ... it was marketed for children though it wasn't specifically for children it was called just *Americans Who Tell the Truth* and it was my first 50 portraits. And that

Lois Gibbs
Activist for a Toxic Free Environment, Writer: b. 1951



Clyde Kennard
Veteran, Student, Civil Rights Activist: 1927 - 1963

actually did pretty well in that market and enabled me to get into a lot of schools – and since then I have painted 200 more portraits and I haven't had another book, and so this opportunity to put them in a book together, themed like this with some essays by people who are in the book was absolutely thrilling to me.

DN: Were there any particular individuals that you just knew from the start you had to paint – people who inspired you – people that you really loved learning about?

RS: Absolutely. I mean sometimes when people ask me who's your favourite portrait, I right away say that's like asking a parent who's your favourite and even if you've got one you're not going to answer.

DN: Right

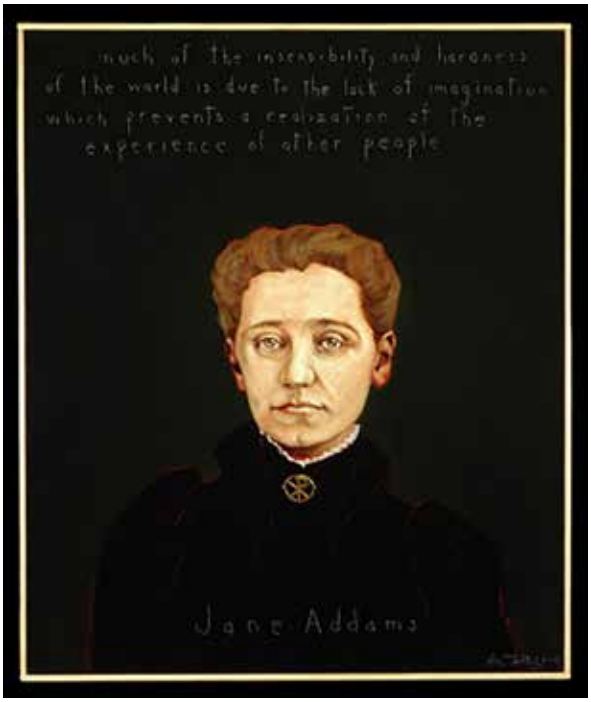
RS: I always answer. It's not so much they're favourites. They're ones that shine a bright light on certain kinds of issues which underpin this entire project. One of the first portraits was Sojourner Truth who was a slave, not in Alabama but in New York state, and was freed in 1827 when slavery was ended in New York and New Jersey. This is just one generation before our Civil War and the quote that's on her painting is critically important. She says: "Now I hears talking about the Constitution and the Rights of Man and I comes up and takes hold of this Constitution and it's mighty big and I feels for my rights." It's like the Constitution is this big hairy animal and she's got to reach in ... inside it and feel around to see if there are any rights for her ... you know... "and I feel for my rights and there aint any there and then I says what ails this Constitution, and he says to me Sojourner there's a little weasel in it." That weasel in our Constitution has enabled people to maintain power, especially white people, for 200 hundred years to avoid the reality of their own language, justice and unalienable rights and those things – has been the great struggle of this country. I think that if we are ever enabled to say that a people or a country has any nobility or is noble, it's because of how they struggle to live up to their own ideals and these people I paint are mostly those people. That's what they have done. They were the ones who are marginalised and denied those rights and so by their struggle to find them, they create our own nobility

DN: It's really 260 paintings of some of the most courageous Americans who have ever lived.

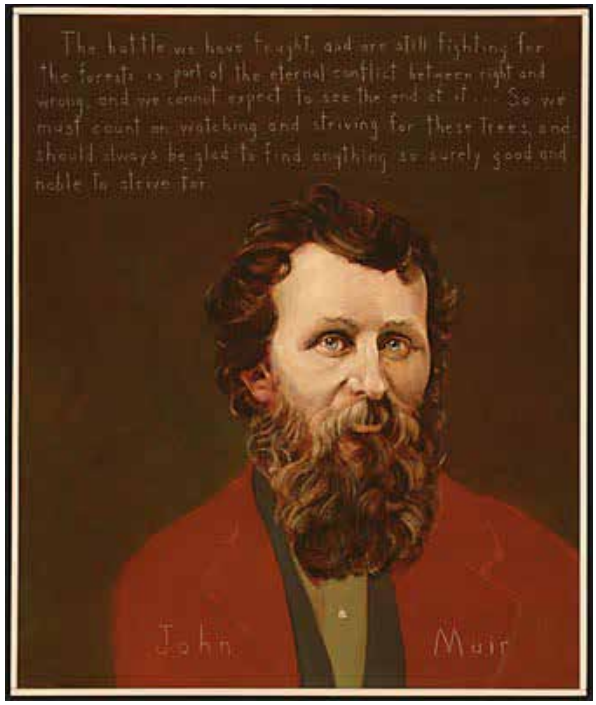
RS: Right

DN: Is it you who makes the decisions about who you're going to paint next, or do you do take advice from people?

RS: Well lets say I get an awful lot of suggestions. Every day. In fact when I go out to speak I always ask an audience 'if you were doing what I'm doing, who would you paint?' I get a lot of good suggestions. I only do a fraction of the people ... so it's my own education as we talked about earlier that produces many of the portraits, but also this has been a huge community effort in a sense. People are always bring-



Jane Addams
Social Reformer: 1860 - 1935



John Muir
Conservationist, Naturalist, Explorer: 1838 - 1914

ing me stories about other people who do pretty amazing things and saying this will make a great portrait. And often it does and that's where a lot of them come from, but it's ultimately my choice. And I want this to be my choice. This is very subjective. There are people, certainly, who look at this show and say, 'who are you to decide who the Americans are who tell the truth?' and I can only say well I'm just one person. I'm making subjective choices. If you would like to see collections of portraits of different people paint them ... do it yourself. This is my thing. ... you know. I stand behind it ... you know. Whenever I get really depressed about where we are in the world right now, one of the first things I do is start another portrait and then hitch a ride on somebody else's inspiration and courage. You know you mentioned the incredible courage of these folks ... one of the most important quotes for me is not on a portrait but was said by William Sloane Coffin. He died years ago but was one of the first works and a great inspiration. He was an elder in the Vietnam War and in the civil rights movement and he said, 'without courage, there are no other virtues' and I believe that intensely and the courage of these people, you know, is the thing that allows us as a society to hold onto the virtues of society ... you know the things we say we live by which we often don't unless we are courageous enough to insist on it.

DN: So these portraits are going to just continue to increase. This is never going to end for you. (RS laughs) This is an ongoing project?

RS: When I painted the first portrait ... you know there are some funny stories in there ... but when I committed myself to doing it I had never painted a realistic portrait in my life I was an artist who thought, well I'm going to do this thing and teach myself how to paint a portrait. So I did that and then I thought I'd set a goal that I don't think I'll ever reach which was 50 because I didn't think I could afford to do it because I don't sell. And then I couldn't stop. It's too fascinating, the stories are too good and the times keep changing and producing new people for me to paint, even though I go back and forth in history. It is just too interesting and I can't imagine doing any other art at this moment that is less engaged with this historical moment.

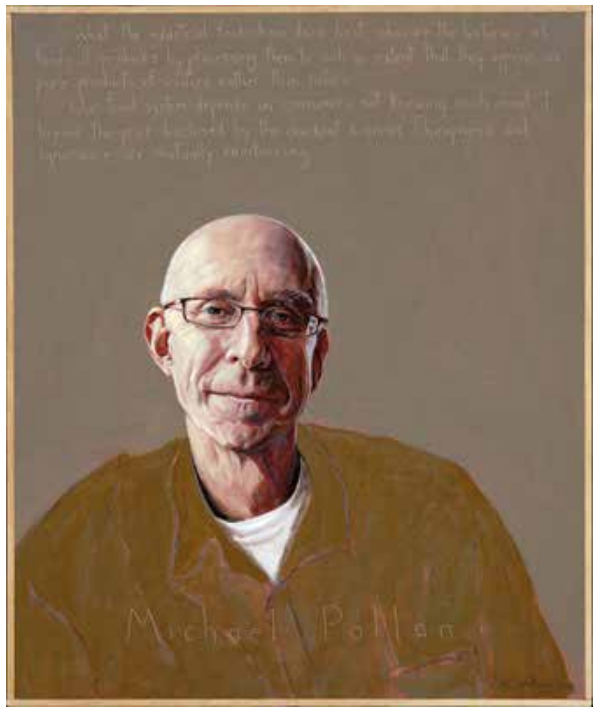
DN: If you're giving any book launches or doing any events, just let me know and we'll add it to the magazine when we put it online.

RS: Oh how wonderful. There are lots of things happening now after a year-and-a-half of Covid where everything stopped except for Zoom meetings. I will travel a bit again. The shows are picking ... you know ... the portraits are moving to different places around the country again.

DN: How is the art world taking to this? Is everybody enthusiastic? Do you have to push at all or do people come to you and say we want to do an exhibition?

RS: That's the only way we can get exhibitions ... is people coming to us but whether it's the ... I wouldn't say it's the art

Kandi Mossett
Indigenous & Environmental Rights Activist: b. 1980



Michael Pollan
Journalist, Professor: b. 1955

world that asks for shows, it's schools, colleges, churches, museums sometimes ... you know ... centres of engagement, a big show coming up at Muhammad Ali Centre in Louisville, Kentucky and that's the kind of place that I love having them because they put on a show, they do lots of background around it, and then bring in a lot of schools to see and be taught around the portraits. It's a kind of thing which is thrilling to me. Although we have a show coming up at a museum in Florida are next year ... a big show ... but that's kinda rare, just a museum show, but they also want to use it for education. Everybody is thinking about this and how they can they use it to confront where we are at this moment.

DN: Some journalist recently wrote that in the 1960s civics was actually taught in American schools (RS laughs) Not any more. Is that right?

RS: It fact it was true as a country that believes in citizenship and democracy and for a while they actually taught how to be citizens, what might be required of them. This is a little bit of how to do that.

DN: Well I wish you every success. Robert.

RS: Daniel. Thank you asked me some really good questions I haven't been asked before.

DN: Well, I understand where you're coming from. Because this magazine was started in community. We are having a book written about us and we are actually called the 'loyal opposition', we sit upon the right to comment upon all cultural things without fear, without favour. We do not do favours because we think that the minute you start doing favours or you let money dictate what you do, you disable culture.

RS: Absolutely.

DN: People do not understand how important the image is and how powerful images are. So we like to talk to people who are doing really good community things because that's where we think the power is of the art world today. We are less interested in the big guys because it's really all money, nothing else.

RS: Now I wish I could have said that as well. It sounds exactly like what I would say.

DN: I get that. I get that. It was lovely to have met you, Robert.

Robert Shetterly's page;
https://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/americanswhotellthetruth/

Sexy Grammar

Colin Fell

In her right hand - right being traditionally associated with correctness, orthodoxy, skill, dexterity - the young woman is holding a watering can; carefully, attentively, lovingly, she's watering some attractively flowering plants. Around her left arm is coiled a scroll, inscribed in Latin: translated, they read "a meaningful utterance which can be written down, pronounced in the proper way". Standing before Laurent de la Hyres' 1650 painting in the National Gallery the other day I felt I could reach out and touch those petals, those terracotta pots, but despite its naturalism this is no actual lady, those are no actual flowers. The lady is a personification of Grammatica, the flowers symbolic of young minds; you get the idea - grammar is the water for young minds to grow. I like this concept, of grammar as life-giving, affirmative; it's a refreshing palate cleanser for those legions of pupils for whom the word grammar summons vivid mental images of dusty classrooms, even dustier teachers, and a general sense of confusion, weariness and tedium. Any primary school teachers struggling to implement Michael Gove's English curriculum, with its heavy emphasis on such arcana as the fronted adverbial, might need to stand as I did in front of *The Allegory of Grammar*, and ruefully contemplate the spoils of time.

Le Hyre's painting, inspired by the allegorical portraits in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1645, reflected a world where the importance of grammar, in its broader sense of the grasp of languages, was unchallenged; Medieval England's original grammar schools, or *scolae grammaticales*, existed primarily to teach Latin to churchmen. In the pre-Reformation, the ubiquity of Latin as the medium of sacred texts reflected the mysteries of Christian faith, while being also an effective method of guaranteeing exclusivity - ordinary people needed the priest, or vicar, to encounter God. The association between grammar and power was undisputed: for translating the scriptures into broadly intelligible English, Wycliffe was punished posthumously - exhumed by the Catholic church, his remains were burned, along with his books, and the ashes flung into the river. Perhaps recognising the danger inherent in grammar, and feeling the need for a word meaning magic and enchantment, 17th-century Scots coined the word *glamour*; after all, what more mysteriously potent than the laws which enable words to be meaningfully written down? Glamour has grown up far from its birth parent, and leads an entirely different, and, well, more glamorous, life.

But in the modern world, grammar is a fraught, and politicised topic - there's a tension between approaching grammar as prescriptive, seeing it as a set of rules to be enforced, and

Tote Bag in Foyles: Author's image


ICONOLOGIA
DI
CESARE RIPA
PERVGINO
Caualier de' Santi Mauritio, & Lazaro,
DIVISA IN TRE LIBRI:
GIO. ZARATINO CASTELLINI ROMANO,
IN VENETIA, M. DC. LXIX.

Cesare Ripa - Iconologia - page 1

Laurent de La Hyre: Allegory_of_Grammar. *1650*

Image: Wiki Commons

as pragmatic, an attempt to understand and reflect on the way language works in practice. Prescriptivists, who - or, ahem, whom – I suspect are in the majority, like to imagine grammar as an unchanging series of rules and precepts. Adhering to Standard English grammar, and pedantically pulling rank on those who don't, is a familiar version of one-upmanship, often sharpened by the Scylla and Charybdis of perceived racial and gender hierarchies.

It's perhaps little wonder that typing 'grammar' into Google throws up "grammar Nazi"; adherence to supposed rules apparently synonymous with SS Einsatzgruppen and concentration squads. Apart from the fact that using any form of knowledge as a way of belittling other people is a crude from of bullying, the problem is that knowledge of the rules only really teaches you when to ignore them. Asking a friend *with whom* they were going to the pub, or answering the phone by declaring *it is I*, are two pretty infallible ways of quickly becoming friendless. Ideas of correct grammar are, anyway, not immutable; like fashions, they change. Any of my teachers, God forbid, reading this article would have crossed out the sentence-opening conjunction 'but' in the previous paragraph, using the argument that co-ordinating conjunctions by definition must join, and therefore cannot open a sentence. But to know this is, well, to feel free to ignore it. And of course non-standard grammar can be as expressive as standard - as a child I was enraptured by Captain Kirk's opening declaration of intent "to boldly go", while Mick Jagger's heartfelt claim "I can't get no satisfaction" would sound at best peculiar in its standard version. Mrs Morel, in D.H.Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, is fascinated by

her future husband's distinctly non-standard Nottinghamshire dialect: "Shouldn't ter like it?" he asked tenderly. "'Appen not, it 'ud dirty thee." She had never been "thee'd" and "thou'd" before. And as for Walter Morel, it was Gertrude's southern pronunciation and a purity of English which thrilled him to hear.

From my own perspective as a teacher of English, I'm acutely aware of the tensions and contradictions within the language and our way of understanding it. The contemporary obsession with grammar as an enforcement of unchanging rules can all too easily become nothing more than the naming of parts, stifling creativity; and much as I'd like to say otherwise, it isn't exclusively Michael Gove's fault. In Elizabeth Gaskell's excellent Victorian novel *North and South*, Margaret visits a school in her childhood village during a grammar lesson:

Cornelis Cort – after Frans Floris:
Grammatica, an older woman, teaches a young child. 1565

"One of the girls was stumbling over the apparently simple word 'a,' uncertain what to call it. 'A', an indefinite article,' said Margaret, mildly. 'I beg your pardon,' said the Vicar's wife … 'but we are taught by Mr. Milsome to call 'a' an — who can remember?' 'An adjective absolute,' said half-a-dozen voices at once. And Margaret sat abashed. The children knew more than she did. Margaret spoke no more during the lesson."

I love Gaskell's wry humour here, and it's scarcely surprising that Margaret spoke no more; we've all been there.

Yet, how enriching it is to be able to think about grammar. In Hamlet's to be or not to be, the repeated infinitive verb shows the tormented student, framing existence and non-existence as abstract concepts, distancing himself from the messier, and more physical notions of life and death while equally escaping the temporal dimensions of past, present, or future which are implicit in finite verbs. It's one of the reasons that modern translations of Shakespeare are so misleading: "shall I kill myself or not?" is scarcely the same thing. Or look at the opening of T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*,

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring

where the repeated participial verbs are subtly disorientating, pointing up the way in which ceaseless natural activity only emphasises the sterility of early 20th-century European life. And what about the opening of Dickens's *Bleak House*, which defiantly flouts the rules of regular grammar; of the opening 16 sentences, probably only one would pass the sternest test of a prescriptivist grammarian, but here's Dickens the journalist, vividly depicting Victorian London as morally fragmented and dysfunctional, and in no mood to respect the rules of syntax.

In Foyles' bookshop last week, I was tempted by a tote bag, with the slogan "Good grammar is sexy" (Discuss, banishing all thoughts of Michael Gove…) Which brings us back to Laurent de la Hyre's lady; benign, supremely confident, glamorous; and, yes, sexy. There's no question in her mind or in mine that she's watering flowers, not stifling them, and whatever they're called, they will all blossom most wonderfully.

letters@newartexaminer.net

Dead but Covered:

The Arc de Triomphe wrapped by Christo & Jeanne-Claude

Christian Hain

You know how it is when a close relation has passed away: going through the papers, taking care of unfinished business. Wrapping things up. If the deceased was a famous artist who has left the most detailed instructions for projects that can still be realized without his physical presence, things might only be a little bit more complicated - just ask Vladimir Yavachev, nephew of 'the monument's taylor' Christo Vladimirov Yavachev who's following through with the Wrapped Arc de Triomphe in Paris (there's also the artist's son, Cyril, somewhere, living the sweet life of an artist's son, but he doesn't seem to be overly involved with managing the estate, or at least not with this project).

Seeing the almost finished installation on our way to the press conference, and tiny Lego figures - actually workmen, very much alive - moving up and down on ropes across the arch in its haute couture dress, we realized for the first time ever, how big it actually is. Personally I've always enjoyed standing on top and looking about the city, a pleasure that's even manageable for those among us who don't appreciate exaggerated heights (or escalators: there's a narrow, steep spiral staircase winding its way up to the top). The views are as good as anybody could reasonably ask for, and it's - well, it was, but we'll come to this later - not even expensive, though not free like that secret tip of every tourist guide, the Galeries Lafayette's roof terrace that once served some flight pioneers for a base camp (Galeries Lafayette on Haussmann, not the latest branch on the Champs Elysees, or wherever else they're expanding to these days).

But back to Christo and the press conference: Vladimir the nephew seems a nice guy, he's definitely a great entertainer, hands-on, smiling and joking with the highest dignitaries of city and state culture - who, needless to say, made their appearance that day - and blue collar workers alike, two of whom he dragged on stage when presenting team members from PR to architecture firm. Brilliant moment, when Vladimir suggested a group photo taken without face masks, 'I'm a rebel', at which point the politicians' advisors intervened. His attitude greatly resonates with the event's brand image (sorry for being a cynic again) which sometimes appears unprofessional, as apparent not least in Christo's handwritten exhibition logo. But, of course, there can be no doubt about the professionalism of workers and craftsmen who really got the job done. They certainly did: looking at this gift to the city from afar feels like a poor kid casting wishful glances at the Christmas tree through an art collector's windows, and we are curious again about what's hiding under the wrapping, 'have those bumps and dents always been there, has it always looked like a castle's battlement?'

Christo Vladimirov Javacheff: Arc de Triomphe wrapped opened by Emmanuel Macron, 16th September 2021.

We'll spare you a tedious listing of numbers, metres of fabric etc., only so much: the wrapping is heavier than you'd

Arc de Triomphe on 5th February 2019
Photo: Wiki Commons

expect - for a moment, we felt very important being handed two small pieces (fine: one I just nicked, showing some initiative for once) as a special gift to the VIP press, then found out that they were given indiscriminately to random visitors. Perhaps more interesting, Christo devised the plan for this project after moving to Paris from socialist Bulgaria in the late 1950s, while living in a tiny room with a distant view of the Arc which greatly influenced his artistic ideas and, ultimately, career. Better not take this thought too far, and ask yourself what it says about a historical monument if all an artist can think about is to wrap and hide it away. The idea, of course, is more about rediscovering and, in a sense, recreating a (much too) familiar sight that nobody notices any longer: giving back the tourist's eye to locals, and something else to tourists than just another postcard view they've always known, helping them and us and everybody to see things for the first time again; to put back into focus what lies hidden in plain view. Changing things without changing them too much; more of the same, but different.

About a quarter of a century before Christo conceived his plan to cover buildings and sites in a 'large grey dress', another Parisian had immortalized the little black dress for humans, but we won't go as far as claiming any direct links between these two. It took roughly another 25 years until, in 1985, the honour fell first to Pont Neuf bridge. Today, nearly 40 years later, Parisians still cherish fond memories of the wrapped Pont Neuf, helping authorities to approve another project, current mayor Anne Hidalgo admitted. At some point, the Centre Pompidou also got involved but I missed the details, reflecting on how it's easier to accept what you're familiar with and how this subverts the artwork's concept and impact: Christo's art being well-known today, it's become an almost familiar sight; wrapping things doesn't change them as much when people know beforehand what to expect and how it will look - are not the best presents always those that you did not add to your wish list?

Mrs Hidalgo further mentioning the grey sky and the annual nuit blanche (white night) of artistic projects all over Paris, I couldn't help but remember that 'city of light' label is clever marketing but rather misleading for those who've never been here: Paris is, after all, a thoroughly monochrome city, clad in all shades of grey from the Seine to palaces and skies, so much so that even the Eiffel Tower in her brownish green iron skin - and boy, is she beautiful (la tour - you can be pretty sure, that if it's phallic in form, the grammatical gender in French is female) brings a dash of colour to her neighbourhood. Only when the sun is shining, the reflections set all the grey, and, obviously old, stones ablaze. The Arc de Triomphe is no exception to the rule: like cut–off elephant feet, its four grey columns reach into the sky, la tête lost dans les nuages and Christo's wrapping doesn't take a fundamentally different colour, not white, but grey, a little silvery, more solid than flash. Thin blue strains are woven into the fabric, but not everybody will notice the bluish aura they supposedly lend the installation, while red ribbons hold everything in place - so that's what they meant with the artist's *clin d'oeil* at the tricolore, the French national flag!

As mentioned above, the Wrapped Arc is still an original creation: Christo and his wife and collaborator Jeanne-Claude took care of everything up to the least detail. Rest assured, no evil chemicals have been used in the production process, all the fabric will be recycled (except those samples distributed among visitors, obviously), Probably no slave labour, either, but hey, the cynic says; that's one reason why the outcome isn't quite as impressive and enduring as the old white monument hidden underneath. The Eternal Flame on an Unknown Soldier's grave in the centre of the Arc (technically, it's rather a perpetually reignited flame) which cannot reach the wrapping and turn it into the world's monumental blaze, as a representative of the association in charge of rekindling the flame every night affirmed. Much more eloquent, smart and funny than you'd expect your average foreign legion veteran to be, he spontaneously decided to storm the stage and thank everybody in person. Not only are the relics safe, but visitors need to put on a facemask for the pedestrian tunnel leading to the monument, and present their pass sanitaire which until further notice is necessary for participating in all aspects of societal life not only in France. It's nothing more than an app with a barcode to certify your full recovery, a positively negative test, or double vaccination, as long as you're not vaccinated with Sputnik

or some other vaccine that's just as efficient.
Also for security reasons, the roundabout at the Monument where some street artist or regular guy in a flash of inspiration (could it even have been somebody involved with the project?) added the fake road sign 'Place Christo & Jeanne-Claude', remains closed for cars on all weekends during the project's runtime. If, still for security reasons, you wonder whether the project would have been feasible in summertime or if the fabric with its woven-in metal strains could heat up enough to burn tourists on the stake (has not every Parisian citizen had this dream from time to time?), the answer is no, it's getting warm, but not hot, only the reflections are annoying: the city was compelled to order sunglasses for security and other staff who spend hours a day with the installation.

Sadly, not only on top, but also at night, the installation is not as impressive as hoped for, ça change pas trop non plus: it doesn't change all that much, either. Indirect lighting helps the wrapped arch to appear harmoniously grown into the environment, but is this really what was wanted? It's like a return to the unwrapped condition, and then again, it would have been hard to do otherwise

We also went upstairs, but you shouldn't, because (a) standing on top hardly adds anything to the experience apart from feeling the fabric under your feet (you cannot exactly see the artwork from here - was this different on the Floating Piers in 2016?), and (b) those in charge of the monument - but not the installation - have raised the price of admission to the rooftop to a ridiculous 16 euros, contradicting Christo's untiringly repeated mantra, his works were freely accessible for all.
Sadly, not only on top, but also at night, the installation is not as impressive as hoped for, ça change pas trop non plus: it doesn't change all that much, either. Indirect lighting helps the wrapped arch to appear harmoniously grown into the environment, but is this really what was wanted? It's like a return to the unwrapped condition, and then again, it would have been hard to do otherwise as any brighter lighting would have been reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower and her hourly neon show, Bangkok style.
The whole project is self-funded, financed by the sale of related art works (i.e. the preparatory drawings), so it could come as a surprise that there are no classic souvenir shops in sight, freely accessible for all. I would willingly have bought a poster/T-Shirt/toy model/Arc-shaped macaron or whatever, if only to wrap it for the folks at home! Instead, we found some guys selling catalogues for books nobody's ever supposed to read, but to put on their coffee table (do you actually know anybody who owns a coffee table for the purpose of displaying books there?). The licensing costs must have been considerable for that former comic book store guy turned multi–millionaire editor. Sadly, they employed students instead of the regular Parisian street vendors, many of whom are of Indian descent. Like us, you should have a look at the artists' website where under common errors you'll learn that they never earned a penny from their installations and outrightly refused all merchandising. The (unavoidable) surplus fully went into new projects, which doesn't mean,the Yavachevs would have lived on fine air - it's always easier to be anticapitalist when you come from a background where, well, money never exactly needed to play an important role in their lives.
In an unfortunate coincidence - please tell me that's what it is - a second building almost as monumental as the Arc de Triomphe some metres down the Champs Elysées likewise dresses in a greyish white wrapping this autumn. That's the Dior flagship store under renovation.
Being faithful readers of the NAE, you might remember my thoughts and more or less substantiated musings on the occasion of a Christo retrospective last year in Berlin, and let me only add this: Christo takes what is already there and makes it a present to the public, to people who already know it without knowing it anymore, like a fancy roleplay dress, handcuffs or diapers: some kink to rejuvenate your relationship which might work for a night or two until the old familiarity sets in, the extraordinary becomes normal, and the effect is lost. Christo's art needs to be ephemeral, unlike the Arc's official inscriptions or that name–tag somebody's carved into the wet concrete next to the access tunnel.
It is in the nature of things that Christo's art is ephemeral - or was, as long as the artist was alive, yet one more work might still see the light of day: the Mastaba in Saudi-Arabia. From Vladimir we learned that one of the late artist's favourite expressions was a triumphant, albeit not grammar-fanatic compatible, "we didded it!" leading me to mentally replace that famous slogan on an American sportswear company's T-Shirts and Sweaters with the words "Christo didded it" during the rest of my séjour in Paris.
To sum it up, spectacles and scandals are subject to the laws of inflation, too, and this is just another art project, after all. Who, for example, still remembers the uproar surrounding Paul McCarthy's oversized buttplug (no weird association of mine, but that's what it was, all officially) on Place Vendôme in 2014? Christo's Wrapped Arc might, sadly, be just as forgotten much sooner than later.

Molly Jae Vaughan, After Boucher

Alexander Stanfield

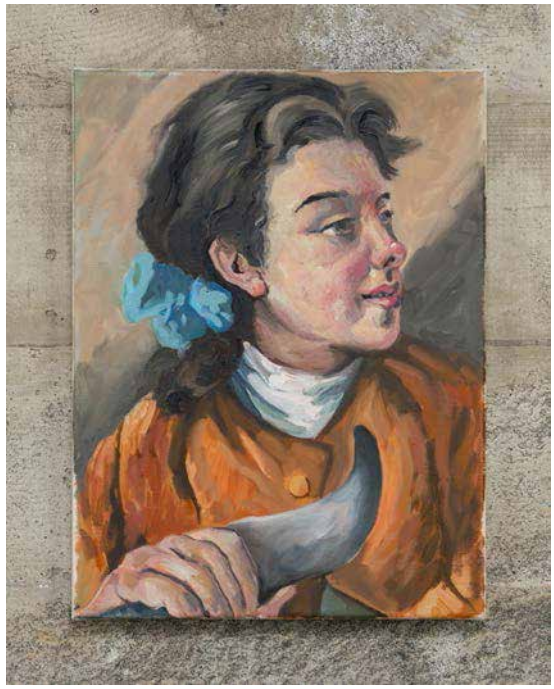
After Boucher, a nuanced solo exhibition of subversion and representation by Molly Jae Vaughan, is showing until Oct 24th at the Fuller Rosen Gallery in Portland, Oregon, United States. All the pieces in this collection are directly influenced by Boucher works from one book of 60 pieces titled *The Drawings of François Boucher* by Alastair Laing. This culmination of five years of Vaughan's dedication presents the works of François Boucher in a new light. Utilizing classic Rococo content, Vaughan repurposes the Boucher works to create a discussion about Queer bodies, identity, and exploitation.

Vaughan, a senior associate professor of art at Bellevue University in Washington, began making work as an openly trans woman as of 2011 and celebrates the representation of trans bodies in their work. There are several mediums at play in this show ranging from crayon, acrylic, sateen, and more. This attests to how an artist's work can shift over time, but also directly references the many mediums and crafts Boucher utilized in his own work.

As an artist of the Rococo, Boucher's work has an inviting sense of movement to it. Ornamental structures, sweeping fabric, theatrical poses and silhouettes fill the subject matter as excessive amounts of material and movement spill out of the image. Vaughan has replicated this treatment of the subject matter and taken the soft color palettes to another place with vibrant pastels while keeping the Classical iconography and powdered wigs for that period touch. Their treatment of color and lines takes these images almost into the realm of graphic design, echoing work of other French artists from the late 19th-century.

Gender and sexuality are at the forefront of this collection, but not in the way you might think. Vaughan has added a notable aspect to these identifiably Rococo settings: the Minotaur. The choice to include this classical character is fun, and clever, but it also adds another layer to Vaughan's conversation with the audience. Minotaurs were vilified and ostracized for being outside conventional constructs. Vaughan has used imagery like this in their work before because they identify with this placement as a member of the queer community.

Anthropomorphized bodies are present where the conventionally gendered bodies once occupied Boucher's images. Aside from an artist further connecting with their audience



Molly Jae Vaughan: Boy with Carrot or Boy with Parsnip; but Really Boy with a Bull's Horn
oil on linen. $3,000

Photos courtesy Mario Gallucci © 2021

through their work, this choice of imagery subverts traditional Rococo subject matter by removing a commonly, but unfortunately, used perspective of the heteronormative male gaze.

Rococo compositions were usually dominated by scenes of leisure, parties, and diversions of the affluent. This was often connected to an exploitive point of view. Throughout the Rococo period the Gaze often found its eyes resting on the young country girl of low economic status, being exploited by the upper, predominantly male class. Being preyed upon is undoubtedly a concern, a fear that Vaughan has either dealt with themselves or experienced through others in their communities. These tense situations are a concept that speaks to the plight of many queer individuals today. The creativity of Vaughan in removing the effectiveness of the Gaze repurposes these Rococo scenes, allowing them to en-

ter a new dialogue with the viewer.

A well-executed example of this is *Young Country Girl Dancing.* As the first image in the catalog, it sets the tone for the remainder of the exhibition. Vaughan has kept the original subject of a dancer but replaced the human likeness with that of a swan head. By removing the conventionally young female visage Vaughan has taken away the exploitative perspective. This in turn makes the viewer's role pivot to focus on other aspects of the image, not just the gender identity.

Many of the works in this show are eye-catching. The most striking is a dress located in the center of the room. Unlike the other works in the exhibition, this is a three-dimensional piece that forces the viewer to walk around it in order to fully take in the article's decoration. Hand-painted queer and trans imagery occupies much of the surface area on this Renaissance-era style dress. In this artistic choice Vaughan may be making a direct statement to convey to the viewer that, much like this dress, genitalia is an article that we adorn, not a forced identity. It is worth remembering that the name Rococo is derived from the French *rocaille*, a method of decoration that gained popularity during the Renaissance. A connection that the artist is undoubtedly aware of.

Even the Young General Wolfe Came
Assisted by Seraphim Hong and Anh Nguyen

Conté and marker on sateen $8,000

As I left the gallery, I found myself considering Vaughan's place as an artist. They have worked for the opportunity to develop a platform to discuss topics of gender identity and sexuality with their art, and within the art world. However, sometimes being political, on-topic, isn't what matters for artists. Sometimes, creating what makes you as the individual happy is what matters. In the end, no matter what your work is about, if you as the artist don't feel compelled by it, it will never achieve its potential.

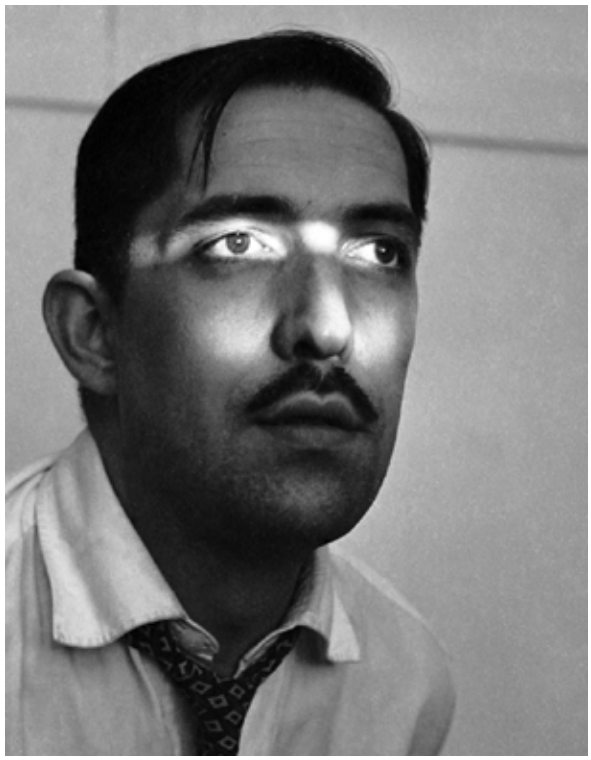
Fotoclubismo: Modern Photography in Brazil

John Haber

More than 50 years ago, a movement in Brazil had a thorough grounding in modern art and design. It featured outsiders to photography, with due emphasis on women, but photography in Europe never came close to its eclecticism and modernity.

Fotoclubismo Brazil introduces a collective, but it opens on the theme of solitude. Solitude can be lonely or revivifying, a forced isolation or the choice of a pioneer, and the Foto-Cine Clube Bandeirante (or FCCB) embraced them all. It took its name from colonial fortune hunters in São Paulo, overlooking a history of slavery and Portuguese control. The group's pioneer, Geraldo de Barros, snapped his self-portrait with sunlight as the mask of Zorro over his eyes. Yet one can feel the loneliness in an empty chair or a little girl facing an ill-defined landscape and an uncertain future. Never mind that Ivo Ferreira da Silva calls his photo of a chair *Confidential* – and Dulce Carneiro saw in that girl the promise of *Tomorrow*.

Or rather do mind, a lot, for this is modernist photography, and the collective believed in its promise. That promise brought urban professionals together on weekends, as sophisticated amateurs. It was a political promise as well. FCCB was founded in 1939, and MoMA sets a thrilling survey in the floor for art before World War II, with work almost entirely from the collection. Yet it took off for real in 1946, when de Barros signed on and the club's magazine, *Boletim Foto-Cine*, began. That was the first year of a republic, and the group died in 1964 along with the republic, as a dictator seized control of Brazil.



Geraldo de Barros: Self-Portrait (Autorretrato) *c.1949*

Exhibition View

A collective solitude

Modernity can be isolating, too, most of all when one is one among many, like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*. But again never mind, for Foto-Cine Clube Bandeirante delighted in the signs of modernity, like telephone wires for Thomaz Farkas or a manhole cover for Marcel Giró. These days one expects Brazilian artists to reflect a uniquely Latin American art and indigenous history - like Rivane Neuenschwander, Roberto Burle Marx, Luiz Zerbini, Lygia Clark, or Grupo Frente. This club knew only modern art as an ongoing experiment. Its clean esthetic and urban subject mat-

German Lorca: Casal na chuva.1952
Reprodução SP - Arte/CASACOR

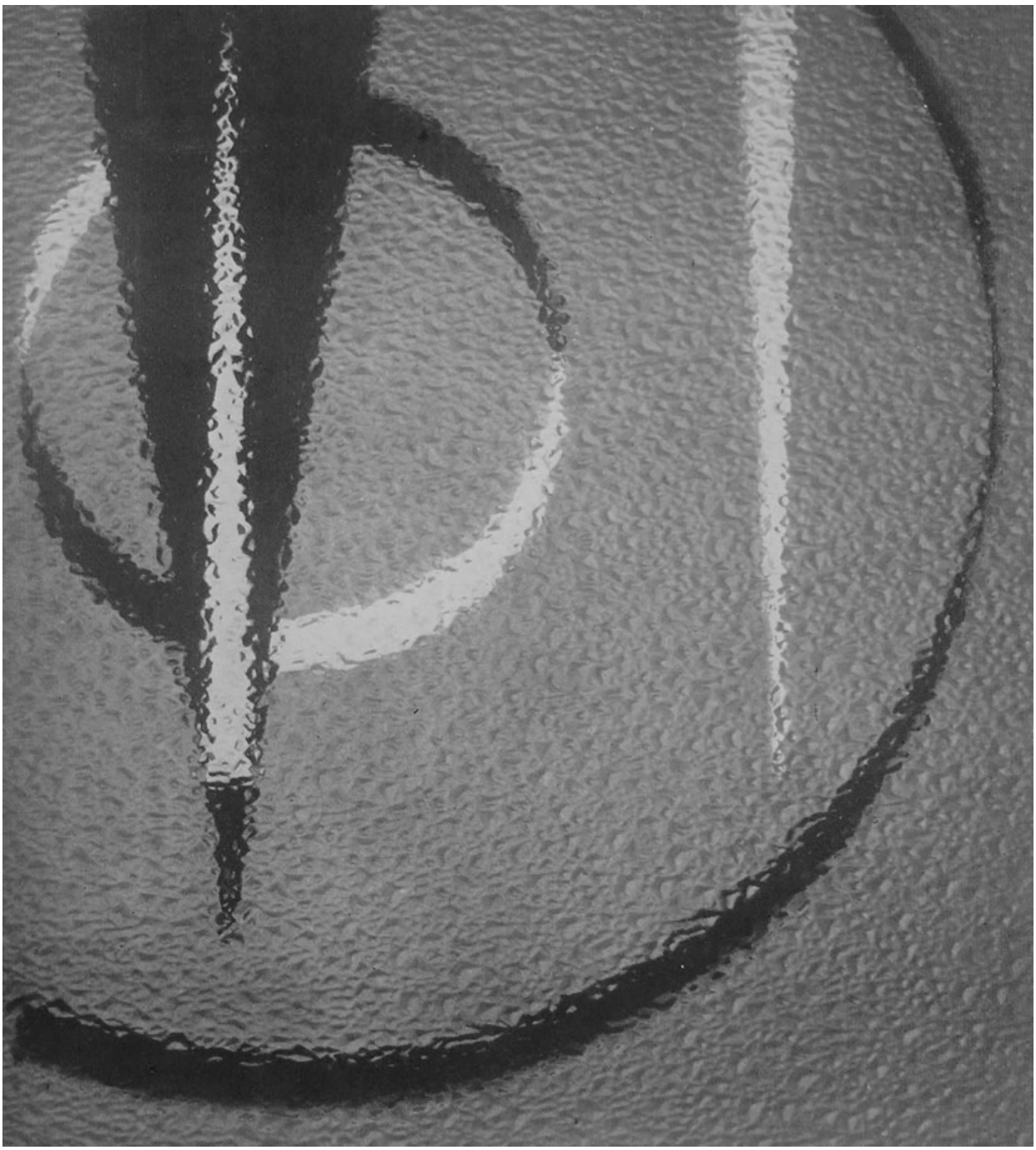
ter recall Margaret Bourke-White and, before her, Henri Cartier-Bresson. When Alzira Helena Teixeira captures the light through a curved overhead window, one might be in rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum with Frank Lloyd Wright.

Above all, FCCB's members had each other, in a show of 60 works—following up on MoMA's re–hanging in its "fall reveal". A photo poses a good 30 in its cast, clearly enjoying the company. They traveled together, and the photo has them stepping off a plane. They kept a scorecard on each other, and they worked side by side. Ademar Manarini photographs a man from behind, leaning against a plain white wall as he faces the patterned windows of a housing complex. With Eduardo Salvatore, the club's president, that complex and its grid of windows then take on a life of their own.

They had their common subjects, like architecture and utility poles. For Giró the Ministry of Education is a white trapezoid, as a backdrop for the wires. It is a short step from white roofs for de Barros to angled walls for José Yalenti or apartment blocks for German Lorca. It is a short step, too, from sand for Yalenti to rushing water for Farkas or raindrops on broken glass for Maria Helena Valente da Cruz. They loved blurred or broken silhouettes, like a busy airport for Lorca or an umbrella in the rain for Giró. With a concrete spiral, Gertrudes Altschul had her own foretaste of the Guggenheim still to come.

They had common techniques, like close-ups and overheads that push ordinary subjects to the verge of abstraction. Tires for Altschul look like monumental sculpture. They ran to back-lit subjects, like people in a park on Sunday for Barbara Mors. They experimented with photograms, solarization, and prints as negatives. When de Barros showed the way, it looked strange, and they drew back, but not for long. They photographed abstract painting, and the show includes a geometric abstraction by María Freire in Uruguay—but Freire had learned from them.

Just as innovative, they had women photographers, like Dulce Carneiro, starting when Altschul, already in her fifties, walked right in. She is one of just three artists with a section to herself, amid an arrangement by theme. Along with solitude, that includes sections for texture and forms, daily life, experiment, and simplicity, but these went together. White roofs for de Barros had to be corrugated, because texture and form were elements of modern life. Many a work could just as well fall in another section. Altschul may have a place to herself, but with a photo called *Lines and Tones*.



José Rodrigues Oiticica: Forma 17-B. *São Paulo, 1957*
Reprodução Studium Iar Unicamp/CASACOR

FCCB never gave up its status as weekend warriors. The curator, Sarah Hermanson Meister with Dana Ostrander, speaks of its work as *carnival* or *familial* – and Julio Agostinelli did photograph a circus, in (sure enough) broken silhouettes. Still, this carnival or family prefers solitude to people, for a proper Modernism and a portrait of modernity. The rare recognizable person stands out. Lorca photographs a terribly proper man reading, with a woman beside and behind him like a caretaker. The movement itself was having way too much fun to take care.

"Fotoclubismo" ran at The Museum of Modern Art through to September 26, 2021.

Nudity in a western culture: “Hayley Goes… Naked”

Mary Fletcher

Hayley Goes series in on the BBC

(Often it takes a lot of time to find images for reviews. This was found in one second and in high resolution. These programmes are actually soft pornography. Ed.)

In this TV programme Hayley Pearce considers aspects of how the female body is regarded. She tries posing sexily in underwear for money online - and won’t take all her clothes off - fearing future disparagement. Later however she agrees to take part in one of those saucy calendar shoots where middle-aged women pose coyly, hiding their breasts with various props, to be photographed by a man. They are raising money by producing a calendar for charity.

Life-class posing is mentioned - and however much I feel images of naked women are often exploitative - rarely acceptable - Bonnard being an exception where the woman is shown with respect and love - at least it seems a cut above girly magazines and their online equivalent. The wholesome attitudes of acceptance of the body in a naked state shown in a nudist camp and a naked yoga class are subverted by the camera person’s coy shots in which a book or long hair conceal breasts or a penis. Yet we also have the ridiculous *Naked Attraction* programme in which participants discuss the relative attractiveness of other people’s exposed genitalia. There are brief shots of classical Greek statues - from a time when the body was idealised and revered without titillation or exaggeration.

It seems now we are mostly stuck with the shame of Adam and Eve.

Landmark - a Sky Arts programme set in the UK

Mary Fletcher

Yet another contest – for public sculpture this time.
They spend a long time introducing the judges, then get to the three contestants – but don't say two of their last names. These surnames do appear on the screen for those who don't glance away - but this won't help their fame and fortune and is a bit thoughtless.
I notice all the women in the show have very striking bright lipstick. No one mentions how they were chosen - they are all quite young. Were they favourites the curators were aware of already, or was there a call for contestants put out in the north of England?
Although I suppose I should be rating the artists by their work, it's impossible not to be influenced by their personalities and what they say. I take an instant dislike to all three out of envy of their opportunity, but as the programme goes on the talk of spiritual wisdom and spiritual conductors - or as I term it pretentious guff - puts me off two of them and I prefer Saad Qureshi who at least has a morsel of self deprecation and humour and prominent leopard print spectacles.
Naturally the time for making the work has to be only two weeks and all three rely on skilled fabricators. Meanwhile we are introduced to artists in the Grizedale Forest - where today's works will be placed after being at the Hepworth Wakefield Museum.
Sadie Clayton - the one with pink hair who looks like a page in Vogue - produces a copper concoction loosely related to a Yorkshire rose. It comes out much nicer than her drawing and forms a gateway with stone supports. She was the one with the annoyingly over-the-top manic enthusiasm.
Saad Qureshi used a lovely turquoise for his perversely three-winged dragonfly piece, though it was a bit disappointing in scale and static looking.
All three are using flat cut-out sheets of metal. The first two artists are emphasised as having dual heritage in their national identity.
So this leaves Steve Anwar, whose construction is the biggest, most complex, and interesting from many angles. It's made from Sheffield steel - but the sort that will rust. He has been severely ill and is now in recovery, is keen on meditation and includes words from Sufi poetry. It's a wheel shape with many pieces and he says it represents breath.

Steven Anwar: Only Breathe

I choose Steve as my winner and have the satisfaction of finding the judges agree on him too. It's interesting to see how the sculptures are made, and, apart from one judge being surprised that the three sculptors are so different from one another, there's not a lot of nonsense spoken.
Roll on the other heats of the competition I say.

Too Many Turns of the Wheel

Mary Fletcher

Delpha Hudson*: Model children and Other People*

The Newly Society of Artists is an exclusive group. Artists have to apply to be chosen as members, and then apply to be in each show, subject to selection. This show had a theme of celebrating the history of the society with many members referencing particular artists from over 125 years.

I happened to go when they were having a public discussion about the Society. When I arrived they were discussing whether the Society could provide an online source and publicity for information that might include social community art.

Art therapy was mentioned without anyone gasping in horror. When Mike Tooby, past director of Tate St Ives, had interviewed me 20 years ago, he said they threw away applications that mentioned art therapy but they fished mine out of the bin because they liked my drawings. Exhibiting drawings in the Tate done by himself as art therapy when he was a child in Kosovo. So, somehow, what I took to be basedoin fear of being associated with mental illness has dissipated as the wheel turns.

It's a diverse show with, as usual, most artists doing what they usually do, but managing to fit it into the brief. Delpha Hudson had a picture with women and children in it and referenced Elizabeth Forbes. Winnie Lyn on the other hand showed some lumpy white objects as far from Terry Frost's work as could be imagined, although she said she was inspired by him.

Julia Giles had a similar motivation to Peter Lanyon in being influenced by her sensory memory of landscape. Kate Waters had chosen fellow mystical dreamer Ithell Colquhoun to ally with. Her painting was a smeary sexual–looking image. Noel Betowski had chosen to show a painting that depicted complex patterns of folded paper, inspired by two paintings with paper lanterns by Percy Gotch and George Sherwood Hunter.

Pippa Young said in her statement that her inspiration was the act of creation in general, and her image was a strange figure combining white and black body parts.

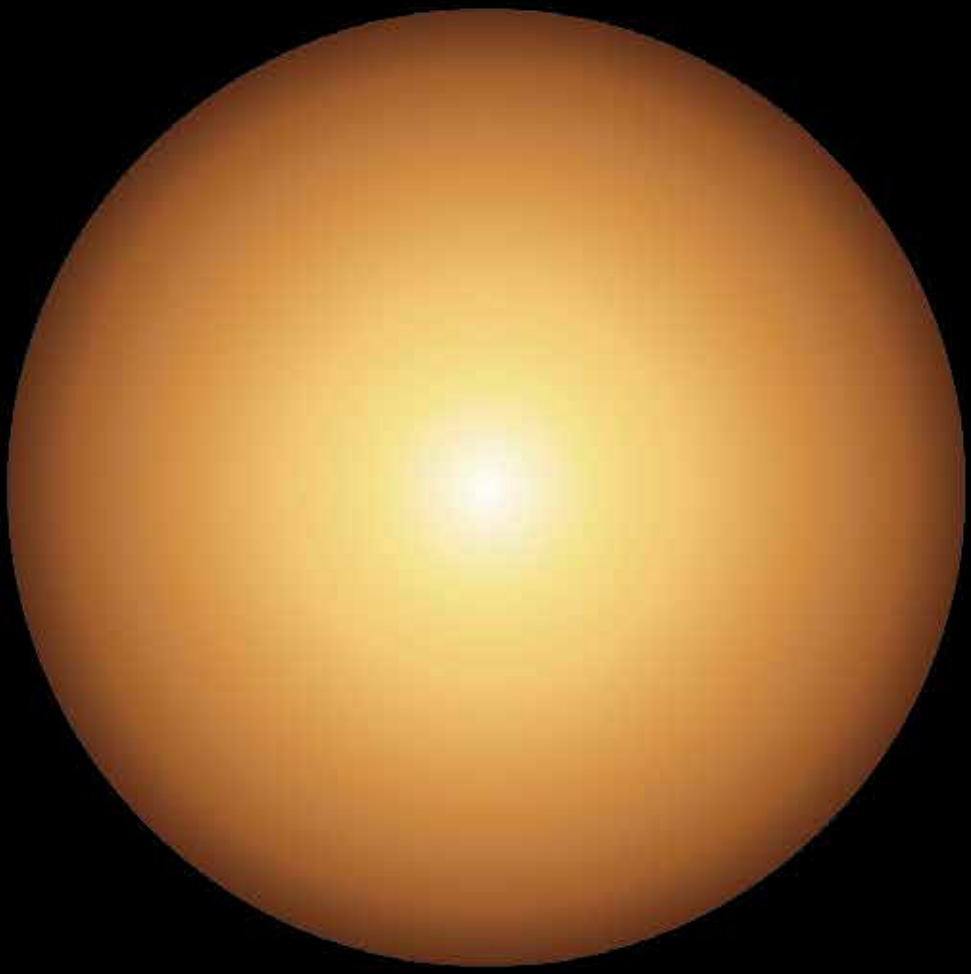
Of course such a theme dangerously invites comparisons with the more famous past members' works, long known and loved and done with such skill and observation that many visitors admire more than our present confusion of styles and media. There's bound to be something of interest and something to hate for most visitors in the 68 exhibits.

The panel discussion came to an end. It was suggested that some new social awareness and political involvement with the local community would be worthwhile, perhaps to revitalise this 'oh so middle class' elite enclave where pictures cost thousands of pounds and membership is closely guarded. But were these suggestions coming mostly from academics and other non–members involved with education etc?

We will see what the next turn of the wheel produces.

Newlyn Society of Artists. 'Past, Present,Future' at Tremenheere Gallery, near Penzance, Cornwall. Oct 16 to Nov 7, 2021

Pippa Young: *The Artist*



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