

EDGAR  
WIND  
SOCIETY  
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WRITING  
PRIZE  
2023\*

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# Foreword

Jessica Glover  
President  
2023

Since the Edgar Wind Society was founded, we have welcomed artists, art historians, curators, critics and many other inspiring members of the art world to share their research, writing, art and ideas. This wonderful collection of collaborators has included major figures such as Ai Weiwei, Cornelia Parker, Jeremy Deller, Tim Marlow and Jeff Koons. By inviting contemporary thinkers, we have created a space in which inquiring dialogue is generated and continues to flourish.

The foundation of a creative, thought-led platform that galvanizes students to share their responses and catalyse further conversation, is a stimulating and timely embarkation. The award is named after the society thus paying homage to its figurehead, Edgar Wind. Edgar Wind was the first History of Art Professor at Oxford, a charismatic, interdisciplinary scholar of the Renaissance who staunchly defended Modern Art. Since his time at Oxford in the mid-20th century, art has rapidly evolved and expanded its projects regarding the constantly evolving world it inhabits. At Edgar Wind we strive to connect the historic with the contemporary and chose our sponsor, Christie's, a world-leading art and luxury business, for their renowned and trusted position at the forefront of the art world.

The essays included in this prize are a brilliant representation of the current interests of the discipline by experimentally approaching works both from the past and present. The essays cover an impressively broad array of subjects from conceptual art and its relationship to the climate crisis, to gender theory in film, photograph or paint, and to much more local subjects such as the Oxford Dodo or Romanian Eggs. We welcomed essays that expand our conversation to global art and stories, some focusing on curation and location, or even embodying the art works themselves.

We are thrilled with the flexibility of thought that these essays possess and feel true pride in presenting them to both our readers and our guest judge, Laura Cumming. Laura Cumming is Chief Art Critic of the Observer and author of several books including *A Face To the World: On Self-Portraits* and *The Vanishing Man: In Pursuit of Velasquez*.

On behalf of the society, I would like to extend our thanks to everyone involved in the prize since its initial conjurings last winter. A special thanks to our collaborators, Laura Cummings, Christie's and The Isis Magazine. The collaborators, writers and organising team alike have made this wonderful celebration of art and ideas possible with unmatched enthusiasm and commitment. We hope you enjoy reading the essays as much as we did and join us in our excitement for the prize to continue in years to come.

# 01 Discourse on Guimi You's *Watering*

Jennifer Ashton

Guimi You,  
*Watering*,  
72 x 60"  
oil on linen  
canvas, 2022

Guimi You created *Watering*, a 72 x 60" oil on linen painting in 2022. The painting consists of two houses with a darkened blue sky above. In the right, mid-foreground, a faceless woman is holding a sprinkler at the end of a hose, watering the colourful mid-ground garden, which covers nearly two-thirds of the canvas. The garden comes to the bottom centre edge of the canvas, giving it an overall diamond shape, which is reflected in the shape of one of the windows on the top right house.

Other common shapes are the square windows and chimney bricks of the houses, the circular style bushes in the garden, and finally, the perfect circle of the hose lying at the subject's feet as if the artist has given her a plinth. The reflection in one of the house windows shows us the time of day is dusk, with a multi-layered coloured sunset, and the neighbouring house on the right has a bright light on in one of the rooms, which is shining down onto one of the bushes in the garden, illuminating its blossoms. These blossoms are in the top central garden and are surrounded by darker plants and bushes, thus heightening their illumination by contrast. The palette of this work consists of muted pinks, oranges, blues and greens with a highlight of red, a fairly primary palette with little blending, and a cool palette with the calm warmth of a brunaille under-painting. There is a splash of fluorescent green alongside one of the houses by way of heightening the interest and dividing the canvas vertically while adding a sense of space separating the two houses.

There is also a similar green outlining the figure's top piece of clothing and a plant in the bottom left foreground which helps the viewer's eye move through the painting, top to bottom, as if mimicking the fall of the water. It is difficult to distinguish whether the ground the sole sprayer stands on is wet from the watering or if it is a water garden because there is blue on the ground, and the figure is standing on a brown piece of land. But it is not that intrusion that I ponder while looking at this piece. Instead, I let the memory of watering my summer garden flood back to me at my cold spring desk, and it's the relaxed movement of the soft-blended flowers contrasted with the sharper lines of the house and stream of water coming from the hose as I consider the tender gardener's expressionless face, and the casual hang of her left arm, with the slightly turned-in shoulder, which gives her figure a sombre look.

For me, the overall impression of comfort and safety I feel viewing this sunset piece sets me falling into a warm Zen space. My mind can wander onto aspects of my own life as I confront my faults at the end of a busy day and at the end of a wet hose when I have space to decipher capacious observations like, *I think I over-married*. And herein lies the genius of this piece. Guimi You's entire body of work; the artist gives us a time and a place, and a space to reflect in. In adding that new dimension, the artwork is as desirable as a meditation room in a house I wished I owned.



# 02 Going the Whole Hog: Rembrandt and the Art of Butchery

Emily Bauer

Left to right:  
Rembrandt,  
*Slaughtered Ox*,  
1655. Oil on panel.  
95.5 x 68.8 cm.  
Louvre, Paris

Similar painting in  
Glasgow, c. 1640,  
likely by a follower  
of Rembrandt

Similar painting in  
Budapest, 1639,  
likely by a follower  
of Rembrandt

Below, there hang four flayed brutes. Some taut as if the paint was pulled thin like latex, others like heaps of wax. Each bring to mind the feverish glow of something coldly sweating, all seem to hug the gloam. Attributed to either Rembrandt or a non-descript 'follower of Rembrandt', the mass represented has been named 'Slaughtered Ox'. You'll find 'Slaughtered Pig', riddled of that ill gleam, Fabritius, Beuckelaer and Netscher deliver us to pinker, snouted pastures. Ox is to beef as pig is to pork: this is a trail of carcass imitation, a chain of finely executed lessons in the labour of hands, and the anatomy of something nearly meat. Yet in wider terms, it is a display of fatty art, that plates up death without condiments, and where our seat at the table is a position of both fast and feast.

These particular paintings hang in Paris, Budapest, Glasgow and Philadelphia, yet the image of a dead pig or ox is scattered wide. From Aertsen to Bacon to Soutine, butchery trots around the marketplace, perched above terracotta tiles and at the foot of each rolled up sleeve, it is as constant as baked bread. Even the canvas becomes its own hanging swine. Stretched out between wood, strung up and gobbled down in a glance, it is a sight of potential creative sustenance – as off-white as flayed flesh, it was indeed with his ox that Rembrandt fed the brushes of his disciples. Yet this is a fashion that goes back further than the seventeenth century. In medieval times, depictions of slaughtered pigs and oxen were a means of honouring the labour that fed and bled these beasts into consumables. In the Dutch genre, the stretched out body of a swine or cow became a vanitas allegory, a reminder that one day we too will be as stolid as a dead pig.

Often pictured alongside the hanging carcass of a swine was a ruddy faced child or two blowing up the pig's its bladder for a ball. In one particular Dutch print book such an image was accompanied with a line of verse; "How hard you blow, o child of the world! You catch nothing but wind. The world is nothing more than a bladder filled with air". From a lively memorial of life to a jollily morbid awareness of its fragility, the splayed beast harkens back as well as it signals forth, back to the noble and bucolic, forth towards all our fleshy demises, and forth too, towards the fork. It is a duality I know well.

When, as a ruddy faced child myself, my father called for me to come and see a friend's pig in the back of a transit van outside our house, I detected not his tone of glee. Over I tore with thoughts of something warm and grunting in straw. Promptly, I was met with half a dead pig, nestled among a boot load of pork chops, loins and back bacon. However, this fable was not merely a lesson in the diversity of pork products, but a teaching in the pink and white horrors of meat. A bloodless meat; rosy and sculpted like modelling clay. It seemed to have been Slaughtered in the instant between my imagining a live pig and my seeing of a dead one.

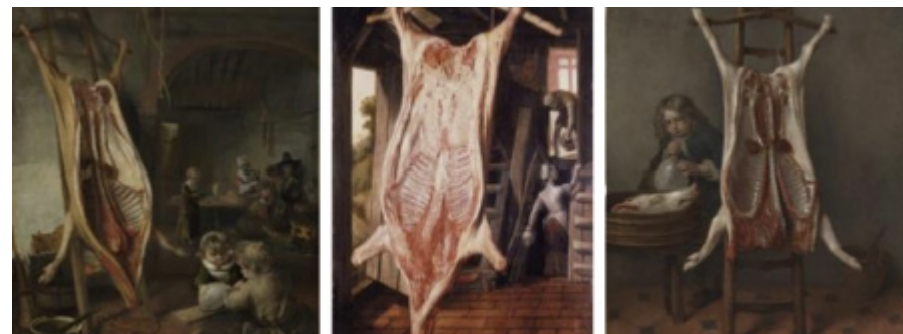
Similar painting in  
Budapest, 1639,  
likely by a follower  
of Rembrandt



In verse, Ted Hughes joins the parade of artistic butchers and paints the 'thick pink bulk' of a dead pig – it is on the cusp of this same instant of 'becoming', as men gather to 'scald and scour it like a doorstep'. Just like a doorstep, the corpse is a threshold of field and fork. The weight of its body is not far from a violent honouring of its life:

"Pigs must have hot blood, they feel like ovens.  
Their bite is worse than a horse's—  
They chop a half-moon clean out.  
They eat cinders, dead cats."

Brought to mind is the purple crescent sneer welded into my sister's arm, the artist being the clamped jaw of a yellow haired sow next door. This sow was a big girl named Frazzle, the same pig who, from the bathroom window, I watched flip a runt lamb onto her snout and send it somersaulting across the paddock like a lavender bag. She barked like a dog and screamed like a woman. It seems improbable that any hand could scald or flay Frazzle, without themselves being flayed. She reminds us of the clamour and the struggle behind the painting, the cloven kicks and crescent bites. The animal is vicious, and so its taming is a sombre one. We may however ask what these things are doing dead in paint, or poem or image. Should they not belong to the archive of some abattoir, like mug shots in a ring binder? Or at least among the turf of a butcher's counter. The importance however, an importance wildly pressing in the days of 26 story pig farm skyscrapers, lies in the wholeness of the individual form, and as a result, its otherness. Not often are we able to perceive of the animal in this liminal state; after paddock, before plate. It is between identities, with no head to really tell us who it was and no fork worthy shape to indicate what it may be – it is, in Hughes' words 'less than lifeless'. So how do we reckon with such a thing that doesn't yet fit into our mouths? Rembrandt's answer, an answer historically arrived at, was to paint it, and in doing so, prevent it from moving along in the process of consumption, rendering it a sculpture of our own human and inhuman tendency. Playing with our food is impolite, and here it is bathed in oil paint and turpentine, to be eternally hung, forever uneaten. It is an omen of remembrance; remembering the furrowing, fighting and flaying, the blood, nose and tail – all the parts that don't make it out of paint.



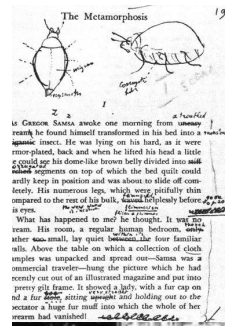
# 03 How artistic interpretations of literature impact our reading of the text: Kafka's

Lilian Berrell

The opening lines of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* have been translated and interpreted in countless ways. In 1933, the famous first sentence was translated as: 'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect' (Edwin & Willa Muir, 1933), meanwhile a more recent translation describes Gregor's transformed state as 'verminous insect' (John R. Williams, 2014), yet 'some kind of monstrous vermin' (Joyce Crick, 2009) perhaps continues to be the most popular and widely-accepted translation. How has Kafka's term 'ungeheures Ungeziefer' led to so many challenges for translators? And how have these challenges materialised in visual depictions of Gregor Samsa to influence our reading of the story? I shall demonstrate how much an artist can change the original text by way of adaptation and interpretation, and whether it is possible for a reader to separate an original text from later adaptations, specifically in relation to the connection between Kafka's descriptive language and imaginative inferences of this language.

I will now turn to the *Metamorphosis* specifically, including the linguistic challenges of the text and Kafka's own wishes in relation to the artistic depiction of the protagonist, the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa who wakes up one morning to discover that he has transformed into some kind of horrific creature and is unable to remain integrated in society, causing his family to abandon all hope for his recovery and resulting in an isolating death. Kafka describes Gregor not as an 'Insekt' (insect), but rather as 'ungeheures Ungeziefer': while 'ungeheuer' is generally accepted to mean 'large' or 'monstrous', the noun 'Ungeziefer' has its roots in Middle High German and denotes something that is unfit for sacrifice such as an unclean animal. 'Ungeheuren' and 'Ungeziefer' are both negations, otherwise non-entities prefixed by an -un. Bernofsky is therefore justified in stating that 'Kafka wanted us to see Gregor's new body and condition with the same hazy focus which Gregor himself discovers them'.

Indeed, in a letter to his publisher in 1915, Kafka stipulated that Gregor should not be drawn on the cover of the book – or even viewed from a distance. The following examples of the different ways in which Gregor has been portrayed in art demonstrate the extent to which artistic interpretation heavily impacts how the text is read today. Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov attempted to depict Gregor Samsa in a drawing, going against Kafka's wishes; based on the descriptions in the text, which Nabokov heavily annotated (below), he deduces that Gregor is 'merely a big beetle' (three-feet-long, to be precise) and that he has the ability to fly and so ends up on the ceiling. Meanwhile, the metamorphosis of the *Metamorphosis* covers seems to have disregarded Kafka's opposition to an artistic representation of his protagonist, with the following publishers including a bug on their covers: 1961 Penguin Books; 1974 Clube do Livro; 1985 Ovenja Negra; 1992 Zephyr (all below). Pop-culture versions of the original text undermine Kafka's authorial intent further through bug illustrations. For example, Robert Crumb's graphic version of the *Metamorphosis* depicts a giant beetle scraping at the door to leave his room and hanging upside down on the ceiling with sticky insect legs. In the same vein, Peter Kuper draws Gregor with a beetle body and a human head; such an interpretation appears simplistic and is only accurate up until the fact that Gregor stops viewing himself as a human being.



DER JÜNGSTE TAG • 22/23



Left 4: Nabokov's Annotation's. Original 1916 cover approved by Kafka, Peter Kuper, The *Metamorphosis* (2003). Robert Crumb, The

Right 4: Later Covers

Depictions of Gregor in theatre are equally as interesting, and an artistic recreation of the *Metamorphosis* on stage tends to focus less on Gregor's possible insect appearance, but instead brings Gregor's human alienation to life. Steven Berkoff's 1969 adaptation, in which Berkoff himself played the part of Gregor, upholds the tradition of a giant insect in the way that Berkoff describes a 'beetle metamorphosis' and uses lighting and projections to depict Gregor's insect leg movements. However, Berkoff in the role of Gregor maintains a human appearance and uses the frame of a cage and stilted body movements to simply imply some kind of animalistic transformation. Meanwhile, Arthur Pita's adaptation for the Royal Opera House in 2011 conveys Gregor's transformation through choreography and black slime that covers the stage. In this play, Gregor is presented as a human (simply wearing a pair of shorts and covered with the black liquid), yet his unusual animalistic movements serve to create a balance between Gregor as a human and Gregor as some kind of vermin: the effect is one of repulsion at someone who is recognisably human, yet deeply disturbing. The audience shares in Gregor's human torment and also in the family's disgust as they witness the contortions of Gregor's body into rigid and horrifying shapes as he moves on his hands and feet into mutilated positions and coils them around each other to grip onto different surfaces, leaving a trail of slime behind him. This adaptation is perhaps most loyal to the original text in the way that Pita allows for various possibilities of Gregor's transformation, subverting the tradition of Gregor as a giant beetle.

# 04 The theatre at Epidauros: An Ancient Marvel

Anya Biletsky

Theatre at Epidauros. (Image credit: Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



It is oft-said that the ancient Greeks were responsible for works of wonder in many fields. The poets are famed for their impeccable iambs, the orators for their rhetorical majesty, the painters for their intricate red-and-black silhouettes of heroes on pots. If anything from ancient Greece is to be called a work of wonder, it is, in my estimation, the early 4th-century theatre of Asclepius at Epidauros in southern Greece. Constructed around 330 BC, the theatre overlooks the sanctuary of Asclepius, the Greek healing god. It functioned therefore, as much as a complement to the religious activity of the sanctuary as it did for entertainment. One can imagine how a 4th-century spectator may have felt, walking up the steep slope of the hill, and performing rites in the god's sanctuary, before sitting down in the theatre to enjoy a play, perhaps an Aeschylean tragedy or an Aristophanic comedy. The experience would have been sacred. Ostensibly, the theatre may not strike one as the pinnacle of Greek architectural achievement and grandeur. Perhaps it isn't. There is the Parthenon to rival it; the lost tomb of Mausolos at Halicarnassus; the temple of Zeus at Olympia. These are larger, arguably more complex feats of architecture, each complete with a whole host of architectural sculpture of equal majesty.

However, when I first studied the theatre of Asclepius, I found myself enthralled by it. Scrolling through images of various ancient Greek theatres, and trying to map their developing shapes (which are the subject of much scholarly debate), I stopped at the theatre of Asclepius. At first sight, it isn't anything vastly out of the ordinary from the other theatres of the 4th century BC - a circular orchestra, a skene building behind it, and curving rows of evenly-spaced seats for the spectators.

Whilst it conforms to the conventions of ancient Greek theatre-building, the theatre of Asclepius is fascinating in how it uses the standards of design and layout to maximise the experience of the theatre. How it does so I shall discuss in a moment.

For a modern visitor of the site, it is not difficult to see how the theatre would have afforded an exquisite watching experience for any visitor. Picture the scene: a slight breeze from the theatre's positioning on the hill's slope cooling down the spectators gathered on the stone seats and alleviating them from the heat; the sunlight beating off the stage, reflecting off the actors' masks and casting long shadows across the stage, making the characters seem larger than life, and dazzling to behold.

Indeed, the theatre did not merely amplify the art on stage - it was in itself a work of what we might today consider artistic splendour.

Magnificently circular, the theatre of Asclepius is designed with every aspect - every seat, every walkway - calculated to an immaculate proportional scheme. This proportionality endows the theatre of Asclepius with exceptional acoustics.

Despite having an impressive capacity of 13,000 to 14,000 spectators, who sat in rows ascending democratically along the hill's slope like a wave rippling away from the stage at its base, the theatre furnishes acoustics of wondrous quality to each and every individual in it. No matter where one sat in the theatre, whether in the front row, or in the last, the sound of the actors' speech would reach every spectator's ears. Listeners would be able to clearly hear the words spoken without the need for strain or exertion. Given that the theatre is entirely open-air, as is typical for ancient Greek theatres, this fact becomes all the more astounding.

It is sometimes recommended to modern visitors of the site to conduct a fun experiment in the theatre; one person stands in the stage area at the bottom, and speaks in their "indoor-voice", without attempting to project. A second person stands in the very last row of the theatre, and listens to the speaker. They find themselves able to hear their words as intelligibly as though they were right beside them.

Much as the theatre's design allows it to fulfil its purpose exceptionally, the visual perfection created by its proportionality makes it surpass functionality, we could say, it comfortably ascends to the status of artistic marvel. Aesthetics and functionality are beautifully married in this theatre. It requires ingenuity and a capability in the craft to design such an effective space for performance. Coupled with the natural setting of the theatre in the mountainside, it becomes an unparalleled venue for engaging with the god Asclepius whilst being able to optimise one's enjoyment of the theatrical performances it was host to.

The theatre at Epidauros, as I see it, is one of those very paradigms of the ancient Greek ability to utilise their knowledge of several diverse fields to create masterpieces, as architectural undertakings tend to require. Manifestly a contemplation of function and the visual in equal measure, the theatre at Epidauros is evidence of what it is possible to achieve when one fully harnesses the powers of aesthetics, mathematics and the resources at one's disposal.

# 05 *The Artist's Studio, 1910-13*, Sir John Lavery

Nicholas Boland

John Lavery, *The Artist's Studio: Lady Hazel Lavery with her Daughter Alice and Stepdaughter Eileen*  
1910-1913

You will probably have noticed that the darkness around me is very big. You will probably have noticed that I, myself, am very big- almost the size of a flesh person like you. I must seem very mysterious to you, and very far away. Yes. I must. And very fertile. Look at me. Look at my clothes, and my maid, and my daughter, and my wealthy, wealthy husband. Even my dog and my stepdaughter are sleek, well-bred, and sharp-nosed. Yes, I must seem very happy to you. And I am.

So much has changed, of course, since I was rich, wet oil paint. Since I left the tube. Since Alice reclined into my shadow, and became Filial Duty. Since John's daughter, Eileen, pulled back her hair, posed over the piano, and became The Debutante. Since John posed Aida turning from us and made of her The Maghreb. Since the tacky nods to Velazquez, of which I never approved: the blue curtain occupying the side of the frame in thick, heavy strokes; John himself in our gilded mirror. Since panting, elegant Rodney at Alice's feet became the final touch. Since we went to Rome, where the critics found me beautiful, but soulless. Since, in response, the darkness around me was expanded, and the light on my face intensified. He set me apart, then, from the others. Before I had been looking, but saw little. Now, I see, and I feel. I feel time passing.

The National Gallery is sticky and hot today. You, yourself, look a little sticky and hot. I hope you don't mind my saying so- I come from a different time, you know. And I may not last to speak forever. My purple colours, my gorgeous turban, my imperial silks fade when they open those big blinds. It's an agony you can't imagine- a burning on my white face. I wish they wouldn't. But that is there, and that is your time. For everyone else, Kensington is stirring to life. The morning papers announce that the King is sick; France will take Casablanca and Oudja; and Shaw's new play, *Misalliance*, is not much good. Alice's nose is running, and if John makes her sit much longer she will cry. Eileen looks away from us both, her face so controlled that she must be angry. She casts one eye on my collarbone. Rodney thinks only of steak and rabbits and the neighbour cat. John paints, of course, and thinks of whatever he thinks. His face is impassive.

It's cold, a very cold morning here, and the birds are singing. Can't you see how cold it is, despite how purple I am, and how blue the curtains are, and how much fruit Aida carries? Usually, John's paintings are all cold or hot: me with a harp, looking towards Ireland (cold) or me in red sprawling out on a chair (hot) (hot) (hot). Here, my clothes are hot, and everything else is cold, and bathed in Vermeer-esque light. The effect is curious. In my time, Alice coughs. In yours, you move to walk away. A mistake. Can't you see that I see you?

Thank you for staying. I find it hard when you go. It's a feeling a little like pins and needles. Sometimes, this life of complete indolence is its own misery. I have had a lot of time to think. I wonder, sometimes, whether John meant us to be a parody. I would never have agreed to sit, if I'd known- well, look at Eileen! Why is Eileen looking away? Why does he always let Eileen have her own way? On the first day of sitting, Alice cried, and Eileen laughed at her. John said "girls!", softly, but left me to sort it. In certain lights, I too look unhappy, as though the recent fight occupied my mind. Perhaps I was. Perhaps it did.

I wish John hadn't painted Aida turning from us. I regret, of course, that she had to wear that costume today, but it strengthens the piece. Anyway, she ought to be



proud of it. It's tradition, and one should look back as well as forward. That's John's philosophy: that Moors are just as wise as us, in their own way. Yes, I wish she would just look at us. The annexation is not our fault, and she has no right to scorn us forever. Empires will be empires. And her asking for five pounds- without any way of knowing where it was going to go! I call it affrontery. I have been a model employer. She must simply understand that we have dispute enough in Ireland without pledging everything to the Maghreb. Things were different for us before Rome. She was still facing away from us, still fetching for us, but John hadn't added his Idonea in Morocco on the back wall. He hadn't yet made of her an allegory. He hadn't made her angry with me forever. He strengthened himself, too, then. He made his figure more distinct, more like what you can see today. He gave himself paintbrushes. As if his hand weren't visible throughout. The cold in this room is so atrocious. The ceilings are too high. I'll faint, and spoil the painting. John will be angry. Eileen's glare seems so much stronger than usual. I can practically hear Aida's pleading voice, as it was last night, as it was when I was alive. I see her lips move. I hold Alice closer, but she stares downwards, as though I were not her mother. John exists only in his pale reflection, but his world-! His vision! I see it all as though for the first time: Alice in sickly white, Eileen hating her, Aida reproving me, Rodney's breath turning sour and John (how like a man!) presiding over us. The details strike me as grotesque. I feel sick. I look away. I look to you. Don't go. Don't go. Don't go.



# 06 Surrealism Beyond Borders at Tate Modern

Eliza Browning

Ted Joans, *Long Distance*, 1976-2005, Ink and collage on perforated computer paper  
© Ted Joans estate, courtesy of Laura Corsiglia. Photo by Joseph Wilhelm / Meridian Fine Art



The British-Mexican Surrealist artist Leonora Carrington has been having a moment. In the past year, her bewitching paintings have been featured in the pages of *The New Yorker*, inspired the theme of this year's Venice Biennale "The Milk of Dreams," sold for \$3.2 million at Sotheby's, and adorned a newly discovered deck of tarot cards revealing the artist's fascination with the occult. Known as "Britain's lost Surrealist," Carrington is just one of a diverse generation of artists featured in the exhibition *Surrealism: Beyond Borders*, which ran from 24 February to 29 August 2022 at Tate Modern. The pioneering exhibition advances a new perspective on one of the twentieth century's most influential artistic movements, eschewing the focus on the largely white male milieu that defined Surrealism's French beginnings and instead platforming a multigenerational group of artists from a diverse range of social classes, nationalities and artistic backgrounds, an all-encompassing scope that embraces the global legacy of Surrealism's strangeness and magic.

In the century since the formation of the Surrealist movement, art has evolved within a scope that would be incomprehensible to the artists of decades past. Yet many of the shocking or unnerving qualities of contemporary art are rooted in Surrealism's groundbreaking and wholly modern preoccupation with dreams, strangeness and the unconsciousness. Today's turbulent world grappling with economic instability and the aftereffects of the pandemic mirrors the social and political crucible of the 1920s from which Surrealism emerged, and the cultural shift signified by the movement's preoccupation with gender, technology, and the unconscious mind continues to resonate today. Since October 1924, when the first two manifestos by rival artists André Breton and Yvan Goll were published, Surrealism has expanded from the tight-knit circles of the French avant-garde to a global milieu of artists responding to the rapid social and political changes of the twentieth-century world.

The Tate embraces this transnational approach by deconstructing national canons and state boundaries. When asked about Surrealism, most people will point to recognisable symbols such as a lobster on a telephone, a train charging from a fireplace, or a fur-covered teacup. *Surrealism Beyond Borders* largely eschews these more conventional works in favour of a fresh and subversive approach. Surrealism's centenary has proved ripe for its reinterpretation, with the exhibition encompassing artists working over a fifty-year period from all corners of the world. Rooms are organised around "convergence points," or different global centres of Surrealist activity.

The Tate's ambitious scope platforms artists whose contributions have otherwise been ignored by conventional Eurocentric narratives. Alongside René Magritte's trains and Salvador Dalí's lobsters are a collection of notebooks covertly assembled by Surrealists hiding in wartime Prague, radical political pamphlets produced by dissidents in Chicago, and paintings by artists from Cuba, Mexico, Cairo and Martinique. By placing canonical artists in conversation with lesser-known creators, especially the female and non-Western artists whose contributions are often overlooked, the curators emphasise Surrealism's role as a global focalising point as well as its appeal to outsider artists, whose own unrepresented or unconventional narratives manifest in the strangeness of their art. This rejection of disparate national movements embraces the Surrealist concept of *dépaysement*, or the state of being unlanded. By exploring factors common to the human experience, the symbolism of dreams and the unconscious mind, artists could connect to a global community dedicated to pushing the boundaries of the collective unconscious instead of furthering a nationalist artistic canon.

One such transnational artwork is Ted Joans's *Long Distance*, a 30-foot folded "exquisite corpse" drawing produced over 30 years on three continents involving 132 participants. Joans, a musician, poet, artist and Black power activist, wanted to create an interdisciplinary project that would facilitate a collective group unconsciousness. A playful and delightfully varied collection of scribbles, drawings, and notes, its contributors included notable writers such as John Ashbery and William Burroughs and artists Dorothea Tanning and David Hammons. Another standout object is *The World in the Time of the Surrealists*, an inverted world map foregrounding China, Russia, Alaska and the Pacific Islands while relinquishing world powers such as Europe and the United States to its outer edges. By quite literally turning the world on its head, the Surrealists subversively advocate for the formation of a collective, transnational identity.

Although the curators' wide-ranging global approach is refreshing, the strict division of galleries by geographical location can feel limiting in its scope. A truly transnational exhibition might place Magritte in conversation with Cuban anarchists, or Japanese collage artist Koga Harue alongside German mixed-media Dadaist Hannah Höch. What new meanings and connections might we then uncover? Instead, there is a sense that some of these comparisons might be overlooked, an inevitability in such an ambitious exhibition. Nonetheless, the effect is uncanny, chaotic, unexpected and invigorating — much like Surrealism itself.

# 07 'If you close the door, the night could last... forever!': Nan Goldin's warm eye



Above: Nan Goldin, *The Hug*, New York City 1980.

Bottom Left: Nan Goldin, *Nan and Brian in bed*, New York City 1983.

Ochre yellow walls plastered in posters and photographs, almost an extension of rooms of adolescence, frosted windows and their dirty sills blocked by stacks of boxes, a sewing machine and even the eerie heads of dolls, a small vestige of soft, mandarin light, corresponding with the light of Nan and Brian in bed (below), communicates that we are familiar here, we are not strangers in Goldin's universe.

In the foreground of *Twisting at My Birthday*, the wood flooring is scuffed, a thing to make mothers shiver, but it does not matter, "this is my party" (Goldin), and these are only markings of dance, of heels scraping and tapping, of hips twisting and arms outstretched, of clumsy waltzes. The figure our eye immediately goes to is the person in the centre, their dark, rich hair, piled up high, a dress adorned in gold paillettes that glimmer in the camera's flash, with tights that will inevitably ladder by the end of the night. In the midst of the twist we see the truest of smiles - cheeks high and teeth visible, the unconscious smile, the type we do not usually assume when photographed, unbridled and natural. Expressions are in range here, with some faces not in view, some mid-meal, one placid while lighting a cigarette. The legs of another individual are cropped in, the sentiment that this belongs to a larger story, that the event is unconned to the bounds of the photograph, enforcing our own belonging to the 'party'. A figure also mid-twist, in jeans and a white shirt scattered in red polka dots, is illuminated by the flash unlike any other, their face not in view, with thick curls, the fuzz of arm hair and shadows curling along muscles, veins texturising the arm that practically enters the viewer's space, further strengthening the feeling of immersion.

Having inhabited a circle of outcasts and recreated her own family largely composed of queer people, the revealing of this world feels so consensual; her photography does not incessantly knock and attempt to prise open the door to capture a glimpse at queer people, rather the door is unlocked from the inside, and Goldin guides us in, taking our coats and introducing us to Greer, to Taboo and Jimmy Paul and Cookie, as friends she has been aching to introduce us to, we raise our glasses and say cheers and pretend to laugh at the jokes we are not entirely privy to, and we go home, falling upon our beds and sofas in tiredness but primarily of awe and in silent resolution.

Bottom Right: Nan Goldin, *Greer and Robert on the bed*, New York City 1983.

Sprawled across mattresses, held in embrace, caught in silences and conversations, *The Ballad* confesses individuals tied and existing by their relationships, where "roles aren't so defined", "bonded not by blood or place, but by a similar morality". Goldin visions individuals belonging to their surrounding relationships and depicts an inherent, chemical need to couple, with relationships at once a breath for us to grasp at, but equally cloistering those within them, lungs confined and breath inhibited. Amongst her pictures of couples in intimate strife, of a bored pain, of relationships visibly and the collective is cloaked in mandarin light, and Bronski Beat is playing and our hearts are full and our blood is thick and rapidly meandering and I look upon a couple grasping at each other's clothes as they move to the palpating beat and it is intimate and public all at once. Now I begin to dance as they do and look at my lover, unknowingly, in the same way. I retreat to the bathroom and look at my reflection, lipstick smeared and hair static and I am aware that this is my mother's chain and the tiredness is overwhelming, yet the mandarin light seeps in and with effort I attempt to stain myself with it, to accept and assume the warm eye.



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## Olivia Cavigioli

I wish I knew not to expose film, to develop my own photographs - the technicality of photography has always alienated me. Naively, I did not see the medium as instinctive, I didn't think it could purge us of muddled feeling, or invoke passion, fear or sadness; this was until I came to know the work of Nan Goldin. Her most celebrated slide-show, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, in its multi-sensory form (accompanied by a soundtrack), in its insularity, was something I could feel, hear and touch all at once. Goldin's self expressed lack of technical knowledge, her 'warm eye', as she calls it, is unpretentious, fiercely sentimental, and yet unbelievably masterful. I can only describe the sensation of the Ballad as to being invited to a party by someone you vaguely know and being slowly introduced to each person of the collective through warranted observation. The immersion is comforting, not objective, the slide-show moving through present documentation, to visual eulogies mourning her beloveds, Mark, Kenny, Cookie, Max and Vittorio, as they pass on during the AIDS epidemic. The underbelly of the slideshow, one that holds us tightly in embrace with those in the photographs, is the instinct to preserve experience, to invoke the 'warm eye' of the viewer.

Top Left: Nan Goldin, *Twisting at my birthday*, New York City 1980

"This is the story of a recreated family, without the traditional roles" - Nan Goldin

Goldin's subjects appeared within her work simply from the banality of being roommates, these collectives and their familiarity still pulsating within the stagnant imprint of movement. *Twisting at my birthday*, a cibachrome print, illustrates this sense of collective warmth emanating from the photograph, as Nico's triumphant low voice accompanies the scene with *All Tomorrow's Parties*.

Left: Nan Goldin, *Skinhead having sex*, London 1978, London.



# 08 Breakfast diaries. 3rd – 9th April 2023. After Wolfgang Tillmans' Still Home (1996)

Coco Cottam

Wolfgang Tillmans'  
*Still Home*, 1996.

## Monday, 8:13.

I'm looking at a plate of mushrooms. Dry and slightly sad. They haven't come out right. They're shrivelled and tough. Ketchup. There's this wisp of sunlight crawling across my plate. A kind of white bracelet. For five days, I'm eating breakfast with Tillmans' *Still Home*. A cruel companion, if somewhat sedate.

## Monday, 8:31

Across the rim of my plate, ants weave their thin pilgrimage. It reminds me of that architectural phrase: 'pathways of desire', the worn-down shortcut between paths. Tillman's knife works this way, the thin glimpse of death slipped in beneath the carcasses. It seems to precede the fruit, sunk to the bottom like that. Like it might be waiting. Amongst all its carcasses, the throbbing orange flesh and the pistachio shell eyelids. There's that thin glimpse of a ridge, an alternative path for the feasting eye. I clear my plate and the ketchup sticks.

## Tuesday, 8:22

I've been reading about the rise of Acid House. The more I read, the more I see the swollen mouth of the pomegranate in his club photography // an untitled image of an arched back, gently slipping out of focus. I see the glint of his chain in the hilt of the knife, the wet-metal trail in the white morning light.

Why is photograph anything different than the series of his throat pictures that appear in the hallowed walls of Berghain? You can see the blue of the smoke, the pistachio shell disco ball, the tear of flesh and the heat of two bodies, it's all here, if not somewhere further away.

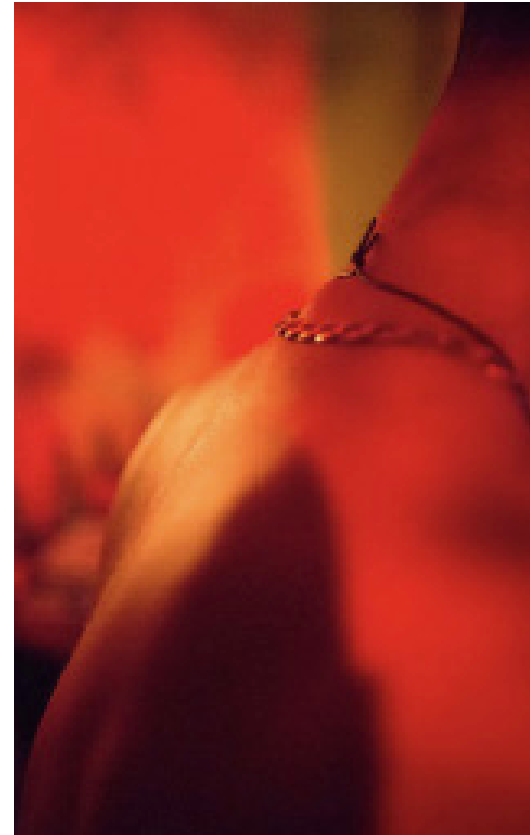
## Wednesday, 8:46

I found a dead ladybird on the windowsill this morning. it was all splayed out, wings bisected like a perfectly split melon. I'm craving salt. Tillmans talks about the throat as "kind of like where all the joy comes in, in different ways and forms." So there's the sex, there's the talk, and there's the food. A split pomegranate, pulped orange, and some shelled pistachios.

## Wednesday, 9:05

Someone on the internet was talking about the Tillmans' pile as 'half-eaten'. It's funny because I've only ever thought of it as fully eaten, as finished. I think it needs to feel finished for us to feel like we can 'solve' it. We/I.

It's the pistachio shells, I suppose. And the knife. But then even the title, 'Still Home' leaves something ongoing. Still Home in the sense of a lazy breakfast, or something else, worse, (still-born?). No, that's too much. He's playing on Caravaggio's still lives; disembowelling the pristine trophy fruit and submitting



them to the grotesquery of the domestic. Cool cool cool. The tradition 'still' exists, the home is 'still' and Tillmans 'still' hasn't finished his Breakfast.

My empty plate grins back boldly at the photograph on my laptop screen.

## Thursday, 9ish?

Late. Tesco's cheese twist. He says nothing about rush!

## Friday, 10:46am.

Lie-in. (Diced pear and yogurt.) Lying here, with all that is left. The knife, no more dangerous than the semi-swollen pomegranate, split open, splurging its pink guts.

'The end cracks open with the beginning: Rosy, tender, glittering within the fissure.'

(*Laurence, late at night, fancying cunt.*) Tillmans says the photograph is "a body entangled in the world". I think about this body, its porous, mangled edges and how it resembles my plate. The same white veins coiled into the corner, the same guts, the stretched yellow tendons. Amongst it all, amongst the sad mosaic of flesh, there's an apple. Intact. A sliver of green amongst the beige entrails. There's the body, its death. Its Life.

His art is never really a way out, but a way in. The knife, tilting on the edge of ceramic, baits its next brawl.

# 10 Martin Wong: Malicious Mischief at the KW Institute

Rachel Dastgir

Martin Wong  
*Stanton near Forsyth Street, 1983, Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York, NY*

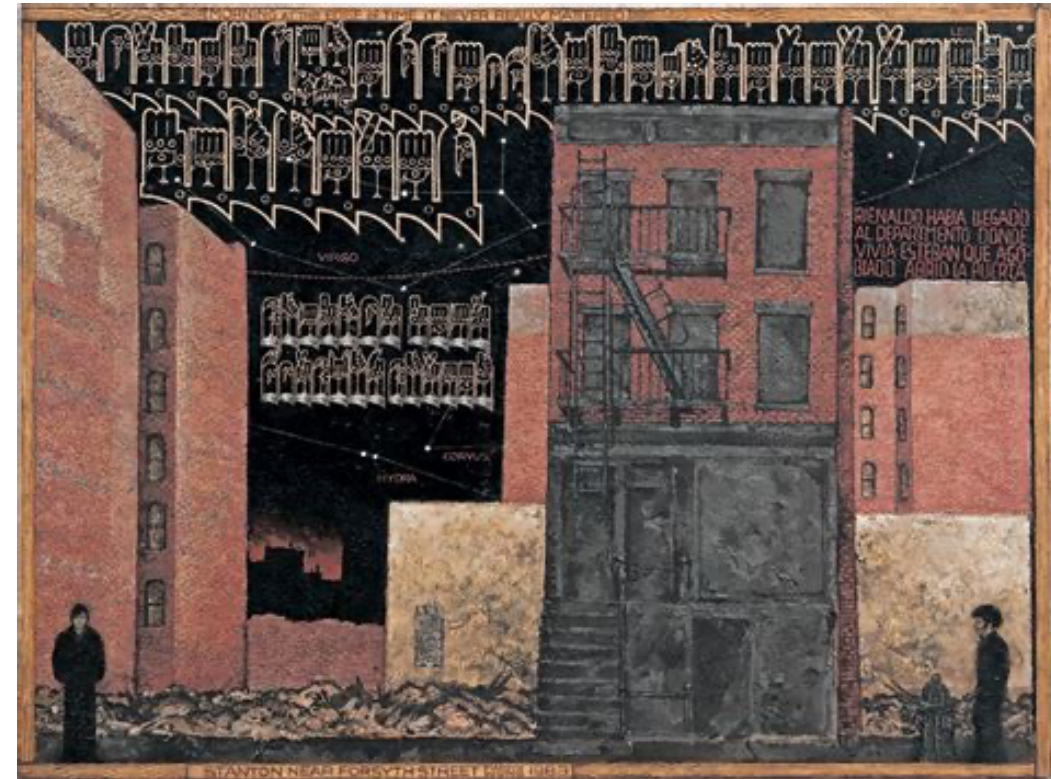
At the KW Institute Martin Wong: Malicious Mischief show, the painting *Stanton near Forsyth Street* (1983) looks more like a brick than it does a painting. It is overwhelmingly rust-red, like an old New York apartment building, and has a flattened appearance and mealy, pasty texture. The painting is a night-time cityscape, with four or five bricked-out windowed buildings, the foremost one with a grey façade. At the bottom lies a soft, cottony pile of rubble and in the background, a fire-scape outline to a horizon of buildings. On the far left and right stand two people dressed in black: Martin Wong, and his lover, the poet Miguel Piñero. But what is most arresting is what can be seen hovering in the night sky.

Above the figures, there is diagrammatic American sign language, a collection of cosmological signs, and floating dark red text in Spanish, a reference to contemporary Nuyorican culture (the hybrid term for Puerto Ricans living in New York). New York contemporaries like Barbara Kruger or Jenny Holzer were also using text but unlike Kruger or Holzer, Wong shies away from text in the form of declarative statements. Instead, his text and diagrams are obscure, and this esotericism invites a sense of wonder. The viewer is tempted to figure out the 'hidden meaning' of the signs. This is a game to draw the viewer in, one in which they are led to engage more deeply, by being forced to generate their own interpretation in the gaps that Wong leaves.

Wong's interest in signs and their signification is most clearly played out in his use of American sign language diagrams. Wong said he got the idea when given a card printed with the alphabet by a person asking for money on the subway in the early 1980s, a commonplace occurrence at the time. To a contemporary New Yorker, the hand sign drawings would therefore have had a dual meaning. It references the subway card printed with sign language, a sign which communicates other signs. It would also bring to mind the act of handing out these cards, a signifier of poverty in 1980s New York. A similar effect is achieved with the Magic 8 ball, a toy which tells fortunes. It is both a sign of the future, and totem from American childhoods. The doubling of meaning underlines the ludic dimension to Wong's project. He mixes figurative, literal and symbolic representation to play with the viewer and make them double-take.

Wong therefore comically tugs at figurative and symbolic representation to throw off the viewer. This is clear from the first work sold by Wong's gallerist and friend Barry Blinder-mann, a painting of a Chinese laundry sign, which recreated something he had seen in the window of a dry cleaners. Blinder-mann describes how from the early 1980s Wong "had already gotten that idea of the painting as a sign, and the painting was a sign... It was neither representation nor a sign, it just was." Wong's use of signs is not an attempt to form a coherent messaging system for his work, but a scrambling images and ideas to disturb and draw out acidic comedy. Whatever sign the individual viewer is drawn to will imbue the work with a different significance.

Wong himself was raised in a scramble of images and places. Born in San Francisco, in a Chinese immigrant household, he went on to train in sculpture at the Humboldt in California. He later became a poet before going to New York to re-invent himself as a painter. Friends he met in New York said they had no idea of his writings, a surprising fact given the dominance of text in his work. This ability to escape past selves points to abilities in total reinvention and absorption of new places and ways of being. As he was moving across America and between artistic practices, Wong was re-forming himself and picking up new vocabularies. He could paint, sculpt, write. He used Chinese iconography, American iconography, iconography for the hearing-impaired. He was taking signs and symbols and hrowing them out of shape, slipping them into a new context, forming a totally new, personal network. Any one of these vocabularies could be used to interpret his painting. The viewer could think of his work in relation to his background in sculpture, for instance. Of Wong's large body of painting, almost every single one features a brick. And when not a brick, there are rounded renditions of hands signing, or else a perfectly formed 8 ball, smooth and lovely. These objects, as well as the material he used suggest a sculptor's attention. Wong mixed iron oxide into paint, a substance found in brick, not only texturing the surface, but by extension, forming a brick on the canvas. Here is not simply the representation of a Nuyorican landscape, but rather a direct recreation, brick for brick. The signifier becomes part of the sign, and there is no detachment from, but rather an embodying of, the subject matter. Wong provides a moving body of work, one that can be interpreted and re-interpreted across time and place, eluding blunt interpretation. Wong invites the viewer to go back over the same images, the same symbols, the same objects. With Martin Wong, the work is never done.



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# 11 Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol: Art as an Agent of Change

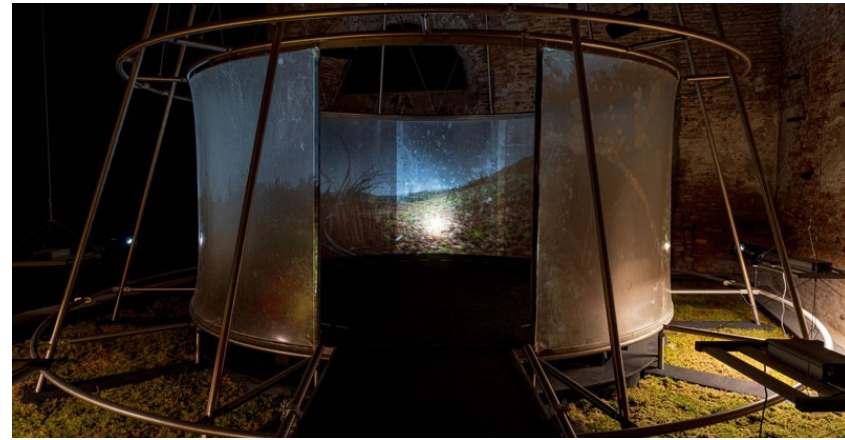
Emma Earnshaw

The Milk of Dreams – ‘where life is constantly re-envisioned through the prism of the imagination and where everyone can change, be transformed, or become something or someone else.’ This was the premise for the 2022 Biennale. The theme came from Leonora Carrington’s children’s book *The Milk of Dreams*. The Biennale is my favourite exhibition; it showcases the endless potential of contemporary art, the artworks comment on societal and political issues, and, of course, it is hosted in Venice. The ways in which the artworks push boundaries demonstrate how the discipline of art history can likewise expand and reflect on its methodologies. The approach of summer and the absence of a Biennale this year has caused me to reflect on last year’s exhibition, notably the installation at the Chilean pavilion: *Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol*, curated by Camila Marambio.

Cecilia Alemani’s chosen theme encourages the artists to ‘imagine’ a better future. The Chilean pavilion speaks to the theme, asking questions about what constitutes life and the difference between people, plants, and animals, as well as challenging our responsibilities to the planet and each other. It is a multi-sensory experience – one that was worth the 25-minute queue. Audiences entered into a room to a field of Sphagnum: a sample of the peatlands that brings the scent of the lands that the project seeks to conserve. It is irrigated by Venice rainwater that is channeled through the pavilion. Over the mossy ground is a walkway guiding the audience members to a translucent cyclorama in the centre of the room. Inside the cyclorama as a short film played; the film, by filmmaker Dominga Sotomayor, consisted of abstract images from the peatlands from different angles and heights to, Sotomayor writes, imagine ‘landscapes that were impossible to ignore.’ The visuals were accompanied by a soundscape designed by Ariel Bustamante: it was a mixture of words (grandmother, ambiguous, new, vegetal, Selk’nam,...) that were layered over each and repeated forwards and backwards. Its abstractness was intended to encourage the audience to commit to listening and attending.

As a filmmaker myself, I was intrigued by the cinematic element. Sotomayor’s films seek to capture the spirit of the peatlands – its truth and potential. I was also fascinated by the unique screen onto which the film was projected, a truly sustainable endeavour. The architect, Alfredo Thierrmann, describes it as ‘a resonating membrane for a language that is reborn and a landscape that resists.’ The fragile biomaterial skin is made of algae extracts, collagen and glacial acetic acid – it is a ‘biocomposite based on 100% organic components.’ The screen was durable for three months and began to degrade after six, allowing it to survive the length of the exhibition (the moisture of the Sphagnum eroded the membrane). The screen ultimately becomes part of the earth once more, meaning that it is sustainable and creates zero waste. I believe this technological feat was a particularly underrated part of the exhibition. As the Sphagnum and screen highlight, the exhibition is the product of scientific research – an experimental conservation device – and seeks to increase awareness

*Pavilion of Chile, Turba Tol Hol-Hol Tol, 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, The Milk of Dreams. Photo: Andrea Avezzi. Courtesy: La Biennale di Venezia*



around the environmental crisis. The wetlands are threatened by numerous factors: climate change, peat mining, the extraction of moss, and the invasion of beavers. The exhibition has an educational element: it emphasises that peatlands are vital to the regulation of the planet’s climate by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere (more so than forests) and storing it in the deep layers of the peat. This function categorises them as one of the ‘most valuable ecosystems on earth.’ It is also a habitat for species of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms. The amalgamation of art and science in the installation showcases the possibilities for art to educate and inspire change.

The exhibition is multi-faceted and additionally seeks to advocate for the Selk’nam people who are striving to be recognised as a living culture. History has falsely labeled them as extinct following a large-scale genocide as a result of colonisation. The title of the exhibit comes from their native language and means ‘the heart of the peatlands.’ They describe themselves as indivisible from the lands. Their spirituality, a key aspect of their culture, is based on their connection to their ancestors (hoowen) and nature (merremen). Their elderly taught them that their hoowen did not die, but instead, became so comfortable in rest that they became the mountains, trees, and animals. The Selk’nam are connected to every element of nature and believe that it is sacred. The project seeks to raise awareness for this endangered culture, adding a second educational element and appealing to the audience’s empathy as people. It also demonstrates the importance of the connection between us and our home, and the urgency of preserving it.

One thing I have learned through studying different methodologies for approaching the history of art is how easy it can be to criticise an artwork or a methodology, but how difficult it can be to devise an effective and well-rounded solution. For this reason I began to argue that while most art does not have the power to instigate real change, such as environmental change, it can seek to educate. The challenge thereby becomes how to effectively educate large audiences. The installation utilises a palimpsest of subject matter and a multi-sensory experience to encourage the audience to engage and learn. However, this production seeks to do more than educate. It envisions a ‘Patagonia in which the peatlands are studied, appreciated, protected, and restored, ensuring their biodiversity and maintaining their contributions to people’s wellbeing.’ The creators believed that the Biennale presented the opportunity for everyone, including the audience, to think collectively and to broaden the realm of contemporary art practices. It certainly presents possibilities for how art can serve as an agent of change. The possibilities extend to art history as well: Carla Macchiavello, one of the artists, is an art historian, and was a crucial figure in researching Selk’nam culture and ‘rethinking the Chilean imaginary.’

# 12 David Bomberg, *Jerusalem, Looking to Mount Scopus*.

Ore Gazit

David Bomberg,  
*Jerusalem, Looking  
to Mount Scopus*.  
1925, Oil on Canvas.  
Tate Collection.©

On the edge of the Mediterranean stands the city of the Temples, of Greek and Roman conquests and the sanguine Crusades. The beating heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the scorching heat of the Levant. The city whose political and religious significance dominated the Middle Eastern politics of the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate, is pictured in complete stillness. Here, Jerusalem is encountered in her harrowing, albeit calming, silence.

Bomberg's viewers are greeted with a timeless scene. Cast in the shadows of the afternoon sun are long, thin rows of umber tiles; hurried markings of ivory make domed roofs, and stout, black lines form small windows and arched clerestories. No house is the same yet they all come together, one overlapping the other, in a dense formation of buildings huddled closely; separated only by narrow, cobblestone streets hidden from sight. What appears to be a naturalist cityscape shows hints of Bomberg's futurist style that dominate his later career bursting at the seams. The fabric of the landscape he constructs and the buildings situated within them are playfully distilled into their purer geometric forms. Even the small huddle of trees in the corner of the canvas is no more formed than dashings of forest green and chartreuse. However, such manipulation of line and colour create a complex setting steeped in realism. Bomberg presents a painting so meticulous it could function as a photograph, yet one with such character and warmth it could not possibly be an accurate depiction.

For a painting of the most well-known city in the world, Bomberg has chosen not to display its key features outright. Neither the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock nor the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are in sight, and no battles nor human figures can be seen. Were it not for the minaret standing above the terracotta roofs and limestone facades, one could easily be mistaken for seeing the painting as a secular meditation on the very place where Abrahamic religions began. Perhaps this is Bomberg rebelling against his patrons, supported by the British Mandate, in portraying the melting pot of identities that roamed the streets of the Old Quarter as devoid of life and innovation. Similarly, Mount Scopus is no longer a Roman barrier, the pedestal of the Hebrew University, or a British cemetery. It exists as an empty palette of scorched earth, laying low towards the horizon. Here, Jerusalem belongs to everyone, and yet no one can be seen within it.

Today, this painting gathers dust in the Tate's archives, yearning for the public to admire it once more. And yet, when it next comes to light on gallery walls, its narrative will be ever more complex and fragile than it was 97 years ago. The waning of the British Mandate pulled Jerusalem into decades of violence, struggle and unrest. Jerusalem went through the ebb and flow of religious crises and revolutionary politics involving many faiths and ethnicities. This raises the question: how should the modern viewer of this artwork respond, as they reach the gallery and admire it for the very first time? Perhaps they should be quick to criticise it for what it was - a propaganda piece in disguise, rooted in the ambitions of the British Empire for the Middle East. Alternatively, it could be appreciated as a devotional piece for Bomberg, a Jewish artist who was brought up and educated in the East End of London. Viewers can convincingly make the case for the painting to be an emblem of ambition; a call for secularism or religious peace in a hopelessly tormented city. In truth, many will glance past the work, taking it in as an innocent representation of a neighbourhood at rest, seeking shelter from the heat of noon.

"Jerusalem of Gold, and of copper, and of light. Behold! I am a violin for all your songs."  
- Yerushalayim Shel Zahav by Naomi Shemer



# 13. Lydia Tár Should have been a Man

Felicity Henry

While scrolling on Facebook some months ago, I stumbled across a post from an old musical peer, Sophie Kauer, notifying us all she was going to perform alongside Cate Blanchett in an upcoming film. Incredibly excited for my peer, I watched the trailer for Todd Field's 'Tár'. As a lesbian musician myself and having an (albeit loose) connection to one of the actors, I was determined to watch what seemed like the film for me. It was extremely upsetting then, to find myself helplessly whisper- shouting "What?!" to my friend beside me in the cinema, mere minutes into the motion picture. I was horrified that the fictional female conductor on screen was telling an interviewer that she had faced no gender discrimination in her field, acting as though we are living in a post-misogynistic utopia in the music industry. With references to the pandemic throughout, the film positions itself in the now, which I can confirm is no utopia for women musicians. Blanchett, herself, has decided "we've matured enough as a species that we can make [Tár's gender and/or sexuality] not the headline or issue", finding "very exciting." (Bergeson, 2022) As a 21-year-old female, aspiring producer, in 2023, I have been the only woman sat in a control room, work-shadowing a classical music producer (a middle-aged, white man) who has freely discussed and joked about "loose labia", "projecting pornography while recording", and who directly told me that "women cannot and should not be sound engineers because having children inevitably interferes too much." How very "mature" we are as a species. How very "exciting" this world is for young female musicians. My horrified outburst in the cinema was prompted by Field's uninformed script writing (musicologically and socio-culturally), which violently forces the mouth of Lydia Tár to casually mention female conductor, Marin Alsop; a throwaway in a list of many female conductors in Tár's -or should I say - Field's easy-breezy world for women musicians. While researching Alsop (I was initially trying to find the article that explains how "it's a girl" balloons were released when she was the first woman to lead the Last Night of the Proms in 2013), I stumbled upon Alsop's own thoughts on this film, a film of which Field did not involve her in the making of:

"So many superficial aspects of Tár seemed to align with my own personal life...But once I saw it, I was no longer concerned, I was offended: I was offended as a woman, I was offended as a conductor, I was offended as a lesbian."

"That feels anti-woman...to assume that women will either behave identically to men or become hysterical, crazy, insane is to perpetuate something we've already seen on film so many times before." (Carras, 2023)

I can only echo Alsop's sentiments. The potential for this film is just incomprehensible to me as a female musicologist. Isop rightfully comments, "To have an opportunity to portray a woman in that role, and to make her an abuser — for me that was heartbreaking." (Carras, 2023) Tracy Gilchrsit, for queer magazine 'Out', also writes that Lydia Tár is "a troubling queer character on the big screen at a time when LGBTQ+ viewers have yet to see enough positive images of themselves on-screen." (Gilchrist, 2023) Yes, lesbians can be bad people. Yes, women can be bad people. But where is our positive representation? Mustn't we have a healthy dose of this in our media before we can start writing these characters in ways we write straight men, who already have the patriarchy on their side, who will always have the power no matter how they are portrayed?

Field responded to Alsop's comments stating, "power, as far as I know, is genderless". In the same breath he states "we're all very familiar with patriarchal abuse of power, we don't read about female persons or lesbian persons every day abusing power, and there's a reason for that — men have held it forever" contradicting himself and assigning power with the male. (Cremona, 2023) As a musicologist, with hours of reading and discussion of gender and music under my belt, I know one cannot be genderblind in the writing of a woman's biography: fictional or not. Their histories must be holistic and in fact initially ghettoising, in order to understand the uniquely discriminatory worlds these women existed in/still exist in and how they still succeed, still have careers and fight against the patriarchy of it all. Of course, Todd Field can write a gender-blind story. He has never had to endure the female lived experienced.

Similarly, straight Cate has never endured the gay experience and therefore has the ignorance and audacity to claim "I don't think about the character's gender nor her sexuality at all, at all. I love that about the film. It just is." Of course, she did not have to think about her sexuality. As a straight woman, why on earth should she! As a lesbian, my sexuality is at the forefront of my mind almost daily, when I have to drop my girlfriend's hand walking in certain parts of our city past certain groups of — honestly — men. For Blanchett, Tár is "musician" above all else. (Bergeson, 2022) It is so easy for straight Cate to erase Tár's gayness from the film within an inch of its life because she has never had to know gayness. But how handy for Field to highlight the character's lesbianism when predation becomes the storyline. How dare Todd Field place another film about a predatory gay on our screens. How dare he.

Lydia Tár should have been a man. Let me explain.

Tár does not or hardly wears make-up. Tár wears suits. Tár has a wife. She refers to herself as 'pater' (German for 'father') whilst intimidating a young girl who is bullying her own daughter. Todd Field wrote a film about a man and then made her a woman for the cultural attaché. If Field were to make Tár a man, would the film be too real to be palatable, as men, who are the real abusers of the industry, would be seen beyond the closed doors they operate behind?

Todd Field's film is not "nuanced". It is not "thought-provoking". It is unfair and unkind to the silenced and oppressed voices of queer women who have real and necessary stories to share. The patriarchy simply strikes again. The straight, white man is praised. The straight, white woman is praised. When will we have our time? Who will grant us our platform, our "podium" on which we can truly stand and not be falsely represented by someone who could not be more opposite to us? Does no one else see how ironic it is, for a film about abuse of power being hailed a "masterpiece", attracting myriad nominations, to be written by a straight, white man abusing his power regarding his presentation of queer women? Ending this article, I urge you to support the works of female, queer filmmakers/female, queer-film makers. I have compiled a short list to get you started:

But I'm a Cheerleader (2000) — American lesbian Jamie Babbitt — a film about a lesbian cheerleader sent to conversion therapy camp, Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019) — directed by French lesbian Celina Sciamma

I Love Her (2013) — directed by Ukrainian Darya Perelay — the first Ukrainian film about a lesbian relationship.

The Journey (2004) — directed and produced by Ligy Pullappally — inspired by a true story of a lesbian couple in the South Indian state of Kerala.

# 14. Fabergé: The Hen That Laid Golden Eggs

Irina Husti-Radulet

Peter Carl Fabergé,  
*First Hen (Fabergé  
Hen), 1885*

As a child growing up in Romania, my mother and I used to dye eggs for the Orthodox Easter. We used red onion skins for the dye and secured the eggs with sheer pantyhose before simmering them in hot water. If we felt especially crafty, we would use ferns and clovers and imprint their shadow on the dyed egg, peeling them back to reveal a negative image. By the end of the process, it was not just the eggs that were stained a deep crimson red, evocative of the blood of Christ, but also our hands.

Years later, I was surprised to discover that Fabergé eggs, those symbols of luxury and opulence, were exchanged by the Romanovs to celebrate Orthodox Easter. The Hen Egg pictured above, created in 1885, was the first ever Fabergé egg, and its seeming simplicity does indeed remind me of the eggs I used to exchange with my family at Easter. I can envision cracking its white hard-boiled enamel with my teeth. The yolk is so golden I can imagine it dissolving on the tip of my tongue.

The Hen Egg was commissioned by Emperor Alexander III as a present for his homesick wife, the Empress Maria Feodorovna. It was an exuberant twist on the Russian Orthodox tradition of exchanging decorated Easter eggs, and marked the start of a partnership between Fabergé and the Romanovs that would last until the Russian Revolution. The word 'Fabergé' now conjures up images of ponderous Romanov splendour, ballrooms before the Revolution, a monarchy sliding off a jewel-encrusted knife edge. But for me, it also evokes this deceptively simple Easter egg: the stuff of traditional fairy tales, whose playfulness ties my childhood to that of a young homesick Princess.



The odds of stumbling upon a double-yolk egg are approximately one in a thousand; the chances of discovering a Fabergé egg are even lower, but never quite zero. As recently as 2011, an American scrap metal dealer purchased a golden egg at a flea market, only to find out that it was the long-lost Third Imperial Egg, valued at \$33 million – a situation straight out of Aesop's fables. Many of the Romanov jewels remain unaccounted for, having been scattered across the globe as the Russian Revolution swept through the Winter Palace. Opportunists flocked to Russia: in 1918, the American journalist John Reed hid precious stones belonging to Nicholas II's sister in the heels of his shoes and was detained at the border. British antique dealer Norman Weiss bought nine kilograms of jewellery and precious stones, paying a mere £50,000 in total. The Bolsheviks auctioned off the Imperial crown jewels in 1926, drawing up a catalogue for the lots. Jewel-encrusted miniatures, tassels, fans, headpieces, bows, and garlands upon garlands of diamond-cut stones drip from its pages. Now available online, this catalogue was priceless at the time, as only twenty of them were ever printed. As the guide of the Royal Collection Trust's 2019 exhibition 'Russia, Royalty & the Romanovs' relates, the catalogues could fetch higher prices at auction than the jewellery itself. If you find a description in a Christie's catalogue that matches a piece in this booklet, you will know that the jewellery once belonged to the collection of the Czar himself.

The House of Fabergé fell afoul of the Russian Revolution, seized by the revolutionary government. Fabergé fled to Switzerland, where he died in 1920. During his lifetime, he had become a taskmaster of legend, producing fifty eggs for the Romanov family, each more elaborate and extravagant than the last. These fancy Kinder Eggs are exquisite, diamond-encrusted windows into imperial life at the time. Many of them commemorated formidable political and cultural moments. The Trans-Siberian Railway egg of 1900 celebrated the linking of two parts of Russia. Its design featured five carriages labelled 'male', 'women', 'smoking', 'non-smoking', and 'chapel' on rock crystal windows, while the surprise inside the egg was a train which could be wound up to run.

The comparatively simple Hen Egg remains my favourite Fabergé creation. Intended to cheer up Alexander III's homesick wife, who had spent her early years as a Danish Princess before leaving Copenhagen to marry him and become a Russian Empress, the egg celebrates the gift-giving and renewal at the heart of Orthodox Easter. Looking at it, I can recall the air softened by the coming of spring, taste the myrrh filling the back of my throat during the Easter church services of my childhood.

Instead of designing a ponderous piece of jewellery, such as the tiaras which seem to pinion Russian aristocrats to the pages of history textbooks by the sheer weight of their diamonds, Fabergé's first egg is playful and simple, inspired by a piece that he once saw at a fair. It is two-and-a-half inches tall and can be twisted apart to reveal a golden yolk within. Inside the yolk is a golden hen sitting on a straw nest of stippled gold. Within the hen lies yet another surprise - a tiny diamond replica of the Russian crown holding an even tinier ruby pendant.

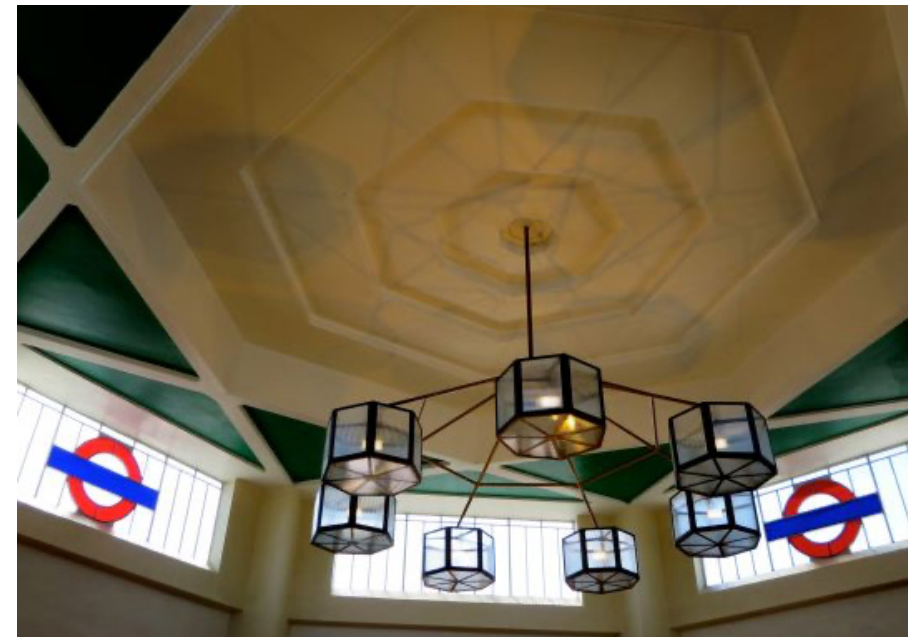
The egg's design is reminiscent of matryoshka dolls, which slot neatly inside each other. I too had one growing up, painted on coarse wood which sometimes embedded splinters in my palm when I unscrewed it. I remember its cheerful red peasant scarf, and two pinkish dots to signify blushing cheeks. Its girlish features became less and less defined as the dolls got smaller, with the smallest having only two black liquorice drops for eyes. It was worlds apart from the intricate Fabergé creations, but it shared a similar story with them. The Fabergé website claims that the eggs should be considered 'the last great commissions of objets d'art.' But to me, the Hen Egg is more than an objet d'art. It forges a link between the imperial splendour of the Romanov court with my own humble childhood in post-Communist Romania.



# 15 Charles Holden: Hounslow West Station, 1931

Rhea Kaur Brar

*Hounslow West Station (Ticket Hall interior), first opened in 1931*



Hounslow West Station was rebuilt by Charles Holden in 1931 when the Piccadilly Line was extended, and the District Line was withdrawn. The station was constructed using reinforced concrete with Portland stone facing to the front and brick facing towards the rear. The structure is trabeated but in a modern way that uses horizontal beams. This mixture of the old and new straddles the past and the present, tradition and modernity. Whilst the ticket hall is radially symmetrical the structure is bilaterally symmetrical. The use of bilateral symmetry helps to guide one from the ticket hall to the platform and reinforces Holden's key belief that "architectural design should be dedicated to a building's intended functions". Yet the emphasis on function was entirely compatible with aesthetic concerns, linking Arts and Crafts to the Bauhaus. The whole charm and appeal of a piece of architecture was seen to lie in its re-conceptualisation and transcendence of function. Despite Holden's proclaimed plainness of approach and criticism of excess, this building is naturally and effortlessly aesthetic. The influence of modernism and art deco is apparent in the structure's innovative shape work such as the use of heptagonal lights, symmetrical cream and pink tiles and a mosaic of an 8-point star.

The exterior of the station is long and horizontal from a face-on perspective. Functionally this relates to its alignment along the side of a main road which helps to give it a sleek finish whilst still being accessible for the public and the intersecting transport links. The structure urges you to approach it immediately as you experience it as a series of spaces. Whilst the station's overall design is intended to progress movement towards the trains, the sequencing and shifts of ornamentation create a drama - a sense of possibility.

The simple and relatively austere exterior focuses more on symmetry, so that the ornate ticket hall which it houses comes as a surprise - and creates a further sense of anticipation - an anticipation now of forward movement, as the ticket hall leads

to a hallway which splits at the end in order to lead passengers directly down to the platform. The hallway is bare and consists mainly of symmetrical glass windows; this passage remains under-detailed and understated simply as a mode of ushering people out of the hall quickly in an attempt not to overcrowd the station. One feels the need to move across it rapidly. This effect is heavily contrasted to the ticket hall where it is possible to make a choice as you are in control of your destination. You may also have to wait. The use of warm pink and cream tiling is inviting; the spaces tend to get more compressed and barren as you make your way through the building and hurry to the trains. Different functions; different visual cues and effects. The station is human in scale and design; it is designed to be proportionate to the human body as it is a station for passenger trains, not trains that carry goods. The colours - which suggest the promise of a glamorous cafe in Piccadilly, at the London end of the line, whilst also glamourising West Hounslow by association - are feminine in the idiom of the period when it was built. At a moment when more women were travelling independently - to work or to shop or to go to the cinema - the underground represented both ease of access and the opening up of its own dream world.

The focal point of the building is the chandelier that hangs in the ticket hall. It is composed of glass and bronze, holds 7 heptagonal lights and is supported by a ceiling designed with concentric heptagons. The symmetrical and geometrical arrangement serves to create a cohesive spatial awareness. The use of glass and bronze breaks apart the simultaneously ornate and earthbound feeling created by the vast number of tiles used in the ticket hall and draws people's eyes upwards. Meanwhile the mosaic of an 8-point star in some religions is a symbol for hope and seeing things beyond the material world. Was Holden trying to beseech the people of London to try to make the most of their city and try to find adventure within it, perhaps by taking a train to somewhere they had never been before?

# 16 Wedding in a Camp



## Harram Khurram

This essay studies the painting called *A Camp Scene*. Through a formal analysis of its subject and content matter the essay investigates what the painting shows about the roles of women in a traditional setting of a wedding. Furthermore, themes of love and marriage will be discussed in relation to the story of Laila and Majnun, the story that inspired the picture. The essay concludes with a comment on contemporary adaptations of the story and what this represents for the young people today.

The painting is attributed to Mir Sayyid Ali. A painter who worked at the ateliers of Herat and Tabriz for the Safavid Emperors () and then moved to Mughal courts in India. It was the property of French jeweler Louis Cartier before the museum acquired it. It is mentioned for the first time in Armenag Sakisian's survey of Persian painting published in 1929.

Upon the first sight the painting a pretty pastoral scene of a nomadic family going about their standard daily activities is neatly nestled in the center of a dismembered folio of a 16th century manuscript. It depicts a nomadic encampment of nine Tents of various kinds and colors. Four low, long traditional Arabian tents, are open. One tent is of a rare type: cone shaped and white. Several yurt-type tents are made with richly patterned textiles. In the largest tent, two older bearded men sit on luxurious carpets. If we compare this tent with the others, we can see it is the most ornate. This is the main "story" of the painting. On the right side of the two men, who appear to be the main actors, there are three men seated diagonally, two of whom are engaged in conversation. On the left side, we see two other men seated on the ground. There is a lot going on in this small painting, with the multitude of characters engaged in various activities.

Mir Sayyid Ali,  
*Miniature from  
Laila and Majnun,  
c.1540*

The style of the robes of these men and the strips of cloth under their chins would suggest that they are Arab nomads. We can tell that these seven men are equally important, as compared to the men standing behind and around them, because there are seven cups neatly lined up in front of the seven men (notice the lids on the cups, perhaps to keep the beverages hot or to keep the bugs out). In front of the two men seated closest to the bottom of the painting are writing implements—books, a pen case and an inkwell are arranged on the grass. Based on these objects, we might infer that this is an illustration of a formal gathering in which a contract or an agreement might be signed, or these objects may simply be reflecting on the status of the men as literate.

In fact, the painting is probably a scene from the well-known folktale of Layla and Majnun, according to art historian, Oleg Grabar. Written by the Persian Poet Nizami, the tale of Leyla and Majnun speaks of the doomed love in Arabia between Leyla and Qays.

In the far-right corner of the painting, we can see that there is a young man, removed from the activities of the painting, lighting a fire—probably Qays. Layla is depicted as the young woman in the red tent decorated with the Simurgh (a recurring mythological bird in most Persian folktales). In the poem there is a scene in which Qays' father goes to ask Leyla's father for her hand in marriage for his son, and this is the likely subject of the men's discussion in the main tent here. If we wander away from the main event to see what else is happening in our nomadic encampment, to the left and behind the main tent, we see a beautifully dressed woman with henna on her hands and her maids in a red tent.

Since illuminated manuscripts were an art of the court, most likely not to be seen in public, restrictions on the representation of the human figure were much more relaxed and within this medium the human form was often depicted. The art of the Persian miniature, is also among the first in Islamic art, to mirror daily life minutiae. Persian literature has enhanced this special art form, and genuinely magnified the elegance and grace that it bestows on its viewer.

As a young girl growing up in with little gadgets, I was accustomed to storytelling and folktales as a standard mode of entertainment. Maids, grandmothers, and visiting relatives all were prompted into telling stories before the afternoon naps. Needless to say, everyone served the tales with their own colorings and variations. The creative nourishment came from vividly imagining landscapes, heroines, and mythological creatures from the tales of Alif Leyla-wa-Leyla (Arabic original title of *A Thousand and One Nights*) and the 'Shahnameh' the Persian book of kings.

The contemporary pop- culture depictions of Layla and Majnun makes one think about the age of instant gratification that has defined the 21st century. Popularized in European pop culture by Eric Clapton's song "Leyla" these adaptations often allude to the temporary, and carnal expressions of love, yet the tale of Leyla and Majnun transcend the physical bounds of bodily needs. Nizami's version of Leyla and Majnun held an allegorical and almost spiritual reverence for the deep connection between Leyla and Majnun. In the painting one can sense the quiet grace and dignified distance between them both metaphorically and visually. What is absent, however, is the allegorical and almost spiritual reverence that Layla and Majnun had. One wonders how the absence of said spiritual Reverence has affected the society that helped shape us.

# 17 I AM PSYCHE: £££ \$SCRATCH PERRY at the Cabinet Gallery

Aram Masharqa

Am I to take him at his word? "I am psyche" opens the promotional video for the exhibition at Cabinet Gallery, ending May 6th. Is it an affirmation, or is it an answer to a question: "Are you psyche?", "Is this psyche?" For the exhibition to make any sense at all, it has to be an affirmation. Otherwise, it collapses under the weight of itself or rather, the weight of that question.

My friend hated the exhibition, I loved it. Though, perhaps an Instagram comment under a post of the Lee Scratch Perry Estate (@leescratchperry.art) understood the point better than either of us:

"Lee Art, Lee Living Art. Lee's Art Living. The Artist of my lifetime. Sound Art, Vision Art, thou art Art. Painting from Art. Words Art, Sounds Art, Powers Art £££ \$scratch Perry visionary, sight" (@reuben\_addis)

No questions: everything is affirmed. This type of comment was not as rare as one might expect, with ££Ps art conjuring ideas of the visionary or prophetic genius. However, I want to suggest that we put the usual understanding of genius to one side. Often we call geniuses those once-in-a-blue-moon types who answer to no one but themselves, and who have an unmatched access to some arcane field, like 'esoteric philosophy, quantum physics, or even just maths'. ££P is kind of like them, but his access is to the endlessly vernacular, the present-moment.

His work, like the present, is constantly unfolding. Like a self, it has no centre. Look too long and you'll see an entire universe: his work dances back and forth from macrocosm to microcosm. His material is the everyday: flyers, receipts, magazines, illustrations, posters to his shows, his own name. Indeed, I've been calling him ££P, rather than Perry or Lee, because that's the signature that features across his works. ££P becomes like the character that appears and reappears across the oeuvre as the artists presence in his own art. He writes himself into the story: this is the first affirmation.

Each of his works explode outward. Take for example the upside down flag, with a kermit toy pinned to the end of the pole, Kermit-Pole. Its absurdity speaks to a network of completely separate items across the room, which opens itself up to meaning just as it spirals out of control. I wonder if the gallery could have provided more guidance for each piece or the exhibit in general, as any explanatory text was kept to a minimum. For the person wondering whether to question the affirmations (my less-than-convinced friend was this person) the gallery does little more than offer up the name, ££P. Like the Instagram comment, it should be self-evident that this is Lee Art, Lee Living Art. Lee's Art Living. Or, take Timeouts Eddy Frankel's remark that if it was by anyone else, it would seem contrived, but it's not, it's by the brilliant Lee Scratch Perry. In many ways, the work does speak for itself to add explanatory text to a myriad of meanings would be to draw limits and attempt to give it shape. Yet, it is noteworthy that his work relies on the artistic identity more than other, similar works might.

Left: Lee Scratch Perry  
*Kermit-Pole (Blue Ark) 2016–2021*  
Wooden Pole, Puppet, Flag  
165 x 10 x 10 cm  
Unique

Left: Lee Scratch Perry  
*Birds War 2019*  
Collage, marker and acrylic on canvas  
140 x 170cm  
Unique



Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion* opens with a question. 'Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse / Be poet's or fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave'. This idea that art is only safely art once the artist passes away is a well-worn idea. However, Keats revised his epic half a dozen times and died early (tuberculosis) before he could finish his only epic. Most of us are no stranger to the paralysis of the question (as a Libra moon I certainly am not), and can empathise with the inability to move forwards, prohibited by indecision. ££P doesn't just affirm but blazes forward entirely self-assured. "I am psyche".

££P built an entire archive for himself. Each piece reflects an intense 'archive fever', saving what feels like every bit of paper from a range of places and times central to him. It is thus an autobiography and a historical archive all in one. Though such singular, idiosyncratic art resists the structural approach, it seems crucial to see the archival energy of the work in light of a historical denial of the archive to people of colour, whose histories were either destroyed, or yet remain illegible to the imperial centre. In a period moving from an age of 'creation' to one of curation, ££P reminds us what's at stake when we build our archive, with the radical attention to detail it implies. In this sense, he is a revolutionary kind of 'contemporary realist', if such a thing exists.

My favourite piece was *Laptop*. I can't explain why. Maybe I liked the adornment of such a mundane yet magical object with paint, cassette tapes, and collage, who knows. For an artist whose only law was the magic of the everyday, his work reads like a conversation with a living creature. Sometimes you're not in the mood to talk, and other days you'll stay for hours. All I know is that if you stay, you're guaranteed to look at the world a little differently. Perhaps that's why the Instagram comment ends '£££ \$cratch Perry visionary, sight'. ££P tells you to go outside and see: everything is psyche if you're looking.

# 18 Gendering Cezanne's Bathers

Kas Pietrzak

Bathing, like everything else, is an art. Cezanne's bathers did it exceptionally well, they did it so it felt like alchemy, they did it so it felt like abject hell. Searching for meaning in an otherwise peculiar scene, I've tried to come into contact with the ancient ones. Without a Ouija board at hand, I've decided to read some Aristotle and alchemical treatises from the Middle Ages. Thus prepared, I asked the bathers to lie down on my psychoanalytic couch, expecting to hear of the horrors they contained. I was met with a deafening Silence from which I nevertheless had to go on.

In 4th century BC Aristotle wrote on the transformative properties of water, particularly when in union with bodily matter. He categorised male semen as almost pure form and menstrual blood as almost pure matter. For Aristotle, a being with a Soul was thus generated in the womb, though I don't think Cezanne's Bathers share those origins. He further asserts in *De Natura Rerum* that the generation of all natural things is possible through the art of alchemy, where "it makes no difference whether it takes place in an artificial or natural vessel" for either come from "the earth" by means of warm, moist putrefaction. Water, it is said by Aristotle, is a substance which contains a vital spirit (pneuma) that engenders life – an argument which forms an exception to his otherwise empirical approach to bathing. The second most famous example of a subversive experiment gone wrong after Frankenstein's Creature -- Marlowe's homunculus -- is advised by Proteus that (much like Cezanne's Bathers) to attain a full existence, he must specifically "begin out in the open sea" where his form can expand.

Clark's argument that Cezanne should be seen "as positivist and materialist in the strong senses of those words" shifts our alchemical debate further into Middle Ages. In the late 16th century Pseudo-Paracelsus, following Aristotle, wrote on regeneration of vegetables; claiming that wood must be burned and placed into a vessel along with "resin, liquor, and oiliness" of the same tree – those, too, form a base for tools of an archetypal painter in 19th century Europe. In the modern age of disenchantment, this is perhaps the closest that painter's materials and oeuvre can get to resemble a form of alchemy. Clark's disambiguation of the humanoid form in Cezanne's Bathers suggests that they could be a result of an alchemical transmutation of form and matter through art, some horribly deformed homunculi: "the shoulders will never quite settle down to be shoulders... they are buttocks and legs as well... woman's hands explodes into the hair of the woman crouching in front of her". Cezanne and the alchemists encourage us to think – what happens when form reigns over matter?

According to Butler, "the effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body [...] bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self..." Alchemy, too, genders its offspring. Basilisk, for example, is "a monster above all monsters" – made purely from menstrual blood, it is compared to a menstruating woman "who also has a hidden poison in her eyes", can ruin mirrors with her glance, makes wounds impossible to heal and spoils wine with her breath. One cannot help but think of Medusa turning men who dare to look at her peculiarities into stone. That magical moment is

*"Come, you spirits  
That tend on  
mortal thoughts,  
unsex me  
Here,  
And fill me from the  
crown to the toe  
topfull  
Of direst cruelty!"  
(Macbeth, Act 1,  
Scene 5)*

Paul Cezanne  
*Les Grandes  
Baigneuses*,  
1898-1905  
Oil on Canvas  
210.5 cm x 250.8  
cm  
Philadelphia  
Museum of Art.



not only a disruption of what has come to be known as the male gaze: it's also a moment of deidentification – the victim is no longer human because he failed to consider her as human herself. She laughs each time, for she recognises the power of her body. Much closer to the formal interests of this essay than Medusa, lies the maid from Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* – close-mouthed, her gaze is placed under the protective spell of a mirror illusion which serves to refract and thus weaken the potentially destructive powers of her gaze. It is in this light, I believe, that Cezanne's Bathers should be seen -- as though through an "impenetrable screen, a resistant boundary to ocular penetration", as it was phrased by Tamar. All signifiers pointing to the abject feminine, can these bathers be Basilisks too? The closest evidence there is, if evidence it may be called, are Cezanne's own musings – "the snake has more suppleness than she, and sun shines obligingly darts / a few golden rays on this beautiful piece of meat".

Kristeva's psychoanalytic position and Cezanne's Bathers allow us to investigate things which do not easily lend themselves to representation or presence, but nevertheless structure our affective lives through simultaneous fascination and disgust. The peculiar specificity of the 'woman question' within a misogynistic symbolic order is problematised by Kristeva, who hints at unnamed (and perhaps unnameable) feature which animates our sensual and affective subconscious. T.J. Clark's encounter with the Bathers captures this emotion - "let me turn to is [...] ludicrously bland [...] let me wrench myself away might be better. Let me look deliberately in the opposite direction." The art-historian-turned-psychoanalyst writing this essay, however, persists in looking straight into its epistemological framework, searching for inexplicable affects which exist within its symbolic order. In vain. Cixous is quite right – "you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing [...] I, too, overflow. My body knows unheard of songs". Looking at the Bathers, I think about my own body. The things that are there though I don't want them to be. The things that aren't there but I feel them nevertheless. I take society's disgust and begin to mold beauty out of it, composing a future in a body which I'd rather belonged to the past. Academics, look away while you can – it will be horror.

# 19 Thoughts on Henry Fuseli's *Britomart Delivering Amoretta from the Enchantment of Busirane*

Rory Price

Last summer I worked as an intern at the German Romantic Museum and Goethe House in Frankfurt, Germany. On my first visit to the museum, I meandered casually around the museum's temporary exhibition and permanent collection, perusing the portraits of various German literary worthies and luscious Italian landscapes. I turned around a corner, and was immediately confronted by a towering figure, arm and weapon thrust high in the air, frozen in a moment of anticipation before the fatal blow would come crashing down onto the floundering man below. Contorted away from this violent image, a naked woman, held in place by her left arm. The power emanating from the painting's armoured figure fascinated me – who was this figure and what was its purpose?

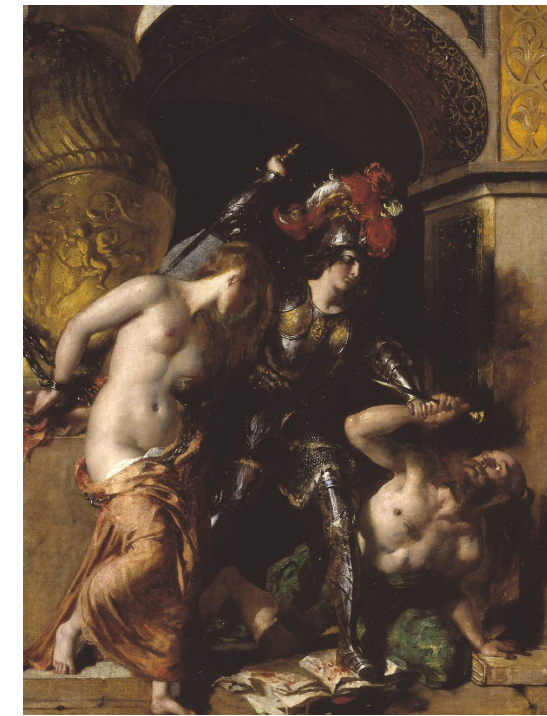
The plaque nearby told me that the painting, Henry Fuseli's *Britomart Delivering Amoretta from the Enchantment of Busirane*, depicted a scene from Edmund Spenser's 16th-century epic, *The Faerie Queene*, in which the female knight Britomart, a symbol of chastity and allegory for Elisabeth I (whose patronage Spenser sought), frees the beautiful Amoretta from her captivity at the hands of the sorcerer Busirane. I was surprised to learn that the erect armoured figure was a woman, Britomart. Indeed, there is little to suggest this directly in the painting itself, only the knight's flowing brown hair. Britomart's presentation seems to exude masculinity; she stands tall over the enfeebled Busirane, restraining him with one arm whilst the other arm appears to merge with her weapon, and one cannot tell where exactly Britomart's hands end and her weapon begins. Britomart even appears phallic in Fuseli's painting; the rigid, militaristic body combined with the arm-weapon combination raised up to penetrate the submissive man below.

It is interesting to note the lines created by the bodies of the painting's three subjects. Britomart's form constitutes a downwards diagonal line from her raised arm to Busirane's arm, while Busirane's posture with his arm outstretched creates a horizontal line. Finally, Amoretta is recoiling away from the centre and towards the upper right of the canvas, thus creating a diagonal line towards the top right corner. As the image on the right shows, the painting has a somewhat coherent structure; Busirane sits in the centre of the image, and is the point towards which Britomart's violent energy flows, and from which Amoretta's energy flees away from.

The composition of Fuseli's painting along these lines invites a comparison of the two female subjects. Their energy flows in opposing directions, one collapsing towards its target, and the other fleeing upwards in the converse direction. The two female figures represent opposites of femininity; Britomart lacks almost any sign of her femininity, and is depicted as being phallic and metallic, whereas Amoretta is the full embodiment of feminine beauty and fragility. She is the one who is imprisoned, and is naked, which emphasises her weakness. Her arm movements are ones of grace and delicacy, which mirror the stark, violent movements of Britomart.

Henry Fuseli  
*Britomart Delivering Amoretta from the Enchantment of Busirane*, 1824  
Oil on Canvas  
183.5 by 153cm

Henry Fuseli,  
*Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret*  
1833  
Oil on Canvas  
90.8 by 66 cm



*The Faerie Queene* has proved to be popular for several prominent painters; the English painter William Etty (1787-1849), for example, painted the same scene as Fuseli in his 1833 composition *Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret*. A comparison of Etty and Fuseli's paintings can bring insights to both compositions. Despite their common subject, the two paintings are wildly different compositions, with perhaps the most significant difference being the lack of directionality in Etty's painting compared to Fuseli's. In Etty's creation, Britomart stands in the middle of the painting, swinging down to Busirane, but this swing appears as much horizontal as it is vertical. The swing, as well as Britomart's wide stance, causes Britomart to lose the sense of domination created by the verticality of Fuseli's *Britomart*. This effect is furthered by Britomart's face being beared towards the viewer, showing her features clearly, thus not surrounding her with any mystery, and showing her to be explicitly and undeniably female.

Another point of comparison is the background scene of the two paintings. Fuseli's painting is very dark, and his subjects blend in with the shadows around them. Etty opts instead for a somewhat busier background; Amoretta is chained to a golden column, inscribed with patterns and images (Fuseli's Amoretta can hardly be seen to be bound to anything at all), and the confrontation is occurring in front of an Islamic-style archway. These background features, as well as Busirane's Chinese-inspired hairstyle, affix a "real" location to this scene, in that the elements surrounding it are familiar, even if they do not constitute a single fixed location. There is very little mystery about Etty's setting, which is simply "foreign". By contrast, Fuseli's background is black, with no location clues at all. The effect of this is to mythologise the scene; by not attempting any sort of realistic setting, Fuseli highlights the scene's fictionality, thus assigning the painting a somewhat mystical quality.

The above interpretation does not seek to downplay the beauty and value of Etty's painting. Rather, I have attempted to compare the two paintings so as to elucidate why Fuseli's painting is able to be as imposing and forceful as it is, and indeed, why it has fascinated me since seeing it at the German Romantic Museum.

# 20 A Paradox of Existence: Doris Salcedo's Shibboleth in 2023

George Rowe

Doris Salcedo  
*Shibboleth and Me.*  
2007

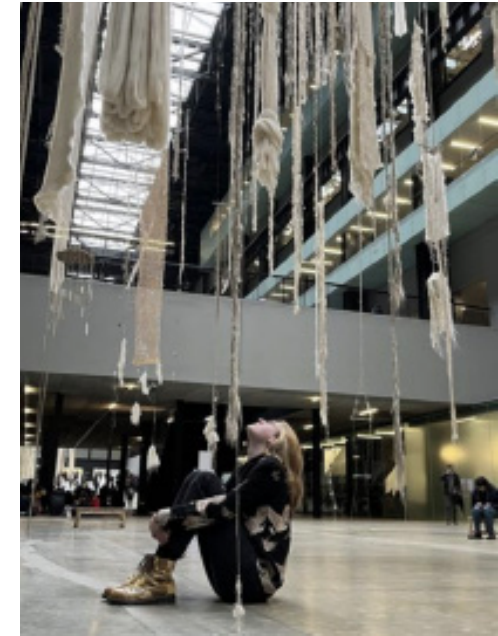
Doris Salcedo's Shibboleth was an installation artwork in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, London, in 2007-8. Or was it?

'Install': To place (an apparatus, a system of ventilation, lighting, heating, or the like) in position for service or use.

Shibboleth is a crack formed down the length of the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, named after a story of genocide from the Bible based around pronouncing this word at the border as a test of nationality. It is a copy of a crack in a cliff face in Colombia, Doris Salcedo's homeland. This negative space in the rockface has been transposed into a negative space in concrete foundations through Salcedo's excavation, exposing a trench which physically divides north and south. Experiencers (I use this rather than viewers since it is an artwork which must be physically grappled with, if only by avoiding tripping over in it, see figure 1) are invited to look down towards the centre of the Earth, into the bowels of the history of the building and the city itself. Many critics have focused on this aspect of the art, arguing it has significant geopolitical messages behind it, which, no doubt, Salcedo intended. However, unlike other installations of the Unilever Series, traces of this work still remain. There is no sun of Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, but Salcedo's fissure, having been filled in, is still visible in its lighter concrete. This is the real installation of Salcedo's work, and it too has political commentary behind it.

Walking through the Turbine Hall today, there is another installation using the vast open space above our heads - Cecilia Vicuña's *Brain Forest Quipu* - but the remnants of Shibboleth beneath my feet still draw my attention. The scar erupts through the floor of the room, refusing to be silent despite having been removed fifteen years ago (see figure 2). Critics' political analyses resurface because, despite the crack's removal, evidence of it is still there. We may see parallels in the North-South divide as the crack runs parallel to the Thames, physically separating South London, the political turmoil of Colombia, and/or religious and nationalistic genocide of peaceful people, with a list of countries too long to name. Such political issues remain in living memory, just as Shibboleth remains in the physical living memory of the Turbine Hall. The space acts now as both gallery for whoever is exhibiting and memorial for the hidden cracks within society.

Doris Salcedo  
*Shibboleth and Me.*  
2023



We cannot speak of Shibboleth's removal since evidence of its existence has been purposely left, serving as a reminder - though of what is up to the viewer - to all visitors. Mieke Bal, writing about the crack, comments 'the installation Shibboleth is no longer an installation. Nothing has been brought into the space to add to it, or so it seems'. The only thing brought into the gallery space is an invitation to the experienter to wonder about the politics of the work. Now, in its filled-in state, the installation has happened. The performative covering of a fissure in the social space of the Turbine Hall is the real work of installation art. Thus, Salcedo has created a permanent temporary installation. Other installations in the Turbine Hall function as art pieces because they are not normally there - they are installation art to be viewed specially rather than part of the architecture and interior design. Shibboleth had to, therefore, first be an exposed crack for there to truly be an artistic installation with a political point. Societal injustices are only in public discourse when exposed so Salcedo's performative recreation of the life stages of injustice (existence-exposure-fix) acts as a reminder to experiencers of Shibboleth of how the 'fix' stage is never truly accomplished. Legacies of such injustices remain.

Having come to Oxford since falling in love with this work, it has acquired another new meaning for me. 'Shibboleth' is now, in my brain, also part of the university's sign-on process, keeping out those who do not attend the university. We may therefore be invited to reflect on the university's history of gender, race, and class injustices (to name but a few) in the admissions process, and whether they are really gone. Will they exist forever in the foundations of the university like Shibboleth will exist in the floor of the Tate Modern?

# 21 Recognition for Digital Media/Pop-Culture in Art Institutions

Hafsa Siddiqui



Contemporary legacies of 'Tokyo Pop' and the work of smaller collectives such as 'Do Not Research' have formed a framework within which I find myself trying to locate unresolved troubles I have surrounding the Institution of Art and its hesitation in platforming artists who draw upon internet culture and youth interest within their practices. This point of contention has continued to perplex me - an apparent generational (and educational) disconnect between these generative 'outside' art practices and what has made its way into recognisable contemporary exhibition spaces.

In conversations with younger adolescent relatives, I was able to surmise a loose set of criteria with which they categorised what fit into their general idea of what Fine Art is, and also what they thought Fine Art should include. What they found exciting or meaningful wasn't the work of Banksy, David Hockney, Damien Hirst or Kara Walker, but instead works by the likes of Aya Tananko. Artists like Jennifer Packer and Ruprecht von Kaufmann inhibited the overlapping space between these two categories. There was no disrespect for the mainstream 'greats', but simply an inability to truly empathise or interact with the work without having to seek some sort of written explanation or guidance. Through the lens of LuYang's multimedia practice and a recent exhibition by Harris Rosenblum, I wish to unpack this generation's idea of what makes 'good art' - aesthetic appeal, individuality, relatability and accessibility - and how contemporary art should continue to better embrace practices that utilise the internet and 'nerd' culture in reworking what can be considered respectable 'high art'. LuYang's NetiNeti (meaning 'not this, nor that') is their first solo exhibition in the UK combining aesthetics of internet identity, gaming and anime in pursuing a surreal exploration of the mind, body, life and mortality through neuroscience, Buddhism and modern technology. It adheres to this idea of a middle path, not being trapped by a binary way of thinking (about art). Displayed in a way that evokes nostalgia of retro Shanghai arcades, LuYang creates a fun and immersive way for viewers to interact with and reflect on these perhaps existential ideas.

LuYang has said in conversation with the Zabludowicz gallery that, especially coming from a foreign background, interpreting artwork can be difficult when a person does not already have knowledge around the subject - knowing what to look for and how to subsequently interpret it makes certain contemporary art something that only those privileged to prior exposure to art can truly interact with. NetiNeti and its other counterparts demonstrate a clear opposition to this sort of deeply coded way of art making, and is actively accessible. Additionally, this attitude to making characters and world-building in what may academically be perceived as a juvenile aesthetic bears no impact on the weight of the work. Sitting on The Fast and the Furious superbikes as Uterus Man and crashing through chromosomes on a race track, playing as DOKU avatars (these different iterations or facets of LuYang's self), or on a Space Invaders style game where visitors try to shoot stylised cancer

LuYang *NetiNeti*.  
Credit: Zabludowicz Collection,  
David Bebbler.  
2022

Harris Rosenblum.  
*Inorganic Demons*.  
Credit: SARA'S,  
Sara Blazej. 2023

Harris Rosenblum.  
*Archangel*  
(after Wowaka),  
2023

cells while attempting to protect the body's organs are still just extended metaphors for contemporary philosophical questions and social movements - gender identity, and investigating different ideas of birth, life and death.

These games and films speak to not only the developing interest in AI and digital self-documentation as extensions of oneself, but also a very sincere and ever-present investigation into how we, mind and body, interact with the world. There are elements of truth, reality and escapism that have forever been present in other periods of art that can continue to be discussed through more relatable means.

Similarly, Rosenblum's exhibition, *Inorganic Demons*, also matches up against this supposed youth criteria - it incorporates the familiar contemporary youth object, yet holds more of a similarity than NetiNeti to more traditional white cube spaces or modern contemporary exhibition tropes.

*Inorganic Demons* draws upon "War as a Machine" in Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* as a philosophical entry point to materialise an apocalyptic universe using computer-aided manufacturing and reference material much like LuYang. This demon, or disruptive evil force is perhaps a metaphor for our fracturing reality in our current political climate. Amongst our disrupted senses of self, others, religion and locality, Rosenblum draws upon a base of research from alienated online spaces, internet fringe groups and the creations of new worlds and alternative belief systems found on fandom Wikipedia pages. These microcosms of culture brought to life within this exhibition perhaps speak to a desire to reconcile a sense of reality through creating meaningful, fun and absurd narratives.

*Inorganic Demons* presents fourteen sculptures, creating some sort of almost religious-like aesthetic and manifestation of post-capitalistic relics - the vape juice, Hatsune Miku as a modern day icon posed upon a resin altar with videos of the late vocaloid creator on an SD card.

Rosenblum pays tribute to what exists solely on the internet - childhood games are displayed in the form of World of Warcraft swords, and whilst these items don't need much explaining they speak to issues of anthropocene, apocalypse, unease and post-consumerist society. The vape, the idols, the games and the sacrificial lamb are recontextualised into this absurdist, cultish assembly of artefacts.

I don't believe that the art world is entirely exclusionary of youth interest or new processes of making, but we need to move away from Western-centred bodies of selection that have become out of sync with the aesthetics and ideas of larger artistic systems that exist outside of the white European world. There is room to progress the understanding of Fine Art and what can be included within it. Things do not have to be heavily abstract, pictorial or unfamiliar to be deemed valuable or meaningful. The value of play, pop-culture and digital media shouldn't continue to be understated.



# 22 Helen Frankenthaler: Passivity and Action

## Eva Stuart

A 1956 photograph of Helen Frankenthaler appears immediately like a poorly contrived magazine shoot. Seated in a disconcertingly childlike pose on the floor, the artist curls her feet up beneath her lap and offers the camera a demure and rather tentative glance. Behind her, reaching with confident expanse, canvases stand sentinel, whilst another spreads beneath her. Their surfaces writhe with washes of colour, and, tucked up on the ground, Frankenthaler seems utterly misplaced within her surroundings. Dark hair, neatly pushed back, appears too carefully arranged beside the slashes of paint, whilst the white skirt, when pressed against the pigmented canvases, seems naïve. She seems immediately incongruous and even uncomfortable. This is an image that suggests prim passivity and, to her critics, indifferent 'femininity'.

And yet, knowledge of Frankenthaler prompts reassessment. Whilst a privileged resident of the Upper East Side of New York and the proclaimed prettiest of three daughters, she should not be reduced to such superficiality. Successful in her twenties, Frankenthaler's large-scale paintings were recognised as crucial products of the abstract expressionist movement. With vigorous wit and sociability – her parties with her husband Robert Motherwell were famed – as well as a potentially self-furthering sex life – her affair with the art critic Clement Greenberg doubtlessly elevated her artistic profile – she should be regarded as remarkably energetic. Indeed, a career of more than six decades suggests anything but passivity. Rather than genuine timidity, then, her portrait suggests perhaps a deliberate coyness: the tilted shoulders seem no longer awkward but self-consciously posed. The photograph epitomises the extraordinary tension within her work – a shifting dialogue between dispassion and vital action.

Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea* (1952) is remarkable, and it absolutely reveals this tension. Seeping paint – oils diluted with turpentine, the first example of her 'soak-stain' technique – swells across an enormous, unprimed canvas, creating ambiguous shapes that suggest the impulsive nonchalance of their creator. Curiously faded colours – peach and pale teal – swim with exquisite translucence within the composition, but it is these weak tones that contribute to a perception of Frankenthaler's work as tentative and non-committal. There is, regardless, a dynamism to the painting: shapes bleed into one another, their edges meeting to create one large, pulsing blot of colour. However, this activity seems dislocated from their maker's hand, for the paint seem to leak across the canvas of its own accord – inky liquid absorbing with unpredictable independence. It is this somewhat laissez-faire approach that prompted the painter Barnett Newman to comment in 1957 upon "the hand that moves under the faded brushwork so limply in its attempt to make art". She was, it is worth noting, successful: at the Biennale de Paris, 1959, she won first prize, and had her first major exhibition as early as 1960, whilst painters such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Nolan acknowledged her direct impact upon the development of 'colour-field' painting. Nonetheless, Frankenthaler's work was regarded by many contemporaries as passive. It supposedly lacked the vigour of Jackson Pollock's forceful paint lassoing, or the angst-prompted depth of the action painters. Indeed, the blanched tones and minimal aggression in her markmaking, as well as her soft, membranous forms, were often attributed to her femininity. Grace Hartigan associated them with the glib frivolity of a society hostess, suggesting that they had been carelessly tossed out "between cocktails and dinner". In this way, Frankenthaler's work was regarded as pleasant, but derivative: The Times dismissed it in 1953 as "sweet but unambitious".



Gordon Parks, *Helen Frankenthaler in her Studio*, 1956. Photograph.

Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea*, 1952, charcoal, oil on canvas, 220 x 297.8cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.



And yet, her work is manifestly deliberate. Whilst the products were often serendipitous, her determination to explore and her capacity for formal invention should not be dismissed. She was inspired, certainly, by Pollock – that much she admitted. Splaying a canvas out across the floor before tossing paint was not novel, but her technique of obtaining a flat surface through suffusing the diluted medium through the weave was. Frankenthaler acknowledged the exploratory and often deceptively casual nature of her process – indeed, she attributed the very discovery of her 'soak-stain' technique to "impatience, laziness and innovation" – but this should not be taken to indicate passivity. Instead, it was very much part of the contemporary fashion for automatism within artistic production.

Furthermore, one may perceive subliminal and purposeful intention within Frankenthaler's compositions: in *Vessel* (1961), there is a deliberately contrived symmetry. Her active placement and guiding of the stains are countered by their subsequent autonomy as they bleed unpredictably into the weave – this is the tension between action and passivity. With awareness of the title of *Mountains and Sea*, too, one can detect thought: a pale grey peak, a quiet signifier for the mountain, forms the apex of the composition, whilst water is suggested by streaking blue rivulets. There is also implicit activity in the gestural swipes of charcoal that bifurcate the pools of colour. In her later pieces from the 1960s, upon the realisation that turpentine eventually disintegrated the canvas, Frankenthaler moved to using diluted acrylic: in contrast to oils, the medium was relatively rigid, and thereby gave her greater control over the shapes it formed. *Pink Lady* (1963) displays this augmented control: shapes of more vivid hues maintain their forms more staunchly than their oil-based siblings. They do not spontaneously leak, but rather tessellate together with controlled neatness. Helen Frankenthaler's paintings, then, much like her portrait, are deceptive. Her laissez-faire approach must nonetheless be regarded as an extension of the crucial abstract expressionist urge for self-expression. The seeping paint may be independent, but there is purpose in its application – action and passivity are in an innovative dialogue with one another. Frankenthaler dimples demurely from within her photograph. She seems at first passive, idealistically 'feminine', and wholly incongruous amidst the mass of fluid paintwork. And yet, another angle reveals that her shoes are off, her naked feet resting upon canvas in a subtle yet eloquent assertion of her connection to the work – she is at its very origin. It is this intriguing tension that permeates her work. Beneath the superficial whimsy and the languid 'femininity' of the faded, amorphous paint, there is vital impulse and purpose.



# 23 Reviewing the Exhibition 'Becoming Overtaci'

Florence Sykes

I want to go back to Overtaci. Because Overtaci is not just the Danish artist Louis Marcussen's transgender identity, but a deep sense of place. The exhibition, *Becoming Overtaci* at the Cobra Museum, Amsterdam provided the floorplan for visitors to witness the construction of this consuming and transportive world.

Interior and exterior transformation was central to Overtaci's existence. Her painting's, made between the 1930s and 1960s in the Riskov Hospital, Aarhus, show a mind grappling with how to control an environment around you that is designed to suppress control - how does one elicit that transformation? For Overtaci the becoming of exterior transformation was her psychiatric ward turned creative inferno. Meanwhile, her interior transformation was not only from man to woman, but also from surviving to living, from breathing to being. The exhibition at the Cobra Museum is populated with beings. They can't be called distinctly human because their figurative form evades conventional interpretation. They are genderless, nameless but not at all hopeless in the representation of their identities.

The landscape Overtaci inhabited at the mental institute in Aarhus was bleak, alien and unfathomable. Human existence so readily assumes an environment and a place of grounding; we think that belonging to a 'place' is conducive of good mental health and stability.

When the place around her was traumatising, the suspension of figures in Overtaci's oeuvre deliberately seek to destabilise the connection between bodies and place. Her figures occupy a liminal zone in her compositions. However, rather than fearing these liminal spaces Overtaci's world demarcates them as sites of freedom, as the precipice for liberation. As critic, Kathrin Busch writes, Overtaci's figures are less people in their proportions than 'lines of flight.'

Indeed, in many of her paintings their feet scarcely touch the ground, and this suspension is most acutely manifest in the hanging figure cut outs. Large eyed and slender they border beauty and pain. Their wraith-like silhouettes tread the line of flourishing and fading. Made of paper they weigh nothing, yet the stillness they command in the space around them has a presence and a sense of gravity. Your eye holds theirs as they turn gently. There is no ventilation in the exhibition gallery, so their movement is simply the exchange between atmosphere and material. They are shapes not yet committed to context or the dimensions provided by a landscape or frame.

Overtaci confronts the paradigms that having a context equates to stability and that place entails a sense of belonging elsewhere in her work. The structures built and enacted by performing rites and rituals is manifest in the painting, *Untitled*. It is a scene teeming with bodies that bedeck a golden chamber as wall paintings and three lone physical presences foregrounded at the bottom. Their task at hand averts their attention to the painted activity around them. So engrained are the habits and motions of the figures that they are written on the walls. The wall paintings too engage with rituals of games, dancing and picking flowers. Amongst the palette of gold and yellow an ariel window at the top right of the painting offers a small square of blue sky. It indicates to us that the place occupied in the painting is one deep underground and anchored.

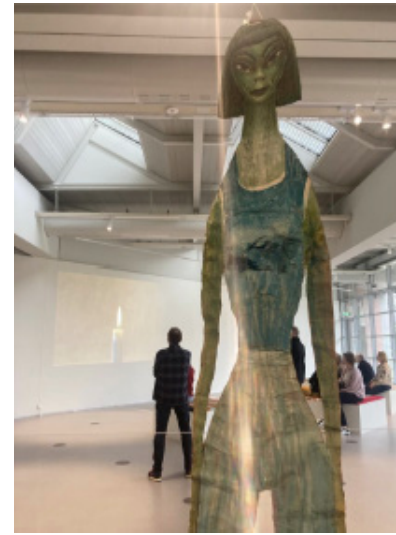
Engraved on the central wall is the word 'Mastaba' coming from the ancient Egyptian meaning for a burial site, otherwise known as 'House of Stability' or 'House of Eternity.' Overtaci postulates the place of death, its rites and its configuration, as the ultimate context for our existence. The ultimate thing that unites humans in a sense of belonging is our mortality. We

Overtaci,  
*Hanging Paper  
Cut out Figure*,  
c. 1940. 75 x 60  
cm.

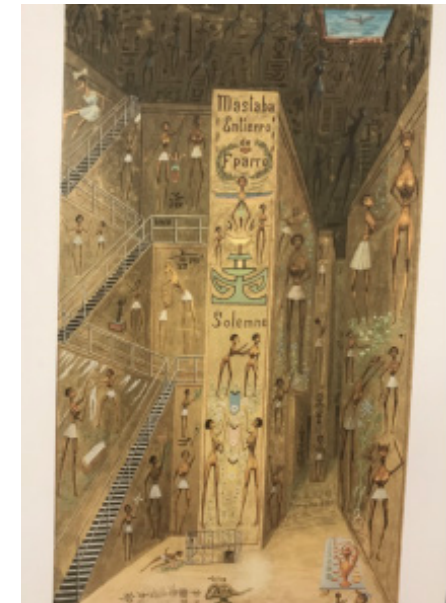
Overtaci,  
*Hanging Paper  
Cut out Figure*,  
c. 1940. 60 x 15  
cm.

Overtaci,  
*Hanging Paper  
Cut out Figure*,  
c. 1940. 70 x 25  
cm.

Overtaci, *Un-  
titled*. c.1930.  
60 x 45cm



will all be reconciled to the continuum that is death. Therefore, whilst living we don't need a fixity and grounding to one route, one way of being or one context. For Overtaci this only brought pain. Life is the place where we should be able to transform, and change, and ambiguously suspend. In life we are figures that hover undecided. That is its beauty. The exhibition *Becoming Overtaci* provided the floorplan, but you didn't keep your feet on the ground. Despite the heaviness of its subject and its questioning of stability, I went away feeling the power of Overtaci's work in its unwavering effect to uplift.



# 24 Before the Storm: Bourse de Commerce, Pinault Collection

Charlie Taylor

Giving the impression of a deconstructed forest canopy three wooden cubic frames neatly fill the colossal central gallery of the Bourse de Commerce. An assortment of branches from oak trees felled by lightning strikes weave around the structures. Interspersed are photographs of plants, a formless wooden statue, and a small writing desk. Vietnamese-Dutch artist Danh Vo's work *Trapeaolum* takes centre stage at the Pinault Collections newest exhibition, *Avant l'Orage* (before the storm) an ambitious attempt to address the role of climate change in contemporary art. An exhibition, which like nature, changes through the seasons.

Opened to the public in 2021 the newly renovated Bourse de Commerce has become the epicentre of French multimillionaire Francois Pinault's vast contemporary art collection. The building originally built in the early 19th century as a corn exchange, was previously transformed in 1889 to become the centre of Paris's commercial life as a trading hall for commodities. Reborn through a fifty-year lease from the city of Paris in 2016 the building underwent a 160-million-euro refurbishment process with new additions to the old trading floor. A large cement cylinder added by Japanese architect Tadao Ando has converted the building into a 32,000 square foot gallery space.

The opening of such a collection was no easy feat. In 2005 after failure to construct a bespoke museum on the outskirts of Paris, Pinault himself wrote a lengthy op-ed in French newspaper *Le Monde* critiquing the supposed prejudice within the French state against the opening of private museums. However, a relaxing around rules allowing Bernard Arnault's Fondation Lous Vuitton to open in the Bois de Boulogne in 2014, has seen a new merger of luxury fashion barons with contemporary art. Pinault, owner of Kering the fashion company which owns Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, has not come without controversy. Questions remain over whether this is simply a space for the display of Frances uber-wealthy, or a genuine act of public service to bring cutting-edge contemporary art to the French public. *Avant l'Orage* plays upon the tension of these wider contexts, situated within a museum space which was quite literally a centre of French colonial and economic expansion. The original murals decorating the roof remain in-situ and symbolise the 19th century expansion of French trade to the five continents of the world, depicting colonised people in obedience to French masters. There is an unresolved tension between the historical context of the Bourse to the artwork on the walls and the space they inhabit. Does it really live up to the intention of the work to highlight that: "another path is still possible, in the eye of the storm" or in the process does it render such artistic critiques null and de-radicalised?

Danh Vo in *Trapeaolum*, an installation purpose built for the central gallery, seeks to highlight this conflict between the building's colonial past and the wider colonial histories of environmental destruction. The wooden beams for his temporary structures are constructed from sustainable wood sourced from Craig McNamara, the son of former Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara one of the leading architects of the Vietnam War. Not only does the work speak to the legacies of French Indochina, but also to the ongoing relationship to different forms of colonial expansion over the natural world. Vo shows here the proximity (by only one generation) to a continued and historic legacy of colonial resource extraction, and environmental destruction unleashed on Vietnam through the use of chemical weapons.

Danh Vo  
*Trapeaolum*,  
*Beyond the Storm*.  
Bourse de Commerce  
Pinault  
Collection

Beyond the central gallery these implicit critiques become more isolated. Brazilian artist Lucas Arruda's *Deserto-Modelo* (model deserts) series presents blank and abstract, if not blurred, landscapes with small fragile horizons. Paired next to Anicka Yi's *Elysia Chlorotica*, a series of artificial cocoons filled with trapped moth like mechanical figures, a soundscape of creaking mechanical devices flutter through the rotating gallery space. Together the works pair considerations on the artificiality of our own construction of the natural world, but also try to imagine the kind of future landscapes climate change might bring.

This audio-visual work sits alongside established contemporary masters such as Cy Twombly's *Coronation of Sesotris* a polyptych which shows the mystical journey of a pharaoh related to the sun god. If Yi and Arruda's representations of an apocalyptic climate wasteland represent the 'dark', then here is the 'light', the sun god through abstraction becomes blurred, at once a god, a star, a boat, and an eye.

The collection ends with Pierre Huyge's audio-visual work *In A Way in Untilled*, a dimly lit room with a film showing the set of relationships between living organisms in an abandoned park. A specific sensory environment has a sporadically illuminated fish-tank play alongside the distorted darkness of the film. The viewer is met not with responses they can control but they also become passive observers too. Here Huyge manipulates a complex web of, often violent, relationships between organisms and the natural world in periodic bouts of darkness.

This is an eclectic and considered collection of multi-media art, but it sits uncomfortably with its premise of foregrounding artistic responses to climate change. Moving upwards to the roof of the rotunda one is met with a coalescing of discordant signs than a coherent whole. The climate crisis is a different kind of crisis and one which requires a different kind of art. It's a complex web to untangle since we are all complicit within it, and the scale is often too vast to make a didactic artistic critique. However, there is a sense of a superficial righteousness in the curation of this collection, bolstering the collections virtue at the expense of cohesive ideas around the climate. Instead, it remains torn between unresolved political aspiration, and revelling in aesthetic abstraction.



# 25 “Glimmering Pictures”: Moving Images, Iconography, and Celebrity in Pablo Larrain’s ‘Jackie’

Samuel Wagman

Richard Aldington’s poem, *Cinema Exist* is, at least to me, the most succinctly perfect evocation of the intimate process of film-going. That process of giving oneself, fully and entirely, to a singular moving image, side-by-side with a room full of strangers, giving their minds and eyes to the visual –losing themselves in “hushed concentration” and “glimmering pictures”. Cinema has become the purest expression of the mass human urge to undertake viewership, to map art onto our lives in the all-consuming way it was intended. We journey into a cinema not just to kill time but to relish in the impartation of art into those in-between spaces. I’d like to tell you about a film which pulled off the feat that every piece of cinema hopes to evoke; a film that grasped my mind firmly in its fingers, and soothed it with its artistry.

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Repeatedly, Larrain in collaboration with Stephane Fontaine, presents us with a conflicted silhouetted image of Natalie Portman’s Jackie Kennedy; a centralised representation of an icon in which she remains impenetrable to public query. She is presented to us in the burst of quintessential 1960s pink that visually ties her to JFK’s assassination. Yet, the woman contained in that blood-stained Chanel suit, placed against a dour backdrop of governmental corporatism and bland continuity, slinks away. Larrain manages to dispose of the mythology of ‘Jackie O’, connected to her lush celebrity and New England poise, and replace it with something eminently more human. She is no longer seated on her golden throne in ‘Camelot’, but desolated in a suit that transcended her to become an icon of conflict, clash, and contrast. Larrain and Fontaine melded artistry with a desire to rummage through America’s locker of visual icons and reach the person, Jacqueline Bouvier, that disappeared within it. The question still lingers: are we to be allowed access to Kennedy, or to be kept in this visual interregnum between viewership of a mythology, and a half-earned deconstructionism?

Pablo Larrain  
Still from *Jackie*.  
2016



Noah Oppenheim’s script forms a vital component of ‘Jackie’s visual landscape. When Portman, in a husky New England accent, comments that she “believes the characters we read on the page become more real than the men who stand beside us”, she fuses the centralising images with which Larrain has permeated his film with the commentary on warped iconography that underpins its narrative thrust. The ‘Camelot’ of the Kennedy White House is another, implicit, representation that is contrasted with the broken, post-assassination cynicism that Jackie is framed with. Once again, Larrain forces his audience to contend with the divergences that framed his subjects life.

Jackie Kennedy’s famed love of the arts is brought into the film as a means of furthering the emphasis of her perception as an empty object of American commodification – Kennedy disappears behind the art not just by virtue of her displaced political role but because she herself forms part of America’s visual lexicon. As she is shown to pack up her ornaments that decorated the Kennedy Camelot, she holds in her hand a blue Chinese porcelain vase – the eye’s gaze is drawn towards it, not toward the downfallen icon that holds it. In doing so, Larrain entices us into the public gaze that defined Jackie Kennedy’s life; we subject her to a process of diminishment, ignoring the woman in favour of the crestfallen symbol. Kennedy’s silhouette is both her definitive identity and the cause of her misplaced celebrity.

A part of me always finishes Larrain’s films with a sense of unfulfillment. Despite each frame being meticulously crafted, there is an inescapable feeling that the real Jackie Kennedy remains hidden behind the same defences that marked her contemporary celebrity. Much like Larrain’s later film, ‘Spencer’, in which Princess Diana remains shielded from us via dreamscape and surrealism, ‘Jackie’ reconstructs the boundaries and limitations of its central icon’s life. When that “vast avalanche[e] of greenish yellow light” washes over the subjects of Aldington’s poem, we too are awoken to the intractability of Jackie Kennedy Onassis’ fortifications as the screen dims. Left only with the vision of her consistent centrality and shielded emblem-hood, mirrored via Fontaine and Larrain’s focalised images of an icon, perhaps we are compelled to ask; what is the purpose of that “click and whirl” – how close can we ever get? How close should we get?

# 26 There's nothing abstract about the climate crisis: an ecological case against conceptual art

Izzy Walter

It's often been said that all art is political. The case is compelling and it is certainly one that I subscribe to. All art is personal, the personal is political and, in a post-truth world, it's important to interrogate the subjectivity of our media consumption. Helpfully, our impartial prophets at the BBC have recently highlighted the dangers of assumed objectivity. On the surface, refusing to air an 'ideologically driven' episode on Britain's ecocide panders to the ageing Brexiteers who still watch daytime television. But the real scandal is the implicit claim that their remaining broadcasts achieve some myth of political neutrality. Moreover, the excised episode is far from being riddled with harrowing, environmental propaganda. In fact, David Goulson, Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, criticised it for not going far enough, imploring Attenborough to use his privileged position in the corporation to 'persuade the BBC to commission the hard-hitting, kick-up-the-arse documentary we really need'. If you want an example of 'ideologically driven' television, look no further than the episodes that did make it to air. Painting Britain's ecological trajectory in a 'deliberately uplifting and overwhelmingly positive' light, it is these portrayals that make a bid for fiction. Here is an instance where it pays to probe the inherently political character of visual art and the bias that underpins creative decisions. However, I worry that bestowing an ideological status onto any ostensibly "ecological" artwork has removed a pressure on mainstream fine art to engage effectively in political issues. Whilst documentary deals with real-life images and tangible events, post-modern art's vendetta against the figurative has a danger of becoming irresolute, impractical, and ultimately lacking in legible commentary. At this point, the climate movement simply can't afford to deal in good intentions. Richard Long and David Nash are two seminal figures of British Land Art, strongly associated with the UK's canon of "ecological" art. Long is well-known for *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), where he walked repeatedly across a field and photographed the trail of flattened grass with ethereal results. Nash also makes elegant alterations to landscape in his work *Ash Dome*. In 1977 he planted a ring of 22 ash trees and diligently cultivated their growth as they began to form an enclosing canopy. Of course, there is a place for this type of work – namely therapeutic – but I don't buy that anyone's walking away, jumping on their computer and sending a letter to their MP. These works are too idyllic to animate practical change and certainly too abstract to instruct it. Ironically, this is the very change required to protect their materials.

The wider problem here is that the bread and butter of conceptual art is simply ill-equipped to deal with climate change. Its love of abstract theory and its survival on the renewal of absolutes cannot even begin to approach the issue's administrative complexity. The existential density of the climate crisis is a serious barrier and one that, if art aims to truly serve its communities, it must counter with lucid anecdotal evidence, not compound the problem. I don't believe the fault of the climate crisis should fall at the feet of the individual (as the BP's Carbon Footprint campaign would have us believe), nor do I think all contemporary art fails to productively engage with the topic. I am simply imploring the art world to reevaluate its love affair with abstraction in the face of imminent disaster. There is nothing abstract about climate change. It might be a different story if, across the board, fine art was under pressure to deal with ecological threats, but 'environmental' art persists to remain in its own category.

Take for example, Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch*. It received global acclaim and Mark Godfrey, a curator at Tate, has commended him for '[making] this crisis of climate change tangible for people because it gives a physical experience and puts people really in touch with something that usually you couldn't imagine'. Whilst that all sounds encouraging, the subject of this praise is a tone-deaf display of three ice blocks, imported from a Greenland fjord and repeated at three locations around London. Does Britain not have enough issues of its own without outsourcing? More recently, just a few urgent issues that spring to mind include the pollution of the Wye River, the government's repeated approval of peat or the effective ban of onshore wind turbines. According to Godfrey, Eliasson has also 'inspired world leaders'! I suppose these are the same 'inspired' leaders who have allowed more carbon to be released from underground stores in the last 28 years than in the 75 before their first COP summit in 1995? I have no doubt that these so-called leaders leapt at the chance to proclaim their admiration for an artwork that uses the same indefinable vocabulary as their own immaterial promises.

So, what does effective ecological Art look like? I nominate Richard Mosse's exhibition, *Broken Spectre* at 180 The Strand. In his latest exhibition, the photographic artist uses multi-spectral infrared sensors to show the destruction of the Amazon rainforest in alien, dystopian colours. Far from the green and pleasant countryside of ecological romanticism, the illusory colour distortion of his photographs is closer to the truth, whilst the projected film gives direct voice to indigenous communities. Reviews described it as 'deeply political and distressing', portraying 'the amazon as a devastated, barren, singed place . . . The whole thing is brutal, overwhelming, affecting, disgusting, heart-breaking, and utterly brilliant'. This is precisely the sort of art that David Goulson is writing about: 'the hard-hitting, kick-up-the-arse documentary we really need.'

# 27 The Oxford Dodo: the evolving connotations of the dodo bird in visual culture

Oliver Wiseman

What does the word dodo mean to you? Is it a comic symbol of extinction used to describe the obsolete: something as dead as a dodo? Perhaps your mind goes to Dodgson, the bumbling character from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, who speaks in nonsensical riddles. Or you might simply associate the word with stupidity, synonymous with fool, one with no wits about them. I recently visited the Dodo exhibit at Oxford's Museum of Natural History; I stood in front of its glass case for almost an hour to gauge what visitors really thought of the bird. Let me begin by saying that there is a fine line between eavesdropping on people's conversations, and an innocent fine art student completing field research for a magazine article... Some children cry out indignantly at the idea of a real, murdered dodo behind glass, while their parents also neglect to read the placard under the clearly labelled model. Children, however, invariably lose interest the second they see a more impressive fossil towering over them. The parents confirm with one another that they captured at least one good photo of their offspring with the bird before they too saunter off. One couple's interest was piqued when they read that the dodo was endemic to Mauritius, perhaps they honeymooned there? The future in our hands the case is titled, it also contains other examples of human-caused extinction and endangerment, including a hedgehog at a child's eye-height for the added appeal of cuteness.

For context, the dodo did not go extinct solely because it was a duodo (simpleton) as the Portuguese named it. I prefer to say that it was too fearless for its own good! When Mauritius drifted away from Madagascar, the dodo's pigeon ancestors suddenly had an abundance of food and no natural predators. Consequently, it evolved to be taller and more plump, it developed a large, rounded beak for eating fruit, its wings shrank to the point of flightlessness and, most crucially, it lost the ability to feel fear. Naturally, when the Dutch invaded, clubbed them for consumption and introduced invasive species, the passive bird did not run away and was exterminated within decades. Thus, the character of the dumb dodo was born, its other given names translating to sluggard, swollen, fat-arse and fool. The Dutch named it Walghvoghel (disgusting bird) when its flesh wasn't to their taste. Art played a significant role in these early encounters. The published reports of 1601 contained the first illustrations, however the bird's appearance differed between accounts, adding to the dodo's enduring mystery. Hugh Edwin Strickland's famous engraving featured a dodo, it

portrayed Mauritius as a fruitful Utopia ripe for the taking, and accelerated European interest in maritime exploration. Roelant Savery's numerous dodo paintings suggested that the dodo was more colourful than did written accounts, perhaps to increase public fascination with exotic birds.

The Oxford Dodo refers specifically to the only soft tissue sample remaining anywhere in the world: a preserved head and foot held in the Museum's archive. Even the Mauritian Natural History Museum doesn't have such a sample in their designated Dodo Gallery. Oxford's sample comes from one of the live dodos exported and distributed across Europe, these foreign birds were made into tourist spectacles and died shortly thereafter. Considering that the Museum adopts the dodo bird as its logo, the model's case is surprisingly unremarkable, it isn't centred within the floor's layout, and its grey feathers blend into an equally dull backdrop. This mundanity contrasts with the comical dodo of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland who, in John Tenniel's definitive engravings, wears a waistcoat, glasses, and walks with a cane. This dodo bears Lewis Carroll's real last name: Dodgson, and stands in as the author's caricature. It has also been theorised that Wonderland itself represents Oxford, Carroll's alma mater. Dodgson organises a caucus race with no concrete start or finish so that every participant wins, this is Carroll's satirical critique of the political caucus system, deliberately employing the dodo bird to imply absurdity. Disney's Dodgson takes the character's foolishness even further, leaning into comedic, slapstick stupidity, while Tim Burton's dodo says very little and is more loyal to both Tenniel's illustrations and historical depictions of the bird.

Do we, as members of the institution of Oxford, have an obligation to repair the dodo's image? What about the bird's remains? Should the Museum's soft tissue sample be restored to Mauritius? After all, the dodo still plays a large role in the island's identity, appearing on Mauritian currency and their coat of arms. In Megan Vaughan's *Creating the Creole Island*, she explores colonial concepts surrounding Mauritian culture, for instance, that the supposed authenticity of a peoples' origins unjustly relies on an ability to trace them elsewhere, 'as if nothing which the island had produced itself, through its own complex history, could be real.' Following its colonisation, people who were brought to Mauritius against their will were unable to trace their origins in this way, the erasure of the dodo bird could arguably be a metaphor for the censorship of Mauritian culture. Oxford's artificial model confronts visitors with its eternal accusatory side-eye, and forces me to ask: have I myself not become The Oxford Dodo? Plodding around the library, grazing in the city's cafés and only running when I choose to? Granted, my feathers are occasionally ruffled by the overwhelming flocks on Cornmarket Street, but there is no direct threat to my existence. I am too comfortable, perhaps I myself will go the way of the dodo...

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