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From the Editor

The impact on the arts in Britain from the coronavirus pandemic this past year has been devastating but, with the easing of the restrictions this summer, art galleries and museums are reopening, and long-held plans for exhibitions realised.

One major exhibition this summer, a retrospective of the rich and diverse work of Paula Rego at Tate Britain, is celebrated by Anna Moszynska.

We are recognising two important anniversaries this year, the tercentenary of the deaths of Antoine Watteau and Grinling Gibbons: Yuriko Jackall from the Wallace Collection reconsiders the art of Watteau; and Andrew Loukes reveals the brilliance of Gibbons' carvings at Petworth House.

Other articles are on Neo-Brutalism in modern architecture by Mark Crinson, Professor of Architectural History at Birkbeck, 'grotesques' by Andrew Taylor, and Paul Strand's photographs of a rural community in post-war Italy by Tim Satterthwaite.

The winner of this year's London Art History Society Prize for Best Modern Period Masters Dissertation at Birkbeck, Sasha Morse, assesses the impact of photographs by women missionaries.

I would like to express my thanks to the contributors, our designer and my fellow editorial panel members.

Barrie MacDonald

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FRONT COVER: *Paula Rego,* Angel*, 1998. Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium, 180 x 130 cm. Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, Cascais, Portugal.*

Paula Rego

Anna Moszynska

The focus of Paula Rego's *The Artist in her Studio* (1993) (Fig. 1) is a powerful, frontally-posed woman seated at a table, legs akimbo. Draped in vivid red skirt and purple blouse, head turned, she grips a long-necked pipe in her mouth, holding its bowl firmly in one hand. The pose is confident, one might say virile, the gesture symbolic. Traditional to the genre, the 'Artist' is shown with all the *accoutrements* of the 'Studio': sculptures, paintings, still lives, easels and so forth. But tellingly, the scene depicts an all-female cast, even if the main figure is not a self-portrait but Lila Nunez, Rego's longstanding model, and it is a mini child as artist who actually sits at the easel.[1] Typically, things are turned on their heads and the feminisation of the subject offers a realm of ambiguous and imaginative projection which eludes easy classification. Executed on paper, the work is technically a drawing, yet it is also a strongly personal, painted response to the 'male collection about men' which Rego had encountered daily at the National Gallery as their first Associate Artist.[2] As with most of her works inspired by a visual source or literary anecdote, the images take over 'like a box of secrets, like Russian dolls.'[3] Meaning may be left open-ended for the viewer but the power of Rego's vision, her 'interior theatre', is compelling. In embracing the figure and plumbing psychological depths which resonate and disturb, Rego did so at a time when figure painting was still largely a male preserve. While she undoubtedly helped set the path for many younger female painters working today, the question posed here is what shaped her own?[4]

The source of Rego's inspiration straddles two cultures and a myriad of sources. Although permanently resident in London since 1976, she was born and brought up in an authoritarian Portugal under prime minister António de Oliveira Salazar (1932-68) as the single child of an Anglophile, liberal, engineer father. Sent with his blessing to London to escape the oppression of their home country, she studied art at the Slade School. Lucian Freud was a visiting tutor and her peers included Craigie Aitchison, Michael Andrews, Euan Uglow, and Victor Willing by whom she became pregnant, and who later became her husband. Working alongside these male painters in a misogynistic climate, it was Rego who won the summer prize in 1954 for her rendition of *Under Milk Wood* (Fig. 2), the life achievement which she claims gives her most pride.[5] The blocky, stylised figures already suggest that enforced drawing from the model at the Slade did not sit happily with her. Needing other stimuli, she found motivation elsewhere, matching the eclecticism of her sources with a propensity during the later 1960s and '70s to use collage. 'I get inspiration' she said later, 'from things that have nothing to do with painting: caricature, items from newspapers, sights

Fig. 1: Paula Rego, The Artist in her Studio, *1993. Acrylic on paper and canvas, 180 x 130 cm. Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds. © Paula Rego.*

on the street, proverbs, nursery rhymes, children's games and songs, nightmares, desires, terrors.' [6] Unsurprising then that the tone of much of her work accords with that of children's storytellers, especially the Brothers Grimm and Zófimo Consigliero Pedrosa, author of *Portuguese Folk-Tales* (London, 1882). Just as fairy tales frequently expose a dark underside of emerging sexuality, desire, jealousy and murder, so Rego explores a similar sinister edge, as in *Little Miss Muffet* (Fig. 3), an etching from her *Nursery Rhymes* suite (1988-89), where the spider chillingly bears the face of her own mother. Here, as elsewhere, Rego's visual imagery reverberates with Goya, James Ensor, and Walt Disney, among others.[7]

Rego's early paintings made after her return to Portugal in 1956 were invigorated by exposure to Jean Dubuffet.[8] His raw approach and fascination with *L'Art Brut* gives

rise to her viscerally expressive and violent painterly depictions in oil of political subjects such as *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland*, 1960, and the erotically-charged imagery and colours of *Gluttony* and *Birth*, both 1959.[9] The quintessential female experience of the latter also becomes significantly political in Rego's ongoing commitment to highlighting the lot of women. Venting her rage at the repression of conservative societies, her images of isolated girls and women in her *Untitled* abortion series (1998-9) powerfully depict their female subjects in the aftermath of illegal backstreet practice.[10] Harrowing in the intimate portrayal of the practicalities of their situation, the subjects of the paintings themselves are nevertheless depicted as resolute, focusing on survival rather than guilt. In a series of hauntingly imaginative prints, Rego recently tackled the subject of female genital mutilation.

Other complex or taboo areas of female experience have included the ageing body: *The Dancing Ostriches (after Disney)* (1995) share with *Untitled* (1995) the image of what Rego describes as 'an ageing woman in an unflattering pose'[11], and revenge is also a recurring theme. In *The Red Monkey* series (1981), the monkey's wife retaliates from being beaten by her husband by cutting off his tail.[12] With the *Girl and Dog* (1986-7) paintings, the girl first cradles her pet lovingly like a baby, but increasingly becomes controlling and vindictive as the dog is implicitly threatened by sexual harassment, mutilation and murder, before disappearing to be replaced by a substitute toy hidden under the bed. As frequently happens, the personal is melded into the narrative: according to Rego's son, the dog is a symbol of faithfulness and the loyalty that she felt for her husband, Victor, but in *The Little Murderess*, she has to kill that faithfulness to escape the feeling she has for him.[13]

Fig. 2: Paula Rego, Under Milk Wood*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 110 x 110 cm. UCL Art Museum, University College, London. © Paula Rego*

Fig. 3: Paula Rego, Little Miss Muffet*, 1989. Etching and aquatint, 22.6 x 21.3 cm/ paper 52 x 38 cm. Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, Cascais, Portugal. © Paula Rego.*

Both animals and children clearly play a vital role throughout her work. The antlered deer's head in *Snow White Playing with her Father's Trophies* (1995) becomes a Freudian substitute for the missing father, and there is a sexual charge in the girl's posture. The Surreal atmosphere of such works, and the less than innocent demeanour of the girls in them, evoke the charged pre-adolescent world familiar to the work of Balthus. However, Rego reclaims this territory from the male perspective, removing the prurience: 'My pictures are pictures that are done by a woman artist. The stories I tell are the stories women tell… stories to be told that are never told. It has to do with such deep things that haven't been touched on – women's experience'.[14] Revenge can sometimes by meted out by women against women, even if only implied by threat. In *The Maids* (1987), inspired by Jean Genet's play based on real events, the domestic, fatal drama is framed against a plain backdrop in which a single tree casts sinister shadows, providing a psychological charge to the images of women inspired by Rego's memories of Portugal.[15]

As is evident in the central figure of *The Artist in her Studio*, it is the capacity of women to survive that seems a major focus throughout Rego's oeuvre. At the end of a sequence of works inspired by Eça de Queirós' novel, *The Sin of Father Amaro* (1876), Rego subverts the ending (in which the illicitly impregnated girl Amélia faces a shameful death) by culminating the series with a triumphant female guardian *Angel* (1998) (Front Cover) who brandishes sword and sponge. In this work, Rego's use of dry pastel, her favourite medium since 1994, demonstrates her

consummate skill in modelling faces and drapery that puts her in line with Degas. Combining drawing with colour in a challenging process that involves careful layering, the medium allows her to push hard into the paper, just as in etching (another favoured technique of hers) where the needle is forced against the copper plate.

The strength exhibited by Rego's women comes at a cost, however. In a number of large figure compositions shown at the Serpentine Gallery in the autumn of 1988, Rego's personal struggles are poignantly evoked. With its strong raking light, strange *retables* and cabinet carvings, an air of foreboding and unease pervades *The Family* (1988) where an incapacitated man is dressed by girls. Victor Willing died of multiple sclerosis in June that year and *Departure* (1988), in which a pinafored girl caringly combs the hair of her besuited beau whose suitcase is at the ready, is clearly a valediction. But the extent of aching loss only comes out forcibly years later in *The Dog Women* series (1994) where *Girl and Dog* becomes transmogrified to woman *as* dog. Crouching, scratching, snarling, howling – raw pain pervades the woman in her various canine poses until exhausted, she falls asleep on the vacated man's jacket.[16]

As in the moonlit pairings of *The Dance* (1988) (Fig. 4), it is quite apparent that human relationships, and the complex emotions they give rise to, lie at the heart of Rego's work. They play out continually in diverse ways across her oeuvre: male/female; daughter/father; daughter/mother, and also, artist/model. Little wonder then, that she was drawn to Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode* when invited to participate in the *Encounters* exhibition at The National Gallery in 1999, nor that Rego's triptych offers a different set of power relations in terms of family affairs. In the left panel, *The Betrothal*, the dirty work of the marriage settlement is given to the women to sort out, echoing again Rego's memories of 1950s' Portugal under Salazar. The triptych format itself (used to such good effect in other works such as *The Pillowman*, 2004) demonstrates Rego's control of complex large-scale compositions that build strongly on the 'Old Master' tradition (note the echoes of Velázquez' *Las Meninas* in *The Betrothal*). Extending well beyond *Under Milk Wood*, Rego's artistic achievement lies in successfully challenging figurative painting as man's work. Her forthcoming retrospective at Tate Britain will show these results, as will a selection of her prints at an exhibition at Hogarth's House, London.

Anna Moszynska is a lecturer and writer specialising in contemporary art. She developed the pioneering courses in the subject at Sotheby's Institute, and has also taught at institutions including the Royal Academy and the Tate, as well as lecturing overseas. Anna also runs her own courses, Contemporary Art Talks*. She has reviewed for BBC Radio and various art periodicals. Her books include:* Abstract Art *(London: Thames & Hudson, 1990/2020),* Antony Gormley Drawing *(London: British Museum, 2002), and* Sculpture Now *(London: Thames & Hudson, 2013).*

Fig. 4: Paula Rego, The Dance, *1988. Acrylic paint on paper and canvas, 212.6 x 274 cm. Tate, London. © Paula Rego.*

Notes

1 A male model on his hands and knees was later painted out and replaced by the still life arrangement of cabbages. Nick Willing, observation to the author, 15 March 2021.

2 Rego worked in the National Gallery's studio between 1990 and 1991. She noted that 'I'm a sort of poacher here, really, that's what I am'. See Colin Wiggins, *Paula Rego: Tales from the National Gallery*, (London: National Gallery Publications, 1991, p. 21.) Inspired by a particular image, the 'story' Rego tells in each case changes as she makes her work.

3 *Paula Rego, Father Amaro,* ex. cat., (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1998, unpaginated).

4 At the time of Rego's first public exhibition (Serpentine Gallery, London, 1988) figurative painting in Britain (as elsewhere in Europe) was still largely dominated by men as shown numerically in Alistair Hicks', *School of London: Resurgence of Contemporary Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1989). The recent exhibition, *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life,* ex. cat., ed. Elena Crippa (London: Tate Publishing, 2018) showed younger artists: Cecily Brown, Celia Paul, Jenny Saville and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, alongside Rego.

5 This and many other previously unknown biographical insights came recently to light in the documentary by her son, Nick Willing, *Paula Rego: Secrets and Stories* (BBC, 2017).

6 John McEwen, *Paula Rego* (London: Phaidon, 1997, p. 72).

7 Disney's films *Fantasia, Snow White* and *Pinocchio* inspired the paintings Rego made for the exhibition *Spellbound: Art and Film*, ex. cat., (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995).

8 Still travelling backwards and forwards to London, she was 'inspired' by Jean Dubuffet's work, encountering his first English retrospective at the Arthur Tooth Gallery, London, 1958.

9 See Fiona Bradley, *Paula Rego* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002, pp. 114-115).

10 A Portuguese referendum in 1998 had failed to stop the illegality of abortion due to insufficient public turnout. The subsequent change of heart in 2007 was claimed to be partly down to the exhibition and dissemination of Rego's series on paintings and prints. See *Paula Rego: Secrets and Stories* (BBC, 2017).

11 Rego, 'Untitled' in Fiona Bradley, 2002, p. 82.

12 The biographical meaning of this series came to light in *Paula Rego: Secrets and Stories* (BBC, 2017).

13 Nick Willing, observation to author, 15 March 2021.

14 McEwen, 1997 p. 85.

15 Nick Willing, observation to author, 15 March 2021.

16 According to Nick Willing, in the *Dog Women* series, his mother tried to process the memories of the feelings she had for her husband during the key years in Portugal after 1956 when Victor went out to join her there. She felt much love but also great emotional dependence. The pictures explore both good and bad, and in her work, the mixture is important. [15 March 2021.]

Neo-Brutalism

Mark Crinson

I remember, as a boy, travelling up to London and seeing near Waterloo a strange building-landscape beside the Festival Hall. It was partly scaffolded but walkways, undercrofts, and wide terraces could be made out. What walls there were seemed largely blind except for the odd rooftop shard or bunker-like extrusion. Everything was concrete. Blocky staircases turned tightly and led, seemingly without purpose, from one external level to another. The colour of the new concrete was a kind of soft yellowy-grey, still with the clinging smell of wet cement. Most appealing and baffling, it all appeared as if assembled from petrified planks, makeshift yet durable. I knew nothing of the wooden formwork that provided the moulds, whose grain and unevenness had left behind these marks in the concrete, but I remember touching and being shocked by the difference between the fine roughness of the concrete and the splintery woodgrain I had expected. Two different material realities seemed fused, each substituting for the other.

If Brutalism never courted familiarity, neither did it achieve a safe niche in architectural history. Larger forces were at stake. The butt of the postmodern attack on modernism, Brutalist housing was found wanting by advocates of 'defensible space', associated with declarations of social malaise, and – battered and unloved – became the target of demolitions for the sake of re-branding, sell-offs and the ruthless privatisation of public housing.

Recently we've seen a new tendency that might be called 'Neo-Brutalism' (as opposed to the historical phenomena of Brutalism and New Brutalism, on which more later). In part this generalises the negativity just described, so that Brutalism is now made synonymous with almost all post-war modernist architecture (making the historian's task a Sisyphean one in challenging this): 'brutalist' is a cipher for disdain for the welfare state. In part, too, the new phenomenon inverts this same negativity as certain estates have become highly desirable – gentrified and restored, accompanied by lush magazine and picture-book tributes full of loving close-ups of bush-hammered concrete. The ugly and the beautiful are tightly related in this current Neo-Brutalism. But there is a more intellectual end to it that takes two forms: new claims for Brutalism's political credentials, and an approach that argues for conventional forms of aesthetic appreciation. Two writers' work epitomise the way these Neo-Brutalist positions are projected onto Brutalism.

First, the prodigious Owen Hatherley. In his career-launching book, *Militant Modernism* (Winchester: O Books 2008) Hatherley staked out the terms and frameworks that have guided much of his writing since. Essentially, this is an attempt to 'excavate utopia', to embrace a 'nostalgia for the future' in those remnants of the post-war built world of social democracy, and the most heroic aspect of this compromised inheritance was Brutalism. Brutalism, Hatherley wrote, 'took its lead from the industrial and urban landscapes of the first country in the world to industrialise, fetishising hardness, dynamism, scale and rough edges'. These values make up the 'brutishness of British art', opposed to Nikolaus Pevsner's famous 'Englishness of English Art' with its claimed picturesque softening of modernism in the English climate. And that 'fetishising hardness' helps Hatherley claim unlikely links with Vorticism, deemed the only other British modernist group to take on class politics and 'the vulgarity of the popular, of mass culture'. Hatherley realises that the Brutalism-Constructivism link was largely made after the event, but he wants some kind of avant-garde precedent for the aggressiveness he claims in Brutalism. But in its origins Brutalism was a movement that pondered the ruins of war rather than celebrating its technologies. There is much that should be made of its roots in the industrial north (a northern modernism) and its 'rough poetry',[1] but there is equally as much in it of deindustrialisation and of the broken landscapes of post-Blitz London. And as for Brutalism's politics, its members may have been broadly social-democratic, probably Labour voting, but they were politically mute when put beside the more mainstream modernists of the London County Council.

In his account of Sheffield and its Park Hill estate, from the later book *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London; New York, Verso 2010), Hatherley reasserted Brutalism's militant credentials. It was 'Modernism's angry underside', 'a political aesthetic, an attitude, a weapon', somehow a successful amalgam of ordinary people's unspoken desire for architectural expressiveness and the city council's need to replace areas of slum housing. It was also, and here I very much agree, an attempt to connect with the older city – the estate's lowest points merged with Victorian terraces and took their streets further into the safely vehicle-less streets-in-the-sky. But surely what Hatherley is talking about is state or institutional modernist architecture as a whole, of which Brutalism was a part. And anyway, the special powers attributed to Brutalism were not specific to its use as state architecture – by the 1960s it was also developers' architecture for corporate offices, multi-storey parking, and shopping malls.

Then there is Barnabas Calder and his more recent book *Raw Concrete – The Beauty of Brutalism* (London: William Heinemann 2016). This is a highly eloquent, at times flagrantly emotional advocacy. If Hatherley's is an odyssey of loss and regret, then Calder's is an odyssey of love and desire. In part *Raw Concrete* takes the form of a travelogue including autobiographical encounters with buildings like the Barbican, New Court, Christ's College Cambridge, and most alarmingly an obscure little concrete hut on a Scottish beach known as Hermit's Castle. At other times it draws on Calder's deep research, particularly into the work of Denys Lasdun. Very much a hero figure for what Calder calls the 'classic Brutalism' of the 60s and 70s, the use of Lasdun is a real historical

Fig. 1: Alison and Peter Smithson, Garden Building, St Hilda's College, Oxford*, 1967-70. Photograph by Mark Crinson.*

problem. It's not so much the recycled image of Lasdun battling against the hydra-headed power of committees, or the defence of the 'old role of the private architectural practice as the creative heart of architecture', but instead Calder's very notion of Brutalism as a style. 'Brutalism is a controversial, muscular style… [a] proud flaunting of modern construction methods, especially concrete, and up-to-the-minute facilities.' This is particularly telling because Calder wants to do to Brutalism what happened with terms like Baroque and Gothic, turning its current negative associations into positive aesthetic categories. He lingers over the exquisite treatment of concrete surfaces in Lasdun's National Theatre, as if his eloquence alone will rehabilitate Brutalism within the canon.[2] But it remains the case that, however great Lasdun was as an architect, his status as Brutalist exemplar is odd, as if all the movement was about was using concrete to remake familiar aesthetic categories (look at how Lasdun wanted to frame the Shell Centre with an opera house and theatre building in the original NT scheme – straight from the Beaux-Arts manuals of composition).

From their different directions, both Hatherley and Calder separate the aesthetic from the ethic; their accounts are all the more impassioned the wider this divide gets. And it is this very separation that defines their Neo-Brutalism. In that sense the aspect of the historical phenomena they are most detached from is what was originally called 'New Brutalism', epitomised in the 1950s work of Alison and Peter Smithson and the writing of Reyner Banham, for whom aesthetics and ethics were actively dialectical ingredients.[3]

The larger historical phenomenon of Brutalism, identified particularly with exposed structure and rough forms of concrete, mainly derives from Le Corbusier's *béton brut* architecture of the postwar period. The term *brut* here meant 'unrefined'; it was not so much a designation of an attitude (brutal) as a condition, a state between architecture and nature, between the *cru* (raw) and the *cuit* (cooked) in Claude Lévi-Strauss's terms.[4] Similarly, British New Brutalism had nothing to do with brutality and everything to do with an inbetween state, but in its case this was focused on those aspects of the everyday environment that were unnoticed or disregarded by architects and planners. (Accordingly, we might also speak of the Brutalist novel with B. S. Johnson, and Brutalist photography with Nigel Henderson and Roger Mayne).

There is no more vivid example of the poetics of New Brutalism than Alison Smithson's response to Le Corbusier's monastery of La Tourette, near Lyon, one of the great concrete monuments of the time. In his review, the critic Colin Rowe had engaged in an existential encounter with the building, barely getting past the north elevation as he struggled with what it implied about depth and interiority.[5] By contrast Alison Smithson's reaction is decidedly odd, even perverse for an architect, certainly less exulted in its estimation.[6] But it is her essay's off-beat qualities that are remarkable. Before even reaching the site, she recounts a series of anecdotes and observations: the scruffiness of the Paris-Lyon road, the scenery, some stone gateposts, a kidney-shaped pond, a Moroccan-French notice with a mistake in it, and a foreman wearing carpet slippers. Finally arriving, most of what she notices are details: varnish, paint colours, ironmongery, washbasins, and the industrial rubber flooring in the monks' cells.

New Brutalism was about acknowledging these kinds of experiences in the ways that buildings were perceived and designed. (I like to think that the staircases I saw as a child were an index of these contradictions, held as if in a concrete solution.) And it entailed that the architecture of the Smithsons has no style, it refuses authorial identity, it is conjectural or at least it insists upon each project having a unique range of conditions or 'set of moral responsibilities'.[7] In part, this was architecture as open hand, as offering all its parts visible and unalloyed, 'the seeing of materials for what they were', not the closed fist of a defensive aggression.[8] And in part it was architecture as a reflection on the conditions and transitive nature of the objects it was made from, their local, social, and anthropological contexts. This is what makes New Brutalism of the 1950s and 1960s entirely different from – indeed unassimilable to – the constant ugly-beautiful, aggressive-radical polemics typical of today's Neo-Brutalism.

Mark Crinson is Professor of Architectural History at Birkbeck and directs the Architecture Space and Society Centre. His most recent books are: Rebuilding Babel: Modern Architecture and Internationalism *(London: I. B. Tauris, 2017),* Alison and Peter Smithson *(Swindon: Historic England, 2018), and (with Richard J. Williams)* The Architecture of Art History – A Historiography *(London: Bloomsbury, 2018).*

Notes

1 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The New Brutalism,' *Architectural Design* (April 1957), p. 113.

2 On how this beautiful Brutalism actually enables the architecture's absorption into neo-liberal commodification see Nicholas Thoburn, 'Concrete and Council Housing: The Class Architecture of Brutalism "As Found" at Robin Hood Gardens', *City*, 22:5-6 (2018), pp. 612-632.

3 Reyner Banham, '*The new brutalism: ethic or aesthetic?*' (London: The Architectural Press, 1966).

4 Hal Foster, *Brutal aesthetics: Dubuffet, Bataille, Jorn, Paolozzi, Oldenburg* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 18.

5 Colin Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-sur-Arbresle, near Lyons', *Architectural Review*, 129 (June 1961), pp. 400-410.

6 Alison Smithson, 'Couvent de la Tourette, Eveux-sur-Abresle, Nr. Lyon, France', *Architectural Design*, 28 (November 1958), p. 462.

7 Reyner Banham, 'Apropos the Smithsons', *New Statesman*, 62 (8 September 1961), p. 317.

8 Alison and Peter Smithson, 'The "As Found" and the "Found",' in Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger (eds.), *The discovery of the ordinary* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2001), p. 40.

Antoine Watteau: reconsidering his art after three hundred years

Yuriko Jackall

On July 18, 1721 the French painter and draughtsman Antoine Watteau died in his 37th year. Despite the brevity of a career cut short by consumption, his artistic talent had earned him unprecedented respect from the French establishment and a devoted, if circumscribed circle of private collectors. And after his reputation re-emerged from a temporary eclipse during the French Revolution, Watteau was once again embraced, this time in the mid-nineteenth century by the denizens of literary circles mournful over the lost aristocratic society he had painted. Marcel Proust saw his art as the very epitome of the sophisticated melancholy of eighteenth-century France[1]. For the Goncourt brothers, Watteau's representations of stately aristocratic gatherings in parkland settings known as *fêtes galantes* embodied: 'l'amour poète, l'amour qui songe et qui pense, l'amour moderne, avec ses aspirations, et sa couronne de mélancolie'[2]. It is true that both assessments are informed by the authors' longing for the supposed romance and ethereal sophistication of the pre-industrial era. Nonetheless, in the three-hundredth anniversary year after his death, Watteau's painted and drawn *oeuvre* appears far from old fashioned. Engaging as it does with a strikingly modern set of issues, this innovative work continues to set him apart as one of the most fascinating artists of his era.

Given the interest bestowed upon him by nineteenth-century French men of letters, it is perhaps fitting that Watteau's life reads like a novel. Born in 1684 — only six years after his birth city of Valenciennes in the County of Hainaut was formally ceded to France from the Spanish Netherlands — he was one of four sons of a roofer of Walloon descent. Although his parents were well-to-do, Watteau hailed, therefore, from a fairly obscure, provincial background and not from the insular, Paris-based artistic class from which the most prominent and successful painters of the day typically emerged. Nonetheless Watteau's early interest in art-making led him to Paris where he found initial employment on the Pont Notre-Dame making copies after popular devotional scenes for the mass market. By about 1705 Watteau was studio assistant to the theatrical designer Claude Gillot, who introduced him to the *commedia dell'arte*, a theme that would become a lifelong passion. Subsequently he moved to the workshop of *ornementiste* Claude Audran III whose arabesques, based upon motifs drawn from popular culture, were all the rage in contemporary room designs.

Fig. 1: Antoine Watteau, Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera, *1717, Oil on canvas, 129 x 194 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

By the standards of the time, this artistic training in the fundamentals of theatrical and interior decoration was unconventional and it set Watteau firmly on the outskirts of the all-powerful Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. Although the institution allowed him to compete for a coveted Prix de Rome, he was never able to fulfil his dream of formal training in Italy, a disappointment that was somewhat mitigated by his introduction, in 1715, to the wealthy banker Pierre Crozat. Recently returned from Italy where he had been negotiating for the acquisition of Queen Christina's art collection on behalf of the Regent, Crozat invited the young artist to take up residence in his household. With Crozat's astounding private collection of Italian and Flemish paintings — works by Correggio, Van Dyck, Rubens, Titian, Veronese — at his disposition, Watteau's artistic progression accelerated. It is during this period of study of the Venetian masters that he fully developed his trademark technique of glazing thin veils of colour, creating shimmering and reflective surfaces that perfectly evoke the impression of silk fabric catching the light. In 1717 he was accepted into the Académie as a fully-fledged academician on the strength of his famous *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (Fig. 1). Housed today at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, this painting, unquestionably one of Watteau's greatest efforts, is emblematic of the artistic form of the *fête galante*.

Fig. 2: Antoine Watteau, Les Charmes de la vie*, c. 1718–19. Oil on canvas, 67.3 x 92.5 cm. The Wallace Collection, London.*

Depicting an ensemble of beautifully dressed couples who board a golden boat bound for the island birthplace of Venus, *Pilgrimage to Cythera* was one of many such painted *fêtes*. The aristocratic merrymakers gracefully disport themselves on the grounds of Crozat's Château de Montmorency in *La Perspective* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). They have moved to an outdoor terrace where one man serenades the group in *Les Charmes de la vie* (Fig. 2). Indeed, in light of the fact that Watteau is so closely associated with these fundamentally social compositions — his protagonists promenade or converse or play music, always in groups — it is initially surprising that Sir Michael Levey wrote so definitively: 'He created, unwittingly, the concept of the individualistic artist loyal to himself, and alone'[3]. And yet this artist, described by the Comte de Caylus as both 'timid' and 'caustic'[4] was nothing if not a mass of contradictions. He quarrelled with many in his entourage including his one student Jean-Baptiste Pater — the two reconciled at the end of Watteau's life — and his other major follower, Nicolas Lancret, after the latter achieved a degree of critical recognition. And although he sought recognition from the Académie, he also ignored the fundamental institutional precept, that the most important compositions must always tell a clear story, leaving Caylus to remark somewhat exasperatedly: '… je dis [donc] il dessinoit sans objet…'[5] And this painter of social gatherings deliberately side-stepped the protection of the group fleeing, for instance, the protection and comfort of Crozat's household, out of the seeming need to maintain his own independence.

In the same vein, Watteau's work explores pathways that venture well away from the *fête galante*. There are the remarkably expressive and sensitive studies of heads in red and black chalks (Fig. 3). There is the troubling series of camp pictures, poignant explorations of the bored misery of militia life, born out of the unmitigated disaster that was France's involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), such as *Portal of Valenciennes* (The Frick Collection, New York). There is *Mezzetin*, painted for Watteau's other great patron and friend, Jean de Julienne: in the artist's hands the typically comic *commedia dell'arte* figure becomes a semi-tragic hero, alone and pining for love (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). There is the full-length, isolated Pierrot, unsettling in his mute alienation from the comrades who laugh and chat nearby (Fig. 4).

If many of the questions raised by these works have been addressed in worthy exhibitions and publications over the last several decades, certain aspects of Watteau's work remain avowedly troubling. The watchful black youth in *Les Charmes de la vie* who crouches on the floor, at the same height as a nearby dog, wears the collar of an enslaved individual. Some scholars have asserted wishfully that Watteau intended an abolitionist rebuke[6], but the truth is that *Les Charmes de la vie* was likely painted for either Claude or Jean-Baptiste Glucq, art-loving brothers whose family wealth derived from investments in the textile industry and the slave trade, and Watteau would have been in no position to overtly critique a patron nor the financial institution that ultimately supported him. Perhaps as Emma Arrindell has suggested recently, Watteau intended a more subtle, if pointed, remark on the contradictions of an elite society that traded in enslaved children while embracing the innocent pursuits of the *fête galante*[7]. This is a convincing argument — and one that shows that we have only just begun to interrogate the role of race (and, for that matter, class) in Watteau's work. The same ambiguity that frustrated Caylus and captivated Proust leaves us wondering still, and in many ways we remain stuck at the shimmering level of Watteau's surfaces. But as we come up to one major anniversary period, and as the clock begins on another hundred years, there is no better time to inaugurate a new era of nuanced scholarly questioning about this artist. One thing is certain: Watteau will always give us something to think about.

Fig. 3: Antoine Watteau, Two studies of the head and shoulders of a young girl*, n. d. Black, red and white chalk on buff paper, 18.7 x 24.5 cm. The Morgan Library and Museum, New York.*

Fig. 4: Antoine Watteau, Pierrot (Gilles)*, c. 1718-19. Oil on canvas, 185 x 150 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.*

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Notes

1 On Proust's unpublished essay on Watteau, see Helen O. Borowitz, 'The Watteau and Chardin of Marcel Proust,' *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1982), pp. 18–35.

2 Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, 'La philosophie de Watteau', in *L'Artiste*, sixième série, tome 2e (1856), p.129: 'poetic love, love which dreams and thinks, modern love with its aspirations, and its crown of melancholy.'

3 Levey, Michael, *Rococo to Revolution. Major Trends in Eighteenth-Century Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson,1966), p. 56.

4 *La vie d'Antoine Watteau par le Comte de Caylus, publiée pour la première fois d'après l'autographe par Monsieur Charles Henry* (Paris, 1837), p. 23.

5 Caylus, p. 39: 'I say therefore that he drew without a clear purpose'.

6 Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'The Flickers of Seduction: The Ambivalent and Surprising Painting of Watteau', in *Antoine Watteau: perspectives on the artist and culture*, ed. Mary Sheriff (Newark: University of Delaware, 2006), p. 130.

7 Emma Arrindell, 'Beneath the Façade of Colour, Collar and Costume: Lifting the Veil on Watteau's Depictions of the Black Boy', Unpublished MA Diss., The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 2020.

The master carver's masterpiece: revisiting Grinling Gibbons' 'most superb monument' on the occasion of his tercentenary

Andrew Loukes

This year marks three hundred years since the death of Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721), widely acknowledged as the greatest ever decorative woodcarver. Born in Rotterdam to expatriate English parents, Gibbons' continental apprenticeship provided not only first-rate technical instruction at the bench of an unknown teacher but also exposure to wider cultural influences such as Dutch still-life painting. By the age of nineteen he was in London, fortuitously discovered by the diarist John Evelyn who spotted the prodigious youth working by the window of his Deptford home. Through Evelyn's contacts within courtly circles, Gibbons soon found favour with major patrons, including Charles II, and went on to supply celebrated carvings for such iconic buildings as Windsor Castle and St Paul's Cathedral.

Yet it was his work for the Carved Room at Petworth House, West Sussex (Fig. 1) which came to be described by Horace Walpole, who visited Petworth in 1749, as 'the most superb monument of his skill'.[1] Today, the Carved Room continues to impress visitors as it has done since the end of the seventeenth century; the bill for its completion is dated 10 December 1692.[2] Yet the current Carved Room is wholly different from that created for the Duke and Duchess of Somerset over three hundred years ago. It reflects significant alterations made in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leaving a visual legacy which, despite retaining its sense of spectacle, represents a complex and problematic evolution that is necessary to unravel in order to better understand both the room as a whole and Gibbons' contribution to it.

Gibbons' Carved Room was the central project among several commissions given to him by Charles Seymour, the sixth Duke of Somerset (1662-1748), whose marriage in 1682 to the teenage Lady Elizabeth Percy (1667-1722) – sole heiress to the vast estates of the Earls of Northumberland – preceded the refashioning of the sprawling manor house of Petworth into a fashionable

Fig. 1: East Wall of The Carved Room at Petworth House © National Trust Images/Bill Batten.

baroque palace on the Duchess's coming of age in 1688. Gibbons took his place among a formidable team of leading artists, craftsmen and designers, including the plasterer Edward Goudge, the mural painter Louis Laguerre and the gardener George London, who were employed at Petworth having worked for the Royal Family.

Gibbons' work for the Duke and Duchess appears to have included lead statues for the roof at Petworth, long since removed and presumed recycled but visible in a section of Laguerre's great mural of 1720.[3] Contemporary with his work on the Carved Room was another commission by the Duke for woodcarvings and a full-length statue of himself to decorate Christopher Wren's Trinity College Library at Cambridge University, of which he was Chancellor from 1689 to 1748. Gibbons even occasionally acted as an agent for the Duke, seemingly procuring two jasper table-tops and the famous painting of *Jacob with Laban and his daughters* by Claude, all of which are still at Petworth.[4]

But it was the Carved Room that formed Gibbons' chief contribution to the house and which took its place amongst a sequence of spectacular ground-floor state interiors, also including the surviving Marble Hall and Grand Staircase, along with a Tapestry Room and a Picture Room which have long since been reconfigured. There were, however, major differences between Gibbons' original room and that experienced today. Most notably, the first Carved Room was half the size of the present one, with the two full-length portraits of the Duke and Duchess by John Closterman – now hanging to the left of the central chimneypiece on the long east wall – situated on a subsequently demolished north wall which divided the current space. As now, these were framed by one of two sets of double carved surrounds, each set formed of three drops with upper crestings, which are a unique device in Gibbons' art. Facing them, on the south wall were the earlier portraits by William Larkin, traditionally identified as the Duke's grandparents on the Seymour side,[5] featuring a corresponding set of triple drops. In this arrangement, visitors entering the room from the south, along the grand enfilade of state rooms, would have been confronted not only by the primary portraits of their hosts but also by Gibbons' masterpieces of limewood carving.

This scheme was dismantled some one hundred years after it was installed when George O'Brien Wyndham, the third Earl of Egremont (1751-1837), created a larger room between 1793 and 1794 – expressly intended for grand dinners – by knocking down the dividing wall, redistributing the Gibbons carvings and rearranging the main paintings. He also brought in further carvings by Gibbons' contemporary John Selden (d.1715) from other rooms in the house – principally those surrounding a relocated major portrait of Henry VIII from the studio of Hans Holbein – and commissioned new ones from Jonathan Ritson (c. 1780-1846). By the end of the 1820s he had also painted the panelling white and introduced a selection of marble busts, Chinese vases and modern paintings – most notably the four views by J. M. W. Turner of Petworth Park, its lake, Brighton Pier and Chichester Canal.

The third Earl's scheme survived until 1870-72, when his grandson Henry Wyndham, the second Lord Leconfield (1830-1901), oversaw a subsequent redesign as part of the major changes made to Petworth by the Victorian architect Anthony Salvin. This saw the removal of the white paint from the panelling, later to be oak-grained.

Over time, three principal changes have fundamentally diminished Gibbons' intended effect: first, the extended scale of the room and the addition of other – largely inferior – carvings have lessened the intimacy and intensity of his design. Secondly, in common with almost all of Gibbons' surviving oeuvre, the physical condition of the installations has been altered by accretions and repairs. His limewood carvings in their original state were silvery pale and uniformly smooth; the Petworth examples, notwithstanding their quality, are not unique in having been variously washed, varnished, stripped and/or damaged by both accident and woodworm to give them a darker and more uneven effect.[6] The third major change affecting today's experience is the relocation of the majority of Gibbons' carvings onto the long east wall, causing them to be sunlit from the front rather than the side. In turn, this reduces their original sculptural impact as there are fewer shadows and highlights, lessening the three-dimensionality and visual drama of the overall design.

While the scale of the original Carved Room and the physical condition of the woodwork have changed

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Fig. 2: Grinling Gibbons, Phoenix wings*, c. 1692. Limewood carving. Petworth House/© Peter Thuring*

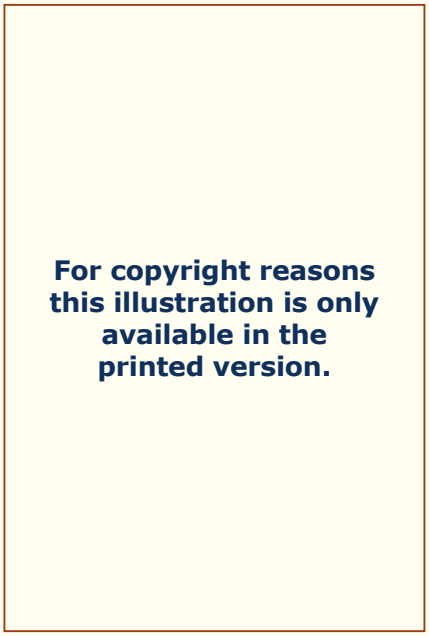

Fig. 3: Grinling Gibbons, Flower basket*, c. 1692. Limewood carving. Petworth House/ © Peter Thuring.*

irretrievably, a recent set of photographs by Peter Thuring – also an acclaimed wood carver – has recovered something of the intended visual quality of the carvings by lighting them from the intended direction. Thuring's choice of black and white film additionally neutralises many of the inconsistencies of colour which were not part of Gibbons' original effect.[7]

This new focus on the individual components of the carvings additionally highlights their iconographic, as well as aesthetic, contribution to the impact of the installation as a whole. Symbolic content is rare in Gibbons' work and indeed the Petworth carvings include many of his favourite devices based on animal, vegetable and plant forms. Here, however, the circumstances of the commission – where the commemoration of the rank and the regal loyalty of the Duke and Duchess of Somerset formed common themes throughout Petworth's state rooms – allowed Gibbons the opportunity to invest several major passages with layers of meaning.

This approach is concentrated within the middle columns of the triple drops. As Christopher Rowell has pointed out, these sections would have enjoyed greater prominence in the original layout where they formed the central features of their respective walls,[8] lending any symbolic content added visibility and significance. Between Closterman's portraits of the Duke and Duchess flows a sequence of imagery which explicitly amplifies the identity of the subjects. The principal and uppermost feature is the giant pair of phoenix wings – a ducal cipher – beneath which a basket of foliage perhaps alludes to the patron's fashionable interest in gardening (Figs. 2 and 3). Underneath is a pair of Greek vases which could indicate his wife's passion for ceramics, as well as lending a general kudos of antiquarianism. Skilfully interwoven with these components are further references to the Duke's rank: Closterman shows him in his robes of the Order of the Garter, details of which are also echoed by Gibbons in his meticulous renditions of the Garter star – above the vases – and the George medallion, suspended on its ribbon from the phoenix wings. These features are amplified by trumpets to symbolise fame and palm leaves suggestive of victory.

The most famous element of the Petworth carvings, the musical trophy (Fig. 4) which forms the principal design on the central column between the earlier portraits, reflects a common theme in Gibbons' work from the 1680s onwards – the integration of violins and other instruments with foliate and animal motifs. The example at Petworth is exceptional for two reasons: first is its particularly accurate verisimilitude – the most-prized characteristic of Gibbons' work to his contemporaries – in the representation of particular instruments; secondly is the inclusion of manuscript music from *The Fairy Queen* by Henry Purcell. As demonstrated by Lynda Sayce and David Esterly[9], this piece was first produced in London at the Dorset Garden Theatre in May 1692 and was, therefore, directly contemporary with the carvings. This inclusion both illustrates the patrons' awareness of fashionable culture and demonstrates their allegiance to the Royal Family: *The Fairy Queen* was dedicated to William III and Mary II on the occasion of their fifteenth wedding anniversary.

Indeed, it was the influence of William and Mary in a more general sense which particularly shaped the redesign of Petworth in the 1690s: their favourite architect – the protestant French Huguenot Daniel Marot – had been employed by them extensively in Holland, and he emerges as a key figure in the rebuilding of Petworth. The house shares strong stylistic similarities with his Dutch commissions and he is referenced in the household accounts[10]. This tendency towards a Dutch aesthetic also underlies the involvement of Gibbons, both as another royal favourite and as a craftsman who was born and trained in Holland. In his work at Petworth there are particularly strong parallels with Dutch still-life painting, especially in relation to the concept of the *vanitas*: the symbolic portrayal of natural forms in allusion to the passing of time. Here, this takes on added resonance in his contrast between the temporal fragility of existence – evoked through a profusion of creatures and plants, the latter shown at different stages of life – and the promotion of the Duke and Duchess of Somerset's contemporary achievements, referenced by their regalia and cultural interests. Three hundred years after Gibbons' own death we might also reflect upon the artist's 'most superb monument' in memoriam, and in doing so consider the even greater sculptural power,

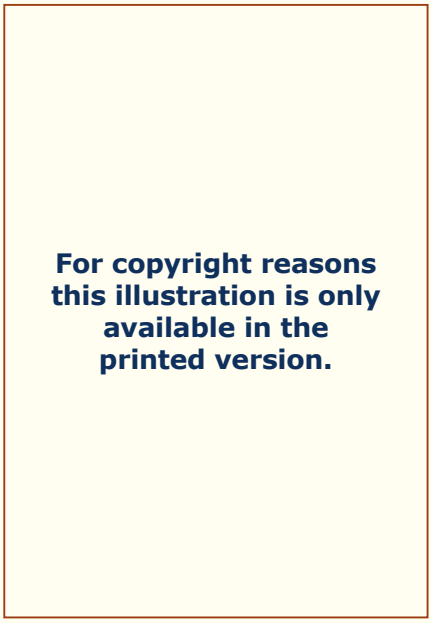

Fig. 4: Grinling Gibbons, Musical trophy*, c. 1692. Limewood carving. Petworth House/ © Peter Thuring.*

in both aesthetic and intellectual terms, which the carvings must have manifested in their original condition and positions.

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Peter Thuring will be showing new carvings as part of the exhibition Centuries in the making*, part of the Grinling Gibbons 300 festival, at Bonham's, London, and Compton Verney, Warwickshire. The photographs in this article can be found in his book,* Grinling Gibbons: the painter in wood, *2019, available from the National Trust*.

Notes

1 Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (Twickenham, 1762), vol III, pp. 85-86.

2 Petworth House Archive (hereafter PHA) no. 245, kindly made available with Lord Egremont's permission by Alison McCann, Petworth House Archivist.

3 Assumed to be those for which Gibbons was paid £173 on March 26 1692, PHA 245: a connection made by Christopher Rowell in *Petworth House* (National Trust, 1997, reprinted 2009), p. 7.

4 PHA 248P.

5 NT nos. 486187 and 486187.

6 The carvings are now so fragile that they can only be lightly cleaned by specialists every five years.

7 The photographs were shown at Petworth in the exhibition *Grinling Gibbons – The Painter in Wood*, 2019, and reproduced in the accompanying catalogue.

8 Christopher Rowell, 'Grinling Gibbons's Carved Room at Petworth', *Apollo* (April, 2000), p. 23.

9 Lynda Sayce and David Esterly, 'He was likewise Musical…', *Apollo* (June, 2000), p. 14.

10 PHA 246.

Implausible beings and the sleep of reason: the grotesqueness of the 'grotesque'

Andrew Taylor

During renovations to the Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome in 1480, a set of underground rooms were unearthed. They were decorated with an array of imaginary figures later described by Vasari as 'fantasies so varied and bizarre'.

Painted on the walls and ceilings were dozens of strange hybrid creatures: plants sprouting – not flowers – but animals turning into human beings; disembodied faces growing out of curling stalks or popping up out of nowhere; and beasts with the head of a horse and with wings and legs dissolving into fins (Fig. 1).

These images conjured up an atmosphere of make-believe and vivid imagination, transformation and metamorphosis. They were both one thing and another, either one thing or another or perhaps nothing at all. Everything existed in a state of confusion or suspension.

Almost as soon as these underground rooms were discovered, artists began to visit them. Lowered down by ropes, they were led by guides holding torches so that they could view and copy these extraordinary images. But such bizarre fantasies needed a name. How could the indescribable be described?

As they were found beneath the Baths of Titus, the rooms were first thought to be part of this complex. Only later were they identified as belonging to the Emperor Nero's lavish palace, the Domus Aurea (the Golden House). After Nero's death in 68 AD, this large and sprawling complex was partially destroyed and built over. Being hidden underground, it was assumed that the rooms were

Fig. 1: Wall decoration from the Domus Aurea, Rome, c. 65 AD. Archivio Parco archeologico del Colosseo, Ministero della cultura, Italy.

decorated caves or grottoes and so the designs on the walls were described as paintings from the grotto – or grotesques. By the end of the fifteenth century the word 'grotesque' was being used to describe these hybrid fantasies. A new category and vocabulary of art had been born.

The grotesques of the Domus Aurea proved to be among the most important artistic and archaeological discoveries of the Renaissance. They offered fresh, radical ways of looking at antiquity and showed that artists could work in the classical tradition without necessarily being confined to the higher aesthetic ideals of order, restraint and dignified beauty. Instead, classicism could incorporate strangeness, weirdness and wild, dreamlike imaginings. Indeed, the sixteenth-century architect and scholar, Daniele Barbaro, described grotesques as 'the dreams of painting'. But dreams are slippery things, often shifting into nightmares:

Fig. 2: Giovanni Ottaviani (after drawings by Pietro Camporesi and Gaetano Savorelli), Loggie di Raffaelo nel Vaticano*, (detail). Copper engraving with hand colouring, printed on paper, c. 1776-1782. From the author's collection.*

the grotesque, as we shall see, operates in multiple modes.

Within ten years of the unearthing of the Domus Aurea, grotesque designs were being adopted by artists across Italy. In Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome (1489-91), Filippino Lippi used grotesque decorations in the 'candelabra' style where candlesticks and urns are piled on top of each other with animal and human forms linked around them. These grotesques are lightweight and charming, providing an unconventional and playful contrast with the classical purity and seriousness of the main pictures.

The most celebrated artist to descend into the Domus Aurea rooms was Raphael, accompanied by a member of his workshop, Giovanni da Udine, who made extensive drawings based on the Roman designs. Their response to what they encountered was to have a lasting impact. In 1515, Raphael was commissioned by Pope Leo X to decorate the lower Loggia of the Papal apartments at the Vatican. The principal paintings are a series of ceiling frescoes of biblical scenes (known as 'Raphael's Bible') but the walls and pilasters are decorated with grotesques executed by Udine from Raphael's designs based on the images in the Domus Aurea. Raphael and Udine retained the unsettling strangeness of the original hybrid creatures but beautified them, transforming them into masterpieces of High Renaissance gracefulness. These Raphaelesque grotesques became the model for one of the central strands in the decorative arts of the Italian classicising tradition, later to reach its apogee in the eighteenth-century neo-classical revival.

The most explicit homage to Raphael's Loggia grotesques was the set of engravings by Giovanni Ottaviani and Giovanni Volpato made in the 1770s and copied directly from the Vatican originals (Fig. 2). So influential were these prints that Catherine the Great had the designs painted on to canvas and mounted at the Hermitage where they remain.

In Britain, Robert Adam brought the grotesque from Rome to England where it became a distinctive element in country house interior design. Adam's finest grotesque work is at Osterley Park in the 1770s and 1780s: light and beautiful, it feels simultaneously frivolous and archaeologically correct. His work also has a striking clarity and symmetry. But as a result, might we find eighteenth-century designs such as these a little too pure and classical? They lack inventive energy. They do not seem to be particularly 'grotesque'. So where and how did the grotesque become grotesque?

Writing in the century before the decoration of the Domus Aurea, the poet Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, describes how painters 'join a horse's neck to a human head' or how what 'starts out at the top as a beautiful woman ends in a hideously ugly fish'. These images, he says, are a 'sick man's dreams'. For Vitruvius they were 'paintings of monstrosities' and 'ought not to be approved'. So, from the beginning there was a feeling that these hybrid, metamorphic creatures represented something dangerous from the dark side of the imagination. In the sixteenth century, Benvenuto Cellini argued that the proper name for these 'chimerical hybrids', was 'monsters', not grotesques. And 'monsters' was how Vasari described them. Beautiful though grotesques could be, their significance lay in the darkness beneath the surface.

A darker and more exaggerated grotesque first appeared in the San Brizio Chapel at Orvieto between 1499 and 1502. Luca Signorelli's decorations show a portrait of the Greek philosopher Empedocles peering out across a frame constructed from a sea of writhing monsters. Grotesque decoration had metamorphosed into threatening monstrosity. It would not be until the seventeenth century that 'grotesque' acquired its adjectival use and expanded its meaning to suggest the physically and ethically repulsive; but it took only the tiniest verbal and mental leap to move from the unsettling image to the unsettling idea.

Now, as the grotesque spread north from Italy through prints and drawings, it turned increasingly from light to dark, from the decorative to the monstrous, taking on a more demonic and ugly character. As we see in this characteristically nightmarish print by the Flemish artist Cornelis Bos (1510-1555) there is a threatening claustrophobia in the Northern grotesque (Fig. 3). The female figure in the centre is imprisoned by the heavy, decorative strapwork while the satyr's face with legs sticking out of its eyes has tipped us firmly into the macabre. And, taking the spirit of 'grotesque' still further, the most bizarre use of ornamental body parts is found in the tradition of

Fig. 3: Cornelis Bos, Grotesque panel with Strapwork and Cartouches*, 1546. Engraving printed on paper, 25.7 x 18.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.*

Fig. 4: Johannes van Doetecum I after Cornelis Floris, Grotesque Panel, *1556. Etching on paper. 30.8 x 20.4 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.*

'auricular grotesque' and *Knorpelgroteske* or 'cartilage grotesque' where the decorative structure dissolves into bones, gristle and knobbly flesh (Fig. 4).

These more monstrous elements in Netherlandish and German grotesque reflect the Northern Europe tradition of Gothic drolleries and gargoyles, those strange, dreamlike creatures often intended to be satirical or moralistic. This darker, more serious tone that feeds into the Northern tradition had found earlier expression in Bosch's menacing, hellish *Garden of earthly delights* (c. 1500). Filled with bizarre, monstrous figures and objects it abandons us to the chaotic world of the nightmare grotesque. It could have been of Bosch that Dürer was thinking when he wrote of the genre he called 'traumwerk': 'whoever wants to make dreamworks must mix all things together'. And nightmarish chaos pervades Martin Schongauer's *Temptations of St Anthony* (c. 1480) as it conjures up imaginary monsters to create feelings of fear and revulsion, and nudge us into the spiritual abyss.

Schongauer's *St Anthony* clearly lies behind *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, the most celebrated of Goya's *Los caprichos*, his dark, satirical images showing a world turned upside down, beset by fear and disorder. And perhaps this is the best way to define the grotesque: the sleep of reason.

The grotesque shows what can be done when the imagination is given free rein, when the artist delves into the deeper realms of the subconscious and learns how to break the rules. It suggests a new way for artists to see the world and our place in it. The grotesque begins as decoration but develops into the creation of images from the edges of our mind. The grotesque leads us into that entire modern tradition of the artist as an outsider with an insight into the unconscious, subconscious, hidden side of the human mind.

Delving beneath the surface of the mind to make what Odilon Redon called 'a living humanness out of implausible beings' allows us to draw clear aesthetic links from first-century Rome, through the Renaissance, and into the modern world.

Many of the important art movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Symbolism, Surrealism and Expressionism, seek to express the improbable and the impossible by opening our minds into unexplored and inexplicable worlds. In doing so, they present us with the same aesthetic and psychological experiences as those of the Renaissance artists who first gazed upon the grotesques of the Domus Aurea.

I would like to thank Mariska Beekenkamp-Wladimiroff for inviting (and inspiring) me to give a lecture on grotesques to Art Historical London. This essay is based on that lecture.

Andrew Taylor is a freelance lecturer and writer. With degrees in art history, church history and ancient history, his range of interests is wide but his work seeks to discern and explain the interconnectedness of artistic and cultural movements and ideas. He lectures to art societies, private groups and adult education students. Andrew leads cultural tours for Kirker Holidays, lecturing on art, architecture and classical music.

Paul Strand's portrait of an Italian village

Tim Satterthwaite

In 1950, the American photographer Paul Strand left New York for France, where he and his wife, Hazel, would live for the next quarter-century, until Strand's death in 1976. The photographs he would make in the first years of this European exile, from journeys through France and Italy, and to Scotland's Outer Hebrides, include some of the artist's most celebrated images. These works mark a culmination of the humanist photographic project that had begun with Strand's pioneering street photographs of the 1910s, but also a rupture; Strand's political and artistic ideals had become increasingly at odds with the paranoid, consumerist culture of Cold War America. The clarity and idealism of Strand's post-war photography suggests a period of renewal and creative optimism that the journey to Europe had made possible.

Strand's long-cherished idea, at this period, was to make a photographic study of a village, capturing the lives and characters of its people, and the villagers' intimate connections to the living world and their timeworn man-made environment: Strand would 'find and show many of the elements that make this village a particular place where particular people live and work'.[1] Such a village would not, however, prove easy to find: the photographer had first to build a relationship with his chosen community, and for that he needed local contacts; more subjectively, the village was to embody an ideal of organic community, a free, collective

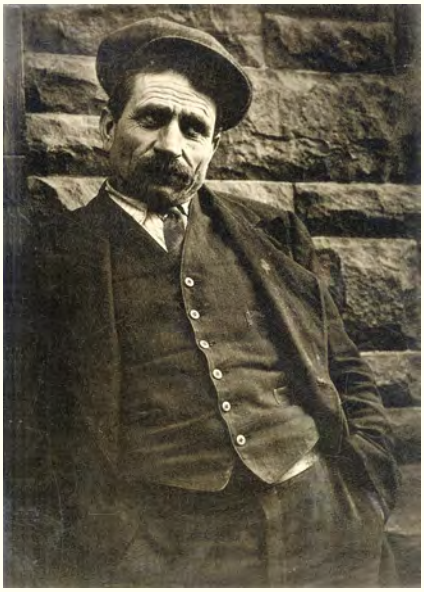

Fig. 1: Paul Strand, The Italian, New York, *1916. Platinum print, 13 x 9 ½ inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art. © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive*

human existence in harmony with nature. In pursuit of this imaginary setting, Paul and Hazel Strand travelled throughout France in 1950–51; Strand's remarkable photographs from these years were published in the photobook *La France de Profil* (A Profile of France), a collaboration with the French writer Claude Roy. But the village for his photographic study remained elusive: rural France, with its insular, familial domestic culture, failed to provide a suitable opening for the non-French-speaking photographer.

The 'particular place' which finally materialised, two years later, was in Italy not France: *Luzzara*, in the Po Valley, the birthplace of the screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, who would provide the necessary introductions, and the text of their collaborative photobook *Un paese: portrait of an Italian village*, published in 1955. Strand's photographs for this book represent, arguably, the defining statement of his late career, and include many outstanding individual images. Yet the work is also a resonant re-affirmation of the themes, social and political ideals, and aesthetic values that had shaped Strand's photography throughout his working life. *Un paese* encapsulates this singular photographic vision, expressing the artist's acute aesthetic and compositional sensibility, austere romanticism, and profound, compassionate humanism. The book also captures, perhaps more completely than any work in his long career, the tension at the heart of Strand's photography, between his aesthetic idealism and his socialist politics, with its implicit imperative of bearing witness to injustice and poverty.

Strand's fascination with everyday life, and working people in particular, was announced in a set of extraordinary, ground-breaking photographs published in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* in 1917. Alongside landmark works of modernist photography such as *Wall Street, New York, 1915* – the famous view of a procession of early-morning workers in the financial district – the *Camera Work* plates include a series of candid street portraits shot in Manhattan's Lower East Side. To capture these images, Strand worked surreptitiously, attaching a false lens to the side of his camera so that his subjects were unaware they were being photographed. The results are astonishing, and quite unprecedented in photographic history: highly detailed, unselfconscious portraits of ordinary, working-class New Yorkers, middle-aged or elderly, photographed in full daylight in their everyday street clothes (Fig. 1).

The significance of these early photographs, declaring working-class life, and the faces of ordinary people, as the new subject of artistic photography, is hard to overstate: Walker Evans, for example, acknowledged *New York [Blind woman]*, as the pivotal 'powerful' image that shaped the course of his photographic career.[2] The portraits are also a little unsettling: these are intimate studies captured without the consent of their subjects, for the delectation of a privileged audience far removed from the hard-scrabble life of lower Manhattan. Strand himself appears to have been troubled by their implications, and made no similar works for a further sixteen years, ceding the ground to a generation of street photographers who picked up on his example in the interwar decades. Ultimately, however, the portraiture of ordinary people – made both with and without a disguised lens – would re-emerge as central to Strand's work.[3] Made nearly forty years after the New York street portraits, *Un paese's* return to this humanist subject matter is inflected with the same constrained idealism. As Strand acknowledged: 'I like to photograph people who have strength and dignity in their faces; whatever life has done to them, it hasn't destroyed them. I gravitate toward people like that.'[4]

A striking aspect of the 'Portrait of a village' is the complete absence of modern technology: there are no cars or tractors visible, no telephones or even radios. Strand's 1950s villagers appear to inhabit a previous century, though we know from Zavattini's text that mopeds and neon lights were beginning to encroach on Luzzara's post-war life. Strand's elegiac vision describes a community's relationship not with technological modernity or consumer capitalism, but with the pre-industrial past – there are meticulous photographs of oxen, handcarts, and handmade tools – and with the cycles of rural life and the natural world. The opening pages of *Un paese* include an elevated view of a farmstead with netted olive trees, and bicycles in a birch wood belonging to workers engaged in the annual effort to maintain the river banks against the risk of flooding. Other photographs capture the organic forms of grasses, and twisted vines climbing an ancient stuccoed wall (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Paul Strand, Untitled, Luzzara, Italy, 1953. *From* Un paese, *p. 76. © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive*

Fig. 3: Paul Strand, Untitled*,* Luzzara*,* Italy, 1953*. From* Un paese*, p. 37. © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive*

Fig. 4: Paul Strand, Untitled [The Family, Luzzara]*, Luzzara, Italy, 1953. From* Un paese*, p. 81. © Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive*

Like portraiture, nature studies had appeared as an aspect of Strand's photography as early as the late 1910s: *Rock, Port Lorne, Nova Scotia*, 1919, for example, depicts the interlocking masses of a shattered rock face or stone wall; photographic studies from the late 1920s capture the natural textures of tree stumps, rocks, and iris leaves. At first glance, the nature photography appears remote from Strand's humanist portraiture: dual aspects of an eclectic, and intensely personal, photographic journey. Yet in formal terms, and at a symbolic level, the works have elements in common: Strand's close camera work, with the photographic subject depicted in intimate and meticulous detail; a fascination with organic form and the effects of ageing and erosion; and a sense of stillness, such that the object – or human subject – appears to express its own 'inner truth', an identity patiently mediated, but not distorted, by the camera lens.

It is this aura of objectivity that unifies Strand's and Zavattini's visual and textual contributions to *Un paese*. Zavattini, the screenwriter of the 1948 film *Bicycle Thieves*, was a leading figure in Italian neo-realist cinema, a movement dedicated to stories of vernacular working-class life. The socialist politics that informed this post-war movement is forcefully expressed in Zavattini's text for *Un paese*, made up of fragments of the villagers' own accounts: stories of oppression and poverty, and memories of wartime atrocities, appear among the book's first-person narratives. Strand's daylit, dignified portrait of a café owner (Fig. 3) is accompanied by her searing account of confronting her husband's murderers: 'I said to him: You placed a revolver in my mouth. They held a trial in Perugia and he and others were set free.' [5]

The tension between such testimonies and Strand's idealising images does not imply contradiction or incompatibility; rather, it underscores the complexity, and incompleteness, of any 'truthful' representation. From this perspective, the narratives add a layer of intimate meaning to the photographs, underlining rather than negating the sense of dignity and self-containment that Strand has sought to capture. These are carefully composed portraits, but resolutely 'true' to their subject, in the sense intended by the photographer.

The most famous photograph from *Un paese* shows two generations of a poor Luzzara family at the front door of their house (Fig. 4); the text recounts the recurrent tragedies in the mother's life, and the humiliations of their sharecropper existence. The arrangement of the figures and the poses are loosely geometric, and the photograph is clearly staged, yet the work has a forceful authenticity, in the ancient dilapidated building and the complex mix of emotions and attitudes projected by its occupants: pride and resilience, impatience and steadfastness, strength and resignation. With the miraculous singularity of great art, Paul Strand captures the life of this Italian village, and the universal experience of rural poverty, in a single timeless photograph.

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Notes

1 Peter Barberie, ed., *Paul Strand: master of modern photography* (New Haven and London: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Fundación MAPFRE, in association with Yale University Press, 2014), p. 19.

2 Svetlana Alpers, *Walker Evans. Starting from scratch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 88.

3 *Paul Strand: master of modern photography*, p. 7.

4 Quoted in *Paul Strand: essays on his life and work*, ed. by Maren Stange (New York: Aperture, 1990), p. 185.

5 Paul Strand and Cesare Zavattini: *Un paese: portrait of an Italian village* (New York: Aperture, 1997), p. 37.

The female gaze on empire: missionary photography and political agency at the turn of the twentieth century

Sasha Morse

Victorian missionaries have been immortalised in British history as heroic pioneers altruistically adjusting to lives of deprivation, but rarely as agents of colonialism. The invisibility of missionaries in post-colonial discourse is troubling to Britain's urgent and belated imperial reckoning. As contemporary calls to decolonise public space gather pace, there remains a significant silence around missionaries despite their role as colonial oppressors.

The archives of missionary photography are extensive and through the popularity of lantern slide lectures in Victorian Britain, the photograph played an integral role in cementing the one-dimensional legacies of missionaries. However, photographs of and by female missionaries are notably absent from scholarship, contemporary cultural debate around post-colonial discourse, the history of photography, and the history of women. This absence formed a central tenet of the research which addressed the importance of decolonising female missionary photography by identifying an evangelical iconography of white supremacy.

The research emerged from the discovery of photographs by Alice Seeley Harris (1870-1970) and of other lesser-known female missionaries, namely Mary Slessor (1848-1915) and Mabel Shaw (1889-1973). These photographs gave aesthetic shape to colonial ideology, utilising an evangelical iconography to position the colonial 'other' in opposition to the missionary. This observation led to a focus on how such photographs were received as evidence in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, and by whom. Set against the backdrop of Christian moralism in Britain, the domestic role of middle-class women as the keepers of an evangelical sense of duty became a central focus.

Religion has been neglected in the prevailing narratives around female political agency. The role of female missionary photography was therefore assessed for influencing middle-class women's move to collective power through evangelical philanthropy. The photographic visibility of the professionalisation of female mission work, as an example of independent women's work outside the home, and mission work as a palatable cause for female philanthropy provided momentum for change in the lives of the middle-class woman. Finally, the research considered how such photographs were positioned in society, at the confluence of religion, highly-gendered and classist divisions of labour, and colonial expansion, to influence the political agency of women in Britain before they had the vote.

In 1898, Alice Seeley Harris, a newly-married Protestant missionary, set sail from England for the Congo Free State

Fig. 1: Photographer unknown, Alice Seeley Harris with Congolese children*, 1905. Photograph © Antislavery International, London. (antislavery.org.uk)*

(Democratic Republic of Congo) with her husband Reverend John Harris.[1] The Harrises were stationed in the Congo between 1898 and 1906, during Belgian King Leopold's barbarous regime of enforced labour for rubber production. They became vocal critics of Leopold's rule and Seeley Harris began taking photographs of the Congolese people maimed by Leopold's soldiers. These photographs have become known as one of the earliest examples of photography being used in a human rights campaign to instigate social reform.[2] These photographs are also a reminder of the cruel paradoxes of purported philanthropic rule and the camera's complicity in the colonial enterprise.

The England that the Harrises left behind was steeped in Christian morality and the pervasive belief that there was a need for an expansion of the Christian faith in Africa. In 1884-85, the Berlin West Africa Conference had been held to legally formalise what has since become known as the 'Scramble for Africa', when European powers competed to colonise the African continent. For the face of imperial politics, Christianity became a compelling justification for colonialism as an axiomatic force of good.

The centrality of religion in Victorian Britain and calls for Christian expansion collided with the advent of photography as a portable means of supplying visual evidence. Photography had emerged in Britain in the early

nineteenth century at an opportune moment, appeasing anxieties about representational accuracy. The photograph's perceived ability for objective exactitude was particularly important in unfamiliar colonial territory; for many Victorians photographs would have been their first visual experience of unseen imperial landscapes. Therefore, photographs taken by missionaries became vital in shaping domestic perception of empire.

As Britain reached the apex of its imperial power, an understanding of an unknown world centred round the marking of binary opposites, differentiating between the side of the light and the good, and that of the dark and evil. These definitions dictated that a continuation of a coloniser's power depended on the inferiority of the colonised 'other'.

Photography was employed by power structures as a measuring mechanism and legitimising force in an increasingly disparate society. The role of female alongside male missionaries in the working world was legitimised by the photographs which simultaneously measured indigenous women in opposition to them.

An analysis of a photograph of and by Seeley Harris illustrates how the making of the female missionary depended on the subjugation of the colonial subject, and the complexity of the photograph's entanglement in a system of extreme violence, whilst advocating a kinder form of colonialism.

Alice Seeley Harris with Congolese children (Fig. 1), is a contrived depiction of the female missionary as heroine of Christian purity. The associations of whiteness and Christian purity would have been familiar to audiences of the time. The aesthetic forms on which colonialism was founded, of light and dark and 'civilised' and 'savage' are employed in high contrast. The civilisation implied by her white European clothing alongside the dark naked bodies of the Congolese children makes her a Madonna-like figure, embodying maternity, self-sacrifice and shrouded in the light of the message of salvation. The Congolese children below Seeley Harris are presented as a mute mass, victims of an uncivilised culture and simultaneously ripe for Christian conversion.

Mr Harris and the mutilated Congo lad, Impongi (Fig. 2) attests in more vehement terms, to the legitimising presence of the missionary and a measuring of the colonial subject. The inclusion of Harris suggests that the African man alone would be an unreliable narrator of violence enacted on his own body. Impongi's lack of personal testimony is obscured by the arrant religious semiotics of the photograph which present him as a suitable subject for Christian education and conversion. In this way, these photographs leave the Congolese people between being brutalised or converting to Christianity, and between the self-interest of different versions of the coloniser, as either brutal or benevolent.

The success of Seeley Harris's atrocity photography being utilised to harness humanitarian intervention illustrates how inextricably linked religion and politics were in Britain at the time. Their saliency would not have been possible without harnessing the beliefs of a religiously-oriented audience.

The number of women involved in religious activity is evidenced by their fundraising efforts. Women did not, however, rise up the ranks of church hierarchies, rather pitching themselves as complementary to the aims of men. Women's suffrage campaigner Frances Power Cobbe suggested of the politically active woman, 'we want her sense of the law of love to complete man's sense of the law of injustice.'[3] Religious tropes of womanhood and subordination came to be a persuasive force in the women's movement, and greater female freedom was won by harnessing religious conventions in a patriarchal society.

Fig. 2: Alice Seeley Harris, Mr Harris and the mutilated Congo lad*, Impongi, 1911-12. Photograph © Antislavery International, London. (antislavery.org.uk)*

Female missionary photography influenced female political agency in Britain by shaping the identity of the middle-class woman and the professionalisation of female mission work. Through visual analysis, the making of the white European feminist was revealed to be contingent on the making of the colonial 'other'. However, further research is necessary to establish forensic connections between the archives of female missionary photography and the political agency of women in Britain.

The efforts to decolonise these photographs have sought to disrupt the colonial ideology they propagate. The research finally looked to the legacies of missionary photography and a lack of evolution in humanitarian fundraising imagery in Africa which continues to posit white female celebrities as heroines of elevated empathic capacity, perpetuating white saviourism.

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Notes

1 T. J. Thompson, *Light on Darkness: Missionary Photography of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), p. 185.

2 S. Sliwinski, 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 5, No.3 (2006), pp. 333-363, p. 334.

3 Frances Power Cobbe, *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863), p. 32.

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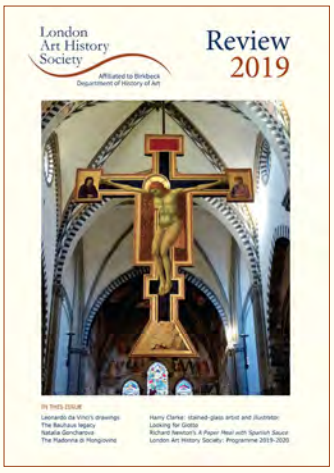

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