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From the Editor

In our first article Sue Rollin looks at the glories of Samarkand in Uzbekistan, and the colourful tilework that decorates the historic buildings in the capital city of Tamerlaine the Great.

One hundred years ago, the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris exhibited a dazzling display of new and innovative styles in architecture, furniture, interior design, graphics, jewellery, ceramics and fashion, later termed 'Art Deco'. Mary Alexander assesses its subsequent influence on art and design throughout the world.

We celebrate the 250th anniversary since their birth of two of Britain's greatest artists, J. M. W. Turner and John Constable, with an article by Nicola Moorby looking at both the differences and similarities in their approach to landscape painting.

In the medieval church of San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples is an awe-inspiring monument to King Ladislaus of Durazzo, one of the last Angevin rulers of Naples. Geoffrey Nuttall describes it and other monuments in the church.

James Christopher Joyce, the latest winner at Birkbeck of the Murray Prize for Best Early Period Masters Dissertation, looks at the influences and ideas behind the fashion for ornamental garden grottoes in eighteenth-century England.

John McNeill, our Vice-President and regular lecturer, died suddenly in December 2024. Here we remember him and his enormous contribution to our Society.

Finally, we provide a listing of forthcoming art exhibitions in and around London, and abroad. And, on our back page, we list some of our Society's forthcoming lectures and study events.

I would like to express my thanks to the contributors, our designer, and my fellow *Review* Editorial Panel members.

Barrie MacDonald
Editor, London Art History Society Review

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FRONT COVER: Gur Emir, Samarkand. *Photograph: Sue Rollín*

Tamerlaine's tiles

Sue Rollin

Fig. 1: Registan, Samarkand. *Photograph: Wikimedia Creative. Commons CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain*.

One of the most outstanding architectural ensembles of Central Asia, the Registan in Samarkand continues to impress visitors with its three imposing madrasas (theological colleges) facing the central square (Fig. 1). The complex was remodelled in the seventeenth century, but the original design dates from the fifteenth century when Ulug Beg, grandson of Tamerlaine, was city governor. Of his endowments, which included a Sufi lodge, two mosques and a caravanserai, only the madrasa survives, brilliantly embellished with polychrome glazed brick and tilework, a feature of architectural decoration which developed under his grandfather.

Tamerlaine, or Timur, to give him his Turkic name, which means 'iron', was the last of the great Central Asian nomad conquerors. Born around 1328 near Kish, south of Samarkand, he pursued a highly successful career as a warrior and tribal leader and by the early fifteenth century was master of a vast empire which stretched from India to Anatolia, from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf. Although he was a skilled horseman in the steppe nomad tradition, Timur had a deformed right leg and would have walked with a pronounced limp, which earned him the appellation Timur-i Leng, or Timur the Lame, corrupted in English to Tamerlaine or Tamberlaine. Tamerlaine's image in the West has long been of a powerful and ruthless military leader with an insatiable lust for conquest, as portrayed by Christopher Marlowe in his play *Tamburlaine the Great*, first performed in 1587, which was a great success with Elizabethan audiences. As the conqueror prepares to march on Babylon he issues a warning:

> *Now crouch, ye kings of greatest Asia,*
> *And tremble when ye hear this scourge will come*
> *That whips down cities and controlleth crowns,*
> *Adding their wealth and treasure to my store.*[1]

As he swept across Asia leaving in his wake death and destruction, Tamerlaine indeed accumulated much wealth and treasure which he used to beautify the cities of his native land, especially his capital, Samarkand, and his birthplace Kish, renamed Shahr-i Sabz, the 'Green City'. Most valuable of all for Timur's plans were the architects, artists and craftsmen, from

Fig. 2: Ak Saray, Shahr-i Sabz*, (corner buttress with banna'i decoration). Photograph: Sue Rollin*

India, Anatolia, Syria and Iran, whose lives he had spared so they could be transported to the royal atelier in Samarkand, where they pooled their skills and knowledge to create what we call the International Timurid style. Two features which stand out are size and decoration, in particular tilework, which covers entire surfaces.

Timur was obsessed with monumentality. The Bibi Khanum Mosque in Samarkand, designed to accommodate 10,000 worshippers, was until recently the largest mosque in Central Asia. The surviving *iwan* (portal) of Timur's Ak Saray ('white palace') in Shahr-i Sabz is also in the outsize department, with a span of 22m and a height of 38m, even in ruin. Both are lavishly decorated with tilework and glazed coloured bricks. Glazed bricks have a long history in the Middle East, dating back to the fourteenth century BC. They were used to striking effect on the Ishtar Gate and Processional Way of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (sixth century BC), now reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, and on the slightly later façade of King Darius the Great's palace at Susa, panels from which are now on display in the Louvre.[2]

For architectural decoration Tamerlaine's artisans drew much of their inspiration from Iran, adopting and further developing techniques in use since the twelfth century. Glazed brick covered large areas using the *banna'i* technique, in which the bricks are glazed on one side and arranged to form geometric patterns or monumental inscriptions in cobalt blue, turquoise and white (Fig. 2). The huge inscriptions on the corner buttresses of the Ak Saray portal read 'The sultan is the shadow of God' – modesty was not one of Tamerlaine's qualities! Other inscriptions repeat the names of Allah, Muhammad and 'Ali in squared *Kufic* script, as on many other Timurid buildings including the Bibi Khanum Mosque and Ulug Beg's madrasa.

The best showcase for Timurid decorative tilework is a necropolis known as the Shah-i Zinda or 'Living King', which grew up around the grave of Qutham ibn Abbas, a Muslim leader and cousin of the prophet Muhammad who arrived in Transoxiana in 676 to preach the new Islamic faith. He was allegedly martyred on the site the following year, but a legend arose that he did not die but met Khizr, the guardian of the waters of life, and continued to live under his own tomb, hence the name Shah-i Zinda. Female members of Timur's family were laid to rest in the mausolea which line a narrow path that climbs the hillside towards the tomb of the popular eponymous saint. An inscription on the carved wooden doorway to the saint's shrine refers to the gates of paradise, for three pilgrimages here are said to equal one to Mecca.

The Shah-i Zinda mausolea are predominantly single-chambered domed brick buildings with highly ornamented portals and interiors which rank among the jewels of Timurid

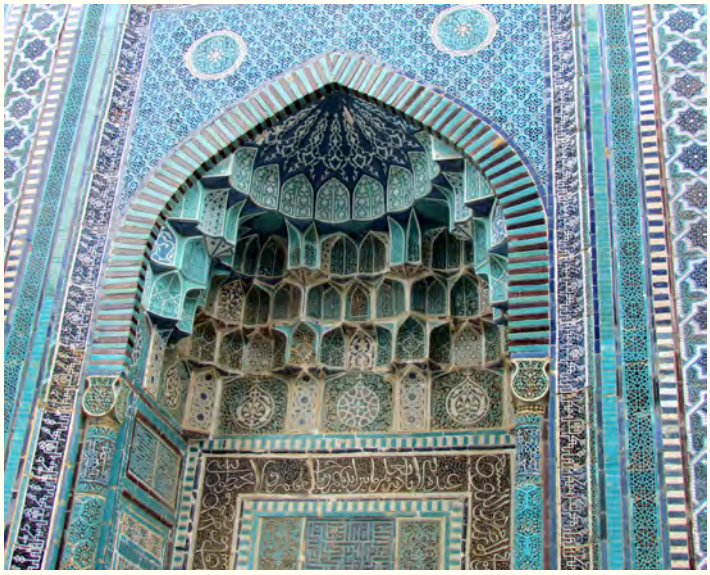

Fig. 3: Shah-i Zinda, Samarkand, mausoleum of an unknown woman, 1360-61 *(detail of facade with carved and glazed terracotta decoration). Photograph: Sue Rollin*

decorative art: the range of colours, techniques and designs is second to none.[3] The palette is mainly cobalt blue, turquoise and white, with splashes of yellow, green, brown, red and gold. Finely carved and glazed terracotta incorporating inscriptions and foliate and geometric patterns covers the earliest portals (Fig. 3). There are multi-coloured calligraphic bands in the *cuerda seca* ('dry cord') technique and several panels use a technique known as *lajvardina*, a term that references lapis lazuli, in which white, red and gold leaf are applied over a dark blue background. An unusual epigraphic design of eight-pointed stars with central roundels delineated by raised straps covers a portal dated 1385, and elsewhere there are relief panels with floral patterns and calligraphy. Towards the end of the fourteenth century there was a move to tile mosaic, with highly accomplished and exuberant polychrome designs (Fig. 4).

Within the Shah-i Zinda decorative scheme we see the three disciplines which underpin Islamic art: calligraphy, geometry and the art of the arabesque.[4] The Arabic script lends itself to elegant and intricate decoration, and calligraphy, used to transcribe the Quran, is considered the noblest of the arts of Islam. Calligraphic styles used in the Shah-i Zinda tilework include angular *Kufic, Thuluth*, characterised by curved lines and extended strokes, rounded and flowing *Naskh* and a microscript called *Ghubari* ('dust'). There are excerpts from the Quran, poetic verses, wise adages and dedicatory inscriptions which praise the monuments and their occupants. The mausoleum of Timur's young niece Shadi Mulk Aka is the 'Garden of Eden where the gem of happiness was buried, … the reliquary where the pearl

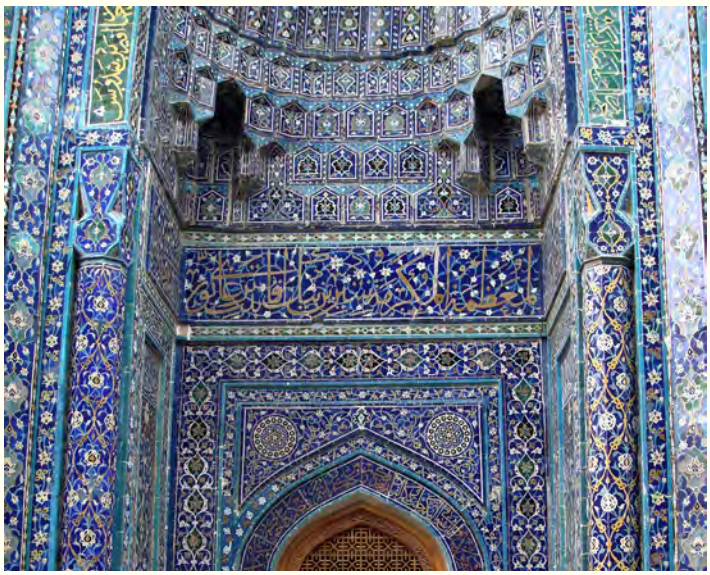

Fig. 4: Shah-i Zinda, Samarkand, Shirin Bika Aka Mausoleum, 1385-86 *(detail of facade with tile mosaic). Photograph: Sue Rollin*

Fig. 5: Gur Emir, Samarkand. *Photograph: John Peacock*

was lost, where … a figure which is slender like a cypress found her refuge'. Some monuments bear the signatures of the craftsmen and artisans, at least two of whom were from Iran.[5]

Geometric patterns of circles, squares, stars and polygons express the harmony and proportion of the universe and challenge the mind, while the arabesque designs, which stand alone or form a dense background to calligraphic bands and geometric panels, are floral, foliate and biomorphic patterns describing the order and unity of nature. They are often based on a spiral from which emerge stylised buds, flowers and leaves.

Timur died in 1404, aged 71, as he set out to invade Ming China. His body was brought back to Samarkand and interred in the magnificent Gur Emir, a mausoleum built for his recently deceased grandson Muhammad Sultan and one of the finest of all Timurid monuments (Front Cover). The brilliant blue, bulbous and fluted dome on a high drum with glazed bricks spelling out the message 'God is eternal' (*al baqa lillah*, literally 'eternal survival is to God') is a masterwork. On the outside, the double brick dome has 64 ribs rising from a band of *muqarnas* and is covered with predominantly turquoise and cobalt blue glazed tiles. A tile mosaic panel over the entrance portal to the Gur Emir complex announces the name of the architect, Muhammad ibn Mahmud from Isfahan, no doubt deported like so many others to work for the conqueror in Samarkand (Fig. 5). After Timur's death we know that some of these artisans moved on, back to Iran or to the nascent Ottoman empire, where they continued the tradition of Tamerlaine's glorious tiles.

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Notes

1 Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part 2, Act 4, Scene 3, lines 98-101

2 Anja Fügert and Helen Gries (eds.), *Glazed brick decoration in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2020), Chapter 1, pp. 7-11, Chapter 6, p. 96ff

3 Venetia Porter, *Islamic tiles*, Chapter 4, p. 62 ff (London: British Museum Press, 1995, reprinted 1999, 2001)

4 Khaled Azzam (ed), *Arts and crafts of the Islamic lands: principles, materials, practice* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013)

5 Bakhtiyar Babadjanov & U. Rustamov, *Epigraphical monuments of the Shah-i Zindah Memorial Complex* (Samarkand, 2015)

The 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes and its influence on the 'Art Deco' style

Mary Alexander

'The first impression is startling. Passing through the silver obelisk towers of the Porte d'Honneur one enters into a dream city… arisen overnight in the heart of Paris.'

Helen Appleby Read (American art critic), April 1925

The sheer ambition and scale of the 1925 Paris Exposition cannot be exaggerated. From April to October, the 55-acre site in the centre of the city was transformed into an extraordinary spectacle by day and illuminated at night. The area covered the Grand Palais, Cours la Reine, the huge expanse of the Esplanade des Invalides, the Alexander III and Invalides bridges and river barges. Access was through the turnstiles of seven monumental portals (Fig. 2) with 15,019,00 official paid attendances, and 15,000+ exhibitors. Targeted at a new post-war international clientele with an appetite for *modernité*, the Exposition attracted international business and leisure visitors, retail buyers, museum curators, and hordes of press keen to explore, purchase and publicise the striking designs on display which would influence a new generation of artists and designers. All new buildings were designed to be temporary. Not a single tree should be felled and no disruption to traffic would be permitted. As a design brief it was an unprecedented challenge.

Planning started back in 1911, when the President of the new Société des Artistes Décorateurs warned the French government of an impending crisis in French 'art industries' blaming complacent manufacturers. French hegemony in high quality luxury goods and craftsmanship had been taken for granted for too long, with no incentive for design innovation and change. The SAD report specifically identified the successful collaboration between German manufacturers and innovative product designers, provocatively asking why 'tout ce qui est nouveau est boche'. From then on, patriotism and politics took centre stage. The original date of 1915 was postponed, overtaken by war which was followed by a slow economic recovery. Unsurprisingly Germany and the Bauhaus designers were subsequently not invited to exhibit. The new focus would be experimentation and *modernité*. Exhibition items must comply with the strict criteria of 'new inspiration' and 'real originality'. This Exposition (international not universal) would be different, as emphasised in the official catalogue: 'the exhibition is not an end in itself – it is a point of departure'. The point of departure would be the luxury goods industries of France and in particular, Paris.

Designer Maurice Dufrêne was a prescient choice to provide the overall concept design layout for the vast site – including the exhibitor pavilions, public spaces, the boutiques on the Pont Alexandre III (Fig. 3), and the new 'must see' highlights such as René Lalique's illuminated crystal fountain (Fig. 4). Sightlines to iconic buildings outside the boundary such as the Eiffel Tower must also be incorporated in the design. Gustave Eiffel would have been proud that his 1889 design, condemned at the time as 'hideous', at last assumed its rightful place in the city's design history, illuminated with giant whimsical letters advertising 'Citroën'.

Fig. 1: Robert Bonfils, Poster for the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. Photograph: Alamy*

Fig. 2: Porte d'Orsay entrance to the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. *Photograph: www.arthurchandler.com*

Fig. 3: Pont Alexandre III illuminated boutiques at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. *Photograph: Bibliothèque nationale de France: Public Domain*

Dufrêne's view of the design process was modern and holistic, identifying the need for a close relationship between designer, manufacturer and client to fully understand the technological design and innovation possibilities. As a founder member of the Société des Artistes Décorateurs, he shared the vision of a new concept of design integration across the visual arts. In 1921 he created the design studio of Galeries Lafayette, one of the four leading Paris department stores which would each showcase their products in pavilions on the main Invalides esplanade. These pavilions – La Maîtrise (Galeries Lafayette), Primavera (Printemps), Pomone (Bon Marché), and Studium (Louvre) – were among the most widely photographed exhibits in reviews and magazines, performing the role of style 'influencers' to a wider public audience. Postcards conveyed images and messages celebrating the feeling of 'newness'. Energetic motifs such as the radiating sunburst and the cascading water fountain became popular symbols of hope and optimism for the future, whether applied to buildings or furniture, ceramics, screens, textiles, fashion and accessories. All represented the chic *modernité* and sleek fluid lines of Paris 25.

There was no *one* style at Paris 25. The forms, vivid colours, materials, and surface effects we associate with the term 'Art Deco' (first used by Bevis Hillier in 1968)[1] could be summarised as having energy, boldness, contrast, glamour, a

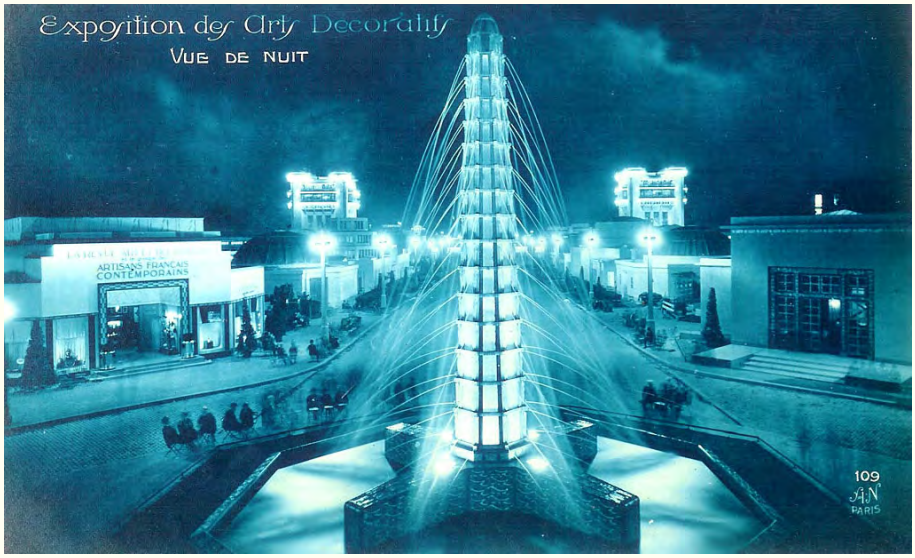

Fig. 4: René Lalique, Glass Fountain at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. *Postcard: Public Domain. Photograph: Mary Alexander*

sense of fun and curiosity. Surfaces were textured and contrasting, mixing matte, reflective and lustre effects with experimental finishes whether in Süe et Mare's furniture, George Fouquet's jewellery or André Perugia's shoe designs. Contemporary descriptions of the style include *le style moderne, le style jazz,* and *le style cubiste*. But not all forms are abstract and geometric. Some are based on sinuous naturalistic forms, as in Art Nouveau, but the shape is simplified down to blocks of vibrant tonal colours creating vivacity of movement and rhythm as in Édouard Bénédictus's designs for rugs and wallpapers. Taking two widely admired and publicised interior room sets, the angular outlines of Pierre Chareau's furniture in the library of the Ambassade Française are different from the sinuous curves of Émile Jacques Ruhlman's designs in the Hôtel d'un Collectionneur.

A key creative ingredient of Paris 25 was the practice of designers working and exhibiting across a range of multidisciplinary media which encouraged experimentation. The term *artiste-décorateur* (used throughout the 480-page official catalogue) is significant in establishing a new status for a profession we would today call 'Design'. Breaking down traditional boundaries and working across visual media was a key element in the success and vitality of the Exposition. Robert Bonfils, designer of the Paris 25 poster (Fig. 1), exhibited across categories such as graphic design and luxury leather work. Similarly, Jean Dunand, renowned for innovative lacquer screens and furniture, also experimented with ceramics, textiles and jewellery. Defying the convention of separate categories, Cartier displayed his jewellery on mannequins with Brancusi-like features wearing gowns by Jeanne Lanvin and Madeleine Vionnet in the Pavillon de l'Elegance.

Visionary couturier and patron of the arts, Paul Poiret, had long before identified the damaging effects of outdated academic hierarchies of 'fine' and 'decorative' arts in holding back design innovation. His contribution to Paris 25 was significant in content, advice and financial patronage to 'make it happen'. Fashion and luxury goods would play a major role in reviving export markets in the post-WW1 French economy. Couture and *La Mode* were positioned as the 'umbrella' arts, as seen in the dominant image of *La Mode* on the Porte d'Orsay entrance banner. As an astute entrepreneur, Paul Poiret understood the role of design in marketing. Publishing his own magazine, with illustrations by Georges Lepape and George Barbier, Poiret conjured a 'mood' of luxurious pleasure. In-house design studio Atelier Martine created packaging and branding ideas for couture and fragrances all way ahead of their time and represented at Paris 25. In fact, it was Poiret who commissioned polymath painter Raoul Dufy to venture into textiles, freeing colour from fluid outline in radical new designs. Many were exhibited at the Exposition, described by Sonia Delaunay as 'a ray of sunlight on a gloomy day... Dufy's designs were embraced by the fashion industry giving it a note of fun and spontaneity that had never been seen before'.

Fig. 5: Robert Mallet-Stevens, Pavillon du Tourisme at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. *Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 4.0 International*

Fig. 6: Edgar Brandt, Oasis Screen, displayed at the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. *Iron and copper. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 4.0 International*

Fig. 7: Charles Keck, Waldorf-Astoria, New York*. Façade bas-relief. Photograph: Mary Alexander*

Maurice Dufrêne's concept of 44 boutiques running along both sides of the Pont Alexandre III bridge caught the public imagination. Visitors marvelled at the size of the plate glass windows, visible from both sides, with André Vigneau's futuristic mannequins in black, red, purple, silver and gold. The striking pared-down simplicity of the displays, focussing on individual artefacts as 'art works', and the bold typefaces on minimalist fascia panels. Widely disseminated images in newspapers and magazines captured the interest of buyers for international department stores. Robert Mallet-Stevens' sensationally tall Pavillon du Tourisme was a beacon of design innovation, providing visitor information, maps and tickets for river cruises and shows (Fig. 5). When the massive task of dismantling the Exposition began in October, it was announced that financial income had exceeded costs.

There was however, one extraordinary omission from Paris 25. The USA had been offered a prime site, but the Commerce Department interpreted the brief of 'new inspiration' and 'real originality' too literally and thought that the USA would not qualify: a decision later regretted but redeemed partially by the intervention of the US Ambassador to France, Myron T. Herrick.[2] He hastily organised a delegation from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to visit and purchase exhibits for the collection. Additionally, 400 items were selected for a tour the following year, visiting New York, Boston, Chicago and Detroit, and attracting widespread American press and visitor numbers.

In this centenary year, a fitting tribute is due to a true design champion, Lucius Boomer. An experienced hotelier, combining a passion for design with astute business acumen and fundraising skills, Boomer was responsible for the 'yet to be built' Art Deco Waldorf-Astoria hotel. He spent ten days at Paris 25 researching and headhunting design talent.[3] Edgar Brandt was commissioned to design metalwork screens and set up Ferrobrandt as an influential design and manufacturing company in New York (Fig. 6). The influence of Pierre Turin, designer of the Paris 25 medallion, can be seen in Charles Keck's sculptural frieze on the hotel façade (Fig. 7). Louis Rigal designed the Wheel of Life mosaic in the main lobby. The subtle elongated curves of French Art Deco spread rapidly. American architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan would soon follow, working on grand-scale commissions such as the Chanin Building, and the Rockefeller Center. New York instantly became the main catalyst and conduit for the spread of French Art Deco throughout the city and the US as a whole, adding its own twist of exuberance, streamlining and 'jazz style' along the way.

The most comprehensive authoritative source remains the exhibition catalogue, *Art Deco 1910-1939*, (London: V&A Publications, 2003).

Mary Alexander is an experienced international speaker on the history of art and design, with BA Hons and MA degrees in History of Art from University College London. She worked at Pentagram Design in London and New York on special events, international conferences and publications, including the Aspen Design Conference. She is currently a freelance lecturer for The Arts Society throughout the UK, Europe and Australia.

Notes

1 Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*, (London: Studio Vista, 1968); and the exhibition catalogue *The world of Art Deco*, (Minneapolis Institute of Art, 1971).

2 Unpublished research by the author.

3 Unpublished research by the author.

Turner and Constable: painting in parallel

Nicola Moorby

Fig. 1: John Constable, The Hay Wain*, 1821. Oil on canvas, 130.2 x 185.4 cm. National Gallery. London. Public domain. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Shared Alike 4.0 International*

Fig. 2: J.M.W. Turner, The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839. Oil on canvas, 90.7 x 121.6 cm. National Gallery, London. Public domain. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Shared Alike 4.0 International*

Human creativity is famous for its rivalries: Da Vinci and Michaelangelo; Mozart and Salieri; Matisse and Picasso – circumstantial pairings where collaboration or competition (or a complicated mixture of the two), drove their participants to greater heights, enriching a cultural moment with the combined force of their achievements.

In Britain, perhaps the most compelling example of this dynamic is J.M.W. Turner and John Constable, the dual figureheads of Romantic landscape painting. As we approach 250 years since their births (Turner's in 2025 and Constable's in 2026) cultural institutions across the country will celebrate the anniversaries of these two beloved artists with numerous special events and exhibitions. One of the most eagerly anticipated bridges the two. Opening in the autumn of 2025 and continuing until the spring of 2026, *Turner and Constable* at Tate Britain will provide a timely opportunity to see these two famous artists side by side and, importantly, to reconsider them in relation to one another.

Turner and Constable are the 'odd couple' of art history. Born just over a year apart, one in the city and the other in the country, biographical contrasts in background, upbringing and personality shaped their profoundly-varying world views. Child prodigy Turner was the free-spirited Europhile with a passion for travel. He drenched his canvases with light and colour – airy confections that seem saturated with heat and sunshine. Ambiguous in their details yet universal in their effects, they might be everywhere or nowhere at once. Prolific, successful, commercially astute, he was secretive to a fault and, to this day, remains a closed book that we are forever trying to read. Constable, by contrast, was the slow burner, a stay-at-home conservative who never went abroad. All about freshness and texture, he painted cool, shady corners of England that are unmistakably portraits of a particular time and place. Anxious, emotional and utterly devoted to family, he wore his heart upon his sleeve and bared his soul every time he picked up his paintbrush. They faced different kinds of personal challenges. Turner had a meteoric rise to fame but had to overcome prejudice against his social background and his aptitude for making money. Constable, meanwhile, struggled to convert his high-minded beliefs into pictures suitable for sale or exhibition, and took a long time to gain academic recognition.

Despite these differences, the two men shared a vital common purpose. At a time of turbulent political and social change, when important advances were happening in science, nature, and technology, they both adopted landscape as a uniquely relevant way of picturing the world. Formerly thought of as something simplistic and lowly, they

Fig. 3: Willy Lott's Cottage, Flatford *(site of John Constable's* The Hay Wain*). Photograph: Nicola Moorby*

mutually sought to challenge the status quo, producing sophisticated images full of meaning and emotion which held up a mirror to the intellectual concerns of the day. Working independently but in parallel, between them they transformed the genre into a powerful expression of British cultural life during the early nineteenth century.

In doing so, they inadvertently shackled themselves together. In spite of, or perhaps because of, their dissimilarities, the critics relished comparison, orchestrating moments where one was weighed up in relation to the other. The newspapers assigned each an elemental force and talked in terms of a clash between titans: a tussle between 'fire and water' or 'heat' and 'freshness'. Colleagues too weighed in, misconstruing moments of professional interaction as vengeful one-upmanship. When Constable moved a painting by Turner at the Royal Academy it was written off as an act of jealousy. When Turner added a blob of red paint to one of his seascapes it was interpreted as cocking a snook at the neighbouring exhibit by Constable. Unsurprisingly, but not entirely accurately, they have been cast in the role of rivals ever since. Posterity has remembered them as antagonists, forever pitted against one another in an ongoing battle for supremacy.

That being said, many people today are often surprised to discover that these two men were contemporaries. Thanks to their best known works, they seem to belong to different periods of history: Constable to the quiet rhythms of an agrarian past, filled with windmills, waterwheels and golden fields of waving corn; Turner, to a faster, noisier era of steam-powered boats and trains propelling mankind into the industrialised modern age. Constable's most famous picture is *The Hay Wain*, a painting that succeeds in making time stand still (Fig. 1). Originally titled *Landscape: Noon*, the scene is one of stasis, a childhood memory preserved in painted aspic. Turner's equivalent is *The Fighting Temeraire*, a seascape that achieves precisely the opposite effect. With its flaming sun simultaneously rising and setting it perpetuates the idea of flux, literally visualising change, be that a moment, a day, a generation, or an entire epoch (Fig. 2).

These ideas have proved to be powerfully enduring. As present-day proof of this we need only compare the way their respective legacies have given rise to very different UK tourist destinations. 'Constable Country' is the Vale of Dedham in Suffolk, an area of outstanding natural beauty and a National Trust stronghold, where the focus lies on careful preservation of the past. Turner Contemporary, by contrast, is a purpose-built contemporary arts space in Margate, occupying a spot the artist frequented, but conceived as a catalyst for the urban regeneration of the Kentish seaside resort. The visual contrast is instructive. Could any two buildings be conceptually further apart than the charming creaminess of Willy Lott's Grade I listed timber cottage in Flatford (Fig. 3), and the pristine glass and concrete hardscaping of David Chipperfield's twenty-first century gallery (Fig. 4)?

In this sense, comparison has heretofore equalled competition, but now is the time to take a new approach. The differences between Turner and Constable are obvious. But the more interesting exercise is to look beyond the superficial for the similarities, those deep-seated areas of common ground where, instead of conflict, we find

Fig. 4: Turner Contemporary, Margate*. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Shared Alike 4.0 International*

kindred spirits pulling in the same direction. They may have adopted different temporal perspectives, but both men were fascinated by nature and how the idea of change could be explored through the quality of evanescence. Fleeting effects of light or weather spoke to the impermanence and fragility of human existence. Often this is most apparent within their sketches – informal exercises where the artists were *looking* with a view to *learning*. At first glance Turner's watercolour study of a beach horizon (Fig. 6) looks nothing like one in oil by Constable (Fig. 5). Colour and surface textures aside, however, what we find are two artists committed to using paint as a way of describing natural phenomena. Independently, both men have observed sheets of precipitation moving in a strong directional wind and have communicated that motion with gestural forms and strokes. In terms of the sensory information they impart, both are utterly convincing. True, Turner's rain looks like it would merely mist your face, whilst Constable's would drench you through to the skin, but the objective is the same. Born out of empirical experience, the act of painting conveys the real world encounter.

As time went on it was this kind of painterly language – the language of naturalism – which alienated audiences within their lifetimes and led to accusations of carelessness, laziness, incompetence or, even worse, insanity. The way Constable described air and light with flickering strokes of pigment, for example, or Turner with hazy layers of colour were simply too difficult for nineteenth-century viewers to look at and decipher. Increasingly the two men found themselves on the receiving end of a critical backlash, sometimes in clichés that were remarkably similar: 'soapsuds' and 'whitewash' being an idiom that was applied to them both. Equally, it is this which, in retrospect, makes so much of their work look forward-looking today. In the light of twentieth century movements like Impressionism or Abstraction, those same stylistic quirks have been validated as artistic (and uniquely British) steps forward; not messy or mad, just modern.

This is why it is such an illuminating exercise to view Turner and Constable together. If we reunite the pair chronologically we can better understand the contexts in which they were mutually operating. Thus, we shift the narrative from one about individual superiority to a new understanding of the magnitude of their shared achievements. And when comparison is couched in positive rather than pejorative terms it becomes a useful analytical tool. Turner's work automatically provides a nuanced basis for appreciating Constable's, and vice versa. Uneasy allies they might have been, but in a crucial sense they were comrades, brothers in arms in the fight for the validity of British landscape painting. To reconsider their relationship is not to spin out a tired old tale of rivalry, but rather to reframe a history best told in tandem.

Turner 250 is a year-long festival of special events and exhibitions held across Britain and abroad. The exhibition, *Turner and Constable* is at Tate Britain, 27 November 2025-12 April 2026.

Fig. 5: John Constable, Rainstorm over the Sea*, c.1824-28. Oil on paper laid on canvas, 23.5 x 32.6 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (Ref: 03/1390). Public domain. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons Attribution Shared Alike 4.0 International*

Fig. 6: J. M. W. Turner, Rain Falling Over the Sea near Boulogne*, 1845. Watercolour on paper, 23.8 x 33.6 cm. Tate Britain, London. (Ref: D35397, Turner Bequest CCCLVII 11). Photograph: Tate Images*

Nicola Moorby is Curator of British Art, 1790-1850 at the Tate and guest curator of an exhibition at Turner's House in Twickenham, *Turner's Kingdom: Beauty, Birds and Beast*, 23 April-26 October 2025. Her new book, *Turner and Constable: Art, Life, Landscape* is published by Yale University Press, 2025.

‘Shock and awe’: the monumental art of San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples

Geoffrey Nuttall

San Giovanni a Carbonara, the church of the Augustinian Friars, dedicated to St John the Baptist, is named after an area of Naples known at the time of its foundation in 1343 as ‘La Carbonara’. This was where the populace came to burn their rubbish, and shovel it into the open sewer that ran below the church, alongside the city walls, past the Capuan Gate, and into the sea. Despite its insalubrious location, however, during the reign of Ladislaus of Durazzo, the last Angevin king of Naples (reigned 1386 to 1414),[1] it became one of the most important churches in the city, the seat of a prestigious theological college founded by the king in 1404, and where his memory endures in what is the most magnificent of all surviving fifteenth-century tombs, the *Funerary Monument of King Ladislaus of Durazzo* (Fig. 1).

Filling the entire wall of the chancel, and rising 18 metres from the floor to the apex of the vault, it is remarkable not only for its colossal size, the richness of its sculptural detail, and as a visual paean to the glories of the Angevin-Durazzo dynasty. It is also exceptional in that its patron, and the driving force behind its construction, was not a man but the king’s sister and successor as ruler of Naples, Queen Giovanna II (reigned 1414 to 1435).

The monument is largely undocumented, but was probably begun around 1420 and finished before the Queen’s death fifteen years later. Members of the theological college were almost certainly responsible for its complex iconographic programme, and their connections with Tuscany and Lombardy helped recruit the stonemasons and sculptors from Florence, Pisa and Lucca who were responsible for its execution. Like Donatello and Michelozzo’s exactly contemporary Brancacci Monument for the Neapolitan church of Sant’Angelo a Nilo, many of the figures would have been carved in the workshops of Pisa and Lucca, shipped to Naples, and then finished, and painted and gilded, on site by local craftsmen. Although the work of many sculptors over at least a decade, the variety of forms and variations in style across the four tiers of the structure retain a coherence that does not detract from its stupendous effect, a discipline no doubt imposed by the constant attention of its patron, Giovanna II.

The monument rests on four gigantic statues of the Virtues, bearing the weight of the throne room where the royal siblings sit in state. Above them, the King’s body is laid out on a bier in a funerary chapel, his obsequies performed by his royal ancestor, the mitred St Louis of Toulouse, and two acolytes; whilst in triumph at the summit of the monument the ‘Divine Ladislaus’ raises his sword high above his head, about to spur his warhorse into battle.

Fig. 1: Tuscan sculptors, Funerary Monument of King Ladislaus of Durazzo*, begun after 1414, completed before 1435. Stone and marble, 18 x 10 m, with traces of paint and gilding; figures in the second tier wall niches painted by Leonardo da Besozzo, on the left side* St John the Baptist*, on the right side* St Augustine*, c. 1430. San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons*

Overwhelming in scale and grandeur, Ladislaus’s tomb is not devoid of humour or pathos, a trait typical of the princely art of the early fifteenth century. Below the figure of St Paul, who stands in the niche immediately to the left of the enthroned king, a playful spiritello, one of the winged spirits that in antiquity carried the soul up to heaven, is poised to urinate on the massive head of Fortitude, in what must have been an intentional and typically courtly jest at the expense of Virtue.

Fig. 2: Tuscan and Lombard artists, Caracciolo del Sole Chapel *looking towards the* Funerary Monument of Sergianni Caracciolo, c. 1425 -1440*. San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples. Photograph: Geoffrey Nuttall*

Though easily overlooked, beautifully carved inscriptions run the length of the entablatures, plausibly composed by Giovanna in memory of her beloved brother. An extract reads, 'Alas, with many tears, his most illustrious sister Queen Joan, gave her brother this beautiful monument.'

Though Giovanna's devotion to Ladislaus remained steadfast, as a woman, and childless, she relied on the support of the local aristocracy to keep her in power, and above all the Gran Seneschal of Naples, Sergianni Caracciolo, whom she took as her lover, purely for reasons of state, in 1416. He thereby obtained permission to build a new chapel behind the chancel (Fig. 2).

The dome of the octagonal chapel, begun around 1427, has collapsed many times, but the decoration of its walls and floor, and Sergianni's tomb, still present a stunning mid-fifteenth-century ensemble of fresco, marble, and maiolica, unequalled anywhere else in Naples, and all the more intriguing in its history as it was Giovanna who in 1432, whilst the chapel was still under construction, had her quarrelsome lover murdered.

Flanking the entrance are four scenes from the *Life of the Virgin*. The first is *The Birth and The Annunciation* by the Milanese painter and miniaturist, Leonardo da Besozzo, who before coming to Naples had worked with his more famous father, Michellino, for the Visconti. He was already in Naples in the 1420s, and around 1430 painted the St John and St Augustine figures in the outer wall niches of the Ladislaus tomb for Giovanna II mentioned earlier. After completing the *Life of the Virgin*, around 1438, he stayed on in the city, to become court painter to the kingdom's first Aragonese

Fig. 3: Leonardo da Besozzo, The Birth of the Virgin*, c. 1435. Fresco. Caracciolo del Sole Chapel, San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons*

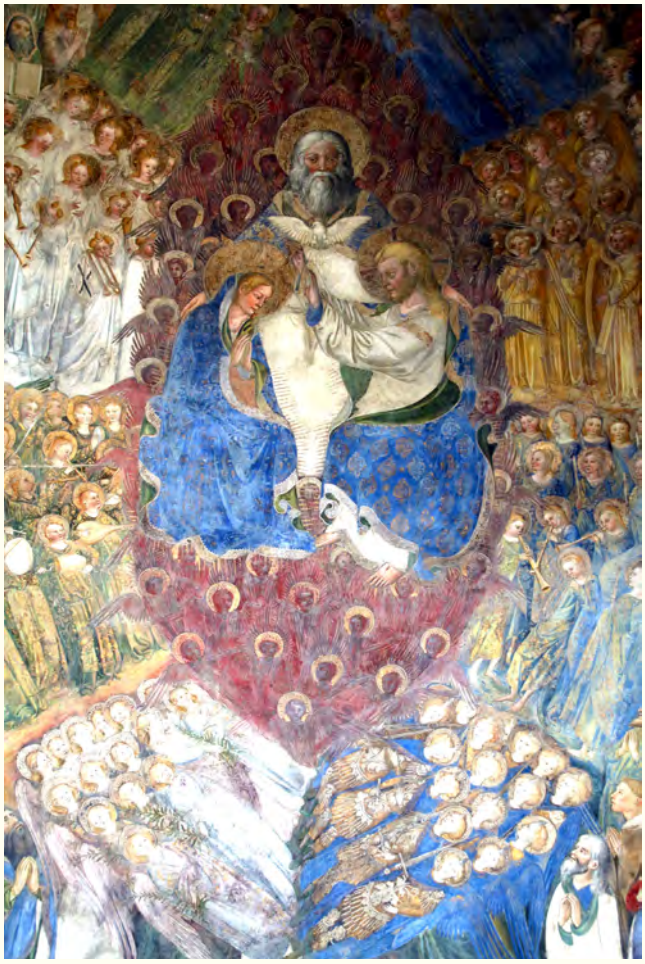

Fig. 4: Leonardo da Besozzo, The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1435. Caracciolo del Sole Chapel, San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples. Photograph: Geoffrey Nuttall*

ruler, Alfonso 'The Magnanimous'. In *The Birth of the Virgin*, signed by the artist, Leonardo applied all the elegance, charm and acute powers of observation associated with the courtly style of Milan and Pavia, in a setting drawn from the architecture, domestic interiors, and fashions of fifteenth-century Naples (Fig. 3).

The Virgin's house is a Neapolitan palace, a similar façade still surviving in the palace of King Ladislaus's secretary, Antonio Penna. At the foot of the staircase, in the family colours of black and white, stands one of the Caracciolo, probably Sergianni himself, escorted by a liveried falconer, and to the left, returning our gaze, is the aristocratically clad Leonardo da Besozzo, sporting a fantastic fur hat worthy of his contemporary Pisanello. The Virgin herself sits up in bed amongst a bevy of female attendants who wash, dry and fold the Christ Child's swaddling clothes, whilst all around them the household, and its pets, get on with their daily routines – hanging out the washing, bringing fresh water down the staircase, gutting a chicken on the kitchen window ledge, all of them oblivious to the fox stealing a hen on the palace roof. Equally engaging, though badly damaged, are *Scenes from the Lives of the Augustinian Friars* by a south Italian artist, Perinetto da Benevento, of around 1440. These encircle the lower walls, suggesting the chapel served as the Friars' chapter house, as well as the Caraccioli's funerary chapel.

Work on the chapel came to a halt after Sergianni's murder in 1432, to resume after the Queen's death in 1435 and the arrival of the Aragonese. Perhaps as a mark of allegiance to the Caraccioli's new masters, the chapel's remarkable, vibrantly coloured floor is laid with hundreds of bespoke maiolica tiles imported from Sardinia, then part of the Aragonese empire. Sergianni's tomb, facing Leonardo's glittering *Coronation of the Virgin* on the opposite wall, was completed in the 1440s (Fig. 4).

Sergianni stands atop his sarcophagus, a rather puny figure in comparison to the three bold heroes of classical antiquity bearing the weight of the sarcophagus. These are almost certainly the work of Lombard sculptors and contemporary with the Ladislaus monument, whereas the upper sections were commissioned in the 1440s by Sergianni's heirs, and attributed to a Tuscan sculptor, who also worked on the Ladislaus tomb, Andrea da Firenze. Not without irony, to enter the chapel Sergianni's sons had to pass beneath the statue of the woman who had murdered their father, their hatred of the Angevin Queen written for all to read in his epitaph on the face of the sarcophagus, likening his fate to Julius Caesar's, murdered by those he had thought most loyal.

Where the fifteenth-century Caracciolo del Sole chapel uses fresco and maiolica to create its dazzling effect, the sixteenth-century Caracciolo di Vico chapel, just to the left of the Ladislaus tomb, and said to be the first work of the High Renaissance in Naples, is sumptuous in its exclusive use of Carrara marble, imperial porphyry and antique marbles (Fig. 5).

Dedicated to the Feast of the Epiphany, its altarpiece of *The Adoration of the Magi* is dated between 1514 and 1517, the work of two Spanish-born sculptors, Diego de Siloé and Bartolomé Ordóñez. The predella, of St George and the Dragon, references the artists' time in Florence, emulating Donatello's *St George and the Dragon* at Orsanmichele of a century before. Looking rather self-conscious, Ferdinand III, the portly Aragonese king of Naples, features in the guise of a Magi, kneeling beneath a pair of trumpeters lifted, somewhat incongruously, from Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar*. Though Ferdinand was probably dead by the time the altarpiece was installed, his presence in the chapel testifies to the high standing of the Caraccioli at the Aragonese court, and tombs of later family members that gird the chapel's walls testify to their continued favour through two centuries of Hapsburg rule, starting with the inheritance of Naples by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, in 1516.[2] The most impressive of the chapel's dozen tombs are those of Galeazzo Caracciolo, its founder, and of his son Nicolantonio, who both spent their lives fighting in the armies of Charles V. The masterpiece is Nicolantonio's monument, dated 1574, by two Neapolitan sculptors, Giovanni Domenico D'Auria and Annibale Caccavello.

Like the Ladislaus monument and the chapel of the Caracciolo del Sole, what makes San Giovanni a Carbonara

Fig. 5: Caracciolo di Vico Chapel *(in the centre,* The Adoration of the Magi *altarpiece, 1514-1517; on the left,* Funerary Monument of Galeazzo Caracciolo*, 1550; on the right,* Funerary Monument of Nicolantonio Caracciolo*, 1574). San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples. Photograph: Wikimedia Creative Commons*

such a wonderful microcosm of Renaissance sculpture is that the Caracciolo di Vico chapel takes inspiration from innovations made in other parts of Italy to create a distinctive Neapolitan style. For example, its structure and sculptural detail derive from Venice and Lombardy, whilst the naked youths flanking the pediment recall Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling, and the Medici Tombs in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo in Florence.

The Via Carbonara is no longer an open sewer, but the church, half hidden from the street by an indifferent eighteenth-century staircase, remains well off the tourist track. Though this is in some ways sad, seeing the Ladislaus tomb for the first time, rising in awesome silence before you, is an unforgettable experience; and the discovery of other masterpieces still to be explored leaves one incredulous at having one of the great treasure houses of Naples all to oneself.

Geoffrey Nuttall is an independent art historian specialising in Lucca and the Lucchese diaspora across Europe during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. He gained his PhD, *Lucchese Artistic Patronage and the Purveyance of Luxury: 1400-1430*, at the Courtauld Institute, London, in 2013. He has since taught at the Courtauld, V&A, and the London Art History Society. He has published widely on Lucchese artistic patronage, most recently in *The Burlington Magazine*, February 2025 (*Lucchese Patronage in Papal Avignon: the Chapel of Carlo Spiafame in Notre-Dame-des-Doms*).

Further Reading

There is very little written in English about San Giovanni a Carbonara beyond tourist guides, but for the chapels, the relevant entries in Tommaso Astarita, *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013); and the recently published *A Companion to the Renaissance in Southern Italy*, by Bianca De Vitis, (Paderborn, Germany: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2023), are good starting points. For the Aragonese rulers of Naples, see the relevant chapter in: Alison Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016). Remarkably, there is nothing comprehensive, in any language, about the Ladislaus monument, but there is a dedicated book on the Caracciolo del Sole chapel in Italian which also discusses the Ladislaus monument, Anna Delle Foglie, *La cappella Caracciolo del Sole a San Giovanni a Carbonara* (Rome: Centro Culturale Agostiniano, 2011). In English, there is an unpublished PhD thesis on the Caracciolo di Vico Chapel: Charlotte F. Nichols, *The Caracciolo di Vico Chapel in Naples and early cinquecento architecture*, NYU, 1988, which can be obtained online from ProQuest, and includes short chapters on the Ladislaus and Caracciolo del Sole monuments.

Notes

1 Ladislaus and his sister Giovanna were born in Zadar, Croatia, and took his title, 'of Durazzo', from what is now the city of Durrës in Albania. Their father, Charles III, had conquered Naples in 1382.

2 Charles V was the son of Philip le Bel and Joanna of Castile, and became heir to Castile, Aragon and their respective domains after the death of Ferdinand III of Naples in 1516.

The eighteenth-century garden grotto

James Christopher Joyce

'And after having remained at the entry for some time, two contrary emotions arouse in me, fear and desire – fear of the threatening dark grotto, desire to see whether there were any marvelous things within it'.[1]

Leonardo da Vinci

In his influential *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), Thomas Whately classifies garden features as either emblems, which represent a single idea, or expressions, which convey a particular emotion.[2] This interpretation has been widely accepted by garden historians, who have generally viewed landscape architecture as communicating a fixed, singular meaning or sensation. However, while this framework may apply to many garden features, it fails to capture the complexity, fluidity, and ambivalence of the grotto, which, as da Vinci noted, evokes 'contrary emotions'.[3] To fully appreciate the grotto, therefore, this article sets aside the conventional view of garden architecture as either emblems or expressions in favour of examining the grotto as a dynamic site of multiple, contrasting concepts and sensations.

Perhaps foremost amongst these contrasts is the relationship between art and nature. The grotto's reputation as a site that seamlessly combines these two concepts dates back to antiquity. In Ovid's portrayal of Diana's grotto, for instance, the poet describes a wondrous subterranean scene where 'Nature had used her talent to imitate art'.[4] This fluid relationship – in which art and nature are almost indistinguishable – remained a defining characteristic of the grotto into the eighteenth century. For example, in Claude Du Bosc's engraving of the Hermitage in Richmond (Fig. 1), the broken pediment of the structure, from which trees and shrubs have sprouted, announces a clear lack of division between the natural and the artificial. Indeed, Du Bosc further emphasises the blurred boundary between art and nature at the grotto through the decorative elements surrounding the image. He achieves this by wrapping natural-looking flowers around the more regular, artificial-looking frame. This not only unites nature and art but also creates the illusion that the garlands cross the picture plane, transgressing the boundary that separates the viewer's world from that of the grotto. In this respect, the flowers challenge the artificial boundary created by the frame, mirroring the way nature challenges the architectural boundaries of the Hermitage.

Looking inside the structure, the fluid interplay between art and nature at the grotto creates a dynamic and transformative environment. In John Vardy's engraving

Fig. 1: Claude Du Bosc (1682-1745), after Hubert-Francois Gravelot (1699-1773), View of the Hermitage in the Royal Garden at Richmond, *1730-37. Etching on paper, 36.6 x 26 cm. British Museum, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under CC-BY-NC-SA-4.0.*

of the Hermitage's interior (Fig. 2) a number of pointed and irregularly shaped objects descend from the ceiling, with a similar design repeated on the room's frieze. These architectural embellishments are designed to resemble naturally occurring stalactites found in caves. Not only do these artificial yet natural-looking objects blur the distinction between art and nature, but their hybridity also suggests that nature has merged with art to produce novel forms. It is as if the natural forces resting above the Hermitage have seeped down through the grotto's roof and, upon meeting the artifice of the interior, fused with art to create these new part-architectural, part-natural stalactite

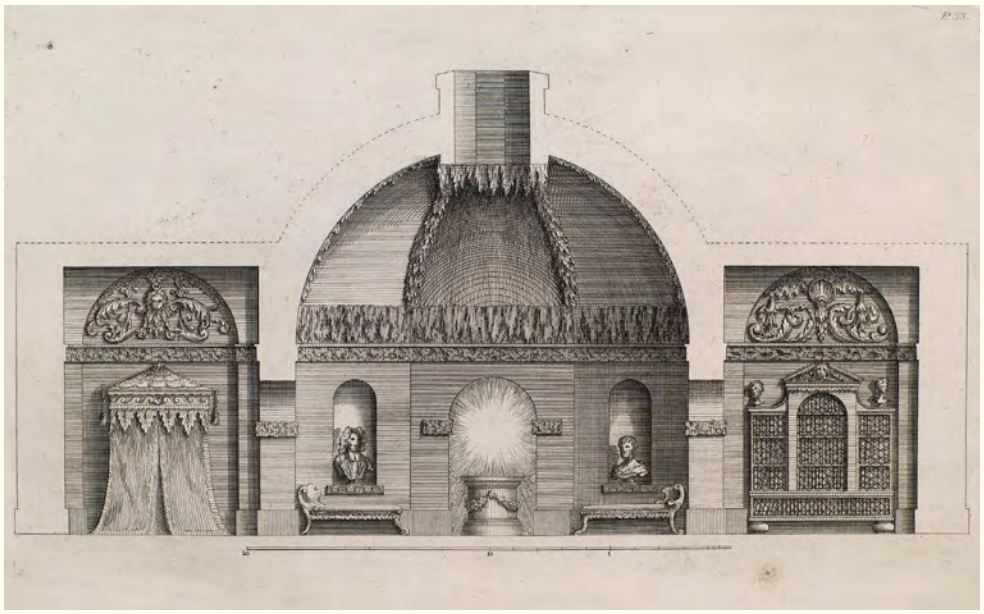

Fig. 2: John Vardy after Inigo Jones and William Kent, Some designs of Mr Inigo Jones and Mr Wm Kent*, 1744. Etching on paper. © Royal Collection Enterprises Limited. Royal Collection Trust.*

shapes.[5] Thus, far from being a fixed and unchanging environment, the porous boundary between art and nature at the grotto creates a dynamic and generative space from which new forms can emerge.

In addition to representing the concepts of art and nature, the grotto also offers a meeting point for science and religion, particularly through the display of geological specimens. Begun in 1720, Alexander Pope's grotto in Twickenham (Fig. 3) was originally conceived as a *nymphaeum* or *musaeum* – a space that provided the poet with a creative sanctuary in which he might commune with the water nymphs and muses.[6] However, after visiting the rock formations at Hotwells Spa in 1739, Pope developed an interest in geology and began transforming his grotto to resemble the interior of a mine. His goal was to create a geologically accurate site where each mineral appeared 'in their several natural Strata'.[7] To achieve this, he consulted William Borlase, the renowned Cornish antiquarian and naturalist, procuring minerals and advice to create an environment that would 'resemble Nature in all her workings'.[8] Yet, by constructing a space that accurately displayed the interior of the Earth, Pope not only presented a scientific account of the planet's structure but also revealed the divine hand of its creator. This notion – that science led to an understanding of God – was articulated in the doctrine of physico-theology. For instance, William Denham, in his *Physico-Theology* of 1713, used scientific enquiry as both a defence against atheism and as a way to understand the creator, asserting that by studying nature, we are presented with a 'demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God'.[9] Indeed, Borlase was also an advocate, claiming in the *Natural History of Cornwall* that the 'principal use' of scientific enquiry was that 'it leads us directly to Religion'.[10] Consequently, Pope's grotto bridged science and divinity, as its geologically accurate display underpinned the existence of God by providing a means by which His intelligence and design could be more readily apprehended.

Whilst embodying the overlapping concepts of art, nature, science and religion, the grotto was also ambivalently positioned between permanence and impermanence. One way this was conveyed was through running water, which represented both the eternal nature of

Fig. 3: Samuel Lewis, Pope's Grotto*, 1786. Etching on paper. Item reference number LCP/3356. By kind permission of Richmond upon Thames Local Studies Library and Archives.*

Fig. 4: John Cheere, River God*, 1751. Painted white lead, 198 x 117 cm. Stourhead, Wiltshire. Photograph: Mike Peel shared under CC-BY-SA-4.0.*

time and the fleetingness of human existence. For example, at Stourhead, in the dark recess of the grotto's outer chamber, John Cheere's 1751 statue of a river god sits upon an amphora that pours water into the basin below (Fig. 4). Described in the guidebook of 1818 as 'a never-failing stream', in one sense this uninterrupted flow symbolises the eternal stream of time.[11] However, it also signifies the brevity of human life. During a visit to the grotto in 1762, Horace Walpole penned a couplet describing the scene, writing:

> *This Stream, like Time, still hastens from my Urn,*
> *Forever rolling, never to return.*[12]

Whilst these words liken the flow of water to time's 'Forever rolling' stream, the accompanying sense of loss – that things once gone are 'never to return' – serves as a poignant reminder of the transience of human life.[13] So, whilst the continuous flow of water at the grotto can be understood to represent time's eternal passage, it also conveys the momentariness of human existence.

As a site where contrasting concepts and sensations converge within a dynamic and creative environment, the grotto resists classification as merely an emblem or an expression. Instead, the structure occupies a unique place in the English garden, offering visitors a multifaceted and metamorphic experience. For those wishing to commune with the water nymphs today, fortunately, there is no need to search far. The popularity of grottoes during the eighteenth century has left a rich legacy for the modern tourist. Pope's Grotto in Twickenham has recently been reopened to the public following a significant restoration, and while the Hermitage was lost in the 1750s, the grotto at Stourhead in Wiltshire remains a theatrical highlight of the garden's circuit walk. Designed to be encountered directly, grottoes invite close engagement, and I encourage all who can to appreciate in person one of the garden's most complex and intriguing structures.

James Christopher Joyce recently completed an MA in Art History at Birkbeck, University of London, where he was awarded the Murray Prize for the best dissertation. Originally trained as an actor, he has a passion for the arts and hopes to continue researching and writing about the eighteenth-century garden.

Notes

1 Leonardo da Vinci, *Codex Arundel*, British Library, London, MS Arundel 263, fol. 155r.

2 Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening*, 2nd edn. (London, Printed for T. Payne, 1770), pp. 151–4.

3 Leonardo da Vinci, *Codex Arundel*, fol. 155r.

4 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin Books, 2004), Book 3, lines 158–9.

5 Diana Balmori describes the stalactites as evidence that nature has 'seep[ed] through the boundary created by art' in 'Architecture, Landscape, and the Intermediate Structure: Eighteenth-Century Experiments in Mediation', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 50, no. 1 (1991), p. 50.

6 Anthony Beckles Wilson, 'Alexander Pope's Grotto in Twickenham', *Garden History*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1998), p. 38.

7 Benjamin Boyce, 'Mr Pope, in Bath, improves the design of his grotto' in Katherine Myers, 'Shaftesbury, Pope, and Original Sacred Nature', *Garden History*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2010), p. 15.

8 Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. by George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) iv, p. 228.

9 William Derham, *Physico-Theology: or, a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from his Works of Creation*, 6th edn (London, Printed for W. and J. Innys, 1723). The quote is taken from the section 'To the Reader', unpaginated.

10 William Borlase, *Natural History of Cornwall* (Oxford: Printed for the Author, 1758), p. iv.

11 Richard Colt Hoare, *A Description of the House and Gardens at Stourhead* (Bath: Barratt and Son, 1818), p. 24.

12 Horace Walpole *in* Paget Toynbee, ed., 'Horace Walpole's Journals of Visits to Country Seats, & co.' *The Walpole Society*, vol. 16, (1927–28), p. 43.

13 ibid, p. 43.

Remembering John McNeill

John McNeill, our Vice-President and regular lecturer, died suddenly in December last year. He was an acknowledged expert on Romanesque architecture and sculpture, and had lectured extensively on the subject since the 1980s for Birkbeck in London, Oxford University and various other educational institutions. His association with our London Art History Society, then called ULEMHAS, began over forty years ago.

John was born in Scunthorpe in Lincolnshire, but grew up in Retford in Nottinghamshire, where he attended the King Edward VI Grammar School. He studied art history at the University of East Anglia, followed by a Master's Degree at the Courtauld Institute in London. He began teaching in continuing education institutions, including Birkbeck, from the 1980s. In 2001 he became Secretary of the British Archaeological Association (BAA), for whom he organised the biennial International Romanesque Conference. He wrote the *Blue Guide to Normandy* (1993) and *The Loire Valley* (1995), and articles for many journals, including our own *London Art History Society Review*.

He was also an inspiring tour leader for Birkbeck, Martin Randall Travel, and on his own architectural tours in Europe and the UK for a group of regular enthusiasts, his 'Mavericks'. Typically standing before a church west front or in a medieval cloister, he communicated his enormous knowledge and enthusiasm for Romanesque and Gothic architecture and sculpture. All who went on them have warm memories of his seemingly tireless energy, patience and kindness on these tours.

Latterly, he had lived in Oxford with his wife Anna Eavis, who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Oxford Preservation Trust, and their son Freddie. John will be sorely missed by so many colleagues and generations of students.

Some of our members share their memories of John.

John McNeill at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, 2023.
Photograph: John Peverley

He was an acknowledged expert on the Romanesque:

Susan Nettle: John was an outstanding Romanesque scholar. I first met John McNeill in 1992 when he taught me on one of his final Birkbeck Extra Mural courses on 'Early Christian to Romanesque art and architecture', [and again when] I finally joined the British Archaeological Association in 2013. John was, for more than twenty years, the ultimate learned society Secretary, quietly efficient, yet with huge energy to develop new projects. During those years he convened two annual conferences, and initiated eight international Romanesque conferences. Many of his published papers appeared in the peer-reviewed *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* and the *Antiquaries Journal*. John was also an editor, and a reviewer, most notably for *The Burlington Magazine*.

He was an inspirational teacher and lecturer:

John Peacock. I did attend many of his lectures and can confirm that they were extraordinary experiences on several levels. Firstly, and most obviously, John had powers of memory and for the retention of facts that were beyond prodigious. Speaking at length, always energetic, always super-articulate, John would lecture almost entirely without notes. It was spell-binding to witness. Secondly, his command of his subject areas was totally comprehensive, extremely insightful above all authoritative. He was quite unique and, most sadly for all of us in the London Art History Society, simply irreplaceable.

Barrie MacDonald: I will always be grateful to John for introducing me to the world of medieval architecture, whether in his lectures to our Society, or on his study tours. He generously gave us his vast knowledge of the architecture of churches, cathedrals and monasteries, with its often colourful terminology of joggled voussoirs or nodding ogees, and passed on his passion for the beauty and innovation of Romanesque and Gothic buildings.

Rosemary Clarke: I loved John's tremendous enthusiasm and encyclopaedic knowledge of medieval architecture

and sculpture. I was impressed with what must have been a photographic memory whereby he could point out comparisons between architectural features from buildings across Europe.

Jacqueline Leigh (writing in the *ULEMHAS Review 2010*): Looking at a building with John fixes it in the memory. Whenever possible he does arrange the sequence of visits to catch the west fronts in the very best light even though, due to the vagaries of the weather, we all have our tales to tell of huddling in portals trying to pick out sculptural details in driving rain. He is a superb architectural photographer, and his slides do more than illustrate his lectures, they illuminate them. Although it is architecture which has been the centre of his teaching he has led us through sculptural decoration, mosaics, murals, manuscript painting and some wonderful accounts of the making and function of stained glass.

Norah Moss. I started volunteering for the London Art History Society in 2018. The first event that I was given to look after was a John McNeill 'Cathedrals' course. I was assured it would be easy to manage – John was extremely experienced and would know exactly what to do. There was just one little thing – John's tendency to over-run. Would I please deal with this? It all sounded straightforward enough. It wasn't! I was probably the only person who wasn't aware that John had been over-running for many years and wasn't likely to stop now. Over the next few years I worked with John regularly and very harmoniously. Like a number of others, I was devastated at the news of his death, but feel so lucky that our paths crossed.

He was a brilliant and energetic tour leader:

Janice Price: John McNeill – possibly the man with the longest legs and the most energy of anyone I have ever known. Many years of Birkbeck lectures, ULEMHAS trips and the privilege of joining the Mavs with John's tours in the UK and Europe. He called us his 'merry band' – how could we have been anything else with such a charming, inexhaustible, unflappable companion, whose range of scholarly passion was matched with a genuine teacher's ability to impart a great deal of information with clarity, engaging the brain and making you eager to find out more.

Michael Pearson: It has been remarkable travelling with John. The memorable thing is visiting the most obscure churches and monasteries. I think this was the most spectacular part of any tour.

Gaynor Humphreys: What springs to mind in remembering John is the way every new church or Roman villa became an enthusiastically shared enterprise. 'My little band' could be egged on to the seventh site of the day and won over by John's love of communicating its delights. Never mind that he told you more of its history than you could possibly remember (while standing outside in the heat or rain); once inside he brought the place to life and gently taught you how to read the stones and never miss a vault springer or an interesting *en délit*.

Paul Morris: On the final day of a trip to Segovia and Burgos [in 2024], we had traversed a dramatic landscape of looming hills and precipitous gorges to arrive at a tiny [seventh-century] chapel at Quintanilla de las Vinas where John gave an enthralling account of the shifts of peoples and ideologies over the centuries before zooming our attention in (like a film director) to the intimate details of carved symbols and configurations of stonework on this remote and beautiful chapel. This was a memorable example of what a tremendous storyteller and teacher John was, embracing the big picture and the smallest of details in one compelling narrative.

He was indefatigable in the face of adversity:

Barrie MacDonald: Before the Portugal tour in 2022, he had had an eye operation and on medical grounds couldn't fly out with us, so undeterred he set off on a long alternative journey down to Lisbon to meet us on our arrival at the airport, where he made a dramatic entrance wearing a black protective eye patch which, of course, he usually forgot to wear during the tour.

Paul Morris: One memorable moment occurred almost at the very end of a trip to Italy when John took us to the fountains and gardens at Tivoli. It was tipping down with rain and John had dramatically slipped on a wet pavement, leaping out of the bus at the start of the visit - he masked whatever pain he must inevitably have been in with cheery exhortations to make the most of our time. At the end of the morning, dripping with rain, mobile in hand, no doubt aching with bruises from his earlier slip, shepherding twenty-plus damp and sluggish travellers onto the bus he had just directed into an impossible parking place, John turned and said: 'I love doing this … when it all comes together!'

Many recall his good humour and kindness:

Celia Jones: On one of the first of John's own tours that I went on with his 'mavericks', we were in Tournus in Burgundy. John said that the abbey, along with many other ecclesiastical buildings, would have been painted white. A novice in this world, I was stunned to think of a landscape full of white buildings. Outside the abbey I said to John, 'Are you sure?' John furled down to me from his great height. 'Celia', he said, in that way he had of exaggerated patience and mock pity, 'I am considered an expert in my field'. With all the brazenness of ignorance, unabashed, I replied, 'Yes, but how do you know?' He took me by the hand as one might a child and led me to a spot on the outside wall. 'There', he said, pointing triumphantly to the remains of some whitewash in crevices. 'You see?' laughing at my expression. John, the self-deprecating expert with a delightfully teasing sense of humour.

Caroline Beamish: Looking back, I am reminded of the meticulous planning made by John before each trip. He also took the greatest care of his group, apparently aware of our differing needs as we grew older and older. In addition to his general thoughtfulness and kindness, his sense of humour kept us going, and his communication skills never seemed to flag. What an admirable man. John, we will miss you sorely.

Michael Pearson: It is the end of an era. What are we going to do now, I wonder.

Forthcoming art exhibitions

Exhibition details and dates are taken from the named institutions' website and are not guaranteed. Please check the exhibition timing and ticket availability before travelling. For regular updated information about public and private art gallery exhibitions see the Art in London *section of the London Art History Society website for the* London Exhibition Listings*, and also the monthly* e-News Bulletin*.*

London

Buckingham Palace
Summer opening of the State Rooms
10 July-28 September 2025.

Design Museum
Wes Anderson: the archives
Exploration of Wes Anderson's aesthetic.
21 November 2025-26 July 2026

Dulwich Picture Gallery
Anna Ancher
A major exhibition featuring more than 40 of her paintings.
4 November 2025-8 March 2026

Kenwood House, Hampstead
Heiress: Sargent's American portraits
16 May-5 October 2025

The King's Gallery
The Edwardians: Age of Elegance
Works by Fabergé, Leighton, Burne-Jones, Sargent and Morris.
11 April-23 November 2025

The National Gallery
Wright of Derby: From the Shadows
The first major exhibition dedicated to Joseph Wright of Derby's 'candlelight' paintings.
7 November 2025-10 May 2026

Edwin Austin Abbey: By the Dawn's Early Light
Features Abbey's study for *The Hours*.
20 November 2025-15 February 2026

Millet: Life on the Land
A retrospective, marking the 150th anniversary of his death.
7 August-19 October 2025

The National Portrait Gallery
Herbert Smith Freehills Portrait Award 2025
Contemporary portraiture competition.
10 July-12 October 2025

Taylor Wessing: Photo Portrait Prize 2025
Contemporary photography competition
13 November 2025-8 February 2026

Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World
This exhibition will showcase Beaton from the Jazz Age to the high fashion brilliance of the fifties.
9 October 2025-11 January 2026

Royal Academy of Arts
Kiefer/Van Gogh
See work by both artists side by side.
28 June-26 October 2025

Summer Exhibition
17 June-17 August 2025

Michaelina Wautier
A seventeenth-century female trailblazer rediscovered
27 March-21 June 2026

Tate Britain
Lee Miller Retrospective
A retrospective, showcasing her French surrealism, fashion, and war photography.
2 October 2025-15 February 2026

Turner and Constable
Marking 250 years since their births, this landmark exhibition explores Turner and Constable's intertwined lives and legacies.
27 November 2025-12 April 2026

James McNeill Whistler
The first major European exhibition in 30 years.
21 May-27 September 2026

Tate Modern
Picasso: The Three Dancers
Celebrating the work's centenary.
17 September 2025-12 April 2026

Tracey Emin
Tracing 40 years of Emin's groundbreaking practice.
26 February-31 August 2026

Frida: The Making of an Icon
130 works from Frida Kahlo's archives.
25 June 2026-4 January 2027

V&A
Cartier
350 items charting the development of Cartier.
12 April-16 November 2025

Outside London

Lightbox Gallery, Woking
Andy Warhol – ARTIST ROOMS
Warhol's work spanning his career from the 1950s–80s.
19 July-2 November 2025

Whitworth, Manchester
Turner: In Light and Shade
Turner's prints, particularly the Liber Studiorum series, not shown in full since 1922.
7 February-2 November 2025

The Ashmolean, Oxford
THIS IS WHAT YOU GET: STANLEY DONWOOD/RADIOHEAD/THOM YORKE
The thirty-year collaboration of Stanley Donwood and Thom Yorke of Radiohead.
6 August 2025-11 January 2026

Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years
200 works, including expansive new installations built in-situ.
26 July-2 November 2025

Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
Turner: Always Contemporary
Turner's own work and his continuing impact.
25 October 2025-22 February 2026

Derby Museum & Art Gallery
Joseph Wright of Derby: Life on Paper
Exploring the role of drawing within the story of Wright's life through 50 works on paper.
23 May-7 September 2025

Overseas Exhibitions

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Sargent: The Paris Years (1874-1884)
John Singer Sargent in France. Over 90 works.
23 September 2025-11 January 2026

The Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin
The Scharf Collection: Goya-Monet-Degas-Bonnard-Grosse
First exhibition of a private collection of 19th- and 20th-century French, and contemporary international art.
24 October 2025-15 February 2026

Programme 2025-2026

The events listed are accurate at the time of publication, but members are reminded to check details on the website before booking as they may have changed, as well as new events added.

Lectures are free to members, but registration is required. The cost of other individual events will vary: updated information will be posted on the Society website and circulated in the monthly emails and e-bulletins.

LECTURES

Thursday 16 October 2025 6pm
Toulouse-Lautrec: from Albi to Paris
Juliet Heslewood
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 26 November 2025 6pm
John McNeill Memorial Lecture. The Romsey Rood: an Anglo-Saxon artefact in the Anglo-Norman world
Dr Richard Plant
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild following the Society AGM at 5pm

Tuesday 13 January 2026 6pm
Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Indian cashmere shawl
Dr Jennifer van Schoor
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 4 March 2026 6pm
"I was a rich man's plaything": pop art in Britain
Dr Ben Street
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 8 April 2026 6pm
Exemplars of twentieth-century British design on the Tube
Mike Grundy
Online via Zoom

Wednesday 10 June 2026 6pm
Mars and the muses: the Renaissance art of armour
Dr Tobias Capwell
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild

SHORT COURSES

Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 September 2025 11am-4.30pm
Architecture through the ages
Dr Steven Brindle
Online via Zoom

8 January to 5 February 2026
Thursdays 11am-1pm
Not the Dark Ages
Dr Sally Dormer
In-person at Lettsom House

12 February to 19 March 2026
Thursdays 11am-1pm
(omitting 12 March)
Understanding the Italian Renaissance: history, society and the rise of the artist
Dr Dorigen Caldwell
Online via Zoom

2, 3 and 4 June 2026
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
11am-1pm
Forging the Baroque: histories of Neapolitan art in the long seventeenth century
Dr Giulia Martina Weston
Online via Zoom

STUDY DAYS

Tuesday 30 September 2025
11am-4.30pm
Gertrude Stein and Paris
Dr Kathy McLaughlan
In-person at Lettsom House

Wednesday 22 October 2025
11am-4.30pm
Art of the pharoahs
Prof Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones
Online via Zoom

Tuesday 28 October 2025
11am-4.30pm
Ravenna: a treasury of mosaics
Dr Cecily Hennessy
In-person at Lettsom House

Friday 5 December 2025
11am-4.30pm
Hanseatic patronage
Dr Zoë Opačić
In-person at Lettsom House

Wednesday 11 February 2026
11am-4.30pm
Heraldry
Adam Tuck, Lancaster Herald of Arms
In-person TBA

STUDY DAYS & WALKS

Wednesday 3 September 2025
2.30pm-4.30pm
Worcester Cathedral
Dr Hugh Doherty

Friday 10 October 2025
11am-3.30pm
William Morris Society and Emery Walker House
Curator

Monday 8 December 2025
11am-12pm
British Library conservation studio
Curator

Wednesday 20 May 2026
Time TBA
Canterbury Cathedral
Dr Sally Dormer

Additional study events will be announced during the year

London Art History Society

Affiliated to Birkbeck History of Art, University of London

Honorary President: Clare Ford-Wille

COMMITTEE

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