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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or members of the Review Editorial Panel.

From the Editor

In our first article we celebrate the tercentenary of the death of the English architect Sir John Vanbrugh with an article by Charles Saumarez Smith on the design and construction of Castle Howard in Yorkshire.

As a preview to her forthcoming series of lectures on Vienna 1900 our lecturer, Niccola Shearman, has written about the artists, architects and designers, such as Gustav Klimt, who together with writers, composers and thinkers, contributed to the seismic shift from the city of eternal Baroque to the fulcrum of modernity.

To accompany the current Tate Modern exhibition on the work of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, Jacqueline Cockburn examines extracts from her diary about her sense of dual personality as expressed in her 1939 painting *The Two Fridas*.

Miriam Gill looks at medieval Doom paintings of the Last Judgement on the walls of English parish churches, and questions their purpose, Biblical sources and evolution from the eleventh century until their widespread destruction in the Reformation.

'Without paint in tubes', Pierre-Auguste Renoir is quoted as saying, 'there would have been no Cézanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro, nothing of what journalists were later to call Impressionism'; Kathy McLauchlan assesses how the mid-nineteenth invention of tin tubes for paints enabled artists to paint outdoors, *en plein air*, and led to advances in landscape painting.

The cycle of paintings on the life of Saint Jerome by Vittore Carpaccio in the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in Venice has recently been restored, and Anya Waddington, who won the latest Murray Prize for the Best Early Period MA Dissertation at Birkbeck, looks at what we have learnt from the restoration, in particular of *Saint Augustine in His Study*.

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.

Sadly, our former editor, Liz Newlands, died earlier this year. I would like to pay tribute to her huge contribution to the *Review*, both as editor and panel member for many years. Also, my thanks to the contributors, our designer, and my fellow Review Editorial Panel members.

Barrie MacDonald
Editor, London Art History Society Review

The Review Editorial Panel

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FRONT COVER: Castle Howard. *Photograph © David Valinsky*

Castle Howard revisited

Charles Saumarez Smith

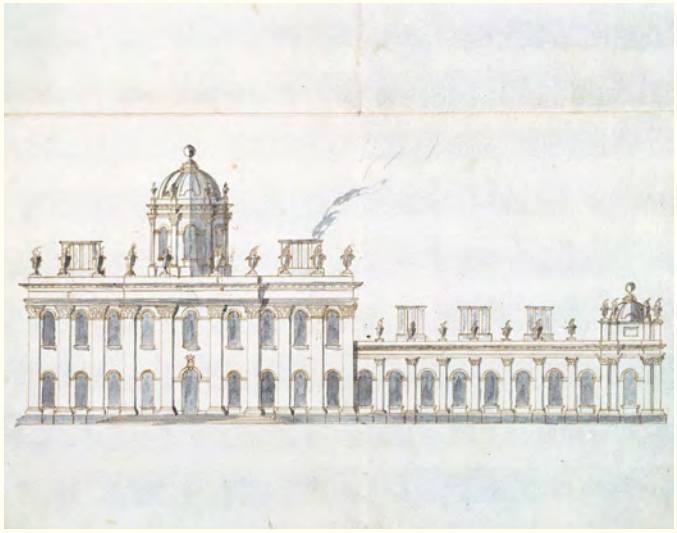


Fig. 1: John Vanbrugh, Sketch design for Castle Howard*, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum E.2825-1995*

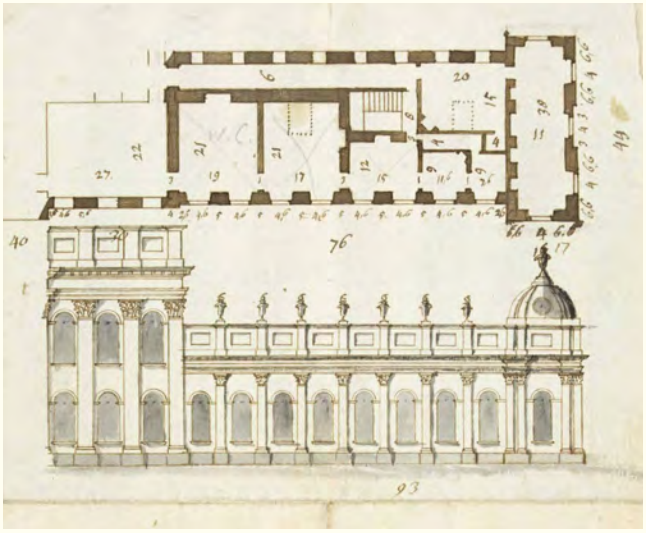


Fig. 2: John Vanbrugh, Architectural drawing of Castle Howard*, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum E.2826-1995*

In early July 1995, two architectural drawings of Castle Howard appeared in a sale at Christie's (Figs. 1 and 2)[1]. They came from the collection of the Marquis of Bute at Mount Stuart and were not, so far as I know, previously known to architectural historians, although a large collection of drawings had previously been sold from Mount Stuart in 1951, many of them acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum and forming the basis for Laurence Whistler's analysis of Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh in his 1954 monograph, *The imagination of Vanbrugh and his fellow artists*.[2]

In making the case for the acquisition of these drawings by the V&A, Michael Snodin, the then Head of the Designs Section, wrote:

> *The lively sketch designs offered by Christie's, which relate directly to the V&A elevation, are extremely important for a proper understanding of the development of the building and of Vanbrugh's role in it. They are Vanbrugh's earliest known sketches, the only developmental sketch designs for the house and the only design drawings to show the building with dome and domed pavilions in place. On a general design level they demonstrate a progression from a comparatively naïve composition with prominent chimneys, no parapet and a small end dome, to (on the second drawing) the deep parapet and larger end dome of the finished conception.*[3]

They were catalogued soon after their acquisition and are freely available online, but I am not convinced that their significance has been fully explored.[4]

Vanbrugh's tercentenary this year has provided an opportunity to show these two drawings in an exhibition, *John Vanbrugh: The Drama of Architecture*, held at Sir John Soane's Museum and to reconsider the issue as to what they tell one about Vanbrugh's ideas of design in the summer of 1699 when he was travelling round the north of England showing off sketches of the great house he planned to replace Henderskelfe Castle in Yorkshire for the third Earl of Carlisle.[5] Over the following decade, these outline ideas turned into Castle Howard.

It has always been regarded as a source of mystery as to how and why Vanbrugh turned himself from an active and successful playwright into an architect (Fig. 3). His conversion attracted the odium of the Irish clergyman, Jonathan Swift, who described how:

Fig. 3: Godfrey Kneller, Sir John Vanbrugh*, c. 1705. Oil on canvas, 91 x 71 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 3231)*

Van's genius, without thought or lecture,
Is hugely turn'd to architecture.[6]

It is worth re-considering the issue: would the Earl of Carlisle really have entrusted an immense building project to someone in whom he didn't have some level of confidence that he had the necessary abilities to oversee such an exceptionally ambitious building project?

These two drawings provide the best evidence as to why the Earl of Carlisle might have turned to Vanbrugh for advice: he had a way of sketching out ideas which demonstrated that he was capable of turning the current conventions of the English country house — four-square and visually self-contained — into something which was more dynamic, more exciting and could hold its own with the German palaces and Roman *palazzi* which the Earl of Carlisle would have seen on his grand tour on the Continent ten years earlier.[7]

A second clue as to why Lord Carlisle might have had faith in Vanbrugh's abilities lies in a small sketch of the cemetery at Surat, in the Indian State of Gujarat, which Vanbrugh attached to his 'Proposals about Building ye New Churches' when he was appointed to the Fifty New Churches commission in September 1711.[8] He was able to draw ostensibly accurately what the cemetery looked like nearly thirty years after he had visited it when he travelled out to India as a factor in the East India Company. This suggests he had an exceptionally well-stocked visual memory. He must almost certainly have been able to draw as a young man if he was able to draw from his memory so convincingly long afterwards.

A third clue lies in the house he got permission to build for himself in the ruins of Whitehall Palace in July 1700, only a couple of years after the palace had burnt down.[9] If he was able to secure permission to build a house for himself in the summer of 1700, then he is likely to have been considering its design the previous summer. One of the display cases in the Soane Museum's recent exhibition of Vanbrugh drawings showed the two large watercolours prepared by Soane's office of Goose-Pie House, Vanbrugh's own house in Whitehall. Because Goose-Pie House was converted into the United Service Institute's Museum in 1845 and demolished in 1898 and because the design of this house was mocked by Jonathan Swift, the originality of this robust and idiosyncratic design has not been adequately appreciated in understanding Vanbrugh's architectural ambitions in 1699, the year he was invited to design Castle Howard.

Fig. 4: John Vanbrugh, Castle Howard, South Front. *Photograph © David Valinsky*

Fig. 5: John Vanbrugh,
Castle Howard, North Front.
Photograph © David Valinsky

But, however much one may think that these two small sketches help us to understand why the Earl of Carlisle entrusted the design of Castle Howard to Vanbrugh, there remains the issue as to how Vanbrugh turned two small sketches, however suggestive, into a vast, three-dimensional building project.

Having looked carefully at the drawings related to Castle Howard, revisited the house on several occasions during Vanbrugh's tercentenary year, and enjoyed the conference *Vanbrugh: From Stage to Stone* organised by the Georgian Group and Ax:son Johnson Centre for the Study of Classical Architecture, including the forensic analysis of the Hawksmoor/Vanbrugh relationship by James Legard[10], I still think, as I have argued in my biography of Vanbrugh, that he was perfectly capable of designing the exterior of the house on his own: the domestic east wing, which has always contained the private apartments of the Howard family; the two great façades which face north and south and which are piled with ornamental carving and, on the entrance façade, statues and urns set in niches, both of which feel somewhat theatrical, as one would expect from someone deeply involved in the staging of plays as well as in writing them (Figs. 4 and 5), and the great corridors which stretch out from the entrance hall, which are likewise highly theatrical in their conception.

The character of much of Castle Howard looks and feels scenographic, perfectly possible to have been built by skilled craftsmen from outline sketches, leaving some of the stonework of the internal courtyards unfinished.

On the other hand, the great entrance hall and the way that the dome is supported above it are of immense compositional complexity. It is hard to imagine a local builder being able to construct this from sketches without a great deal of advice on how to support the dome on the eight great Corinthian capitals which are at the four corners of the Great Hall. This is a feat of engineering more than scenographic design (Fig. 6).

It is at this point that Vanbrugh is likely to have needed the help and advice of Sir Christopher Wren who had far more experience of the problems and logistics of constructing a dome than anyone else in England. He had been preoccupied by the idea of building a dome for St. Paul's even before the Great Fire had destroyed it in September 1666. It feels to me more than possible that Vanbrugh will have recognised his lack of experience in the details of construction, so needed more specialist advice when it came to the selection of craftsmen, the nature of their contracts, and how much they should be paid.

So, it would have been at this this stage of the project that Wren may have introduced Vanbrugh to his long-standing and exceptionally-experienced former clerk, Nicholas Hawksmoor, who had worked so closely with Wren on the design of St Paul's

Fig. 6: John Vanbrugh,
Castle Howard, Great Hall.
Photograph © David Valinsky

Cathedral and drawing up detailed plans for Greenwich Hospital. Vanbrugh had constructed his house in Whitehall not far from the Office of Works in Scotland Yard. So, it would have been relatively easy for Vanbrugh to seek the advice of its officers and then to suggest to the Earl of Carlisle that he employ Hawksmoor in a role similar to that which he had performed for Wren over the previous twenty years — drawing up detailed designs, employing appropriate workmen, measuring the work once it had been done, and ensuring that it was done to appropriately high standards. Hawksmoor's involvement in the construction of Castle Howard was essential. It was a double act, for which Vanbrugh got the credit at the time.

Simon Jenkins recently reminded me of the description of the nature of the relationship between Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor which appears in John Summerson's *Georgian London*, the first edition of which was published in 1945:

> *Until recent years it has seemed that nobody was able to believe that both these men had genius. Either Hawksmoor was a hack and merely followed Vanbrugh; or Vanbrugh was an incapable amateur entirely dependent on Hawksmoor. Documents and drawings, carefully collated, have proved both these theories wrong. The truth is that the Vanbrugh Hawksmoor combination was that rare thing – a fertile marriage of equally creative minds. Each could do what the other could not. Vanbrugh's gay, humane temperament leapt at the discovery of Hawksmoor's passion for serene rhythms and dour Roman grandeur. Hawksmoor, on the other hand, reacted to Vanbrugh's splendid unorthodoxy, his love of movement, of dramatic recession and silhouette. They were complementaries. Neither could have been great without the other. In the event, both were great.*[11]

This remains a good encapsulation of their relationship. It helps one to understand and interpret their respective roles in the design, composition and construction of Castle Howard.

Notes

1 The two drawings were sold by Christie's, 11 July 1995, lot 3.

2 The drawings, which were originally acquired by the third Earl of Bute from the sale of Hawksmoor's drawings in 1740, were sold by Sotheby's, 23 May 1951. Many were donated to the V&A by the National Art Collections Fund and form one of the most substantial holdings of Vanbrugh drawings. Laurence Whistler, *The imagination of Vanbrugh and his fellow artists* (London: Art & Technics, 1954)

3 File Note by Michael Snodin, RF1995/1435, V&A Archive. Where he refers to 'the V&A elevation', I assume he means the early Elevation of Castle Howard acquired in 1951 (V&A E.420-1951).

4 The catalogue was prepared by Charlotte Lorimer, a volunteer in the Department of Prints and Drawings, in 1996.

5 The drawings are illustrated and discussed in Charles Saumarez Smith, *John Vanbrugh: the drama of architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 2025), pp. 58-59.

6 Harold Williams (ed.), *Poems of Jonathan Swift* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), I, pp. 86-87.

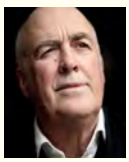
7 For the third Earl of Carlisle's time in Rome, see Charles Saumarez Smith, *The building of Castle Howard* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 3-4.

8 'Mr Van-Brugg's Proposals about Building ye New Churches' survives at Bodl.MSRawl.B. 376, ff.351-2 and was reprinted as Appendix E in Kerry Downes, *Vanbrugh* (London: Zwemmer, 1977), pp. 257-8.

9 H.M. Colvin (ed.), *The history of the King's works* (London: HMSO, 1976), p. 298.

10 James Legard, 'Vanbrugh/Hawksmoor: The Graphic Anatomy of an Architectural Partnership', conference paper, '*Vanbrugh: from Stage to Stone*', 27 March 2026.

11 John Summerson, *Georgian London* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1962), p. 86.



Sir Charles Saumarez Smith has served as a Director of the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery, London and is the former Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts. He is the author of *John Vanbrugh: the drama of architecture*, published by Lund Humphries in 2025.

David Valinsky is an award-winning architectural photographer with a background in architecture and architectural history. He has recently issued limited editions of selected photographs from Blenheim Palace, Castle Howard and Grimsthorpe Castle, which can be viewed at *davidvalinskyphotography.com*.

Setting the stage for 'Vienna 1900'

Niccola Shearman

Fig. 1: Gustav Klimt, Beethoven Frieze ('the yearning for happiness, the sufferings of weak humanity; their petition to the well-armed strong one')*, 1902. Fresco with casein colours, gilt stucco, mosaic and mixed media. Secession Building, Vienna*

This short introduction to the forthcoming series of lectures for the London Art History Society on Vienna 1900 begins on a personal note, with a return to my first encounter with that era of extraordinary cultural ferment. It was 1985, when the city staged the mammoth exhibition entitled *Dream and Reality: Vienna 1870-1930*.[1] In an encyclopaedic show, an impressive line-up of artists, architects and designers shared the spotlight with those writers, composers and thinkers who had played an equal role in the seismic shift from the city of an eternal Baroque to the fulcrum of modernity. Gustav Klimt and his rebellious acolytes Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele; Josef Hoffmann and the designers of the Wiener Werkstätte; architects Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos; writers from Arthur Schnitzler to Robert Musil; composers including Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schoenberg, plus those purists of language, the savage critic Karl Kraus and philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein; all of these figures would in one way or another overturn conventional notions of reality in pursuit of a new honesty of expression.[2] As demonstrated in the example of Sigmund Freud – whose theories formed a continuous undercurrent throughout this exhibition – the world of dreams had a lot to contribute to a deeper embrace of the real.

Needless to say, these towering figures were all men; it would take another generation before women were readmitted to the historical arena that we now know to have been rightly theirs. There was no lack of female forms on the canvas, however. The sinuous bodies of the assorted femmes fatales who adorn the inimitable *Beethoven Frieze*, first created by Gustav Klimt for the fourteenth exhibition of the Secession in 1902, were on show for the first time since a major restoration of this long-forgotten work (Fig. 1).[3] Oskar Kokoschka's youthful explorations of adolescent sexuality and his obsessive portraits of his lover Alma Mahler were much in evidence; as were the explicit nudes of Egon Schiele, as eager to strip himself down to essentials as to scrutinise the opposite sex (Fig. 2). And then there was Klimt's shimmering portrait of Adèle Bloch-Bauer, 1907, the icon of the artist's 'golden period' and, at the time of the exhibition, the jewel in the crown of the Austrian Gallery in the Belvedere. One must now travel to New York to see the work, justly returned to its rightful heirs and doubly famous for the restitution case that would set a precedent for all subsequent questions of provenance and Nazi-looted art (Fig. 3).[4]

In his opening essay to the catalogue, cultural historian Carl Schorske explored a theme that still offers a sound framework for interpretation of the era.[5] Grounded in the twin Baroque traditions of theatre and the religious spectacle of the Counter Reformation that one encounters in the city's great churches, Schorske's emphasis is on the performative element of Viennese culture that by the end of the nineteenth century – where our studies begin – had 'if anything' become more important, as the tensions caused by reality encouraged a desire to cling onto a dream. This was a period that saw considerable concessions to liberalism after the civil unrest of 1848, a loosening in the hold of the Church in line with a new secular order that included the expansion of the university and independent

Fig. 2: Egon Schiele, Death and the Maiden*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 150 x 180 cm. Belvedere Gallery, Vienna*

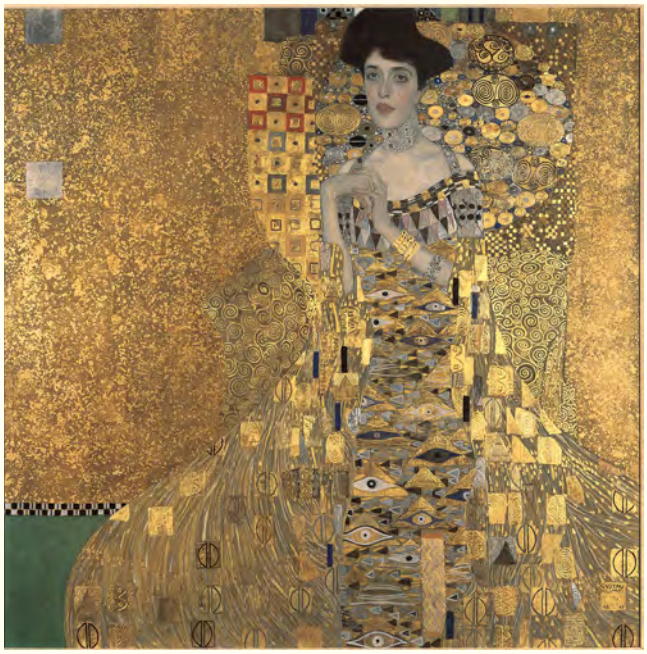


Fig. 3: Gustav Klimt, Portrait of Adèle Bloch Bauer 1*, 1907. Oil and gold leaf on canvas, 140 x 140 cm. Neue Galerie, New York*

judiciary according to principles of the Enlightenment, as well as significant laws of citizenship that benefitted Jewish members of society.[6] Nonetheless, Vienna's institutions and social traditions still operated according to a *Gefühlskultur* [culture of feeling], an aesthetic principle which took its cue from the grand painted ceilings of Baroque splendour. In this vein, Schorske points to the influence of the so-called *theatrum mundi* where a graceful continuum of divine and terrestrial beings are held aloft on banks of rosy clouds (Fig. 4).[7] Whether in church or at the theatre, illusion was serious currency in this tradition; a fact underlined by the young Gustav Klimt's professional arrival with an award-winning work that commemorated the original Court Theatre. Commissioned as a memorial to this beloved institution at the heart of the old palace before the major move into the new building on the Ringstrasse, the scene depicts the gracious auditorium with its assembled audience of dignitaries and socialites, many of them recognisable at the time as actual portraits. By the time of the opening of the new Burgtheater in 1888, with enlarged capacity and modern interiors – complete with grand ceiling paintings fortuitously supplied by Klimt, his brother Ernst and their associate Frantz Matsch – the theatre of religion had passed seamlessly into the religion of theatre.[8] In his memoir *The World of Yesterday*, author Stefan Zweig would recall that,

> *For to the Viennese and indeed the Austrians, the imperial theatre, the Burgtheater, was more than just a stage on which actors performed dramatic works; it was a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, a bright mirror in which society could study itself.*[9]

For Carl Schorske, in whose critical regard the democratic overtures of mid-century had largely been stifled by the autocratic regime, the generation of Zweig and Klimt were prone to 'a hypertrophic sensibility [that] looked to the arts as the source of all life's meaning when their inherited expectations of a more rational world were not borne out by history.'[10] The prime example here, from amongst the writers of the 'Jung Wien' circle, is the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in whose graceful lyricism the exquisite nostalgia for an unattainable happiness offers the very definition of the '*fin de siècle*'.[11]

The new Burgtheater was just one Neo-Baroque pearl in the necklace of grand public buildings to be erected on the circular boulevard of the Ringstrasse, in a major building project that lasted from 1867 to the 1890s (Fig. 5). The imposing neo-Renaissance Art History Museum, which stands in a pair with the Natural History Museum, was one of the final buildings to be completed, in 1891. Here too, Gustav Klimt & co. had the opportunity to show off their mastery of historicist decorative painting styles, in a series of vignettes in the overall scheme of the history of art that plays out above the main staircase. From the symbolic intentions behind the vast 'democratic' institutions and concomitant implementation of civic control (the sweeping boulevard afforded ease of manoeuvre for the military should force be required), to the major investment by families of Jewish heritage, the Ringstrasse is a subject unto itself.[12] However, for this lecture series it sets the stage in more ways than one. First and foremost is its outright theatrical purpose:

Fig. 4: Johann Michael Rottmayer, Ceiling painting for the cupola of the Church of St Charles (detail), *1725-30. Karlskirsche, Vienna. Photograph: Niccola Shearman*

Fig. 5: The Burgtheater in Vienna*, 1898*

a backdrop to a new era in which Emperor Franz-Joseph would at least nod towards the founding of a constitutional government. Secondly, for the ire it inspired in its critics, who felt they could see too easily through the illusion of historical permanence depicted in the line-up of facades plucked from architectural history according to the received tradition of the institution in question: Gothic tracery for the City Hall; Hellenic columns and classical pediments for the Parliament building; Baroque for that central institution of the theatre, and so on. To the generation of 'Vienna 1900' this looked like a jumble sale from the past; a fancy-dress parade designed not to serve a modern society but to distract from the stubborn manner in which those in power clung to the past. No one put it better than writer and literary historian Hermann Broch, who would regard such redundant grandeur as little more than a backdrop to 'a gay apocalypse'.[13] In a similar vein, in 1898 critic Karl Kraus launched his satirical journal *Die Fackel (The Torch)* precisely to lay waste to the decorous façade perpetuated in the flowery language of the daily press and literary feuilleton.[14]

Picking up the story with the founding of the Vienna Secession in 1897 and closing in the dark days of the late 1930s, this set of lectures will map the shifting priorities of dream and reality, surface and depth, public and private manifest in the work of key cultural protagonists. In the process, we shall observe how Gustav Klimt's fall from institutional favour would land him in the avant-garde hall of fame; how women found [almost] equal opportunities in design workshops and exhibiting societies; how Expressionism in art, music and literature insisted on throwing off the veil of appearance to reveal the naked truth, while clinging on to the beautiful surface; how the Utopian dream of a new society was embodied in the social housing of 'Red Vienna'; and how little of this would have happened without the central role played by patrons of Jewish heritage. Overturning that Baroque scenario of the *theatrum mundi*, Karl Kraus would refer to Vienna as 'an experimental station for the end of the world'.[15] In the event, we may conclude that it was the persistent tension between these worlds that draws us back over and again to the era.

Vienna 1900: surface and depth
Dr Niccola Shearman
Wednesdays 11 and 18 November 2026, 11am to 4.30pm
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild

Notes

1 *Traum und Wirklichkeit Wien 1870-1930*, exhibition held at the Vienna Künstlerhaus, 1985.

2 See Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna 1898-1918, Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and their contemporaries*, 2nd edn. (London: Phaidon, 1981).

3 See Frank Whitford, 'The Artist as God' in *Klimt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990) pp. 83-93.

4 Read about the history of this work, now in the collection of the Neue Galerie, New York: https://www.neuegalerie.org/womaningold (accessed 3 March 2026).

5 Carl Schorske, 'Österreichs ästhetische Kultur, 1870—1914, Betrachtungen eines Historikers', in *Traum und Wirklichkeit Wien* (Vienna: Museen der Stadt Wien, 1985), pp. 12-25.

6 See Stephen Beller, 'Empire on Notice, 1866-1918' in *A concise history of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 141-195.

7 Schorske, 1985, 13. Carl Schorske's major study of this period in the English language still forms an excellent introduction to the intellectual and political background: *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, politics and culture* (New York: Random House, 1981).

8 See the cycle of paintings for the new interior on https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-burgtheater-cycle-of-paintings-burgtheater/UwWBiFk_Ivy0Kw?hl=en (accessed 5 March 2026).

9 Stefan Zweig, *The world of yesterday, memoirs of a European*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Pushkin Press, 2009), p. 36.

10 'Kunst und Kultur, die von den Eltern als intellektuelle Errungenschaft gepriesen wurden, rief in den Kindern häufig eine hypertrophe Sensibilität hervor, die zu den Künsten als Quelle der Lebensdeutung hinzog, wenn ihre ererbten Erwartungen einer rationaleren Welt von der Geschichte nicht erfüllt wurden.' Schorske, 1985, 16.

11 See for instance the poem *Experience (Erfahrung)*, trans. Mary Kinzie, available here: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=188&issue=1&page=15 (accessed 5 March 2026).

12 See Joseph Leo Koerner, 'The Ringstrasse at 150 Years', *Burlington Magazine*, 2016-01, Vol. 158 (1354), p. 26-31.

13 Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his time: the European imagination 1860-1920*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 59.

14 Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, apocalyptic satirist: culture and catastrophe in Hapsburg Vienna* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989).

15 Karl Kraus, *Die Fackel* July 1914, cited in Ibid., p. 10.

Dr Niccola Shearman is an independent art historian and freelance lecturer in the field of twentieth-century German and Austrian art. Educated at Oxford University and at the Courtauld Institute of Art, her doctorate concerned the German modernist print in the aftermath of the First World War. Niccola has been associate lecturer at the Courtauld Institute and the University of Manchester and is a regular contributor to Courtauld Short Courses and to the V&A Academy. In 2025 she was co-curator, with Emily Christensen, of *With Graphic Intent, German and Austrian modernist works on paper*, at the Courtauld Gallery. Publications include academic articles, book reviews and exhibition catalogue essays. Current research concerns Viennese artists and art historians in exile in London and New York.

Wings to fly: Frida Kahlo's diary

Jacqueline Cockburn

In the light of the Frida Kahlo exhibition *Frida: The Making of an Icon* coming to Tate Modern, London in June 2026, this article will explore one diary entry to demonstrate an aspect of Kahlo's exploration of her 'many selves'. During the last ten years of Frida Kahlo's life, she wrote a diary which included letters.[1] In 1950 she made a double entry entitled 'Origin of the Two Fridas, a memory'. In the grid-shaped red drawing, divided into three, occupying the bottom half of one page, and entitled'LAS DOS FRIDAS', she separated her own name into two. Below this caption is written her address – Coyoacán Allende 52. In the centre of the chaos of menacing shapes which surround her, is a small girl in boots, seen from the back, drawing the 'door/window' she entered, watched closely by an eye (Fig. 1).

Written first in blue ink and then in a larger brown scrawl over the top, Frida Kahlo detailed in the entry how she can fly through a tiny 'door', which she would draw with her finger on the misted, damp windowpane in her childhood bedroom facing Allende Street. Through this door, like Alice in Wonderland, she would go out across a field and reach a dairy store called Pinzón. She would enter a pain-free world through the 'O' in the word Pinzón, which means 'finch'. From there, 'I went down to the entrails of the earth where my secret friend would always be waiting for me.' She was six at the time of the story and recently diagnosed with polio. Lonely and ostracised by other pupils, with large boots to hide a withered leg, she sought comfort, much needed friendship and an outlet for her secret thoughts.

Her imaginary friend of her own age had all the attributes Frida lacked; she was agile, could dance and was joyous and weightless. She laughed soundlessly. The entry in the diary states, 'Thirty-four years have passed since I lived this friendship and whenever I remember it, it comes more alive and it grows more and more in my world.' She described utter pleasure and joy which helped her to return to her life after 'a second or thousands of years.' In this tiny drawing we have the key to a discovery. The small child, Frida, entered a world to which she could not only escape but also discover her bodily and emotional completeness. She would be watched by an eye, drawn in the next windowpane, both Hindu symbol and Surrealist preoccupation, enabling her to look inward; a kind of detached third eye which observed as the child, Frida, entered her healing world. The painting she referenced in her title *The Two Fridas* was done in 1939, the year of her divorce from Diego Rivera and estrangement from her sister, his new lover (Fig. 2).

Frida Kahlo wrote the 171-page diary and bound it into a red leather book. It was handwritten and illustrated

Fig. 1: Frida Kahlo, LAS DOS FRIDAS; Coyoacán, Allende 52 *(Diary entry)*

then eventually published fully 50 years or so after her death, having been held in the Bank of Mexico vault. The appearance of the work is suggestive of a *journal intime*, written for herself as a kind of exorcising of her pain during the final years of physical decline, disability and disembodiment. Kahlo's motivation had perhaps less to do with communication than negotiation with herself. Whereas her paintings construct a performative self with Diego Rivera as her muse and artistic collaborator, the diary uncovers another self; one that carries a secret self, which Frida embedded within the pages of the diary, one that nurtured her and functioned as a private source of comfort and energy.

Fig. 2: Frida Kahlo, The Two Fridas (LAS DOS FRIDAS)*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 173.5 x 173 cm. Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City*

What helps us to believe that these non-chronological pages of doodles, ink blobs and stains that she coaxed into biomorphic forms were a means of survival? Splodges, words, poems and splatters soak the page, drenching the other side. Using coloured pencils, inks, washes, Conté crayon and gouache, she seemed to relish the elements of chance and spontaneity so absent from her paintings. The strokes or marks on the page have a physicality and a direct relationship with experience. There is no attempt at the real or mimetic representations of people or objects; these are drawn thoughts, outpourings and visual ideas, executed with an astonishing immediacy. Ideas, which in themselves may be sophisticated or complex, display an implementation which is vulnerable, free, exposed. The mask is down.

Diego Rivera, as you would expect, is prominent in the diary although she did not write it *for* him. Kahlo's diary is a record of her path towards death and a confession of her need to hide her broken self from the scrutiny of her public. In the diary she had a dialogue largely with herself although at times she addressed Diego directly: 'Diego, I am alone'. To complete her, Diego must be two selves: lover and child.[2] This is made explicit in her entry, 'I am not only your mother'. In one note she is at her most explicit and refers to herself as the embryo or first cell, which engendered him concluding that they are one and the same person.

The diary is a private document, the place of dismemberment, increasing disability and pain. Although it is known that she showed pages, they are largely meant for her eyes only.[3] In her diary Kahlo made an explicit connection between ink and blood and woman's creativity.[4] Tear-like blotches appear on some of the most ardent letters and long thin red lines of ink indicate pain. Her tortured body, clothed in Mexican finery, performed a persona in her paintings and although her broken foot, shrivelled leg and spina bifida condition were inescapable, she found a refuge in her imagination and a support system for the fear of endless operations and amputations. Bird-like, she could take flight. 'I am a bird', she stated explicitly in her diary and the perfect 'O' in 'Pinzón' facilitated her journey through the air. The child in the drawing was her six-year-old self. 'I paint myself because I am alone. I am the subject I know best.' [5] The diary itself is incomplete, also disintegrated and broken.[6] 'I am disintegration,' she commented on a diptych drawing of a Janus-like bull's head and an image of herself with one leg balancing on a classical column.

'Where is the I?', Kahlo questioned in 1938. She could hide behind her masks and her costumes as she made explicit in *Girl with Death Mask (She Plays Alone)*, 1938. (Fig. 3). But this is the six-year-old who sought friendship through her imaginative capacity to fly.

Was Kahlo a 'fabulating machine' who invented personae to escape from pain?[7] By writing her diary she turned herself into the subject AND object of her scrutiny. In her diarised realisation that she is separate from Diego: 'Why do I call him my Diego? He never was and never will be my Diego', her metaphorical allusions to herself as a bird are even more poignant. Capable of flying in her imagination, 'Why do I want feet, I have wings to fly,' she was able to escape her predicament.[8] (Fig. 4)

Humberto Naguera's study of the 'imaginary friend' in children suggests that the companion will often have

Fig. 3: Frida Kahlo, Girl with Death Mask (She Plays Alone)*, 1938. Oil on metal, 14.9 x 11.0 cm. Nagoya City Art Museum, Nagoya, Japan*

Fig. 4: Frida Kahlo, 'Why do I want feet, I have wings to fly'*, 1953. (Diary entry)*

the attributes the child lacks.[9] And Frida's companion not only danced and laughed but also listened to her. She was her alter ego or another self. Kahlo, in this drawing, was remembering her entry into an alternative world through the perfect 'O' of a circle where she was once again the child of six years old, stricken with polio. 'Although many imaginary companions vanish without a trace or lingering thought, Kahlo', claims Marjorie Taylor in her study of this phenomenon, 'speaks for all the adults who still cherish the memory of an invisible childhood friend'.[10] Kahlo used her wings to fly to an imaginary companion, and her later memory of the event served as pain relief, her alleviation from loneliness and neglect and her unravelling of what that ideal self meant to her towards the end of her life.

Notes

1 Carlos Fuentes, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: an intimate self-portrait* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

2 Raysa E. Amador Gómez-Quintero and Mireya Pérez Bustillo, 'Dissecting the Self' in *The female body, perspectives of Latin American artists* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 75.

3 Martha Zamora, *The brush of anguish* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990) p. 100.

4 Susan Gubar, 'The Blank Page and Female Creativity' in *Writing and sexual difference*, ed. Elisabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 73-94.

5 Introduction to S.M. Lowe, *The diary of Frida Kahlo: an intimate self-portrait* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995) by Carlos Fuentes p. 14.

6 Martha Zamora, *The brush of anguish* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990), p. 100.

7 S.V. Betcher, *Spirit and the politics of disablement*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) p. 181.

8 Carlos Fuentes, *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: an intimate self-portrait* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

9 Humberto Naguera, 'The Imaginary Companion: Its significance for Ego Development and Conflict Solution', in *Psychoanalytic study of the child*, vol. 24 (1969), pp. 165-96.

10 Marjorie Taylor, *Imaginary companions and the children who create them* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 133.

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'The great doom's image'[1]: viewing medieval murals of the Last Judgement

Miriam Gill

Fig. 1: The Wenhaston Doom. *St Peter's Church, Wenhaston, Suffolk. Photograph: John Salmon. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike 2.0*

The Doom or Last Judgement enjoys the highest cultural profile of all the subjects painted on the walls of churches in medieval Britain. Its compelling presence extends from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, as referenced in the title, to novels such as J. L. Carr's *A Month in the Country*[2] and Penelope Lively's *Judgement Day*[3]. The Doom may owe its hold on the imagination of writers and church crawlers to the starkness of its contrasts: Heaven and Hell, angels and demons, salvation and torment. Looking at historical murals is a form of 'time travel'. Standing before a medieval Doom painting prompts speculation about the thoughts and feelings of its original creators and viewers, and offers a tantalising glimpse into pre-Reformation English society and its attitudes to the afterlife.

Shakespeare's father was charged with supervising the defacement of the wall paintings including the Doom in the Guild Chapel at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1563, and nearly all medieval Doom paintings shared its fate, being covered with whitewash during the waves of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. At St Peter's Church at Wenhaston in Suffolk, the Doom painted on the tympanum was only found in 1892 when the whitewashed wooden panel, which had been removed from the church during renovations, was washed clean by rain revealing the painting beneath (Fig. 1).

The term 'Doom' derives from the Old English word for 'judgement'. The Last Judgement was one of the most enduring themes in medieval wall painting, with surviving examples ranging from the eleventh century through to the eve of the Reformation. This chronological range is

Fig. 2: The Wenhaston Doom (detail of the Mouth of Hell). *St Peter's Church, Wenhaston, Suffolk. Photograph: Michael Garlick. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0*

well represented in the region around London. It is probably the second most common subject after St Christopher. Most Dooms are in parish churches, but there are some in grander locations and the more intimate settings of tombs and chantry chapels.

The longevity of the Doom makes it an index of both the stylistic development and the changing theological and cultural context of the Middle Ages. At the same time, many conventional elements in paintings of the Last Judgement remain consistent through half a millennium, in spite of significant changes in belief and eternal expectation.

In the majority of Doom paintings in parish churches the sense of looking 'ahead' into the future finds physical expression. The conventional and most common location for this subject in Britain was on the east wall of the nave, above the chancel arch. In practical terms this ensured that this subject commanded the attention of those worshipping in the nave as they looked east to the chancel and altar. A sermon by the late fourteenth-century preacher John Mirk for the dedication of a church describes how this placement reproduces the expectation: 'that Cryst schall come out of the est to the dome'.[4] Mirk's sermon goes on to evoke a juxtaposition between the Doom and the cross or rood which was frequently displayed at the east at the nave. The visual expression of this theological contrast of present mercy and future judgement could be powerful, although on the early sixteenth-century Doom at Wenhaston painted on a wooden tympanum, the cross was evidently so large that the conventionally central figure of Christ the judge was placed to the left.

Fig. 3: Doom (detail of the fraudulent alewife). *Holy Trinity, Coventry. Photograph: Robin Stevenson*

The Doom itself is a composite. It is not the visual transcription of a single text but a bringing together of ideas from different textual and visual sources, both the realms of theology and more 'popular' culture. The underlying concept of the Last Judgement derives from St Matthew's climactic Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (*Matthew 25:31-46*). This parable gives us the central vision of the judgement and the angels and the organising principles of right and left for salvation and damnation. Many of the other vivid images are taken from different books of the Bible, from the monstrous Mouth of Hell from the description of Leviathan (*Job 41:14-15*) (Fig. 2), to the rainbow throne and heavenly city of Revelation (*Revelation 4:3* and *21: 1-3*). The flanking figures of the Virgin and St John the Baptist as intercessors are introduced from the eastern icon of the Deesis. In the case of more 'popular' motifs, such as the fraudulent alewife found for example at Holy Trinity, Coventry (c. 1435) we can't identify a single origin, but we can point to a shared culture visible in images, vernacular texts and drama (Fig. 3).

Even when a Doom painting included only the most conventional and generic elements, the relative size, location and presentation of these could enable a different approach or idea to be articulated. A brief survey shows how these shifting conventions play out over time and the ways in which they can express theological and local understandings and can be used to track changes over the centuries.

Painted with great skill but a limited range of pigments, the early twelfth-century Doom in the Church of St John the Baptist at Clayton in Sussex is a rare example of fresco technique in Britain (painting into 'fresh' plaster before it dries) (Fig. 4). The symmetrical composition on the east wall is focused on the central figure of Christ (fragments of a comparable figure survive at Coombs, West Sussex). Within the stylistic elegance of the Romanesque, the immediacy of the Second Coming is presented as Christ's full body halo interrupts the decorative border and his right hand reaches out, as flanking angels propel him forward (*Matthew 25:31*). Christ raises his wounded hands in a gesture of judgement,

Fig. 4: Christ in Judgement with the Apostles. *Church of St John the Baptist, Clayton, West Sussex. Photograph: The Voice of Hassocks*

while his robe reveals his right side. The figures of the twelve apostles, with a venerable tonsured figure recognisable as St Peter at Christ's right hand fulfill the promise of their share in judgement (*Matthew 19:28* and *Luke 22:30*). Apocalyptic and judgement imagery extends in two tiers along the north and south walls with some familiar elements such as the heavenly city (*Revelation 21: 2*) at Christ's right hand in the upper tier of the north wall and angels displaying the cross (the prime Instrument of the Passion) and blowing the 'last trump' (*1 Corinthians 15:52*).

From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the imagery of the Last Judgement becomes more standardised. Doom paintings of this date often continue to organise the scheme into tiers as in the early fourteenth-century painting on the east wall of the north aisle of the Church of St Mary the Virgin at Newington near Sittingbourne in Kent. Newington also includes numerous figures of the Resurrected, in attitudes of amazement as they are awakened and summoned from their graves at the sound of the trumpet (Fig. 5). The figures of the Resurrected are conventionally naked and without genitalia, presumably because there is no marriage after the Resurrection (*Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:36*), but their gender and identity is shown by their hair and headgear. This period sees the introduction of interceding figures of the St John the Baptist and the Virgin, often baring her breasts to remind Christ of her unique status as his mother. Centrality and scale are used to indicate a hierarchy of importance and the visual contrast between Heaven and Hell is often not only left and right but also up and down.

Fig. 5: Doom (detail of the Resurrected). *Church of St Mary the Virgin, Newington, Kent. Photograph: Poliphilo. Licensed under Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain*

From the later fourteenth century, the lively and complex iconography of the Doom had become a monumental scene set in a single unified space. In Essex, the now abraded Doom at St Mary's Church in Woodham Ferrers dates from the early decades of the fifteenth century, its vibrant and saturated colouring, having been captured in a recent project by Steve Lawes to recreate its appearance using medieval materials.[5] In this image green grass like with flowers and a brilliant crimson sky with stars of gold leaf recall the appearance of contemporary tapestry and panel paintings. At Waltham Abbey, a similar verdant pastoral meadow inspired by tapestry forms the setting in the painting of the Last Judgement on the east wall of the south chapel. Although now seen through its nineteenth-century restoration, the famous Doom at St Thomas's Church in Salisbury (1470s) conveys the power of a late medieval Doom, with central judge, intercessors, the twelve apostles, angels with the instruments of the Passion, Resurrection, and Heaven and the gaping Mouth of Hell (Fig. 6).

The late medieval Doom combined theological and moral teaching. At Waltham Abbey the labels around the Mouth of Hell indicate the punishment of each of the Seven Deadly Sins. St Thomas's in Salisbury and Holy Trinity Coventry include the figure of the fraudulent alewife, castigated for her short measures. While some Doom paintings were 'even handed' showing monks and monarchs among both the

Fig. 6: Doom (upper section with Christ in Judgement, intercessors, Apostles and the Heavenly City). *St Thomas's Church, Salisbury. Photograph: Rabe!. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 4.0 International*

saved and the damned, the Doom at Wenhaston focuses on St Peter welcoming the religious and social elite. Images of demons and punishment also represented a disturbing blend of the grotesque and the familiar. Wenhaston is one of the Dooms where the demons in Hell brandish a kitchen implement with multiple hooks used to cook meat.

This account has been largely 'formal', discussing stylistic characteristics and iconographic details but behind these observations lurks the question we started with, the compelling question of what the Doom means or, more specifically, what it meant to those who stood before it. The Doom positions the viewer as one of those 'queuing up' to be judged. In this consideration, it can be hard to disengage or step away from our own subjectivity, but it helps a bit if we name and identify our expectations, hopes and fears, and are aware of the ways in which the terror and humour which the Doom imagery deliberately evokes intersect with our anxieties, whether about the fate of our soul or the misuse of power.

Notes

1 William Shakespeare, *The tragedy of Macbeth*, Act 2, Scene 3, line 77 (Macduff: 'And look on death itself. Up, up, and see The great doom's image').

2 J. L. Carr, *A month in the country* (with an introduction by Penelope Fitzgerald) (London: Penguin, 2000).

3 Penelope Lively, *Judgement day* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

4 Johannes (John) Mirk, *Mirk's festial: a collection of homilies*, ed. by Theodor Erbe, part 1 (London: Early English Text Society, 1905), p. 279.

5 https://www.stmarysheritagehub.co.uk/doom-painting/doompainting-reconstruction

Further Reading

Anne Marshall, *Medieval wall painting in the English parish church* https://reeddesign.co.uk/paintedchurch/index.htm.

The National Wall Paintings Survey https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/researchseries/the-national-wall-paintings-survey.

Ellie Pridgeon, *Wall paintings for the 2020s* https://elliepridgeonwallpainting.co.uk.

Roger Rosewall, *Medieval wall paintings in English and Welsh churches* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

Roger Rosewall, *Medieval wall paintings* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2014).

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En plein air: the lure of the outdoors in French landscape painting

Kathy McLauchlan

'Without paints in tubes', Renoir said, 'there would have been no Cézanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro, nothing of what journalists were later to call Impressionism.'[1] A new method and a new vision, all made possible by the invention of a new kind of packaging for oil paints – the screw-top tin tube (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Lefranc et Cie, 'Couleurs en tubes' *from* Fabrique couleur & vernis: couleurs fines et matérial pour la peinture a l'huile*, (Paris: Lefranc et Cie, 1896)*

In fact, the practice of plein air had begun over a century earlier among landscape painters working in and around Rome. Painters, patrons, thinkers, and writers gathered there to form an international community of exchange for the latest ideas on art, philosophy, and the natural world. Among them was a growing number of landscape painters who, together with their patrons, developed a fascination with the workings of nature. In pursuit of that goal, the practice of plein-air painting grew rapidly in importance.

The leading practitioner was Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, a landscape painter and teacher, who saw the outdoor oil sketch as central to his practice, a way to develop skills of observation and to record natural phenomena in real time. He sought above all to investigate the ways in which shifting light conditions determined the overall effect of a landscape. In an influential treatise on landscape painting, published in 1800, Valenciennes advised that studies be made quickly – in no more than half an hour if the subject was a sunset or sunrise.[2]

Typical of Valenciennes' plein air work, the *Study of Clouds over the Roman Campagna*, c. 1782, (Fig. 2) is a small oil study on paper, with the barest indication of landscape features, the brushwork free and sketchy. The composition is overwhelmingly dominated by the cloudy sky – reflecting Valenciennes' interest in weather effects. The paint is also quite thin in some areas, allowing the white paper to enhance dramatic contrasts between dark and light.

The open technique of Valenciennes' study is appealing to the modern eye. It embodies the qualities of freedom and spontaneity and suggests that the artist is giving his own personal response to the natural world. We tend to view the sketch as somehow more 'authentic' than the idealised, carefully-composed landscapes associated with the classical tradition.

And here we run into a problem – a mismatch between our enjoyment of the outdoor sketch and the original purpose of such works. For Valenciennes and his followers, these outdoor studies were the preliminary stages of the painting process, not ends in themselves. They were resources – rather like a writer's research notes – to be used in the production of finished works for exhibition and sale.

By the early nineteenth century, plein-air work was a familiar practice across Europe, and artists' suppliers were on hand with a wide range of portable equipment: a painter's smock, foldable easels, wooden paint boxes, and (that essential accessory) parasols. The paint boxes probably held a rectangular palette, sheets of paper, brushes and paints. Collapsible tin tubes

Fig. 2: Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, Study of Clouds over the Roman Campagna*, c. 1782. Oil on paper, 19 x 32 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington*

for oil paint were invented in 1841 by the American artist John Rand[3], but they were not in widespread use for some years – new technologies tend to cost more.

In the meantime, painters could buy ready-prepared oil paint, which was stored in pieces of pig's bladder, drawn together and tied tightly to keep out the air. An iron tack or ivory needle was used to pierce the bladder so that the artist could squeeze colour onto the palette. As a storage method this was less than ideal: the bladders were not fully airtight, and once punctured the paint hardened quickly. But they clearly served well enough for outdoor work before the rise of the tube. Examples of portable paint boxes and their contents can be found in several museums in the UK. The V&A has a painting box from the early nineteenth century, and Tate Britain has a metal paint box with eleven paint bladders used by Constable.[4]

During the first half of the nineteenth century artists and their patrons grew increasingly impatient with the conventions of classical landscape and the endless 'souvenirs' of the Roman campagna on show at the Paris Salons. They sought an alternative closer to home, and found it in the Forest of Fontainebleau, a wilderness of woodland and scrub just 40 miles southeast of Paris.

From the 1820s the area started to draw in artists like Jules-Louis-Philippe Coignet and Camille Corot, and these were soon joined by leading exponents of naturalist painting including Théodore Rousseau, Charles Daubigny, and Jean Millet. This was the so-called Fontainebleau (or Barbizon) School – misleading, since the artists involved never formed a cohesive group. But they did share a belief in naturalism – in painting nature as they observed it without reference to classical ideals. Over time the number of painters making their way

Fig. 3: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Rocks in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1860/65. Oil on canvas, 46 x 59 cm. Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington*

to Fontainebleau grew. The area became internationally famous, as essential a destination for landscapists as Italy had been in the eighteenth century.

Plein-air painting remained central to the naturalist agenda, and over time the Fontainebleau painters began to incorporate some of the immediacy and freshness of the oil sketch into their finished works. To begin with, this 'unfinished' appearance proved controversial. Théodore Rousseau was dubbed the *grand refusé* after suffering a series of rejections from the Paris Salon at the start of his career.[5] By the 1850s, however, expectations had shifted, and urban audiences started to take an escapist delight in a more informal, naturalist evocation of the French countryside. The great pioneers of the Fontainebleau school – Daubigny, Rousseau and Corot – were now respected members of the French art establishment.

Fig. 4: Claude Monet, Bodmer Oak*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 96.2 x 129.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*

Corot was particularly important for a new generation of painters who started to explore the Forest of Fontainebleau in the 1860s – notably Renoir, Sisley and Monet. To them he was 'Père Corot', a supportive presence who encouraged their efforts and offered practical guidance. A small painting by Corot, *Rocks in the Forest of Fontainebleau* (Fig. 3) of the early 1860s is comparable in motif and method with Claude Monet's *Bodmer Oak* (Fig. 4) of 1865. But notice also the differences. Monet's work is more brilliant and less tonal in its approach than the Corot, the areas of light and shadow formed from contrasts of blue, violet, orange and terracotta. Monet aims to paint what he sees, not what he knows to be there, so solid forms – tree trunks, leaves, a pathway – are rendered as small patches of colour. There are indications here of a new stage in the development of plein-air painting, a focus on light, atmosphere and visual effect that will become known as Impressionism.

Notes

1 Jean Renoir, quoting Pierre Auguste Renoir on the invention of the tin tube in 1841, in *Renoir, my father* (London: Collins, 1962), p. 77.

2 Pierre-Henri Valenciennes, *Élémens de perspective pratique, à l'usage des artistes, suivis de Réflexions et conseils à un élève sur le peinture et particulièrement sur le genre du paysage* (Paris, 1800), p. 407.

3 Anthea Callen, *The art of Impressionism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 106.

4 For the V&A's paintbox (c. 1800-1830) see https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O118157/paintboxunknown/. For the Tate paintbox and Constable's technique see https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-t13896/indepth-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows/techniques-materials-six-footer-paintings.

5 On Rousseau's reputation see the review by Kelly Prescutti of Simon Kelly's *Théodore Rousseau and the rise of the modern art market*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2021): https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring24/presutti-reviews-theodore-rousseau-and-the-rise-of-the-modern-art-market.

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Restoring the vision: new light on Vittore Carpaccio's *Saint Augustine in His Study*

Anya Waddington

Fig. 1: Vittore Carpaccio, Saint Augustine in His Study*, 1502. Oil and tempera on canvas, 141 x 211 cm. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice.*

In a dimly lit room on the ground floor of a small Venetian *scuola*, a painting has hung in the same spot for over five hundred years. Vittore Carpaccio's *Saint Augustine in His Study* (c. 1502) (Fig. 1) was made for the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, a confraternity founded in 1451 for the Dalmatian (Schiavoni) immigrants living in Venice. The painting is the last in a cycle of nine canvases Carpaccio created for this modest, but beautifully decorated, meeting house. Recent restoration research has established the painting's continuity of place, which is fundamental to the way that the viewer interprets the picture.[1]

Saint Augustine in His Study shows a scholar-saint at his desk, pen poised, his gaze turned towards the light streaming through the windows. The details in the surrounding room are meticulously rendered: shelves lined with books, musical scores, astrolabes and scientific instruments; a bronze statue of the Risen Christ gleaming on an altar in a mosaic-lined apse and a small white dog – its alert stance confirming that the scene depicts something more exceptional than a scholar going about his routine work. For over four centuries, this saint was misidentified as Saint Jerome. It was only in 1959 that the art historian Helen Roberts demonstrated that the figure is in fact Saint Augustine, depicted at the precise moment he receives a supernatural revelation in which he hears a voice announcing the death of his fellow Doctor of the Church, Jerome.[2] Roberts's reattribution transformed how scholars read the painting. Suddenly, the musical scores, the liturgical furnishings, the saint's arrested gesture all made coherent sense. However, while the 'who' and 'what' were settled, the 'where' and 'why' remained debatable.

Most scholarship assumes that Carpaccio's nine paintings had originally hung on the upper floor of the Scuola, following the practice used in other Venetian confraternities, and that they were moved downstairs during a major renovation that took place in 1551.[3] The recent restoration of the Scuola begun in 2019, led by conservator Valentina Piovan and funded by Save Venice, has changed that theory decisively. Through renewed study of the canvases' physical aspects and fresh examination of the Scuola's archival documents, Piovan provides compelling proof that the cycle was always intended for the ground floor, in a configuration that corresponds,

more or less, to where it hangs today. There is also a persuasive historical reason why: from early 1502, the very year Carpaccio began work in the Scuola, the confraternity was locked in a heated legal dispute with the neighbouring Priory of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem over control of the upper floor.[4] It would have been inconceivable for the Schiavoni to commission a major decorative programme for a space they did not legally control. Carpaccio designed his cycle for the one room the confraternity could freely ornament: the ground-floor meeting hall.

Fig. 2: Interior of the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, Venice (showing the Carpaccio cycle in situ today). *Photograph: Anya Waddington*

Piovan's findings refine our understanding of the painting, and above all its light. *Saint Augustine in His Study* was positioned on the right-hand wall of the hall, where a window above the entrance door admits natural light from the right, precisely the direction from which supernatural illumination floods the painted room. Restoration research reveals that before the 1551 renovation raised the ceiling by approximately 180-190 centimetres, the actual window and Carpaccio's painted windows would have been in even closer alignment.[5] For the Dalmatian confraternity gathered below, the light in the painting and the light entering the building would have appeared as a single, continuous illumination (Fig. 2). The boundary between the architectural space and the painted interior was designed to dissolve, collapsing any clear distinction between natural and supernatural light.

Carpaccio reinforced this effect through careful visual alignment. The gilded coffered ceiling painted above Augustine's study directly echoes the decoration of the Scuola's own ceiling, as confirmed by the confraternity's 1557 inventory.[6] Augustine's study and the meeting house replicate the same decorative scheme. Walking into the Scuola, a Dalmatian immigrant in the early sixteenth century would not have felt they were looking at a painting so much as stepping into an extension of their own space – a room within a room, sanctified and scholarly at once.

What is remarkable about all of this, is how quietly Carpaccio achieves the miraculous. Other artists depicting the same Augustinian moment relied on conventional visual signals to tell the viewer that something supernatural was occurring. Sandro Botticelli's fresco of the same subject in the Chiesa di Ognissanti in Florence (1480) uses needle-like golden rays to make the heavenly light legible. Benozzo Gozzoli, in his version at San Gimignano, added an inscription to make it explicit. Carpaccio does neither. His light streams in as ordinary sunlight, casting distinct shadows across the floor. The white dog's alert stance (added deliberately in place of a different animal in the preparatory drawing)[7] is the only signal that something extraordinary is happening (Fig. 3). Carpaccio understood that viewers experience light naturalistically, even when it is of miraculous origin. Rather than announcing the divine, he makes it inhabit the familiar world so convincingly that the boundary between the two simply disappears.

Patricia Fortini Brown has described this as the painting's most striking feature: the way light alone becomes 'the exquisitely subtle carrier of its highest meaning'.[8] Recent restoration deepens that observation. We now know the painting was always here, catching the same light from the same window. Carpaccio's achievement can therefore be understood as not only pictorial but architectural: a fusion of represented and actual light. The candlesticks on the altar are empty, and yet the room blazes. Sacred illumination is conveyed through light that appears entirely natural.

The restoration of the painting, carried out in 2020 alongside another painting in the cycle, *Saint George and the Dragon*, before both works travelled to the first major Carpaccio retrospective since 1963, has brought its material world into sharper focus.[9] Cleaning revealed distinct pentimenti in the figure of Augustine, further evidence of what has long been suspected: a 'portrait by proxy'.[10] This, together with the proposed identification of the folded papers on the dais, one bearing a red wax seal, as the indulgence granted to the Scuola by Cardinal Bessarion in 1464, the Greek humanist and exile long proposed as the figure's model,

Fig. 3: Vittore Carpaccio, Saint Augustine in His Study*, c. 1501. Drawing, pen and ink on paper, 27.8 x 42.6 cm. British Museum, London. (Museum number 1934,1208.1)*

strengthens the case for an allusive portrait.[11] Elsewhere in the painting, the shelves reward this renewed clarity: a Mamluk silver food container, an Ottoman-style bound book, and Islamic glass perfume sprinklers sit beside Venetian devotional objects. For the Dalmatian community, traders and sailors navigating between Catholic Venice and the Ottoman East, these were not exotic curiosities but markers of a familiar world. The painting reflects the world of those who commissioned it.

Carpaccio signed the *cartellino* in the painting's foreground with a single, carefully chosen word: FINGEBAT: 'was forming', or 'was feigning'. The imperfect tense is unusual; it suggests not a completed work but an act of invention still in progress, a world being shaped rather than one delivered. The recent restoration returns that word to its full resonance. What Carpaccio was forming, we now understand, was not just a painting but an imaginative environment – at once fabricated and immediately recognisable – a space in which a fifth-century North African bishop could be encountered as a sixteenth-century Venetian contemporary, in which miraculous light and morning sunlight became indistinguishable, and in which the study of a saint and the meeting room of a Dalmatian immigrant confraternity were no longer discrete realms but parts of a single, sustained imaginative construction.

Anya Waddington recently completed an MA in the History of Art at Birkbeck College, University of London, where she was awarded the Murray Prize for the Best Early Period Masters Dissertation. Her first degrees were in English Literature, and she has a professional background in book and magazine publishing.

Notes

1 Valentina Piovan, with Stefania Randazzo and Melissa Conn, 'Carpaccio's Original Painting Installation in the Scuola Dalmata: Where and Why', *Confraternitas* vol. 32, no. 1 (2021), pp. 6-25.

2 Helen Roberts, 'St Augustine in St Jerome's Study': Carpaccio's Painting and Its Legendary Source', *The Art Bulletin* vol. 41, issue 4, (1959), pp. 283–297.

3 For the widely accepted view that the cycle was originally installed on the upper floor, see Guido Perocco, *Carpaccio: le pitture all Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavon*i, trans. by Brenda Balich (Treviso: Canova, 1975), p. 77. Patricia Fortini Brown is more cautious on this point; see 'Carpaccio's St Augustine in His Study: A Portrait within a Portrait', in *Augustine in iconography: history and legend*, ed. by Joseph C. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fleteren (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 507–537 (p. 510).

4 Piovan, p. 11.

5 Piovan, p. 16.

6 Piovan, p. 8.

7 The preparatory drawing in the British Museum reveals that Carpaccio originally included a different animal.

8 Brown, p. 512.

9 'Vittore Carpaccio: Master Storyteller of Renaissance Venice', National Gallery of Art, Washington, exh. 20 November 2022 to 12 February 2023.

10 Valentina Piovan and Stefania Randazzo, 'Il restauro dei teleri di Vittore Carpaccio della Scuola Dalmata dei Santi Giorgio e Trifone: ricerche, scoperte e metodologia di intervento' in *Vittore Carpaccio: contest, iconografia, fortuna*, ed. by Peter Humfrey and Gabriele Matino, (Venice: Linedacqua, 2024), p. 112.

11 Brown, p. 520.

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
9 July-27 September 2026

Dulwich Picture Gallery
Portrait of a City: A century of American Photography 1907-2012
28 July-4 October 2026

Hokusai: Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji from the Iuchi Collection
20 October 2026-17 January 2027

The King's Gallery
Queen Elizabeth II: Her life in Style
Until 18 October 2026

The National Gallery
Renoir and Love
Showcasing Renoir's gift for showing love, friendship, and everyday emotion in his work. The first London exhibition of 'Bal au Moulin de la Galette' (1876).
3 October 2026-31 January 2027

Van Eyck: The Portraits
Exhibiting all nine of Van Eyck's known painted portraits for the first time anywhere.
21 November 2026-11 April 2027

The National Portrait Gallery
Marilyn Monroe: A Portrait
The life of an icon through portraiture and personal objects.
4 June-6 September 2026

Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer Portrait Award show
25 June-7 October 2026

Royal Academy of Arts
Summer Exhibition
16 June-23 August 2026

Young Artists' Summer Show
14 July-30 August 2026

Richard Dadd: beyond Bedlam
25 July-25 August 2026

Painting the French Riviera
How the French Riviera supported the rise of modern art. 160 works 1870-1960.
2 October 2026-31 January 2027

Peggy Guggenheim in London
Reuniting works from her groundbreaking Cork Street Gallery 1938 show. Dali, Hepworth, Moore, Kandinsky, and Mondrian.
21 November 2026-14 March 2027

Tate Britain
James McNeill Whistler
The first major European exhibition of Whistler's work for thirty years.
21 May-27 September 2026

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant
250 works exploring their 50-year creative relationship.
12 November 2026-11 April 2027

Thomas Gainsborough
A landmark exhibition marking the 300th anniversary of his birth.
20 May-10 October 2027

Tate Modern
Frida: The making of an icon
Works from Kahlo's archive.
25 June 2026-3 January 2027

Monet: Painting Time
How Monet's work responded to the passage of time and the innovations of the age.
25 February-27 June 2027

V&A East Storehouse
David Bowie Centre
The home of Bowie's archive, open daily. Specific items can be booked in advance.

V&A South Kensington
Lost music venues
A display featuring around 50 'lost' performance spaces from the 1980s to the 2010s. (Room 104). Ongoing.

Outside London

Ashmolean, Oxford
Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess
The evolution of Aphrodite into an iconic figure symbolising love and beauty.
8 October 2026-11 April 2027

Derby Museum and Art Gallery
Wright of Derby: From the Shadows
The blockbuster 'candlelight' paintings transfer to Derby from the National Gallery.
13 June-1 November 2026

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
A Call to Art: William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites
The radical vision that lies behind their work.
23 October 2026-3 May 2027

National Galleries of Scotland
Gwen John: Strange Beauties
A major retrospective of the Welsh artist's work.
1 August 2026-4 January 2027

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Henry Moore at Kew
9 May 2026-31 January 2027

Tate St Ives
The Turner Prize
21 October 2027-23 January 2028

Overseas Exhibitions

Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Cezanne and Us
Cezanne's artistic legacy, as the 'founding father of pictorial modernity'.
23 September 2026-17 January 2027

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Giacometti in the Temple of Dendur
Pieces by Giacometti will stand in the 10th century BCE Temple of Dendur.
12 June-8 September 2026

Programme 2026-2027

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

Monday 19 October 2026 6pm
Arcimboldo at the court of the alchemists
Rupert Dickens
Online via Zoom

Monday 23 November 2026 6pm
Jan van Eyck and the revolution in the art of the portrait
Clare Ford-Wille
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild following the Society AGM at 5pm

Thursday 14 January 2027 6pm
Lyonel Feininger: 1871-1956. A life and art beyond the Bauhaus
Tom Abbott
Online via Zoom

Monday 1 March 2027 6pm
London's medieval churches
Dr Lesley Milner
Online via Zoom

Monday 12 April 2027 6pm
Volcanos in art: enlightenment, power and revolution
Matthew Morgan
Online via Zoom

Monday 7 June 2027 6pm
J. L. Petit: Britain's lost Impressionist?
Philip Modiano
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild

SHORT COURSES

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 6, 7 and 8 October 2026 2pm-4pm
The Barbizon Group
Jo Rhymer
Online via Zoom

Wednesdays 11 and 18 November 2026 11am-4.30pm
Vienna 1900: surface and depth
Dr Niccola Shearman
In-person at the Art Workers' Guild

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 24, 25 and 26 November 2026 10am-12pm
London interiors 1660-1940
Dr Stephen Brindle
Online via Zoom

Fridays 8 January-4 February 2027 11am-1pm
Marian art
Dr Sally Dormer
In-person at Lettsom House

Thursdays 11 February-11 March 2027 11am-1pm
The Italian Renaissance villa
Dr Dorigen Caldwell
Online via Zoom

STUDY DAYS

Date and time TBA
Theatrical staging
Dr Jane Pritchard

Wednesday 28 October 2026 11am-4.30pm
Byzantium's capital: Constantinople
Dr Cecily Hennessy
In-person at Lettsom House

Friday 9 April 2027 11am-4.30pm
Etruscan art
Dr Steve Kershaw
In-person at Lettsom House

STUDY VISITS AND WALKS

Wednesday 9 September 2026 1.30pm-3.30pm
Romsey Abbey
Dr Richard Plant

Friday 2 October 2026 11.30am-4.30pm
Canterbury Cathedral
Dr Sally Dormer

Monday 2 November 2026 5.30pm-7.30pm
Simon Gillespie Studio

Friday 4 December 2026 Time TBA
Pitzhanger Manor

Additional study events will be announced during the year

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