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From the President of MAHS:

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Midwest Art History Society's online journal *Venue*. From the time of its founding in 1973, the Society has prioritized the support of scholarship. That is one of the goals of our annual meetings, which create a forum for the presentation of new research in art history. It was this mission that prompted the Society to provide financial support for several catalogues devoted to European drawings in Midwestern collections that were published between 1996 and 2015. Wishing to widen its focus, the Society has expanded its support of scholarship through awards, including prizes for graduate students and early career scholars and awards for catalogues produced by curatorial scholars at museums. We are delighted to add this online journal to the ongoing list of contributions made by MAHS to scholarship in the field of art history over the last fifty years.

Its appearance is the culmination of the work of Heidi Hornik, a past president of MAHS and the guiding force behind bringing the journal to fruition. This project is supported with various resources from the Office of the Provost, College of Arts & Sciences, and the Department of Art & Art History, Baylor University. It is hosted by the Texas Digital Libraries, an Open Journal System, through Baylor University Libraries.

In this first issue, Hornik, founding editor in chief, has been assisted by the volume editor, Judy Mann, and the series editor, Cheryl Snay. Snay provided a worthy model for this issue with her 2019 online publication of papers devoted to monuments that were presented at the Society's 2018 meeting in Indianapolis. John Duncan served as our copy editor. The journal is peer reviewed, and the editors have been ably assisted by anonymous readers who provided guidance and informed criticism to the authors. Special thanks are owed to VGreen Design for the website creation and production.

This inaugural volume is devoted to selections from the Society's ongoing sessions at the annual meeting of the College Art Association devoted to "Icons of the Midwest." Each session focuses on major works of art housed in Midwestern collections, examined using a variety of methodological tools. The Society plans to publish the journal on a bi-annual basis, and the editors are accepting submissions for the next volume. Submissions may be for a group of papers that form a cohesive volume (future volumes will be expanded to include more than six essays), or for individual articles. Please spread the word among your colleagues and students for this opportunity to publish. The journal is searchable through centralized digital archives in conjunction with Open Journal Systems, meaning that the essays will reach a large audience. Also, note that exhibition reviews are welcome (eight appear in this issue); we look forward to offering book reviews in upcoming issues.

This is an important milestone for MAHS, and I am confident you will find this virtual journal a valuable resource for future scholarship and a pleasure to read.

Rebecca Brien, President, Midwest Art History Society

September 1, 2022

Contributors

Ruoxin Wang is a PhD candidate in Art History at Rice University. She is currently working on her dissertation “Opening the ‘House Altarpiece’: Domestic and Traveling Triptychs in Northern Europe, 1400–1600.” Her areas of focus are northern Renaissance art and medieval Chinese art. Ruoxin worked as UAB curatorial fellow at the Birmingham Museum of Art from 2014 to 2015.

James Clifton is Director of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation and Curator in Renaissance and Baroque Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. He has published extensively on early-modern European art and culture, including recent essays on Johannes Stradanus’s *Nova Reperta*, Louis Finson’s *Allegory of the Four Elements*, Asian porcelain in European collections, and devotional cabinets in *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*. His curated and co-curated exhibitions include *The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150–1800* (1997); *A Portrait of the Artist, 1525–1825* (2005); *The Plains of Mars: European War Prints, 1500–1825* (2009); *Scripture for the Eyes: Bible Illustration in Netherlandish Prints of the Sixteenth Century* (2009); *Elegance and Refinement: The Still-Life Paintings of Willem van Aelst* (2012); *Pleasure and Piety: The Art of Joachim Wtewael* (2015); and *Through a Glass Darkly: Allegory and Faith in Netherlandish Prints from Lucas van Leyden to Rembrandt* (2019).

Natasha Seaman is Professor of Art History at Rhode Island College. She is the author of *Hendrick ter Brugghen and the Theology of the Image: Reinventing Painting after the Reformation in Utrecht* (Ashgate, 2012) and co-editor, with Joanna Woodall, of *Money Matters in European Art and Literature, 1400–1750* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022). She received her PhD from Boston University, her MA from Tufts University, and her AB from Bryn Mawr College. Her work has been supported by Fulbright, Kress, the Historians of Netherlandish Art, the American Association of Netherlandic Studies, and the Center for Advanced Studies in Visual Arts.

Beth S. Wright is Distinguished University Professor and Professor of Art History at the University of Texas at Arlington. She specializes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French art and the relationship between text and image, historical representation, and the impact of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels. Her publications include *Painting and History during the French Restoration: Abandoned by the Past* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Cambridge Companion to Delacroix* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); articles in *Art Bulletin*, the *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *Word & Image*, *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, and other journals; and chapters contributed to Dorothy Johnson, ed., *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives* (University of Delaware Press, 2006); Murray G. Pittock, ed., *The Reception of Scott in Europe* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007; rev. 2014); Sarah Hibberd and Richard Wrigley, eds., *Art, Theatre and Opera in Paris, 1750-1850: Exchanges and Tensions* (Ashgate, 2014); Peter Cooke and Nina Lübbren, eds., *Painting and Narrative in France, from Poussin to Gauguin* (Routledge, 2016); and Julia Douthwaite Viglione, Antoinette Sol, and Catriona Seth, eds., *Teaching Representations of the French Revolution* (Modern Language Association, 2019).

John Klein is Professor of Art History at Washington University in St. Louis. In addition to his work published in numerous articles and book chapters on a variety of topics in modern and contemporary art, including portraiture, he is a specialist in the work of Henri Matisse, with two books on the artist: *Matisse Portraits* (Yale University Press, 2001) and *Matisse and Decoration* (Yale University Press, 2018). The latter considers for the first time the great range of projects the artist undertook in such diverse applications as stained glass, ceramic murals, decorative glass design, tapestries and other textiles, whose procedures were necessarily collaborative, difficult to master, and sometimes frustrating.

Cynthia Amnéus has been curator of fashion arts and textiles at the Cincinnati Art Museum since 1996 and chief curator since 2014. She has been an adjunct professor at Xavier University and the University of Cincinnati and curated numerous exhibitions, publishing both exhibition catalogs and articles on a variety of fashion-related topics. Amnéus's particular research interests include nineteenth-century women's dress, the designs of contemporary Japanese designers, and women's activism. She is currently working on a major exhibition about Elizabeth Hawes, her fashion-related work, and her involvement in women's rights issues.

Abstracts

An Early Sixteenth-Century Flemish Chasuble at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Ruoxin Wang, Rice University

Among the many wonderful artworks accessioned by the MFAH in 2018 is a magnificent Flemish chasuble made in the early sixteenth century. Considering its age and delicate material, the chasuble is in exceptionally good condition. Its rich, shimmering Italian brocade is made with pile-on-pile velvet, which is decorated with elaborate artichoke patterns and enriched with gold *bouclé* loops. The cross orphrey on the back and pillar orphrey on the front feature stories from the lives of Christ and the Virgin, which are embroidered with the celebrated *or nué* (shaded gold) technique that was characteristic of contemporary Burgundian-Netherlandish embroidery. Lavishly used gold and silver threads glow underneath silk threads and result in an iridescent vibrancy. A variety of stitches have been used to render different textures and effects. In this article, I first offer a thorough analysis of the sophisticated brocade and embroidery techniques used to make the chasuble. I then trace the artistic sources of the biblical scenes on the orphreys and examine the liturgical significance of the chasuble's iconographic program. I argue that the chasuble was most likely worn by a priest during one of the feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary. When enacted by the priest's body, the chasuble could enhance the otherworldly experience of the Eucharistic rite and facilitate viewers' perception of the transubstantiation miracle.

The Erotics of the Axillary Pose

James Clifton, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston

Perseus's rescue of the princess Andromeda from a sea monster was a popular subject in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visual arts, both south and north of the Alps. The narrative, told most influentially by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, hinges on Andromeda's beauty: it was the subject of her mother's boast that angered Neptune and led to his demand for her sacrifice, and it was what drew Perseus's attention and provoked his difficult battle with the monster. Andromeda's parents subsequently offered her to Perseus as bride; thus, as Ovid put it, she was both cause and reward of all his labor. The artist's task, then, was to present Andromeda as exceedingly beautiful and enticing, to both Perseus and the viewer of the artwork. She was almost always depicted nude and facing the viewer, her hands chained to a seaside cliff or large rock behind her. Many artists, however, chose to enhance the erotic nature of the

figure by positioning one of her arms above her head, thereby exaggerating her usual contrapposto stance and exposing her armpit (axilla)—what I refer to as the axillary pose. Adducing well-known examples in various media—by Giorgio Vasari, Hendrick Goltzius, Agostino Carracci, Joachim Wtewael, and Guido Reni—this article considers the affective qualities of the pose within the context of early modern notions of the erotic possibilities of the armpit.

Naturalism and Archaism in Hendrick ter Brugghen's *Crucifixion* and *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*

Natasha Seaman, Rhode Island College

Ter Brugghen's *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene* was painted the same year as his *Crucifixion*, and in both works, the artist evokes sixteenth-century northern painting. The *Saint Sebastian*, however, approaches the past differently. In the *Crucifixion*, the figure of Christ appears as a re-creation if not direct quotation from sixteenth-century works, inserted between the defiantly seventeenth-century Mary and John. Blood drips from Christ's wounds apparently onto the surface of the painting, accentuating the picture plane and thus the work's materiality, a quality uncommon in seventeenth-century works. In the *Saint Sebastian*, the sixteenth-century elements are reduced to details (the historic Cope of David on which Sebastian sits or the gruesome treatment of Sebastian's upper wrist) and the blood that appears drips onto the fictive surfaces, not in free fall. With this work, ter Brugghen moves toward a new phase in his painting in which light effects prevail over effects of materiality, and beauty prevails over the ugliness which was so often present in his earlier paintings. The martyred body of Sebastian can be read as a figure of Christ, but also as a figure of ter Brugghen's release of his art from the complexities and miseries of art during the Reformation.

"As I Was Perpetually Haunted by These Ideas": Fuseli's *The Nightmare* and Its Influence on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*

Beth S. Wright, University of Texas at Arlington

Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781, Detroit Institute of Arts), inspired in part by Anna Landolt's rejection of the artist, connected sexual desire and frustration with the occult and the loss of will and potency. Fuseli expressed similar views in *The Mandrake: A Charm* (1785), *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches* (ca. 1794-96), and *Brunhild Watching Gunther Suspended from the Ceiling on their Wedding Night* (1807, inspired by the *Nibelungenlied*). Since Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, Fuseli's intimate friend, it is not surprising that she was able to demonstrate a profound

understanding of Fuseli's interpretations in her novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and her unpublished novella *Mathilda* (written 1819). In these works, Mary Shelley's analyses of birth and parenthood; domination, especially relating to incest; and the link between orgasmic release and destruction demonstrate Fuseli's influence while revising his misogynistic viewpoint to direct blame at non-nurturant parents and generative authorities.

Is Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* a Cubist Painting?

John Klein, Washington University in St. Louis

Matisse's enigmatic composition has resoundingly defied interpretation. What appears to show an easily understood action does not resolve into a coherent story. Did Matisse deliberately thwart his viewers' anticipated satisfaction? By subverting expectations Matisse may have been exploring an alternative to modernist primitivism, which similarly challenged European art's traditions of making meaning. For Matisse ambiguity may have been an instrument in the service of his broader goal, which was to create a modernist decoration.

American Couturier Elizabeth Hawes and the Feminine Mystique

Cynthia Amnéus, Cincinnati Art Museum

Known by few, Elizabeth Hawes (1903–71) is generally regarded among fashion scholars as one of the very first American couturiers. She opened her salon in New York in 1928 with designs that were well ahead of their time—an indication of everything she thought and did throughout her life. Hawes approached clothing design by delving into the psyche of the client—whether a wealthy socialite or the common man or woman. For Hawes, clothing was a direct expression of one's self. She believed that one should have control over the style of clothing one wore, that it did not have to follow or be dictated by the fashion industry. In the 1930s, she forecasted styles that were not realized until the 1960s.

Hawes's *Anything but Love* (1948) was a diatribe against the "happy housewife" role that women were expected to fulfill. Hawes examines how the media, the male patriarchal system, and women themselves eagerly indoctrinated the next generation to accept a proscribed role as homemakers and mothers. Written fifteen years before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), *Anything but Love* debunked some of the most basic myths about American women's lives. Like her fashion designs, Hawes's ideas about women's roles were far ahead of her time. This article explores Hawes's avant-garde ideas within the realms of fashion, politics, and female roles in the United States.

An Early Sixteenth-Century Flemish Chasuble at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Ruoxin Wang



Fig. 1. Flemish, *Chasuble with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin* (front), ca. 1510, silk, velvet, gold- and silver-wrapped thread, linen, 105 x 64.2 cm, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the College Art Association 2020 Annual Conference. I would like to thank the organizers of the panel and the audience for their helpful comments. I am grateful to my advisor, Diane Wolfthal, for introducing me to this wonderful object. Many thanks also to Emma Cameron, Christine Gervais, and Ingrid Seyb at the MFAH for their generous support throughout this research project, and to the anonymous peer-reviewers and the editors at *VENUE* for their careful reading and many valuable insights and comments. Special thanks are due to Rex Koontz, Professor of Art History at the University of Houston, who has encouraged me to carry this project further.

In November 2018, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) acquired a Renaissance chasuble in excellent condition from the London based art dealer Sam Fogg.¹ (Figs. 1–2) Complete and ornate Renaissance church vestments in such good condition have become a rare sight on the art market. The majority of those that have

withstood the wear of centuries either remain in church sacristies or have already been accessioned by museums such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. This chasuble is MFAH's first accession of a Renaissance period liturgical



Fig. 2. Flemish, *Chasuble with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin* (back), ca. 1510, silk, velvet, gold- and silver-wrapped thread, linen, 119.8 x 73 cm, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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vestment. It features masterful Netherlandish embroidery and provides valuable comparative material to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish chasubles in the museum's collection.²

The chasuble features sumptuous crimson velvet. The elaborate pomegranate motif enclosed by a polylobate pattern is brocaded with wefts of gold metal threads. The vertical band in the middle of the front side, called a pillar orphrey, and the cross orphrey on the back illustrate episodes from the life of Christ and the life of the Virgin Mary. While the pillar orphrey does so in vibrant colors of red, green, and blue, the cross orphrey shimmers with an exuberance of gold. The creator(s) of both orphreys lavishly used *or nué* (shaded gold), the celebrated embroidery technique that was well established by the fifteenth century and is best represented by the set of vestments commissioned by Philip the Good, the duke of Burgundy, for the Order of the Golden Fleece.³ The chasuble has been tentatively dated to the early sixteenth century.⁴ However, the striking violin shape of the chasuble front, also known as the "fiddle-back" style, was not developed until the seventeenth century.⁵ This suggests that the chasuble was probably still in use at least a century

later, and was altered into a more fashionable format.⁶

Although the chasuble form originated from the bell-shaped mundane upper garment called *paenula* worn in the Greco-Roman world, by the eleventh century it had become an obligatory vestment for priests.⁷ The MFAH chasuble would have been an important visual focus of the ritual. Through detailed technical analysis in the following pages, I seek to retrieve the dramatic visual effect of the chasuble when it was used in its original, liturgical context—an aspect that is probably difficult to envision today when it is displayed in the museum under ample and stable electric light. I argue that the artist took into consideration the reception of the audience and the dynamic interactions between the chasuble, the movements of the officiants, and the condition of light. The visual impact, combined with the biblical and apocryphal stories embroidered on the chasuble, could facilitate the congregation's perception of the transubstantiation miracle in a very compelling way.⁸

The Brocaded Velvet

In the sixteenth century, velvet was already established as the standard material for making chasubles.⁹ Upon closer inspection, this crimson cut-pile velvet has a

design that is formed with another higher register of cut pile (Fig. 3, detail a), which creates subtle variations that enhance the velvet's visual appeal. Such so-called pile-on-pile velvet is more complex and labor intensive to make, thus more luxurious.¹⁰ Sometimes, instead of the piled surface, areas of the velvets are woven with ornate patterns in gold brocade, making them even more sumptuous, as is the case here.¹¹ On the MFAH chasuble, the brocade was created with gold and silver metal-wrapped threads, and it constitutes the elaborate pomegranate pattern on the velvet. According to textile historian Lisa Monnas, the ever-present pomegranate design, sometimes identified as artichoke or pineapple, was adapted from Asian motifs by Italian velvet designers through their trading contacts in the Muslim Levant region and with the Mongol empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹² The different textures and shades on the pomegranates are achieved through the *bouclé* technique (Fig. 3, detail b), which was developed by Italian weavers around the 1420s.¹³ In this technique, the gold metal wefts are twisted to form tiny loops that are raised from the surface. Compared to the wefts that lay flat, these loops reflect light in different directions,

and therefore glisten with a higher intensity.

The Embroidered Orphreys

With narrative episodes in colorful expression and a liberal use of gold metal threads, the embroidered panels on the two orphreys are the most eye-catching part of the chasuble. They illustrate biblical and apocryphal subjects in nine compartments, from top to bottom, with the Nativity of Christ, Presentation of Christ at the Temple or the Circumcision, and the infant Mary with Saints Anne and Joachim¹⁴ on the pillar orphrey (Fig. 1), and the Holy Ghost, the Annunciation flanked by two prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures, the Presentation of the Virgin Mary, and the Visitation on the cross orphrey (Fig. 2).

To translate a drawn or painted design to a different medium while making the most of the medium's unique features, the embroiderer applied a variety of methods. In the first place, *or nué* was used on every panel. In this technique, gold metal threads are laid horizontally on the ground fabric (Fig. 4). They are held in place and fixed to the ground fabric by couching stitches sewn with colored silk. Each couching stitch holds two gold metal threads. These stitches not only serve this practical function, but they are also the constituent



Fig. 3. Detail of the MFAH Chasuble, showing the pile-on-pile velvet (a) and *bouclé* technique (b).
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Fig. 4. Detail of the MFAH Chasuble, showing the *or nué* technique. Photo was taken by the author.

elements that give color and shape to the images on the orphreys.

Because these couching stitches enwrap the gold metal threads, it may be argued that they dampen the embroidery's luminosity and make it appear duller and less sumptuous. But in fact, they create a more complex light effect that can be quite unexpected. In his nuanced analysis of the Burgundian paraments of the Order of the Golden Fleece, art historian Andrew Hamilton makes the apt analogy between *or nué* and the light effect created with a Venetian blind. He argues that the couching stitches function like the slats, while the gold metal threads are the light that shines through. And, just as light still shines through when the slats of a blind are shut tightly, even when the couching stitches are dense and placed close to each other, the faint golden glow is still palpable underneath the silk stitches.¹⁵ The embroidery would glisten and sparkle even in the densely couched areas that appear to have no gold, as if light shines from within the scenes.

By adjusting the placement, amount, and color properties of the couching stitches, the embroiderer could achieve various visual effects. On the MFAH chasuble, the vibrant colors of the pillar orphrey (Fig. 1) form a strong contrast to the overall golden outlook of the

cross orphrey (Fig. 2), where the colored silk couching stitches are only sparsely used, leaving a large portion of the gold metal threads uncovered.¹⁶ Moreover, the colors of these couching stitches are paler and duller than on the pillar orphrey; thus, they complement very well the golden outlook instead of clashing with it.¹⁷

While *or nué* was mainly used for areas of clothing and architecture to give an impression of material splendor, the figures' faces do not show gold metal threads. Take Joachim's profile in the panel of *Presentation of the Virgin Mary* (Fig. 4) for example: the golden threads form U-turns around his hair and face, leaving the rough ground fabric to serve as the skin, on which Joachim's bearded facial features were stitched with black, brown, and madder silks. But it seems that the ground fabric is too rough for the refined young features of Gabriel and the Virgin; thus, their faces in the *Annunciation* scene were created upon a smoother material (Fig. 5). Apparently, this material is partially covered by an ivory-colored silk, which constitutes the highlights on the faces (Fig. 6). The stitching technique used here is split stitch, where each stitch goes backward and splits the fibers of the previous stitch before it goes forward. This technique creates a denser



Fig. 5. Detail of the MFAH Chasuble, showing the embroidery of the *Annunciation*.
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coverage of the ground fabric and makes the surface appear smooth and refined, capable of rendering subtle details. For this reason, split stitch is also called "needle painting."¹⁸

Apart from *or nué* and split stitch, the embroiderer also used other techniques to achieve

various effects, especially on the *Annunciation* panel. For example, while chain stitch was used for rendering the straight portion of Gabriel's hair (Fig. 6), a different type of stitch with rougher texture was used for the curly part. Thicker gold metal threads accentuate some of the outlines. They

are either fixed to the ground fabric with couching stitches, such as those that form the upper edge of Gabriel's wing, or sewn down with stem stitches, which create a pattern of twist, such as the border of Gabriel's banderole and the Virgin Mary's halo. To achieve a raised effect for the four-lobed pattern on the floor tiles, the embroiderer

used bullion stitch, in which the gold metal thread was wrapped around the needle to form a coil and then sewn down on the ground fabric. In addition, red couching stitches form the so-called diaper pattern in the background. They also fix the gold metal wefts to the ground fabric, being decorative and functional at the same time.



Fig. 6. Details from the MFAH Chasuble, showing the face and hair of angel Gabriel in the *Annunciation* embroidery. Photo was taken by the author.

Iconography

The Virgin is featured prominently on the two orphreys, more so than Christ.¹⁹ She is present in every narrative panel, most notably the two lavishly embroidered scenes of *The Annunciation* and *Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple*. The popularity of Marian devotion reached new levels during the high Middle Ages and grew continually throughout the late medieval and Renaissance eras. Mary's genealogy and stories of her life were made familiar through widely circulated texts like Jacobus da Voragine's *Golden Legend* and the ever-present images of her in both religious and secular settings.²⁰ But Mary's prominence on the MFAH chasuble probably had more specific significance. It is possible that the chasuble belonged to a church that had the Virgin as its titular figure, or it could be that the chasuble was made to be worn during feasts dedicated to her. It could also be the case that the donor of the orphreys was particularly devoted to the Virgin.²¹

The *Annunciation* panel (Fig. 5) follows the conventional iconography in Northern Renaissance paintings, which shows Mary and Gabriel in an interior setting surrounded by domestic furnishings.²² In terms of the holy figures' postures, the closest I have come across is an *Annunciation* painted

by an obscure painter referred to as the Master of Saint John the Evangelist (Fig. 7). In both renditions, Mary opens her hands outward in a gesture of awe.²³ Her haloed head tilts back towards the angelic messenger, who is draped in a white alb underneath a billowing cope. In both renditions, Gabriel is holding a staff with one hand while gesturing towards heaven with the other. Even the ways in which the figures' draperies spill over the floor are comparable. Peculiar to the chasuble's *Annunciation* is the mannerist way in which the archangel tilts his head away from the Virgin. I have not seen such expression elsewhere.

Another potential visual source for the embroidery design is the Office of the Virgin in illuminated Books of Hours. Particularly, images showing the Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple in a group of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century French Books of Hours in the Morgan Library & Museum in New York bear strong resemblance to the embroidered panel with the same subject (Fig. 8).²⁴ The illuminations appear in the Office of the Virgin. All of them show the small figure of Mary ascending a staircase with vaulted arch, while her parents Saints Anne and Joachim stand on the left side and watch her attentively.



Fig. 7. Master of Saint John the Evangelist, *Annunciation with Saints Lazarus and Anthony Abbot, Catherine of Alexandria and Clare, Anthony of Padua and John the Baptist, Francis and Jerome*, 1490–1500, tempera on panel, 234 x 223 cm. Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.
©Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan. (CC BY-NC-SA).



Fig. 8. Detail of the MFAH Chasuble, showing the embroidery of *Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple*. Photo was taken by the author.

These elements all correspond to those on the MFAH chasuble. It is possible that the designer of the embroidery drew inspiration from illuminations in Books of Hours, given their immense popularity—they are sometimes called “medieval bestsellers”—and the essential place of the Office of the Virgin within them.²⁵

A further detail that attests to the affinity between manuscript illumination and the MFAH chasuble embroidery are the bands of meandering clouds, whence the prophets emerge on the short arm of the cross orphrey (Fig. 9). They are fashioned in a stylized manner typical of how clouds are rendered in medieval and Renaissance manuscripts.²⁶

The Chasuble as Liturgical Spectacle

Several inconsistencies can be discerned among the orphrey panels. Apart from the difference in color schemes between the pillar and cross orphreys already mentioned, the execution of the needlework also differs considerably. This is especially evident in the garments worn by some of the figures. On *The Annunciation* and *The Presentation of the Virgin Mary* panels (Figs. 5 and 8), folds are delineated with soft and undulating lines, and volume of the draperies is built up convincingly with silk threads of

varying shades. By contrast, garments on the pillar orphrey and on *The Visitation* panel of the cross orphrey are less naturalistic due to excessive linearity in the folds and a lack of gradation in the use of colors. These discrepancies suggest that the orphrey panels were made by different embroiderers. Similar to many liturgical vestments, the MFAH chasuble is a work of assemblage, and it went through a series of alterations before reaching the appearance we see today.²⁷ The orphrey panels were sewn together and then joined with the velvet, which was also assembled from several pieces. This is evident from the seams between the embroidered panels and those that run across the velvet in the middle of the front side, at the shoulders, and at the bottom of the back side. Collecting all the pieces to be used for the chasuble could be a gradual process, especially if they came from different sources—whether directly commissioned by members of a church, recycled from other garments,²⁸ or donated by wealthy patrons²⁹—and arrived at the church sacristy at different times.

When assembling the pieces, the artist often had to work in a creative and flexible manner with what was available rather than following a predetermined design or fixed scheme. If this was the case



Fig. 9. Detail of the MFAH Chasuble, showing one of the prophets on the cross orphrey.
Photo was taken by the author.

for the MFAH chasuble, it could not only explain the visual discrepancies between the different panels, but also account for yet another inconsistency between them: apart from the placement of *The Annunciation* panel, which is expectedly put at the most prominent position

given the critical importance of Christ's Incarnation to the ritual of Mass, the arrangement of the rest of the narrative scenes is quite puzzling, as they neither obey chronological order nor follow any apparent iconographic logic. The license in the order suggests that

narrative specificity was not held to an exacting standard. Instead, visual coherence and visual impact were the goals that took precedence. For the pillar orphrey in the front, the color scheme is unified with vibrant colors of red, green and blue, while the cross orphrey has all the sumptuous panels that sparkle with golden light.

Such arrangement took consideration of the varied ways in which the vestment would be displayed at different moments of the liturgy and helped convey the transubstantiation doctrine in a more persuasive way. From the thirteenth century, it became a common practice for priests to turn their backs to the congregation and face the altar at the moments of consecrating the eucharist species and the elevation of the Host.³⁰ Therefore, only the back of the chasuble would have been visible to the lay audience,³¹ and understandably it is often more lavishly decorated than the front, as is the case here.³² The bottom panel on the cross orphrey (Fig. 2) that shows *The Visitation*, however, displays vibrant colors and therefore creates a visual disjunction with the above panels. The incoherence may appear quite jarring in a static museum display but actually makes liturgical sense. When a priest elevates the Host or the chalice, the deacon(s) kneeling behind him would

lift the bottom of his chasuble³³—a detail commonly recognized and illustrated in pictorial renditions of this ritual moment, such as *The Mass of Saint Giles* (Fig. 10). In doing so, they would ensure that the cross orphrey remained a coherent display of golden splendor during the most important moment of the Eucharist liturgy. Another factor to consider is that the bottom panel must have suffered the most wear and tear because of this bending motion. Therefore, it could be that a more durable panel with more couching stitches was put at the bottom to withstand the stress.

It can be instructive to imagine the chasuble being worn by a priest during Mass in its original, early modern setting. Many components on the chasuble can be activated by light, such as the pile-on-pile pattern of the velvet, the *bouclé* loops on the brocade, the *ornu* embroidery, the sleek surface of the “needle painting,” and the patterns and motifs that are set in relief. The chasuble would have been galvanized by the iridescent light filtered through stained glass windows and by the flickering candlelight in a church, thus becoming a transcendent sight that heightened spirituality and intensified the sacramental mystery. As the priest stood up from a kneeling position and raised his arms to elevate the eucharistic Host, the



Fig. 10. Master of Saint Giles, *The Mass of Saint Giles*, ca. 1500, oil on oak panel, 62.3 x 46 cm, The National Gallery, London. ©The National Gallery, London (CC BY-NC-ND).

cross orphrey was also elevated. To the congregation farther away in the back, the chasuble at the climactic moment might just look like a glowing cross, and the Holy Ghost at the top of the cross orphrey echoed the shape of the Host. The dramatic visual effects of the chasuble and the alignment of the elevated Host, the Holy Ghost, the Annunciation scene, and the cross, would facilitate the audience's understanding of the teachings that were, and still are, at the heart of the Catholic faith: that humanity is redeemed through Christ's Incarnation and his death on the cross, and that the consecrated eucharist species are the real body and blood of Christ, begotten through the Holy Ghost, just as "Word was made flesh"³⁴ in the Annunciation.

The 2020 CAA session focused on recent acquisitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the intended site for the 2020 MAHS meeting. The meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19, and the 2021 meeting was virtual. MAHS finally did meet in Houston in 2022.

¹ For a more detailed description of its condition, see Matthew Reeves, “Chasuble with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin,” in *Late Medieval and Renaissance Textiles*, by Rosamund Garrett and Matthew Reeves (London: Sam Fogg, 2018), 58; the full provenance information provided by MFAH is as follows: “estate sale of Marzell von Nemes, Helbing, Munich, 1931; Maîtres Chapelle et Martin, Versailles, c. 1933–34; collection of Charles Ratton (1895–1986), Paris; Sam Fogg, London, 2018; purchased by MFAH, 2018” (“Unknown Flemish Chasuble with Scenes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin,” The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://emuseum.mfah.org/objects/140412/chasuble-with-scenes-from-the-lives-of-christ-and-the-virgin>).

² The accession numbers of the Spanish chasubles are 36.38, 36.39, and 36.52.

³ One of the most impressive of these liturgical vestments is the *Marian Mantel*, which is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. An image is available at “Marienmantel des Meßornats des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies (Pluviale),” Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/86220/>.

⁴ Both Sam Fogg and the MFAH have dated the chasuble to around 1510. More precise dating and identification of the materials can be achieved by technical examination of the dyestuff, the selvedge, and the twist of the ground weave thread. A visual inspection of the underside is also desirable. However, it is covered by a linen cloth, which was probably added in the early

twentieth century. I would like to thank Ingrid Seyb, conservator at the MFAH, who provided me with this information. For the importance of inspecting the underside of velvets, see Lisa Monnas, “Introduction,” in *Renaissance Velvet* (London: V&A, 2012), 14–15; For dating church vestments in general, see Pauline Johnstone, *High Fashion in the Church: The Place of Church Vestments in the History of Art from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Leeds: Maney, 2002), 70, 141.

⁵ For the “fiddle-back” shape, see Christa C. Mayer-Thurman, *Raiment for the Lord’s Service: A Thousand Years of Western Vestments* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1975), 40; and Elizabeth Coatsworth and Gale Owen-Crocker, *Clothing the Past: Surviving Garments from Early Medieval to Early Modern Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 135.

⁶ For more examples of chasubles whose shape were altered at a later time, see Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker, *Clothing the Past*, 120–58.

⁷ Joseph Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung im Occident und Orient* (Freiburg: Herdersche, 1907), 169–71, 239. See also Maureen Miller, *Clothing the Clergy: Virtue and Power in Medieval Europe, c. 800–1200* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 11, 15, 34.

⁸ For a discussion of church leaders’ efforts to inculcate the laity with Catholic doctrines through every aspect of the ritual, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98–108, esp. 103.

⁹ Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung*, 185.

¹⁰ The irregularly spaced, light-yellow stripes that run vertically through the length of the velvet seem to be the result of discoloration in those pile warp threads. A lab report on the silk threads and the dyestuff will probably shed light on the precise cause of the discoloration.

¹¹ In Renaissance paintings, gold brocade velvets are reserved for holy figures and people with high prestige, such as Saint Donatian in Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele* in Groeningemuseum, Bruges, or the young Magus in Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint Columba Altarpiece* in Alte Pinakothek, Munich. For a comprehensive examination of fabrics represented in paintings, see Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings, 1300–1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

For extant examples of Renaissance gold brocade velvet, see the fifteenth-century Dalmatic in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1975.1.1807, "Dalmatic, 15th Century," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/461237>) and a sixteenth-century Dalmatic in the Victoria and Albert Museum (T.372-1976, "Dalmatic, 1530–1569 (Made)," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O353555/dalmatic-unknown/>).

¹² Monnas, "Introduction," 12–13.

¹³ Monnas, "Introduction," 19.

¹⁴ The identification of this embroidery panel is debatable. It does not seem to follow any iconographic convention. The figures are so identified mainly because the small child held by the elderly woman is draped in a blue garment, which is characteristic of the Virgin.

¹⁵ Andrew Hamilton, "The Art of Embroidery in the Burgundian Paraments of the Order of the Golden Fleece," in *Staging the Court of Burgundy: Proceedings of the Conference "The Splendour of Burgundy," Groeningemuseum, Brugge, 27 March–21 July 2009*, ed. Wim Blockmans et al. (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2013), 153.

¹⁶ According to Ingrid Seyb, the bright pink stitches under the three arches on the pillar orphrey and the arch at the bottom of the cross orphrey are probably later additions. See Ingrid Seyb, "Conservation Summary," MFAH curatorial file, September 13, 2018.

¹⁷ Although there is also the possibility that the original colors of the threads have faded.

¹⁸ Hamilton, "The Art of Embroidery," 154.

¹⁹ This aspect is not unprecedented, but still quite unusual for surviving chasubles. I only found two that are comparable to the MFAH chasuble in this respect. Both are in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, with accession numbers 329–1908 and T.27–1922. The so-called *Pienza Cope* is also unusual, as its embroidery panels feature female holy figures exclusively (see Wendy R. Larson, "Narrative Threads: The Pienza Cope's Embroidered 'Vitae'

and Their Ritual Setting,” *Studies in Iconography* 24 [2003]: 139–63).

²⁰ For the development of Marian devotion during the medieval and Renaissance eras, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 191–332.

²¹ Timothy B. Husband, “Ecclesiastical Vestments of the Middle Ages: An Exhibition,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 29, no. 7 (March 1971): 289. I follow the same argument given by Husband here for the figure of Saint George on a fifteenth-century chasuble.

²² Some examples of such *Annunciation* paintings include Robert Campin’s *The Annunciation Triptych* (56.70a–c, image available at “Annunciation Triptych (Merode Altarpiece), ca. 1427–32,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470304>) and two panels by Hans Memling (17.190.7, image available at “The Annunciation, ca. 1465–70, Hans Memling, Netherlandish” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437490>; and 1975.1.113, image available at “The Annunciation, 1480–89, Hans Memling, Netherlandish,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459055>) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), and Rogier van der Weyden’s Louvre panel (INV 1982, image available at “L’Annonciation, 1400/1500 (XV^e siècle), Weyden, Rogier van der, Atelier de Pays-Bas du Sud, École de,” The Louvre,

accessed February 24, 2021, <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010061889>).

²³ This hand gesture is similar to those of the preachers in Fra Angelico’s *The Coronation of the Virgin* in the cell of San Marco, Florence. See Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65–66. Based on primary sources, Baxandall interprets this gesture as indicating that the preachers are discussing holy matters, even though none of the preachers has his mouth open in Fra Angelico’s painting.

²⁴ The illuminations in question can be found on MS H.5 fol. 30r, MS M.231 fol. 31r, MS M.1001 fol. 18r, MS M.189 fol. 17r, MS M.131 fol. 25r, and MS M.179 fol. 60v (images available at “Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts,” The Morgan Library and Museum, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscripts/list>).

²⁵ Roger S. Wieck, “Introduction,” in *Painted Prayers: The Books of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, in association with the Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997), 9–25.

²⁶ For one example, see the clouds beneath the angels in Jean Pucelle’s illumination of *The Crucifixion* in *The Hours of Jeanne d’Évreux*, fol. 68v, which is in the collection of MMA (accession no. 54.1.2, image available at “The Hours of Jeanne d’Évreux, Queen of France, ca. 1324–28, Jean Pucelle, French,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed February 24,

2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470309>).

²⁷ The alterations of the MFAH chasuble include the “fiddle-back” shape in the front, the linen lining added at a later time, and the pink stitches under several of the arches on the orphrey; see endnotes 5, 4, and 16 above respectively. For more examples that demonstrate these aspects of the liturgical vestments, see Elizabeth Coatsworth, “Survival, Recovery, Restoration, Re-Creation: The Long Life of Medieval Garments,” in *Refashioning Medieval and Early Modern Dress: A Tribute to Robin Netherton*, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer (Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 63–65; and Christa C. Mayer-Thurman, “Ecclesiastical Textiles,” in *European Textiles in the Robert Lehman Collection* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 35–172.

²⁸ For example, the orphrey panels of a cope could be recycled and used on a chasuble. See the so-called *Butler-Bowdon Cope* (accession no. T.36–1955) and the Chasuble (accession no. 329–1908) in the Victoria and Albert Museum. See also Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker, *Clothing the Past*, 115, 151.

²⁹ A prominent donor of liturgical vestments was the Duchess Matilda of Saxony (1156–89). See Jitske Jasperse, “Matilda of Saxony’s Luxury Objects in Motion: Salving the Wounds of Conflict,” in *Moving Women Moving Objects (400–1500)*, ed. Tracy Chapman Hamilton and Mariah Proctor-Tiffany (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 95–103.

³⁰ Martin Kemp, *The Oxford History of Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138.

³¹ For churches installed with a rood screen, the congregants could still be able to observe the Mass ritual through openwork and squints on the screen. See Paul Binski, “The English Parish Church and Its Art in the Later Middle Ages: A Review of the Problem,” *Studies in Iconography* 20 (1999): 12–14.

³² See the curatorial remarks on a fifteenth-century chasuble (accession no. T.256 to B-1967) in the Victoria and Albert Museum (image available at “Chasuble, 1400-1430 (Made),” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed February 24, 2002, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O84718/chasuble-unknown/>). See also John T. Doherty, “Ecclesiastical Vestments in the Modern Church,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 29, no. 7 (March 1971): 312.

³³ Adrian Fortescue, J. B. O’Connell, and Alcuin Reid, *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described* (London: Black, 2009), 140.

³⁴ John 1:14 (King James Version).

The Erotics of the Axillary Pose

James Clifton

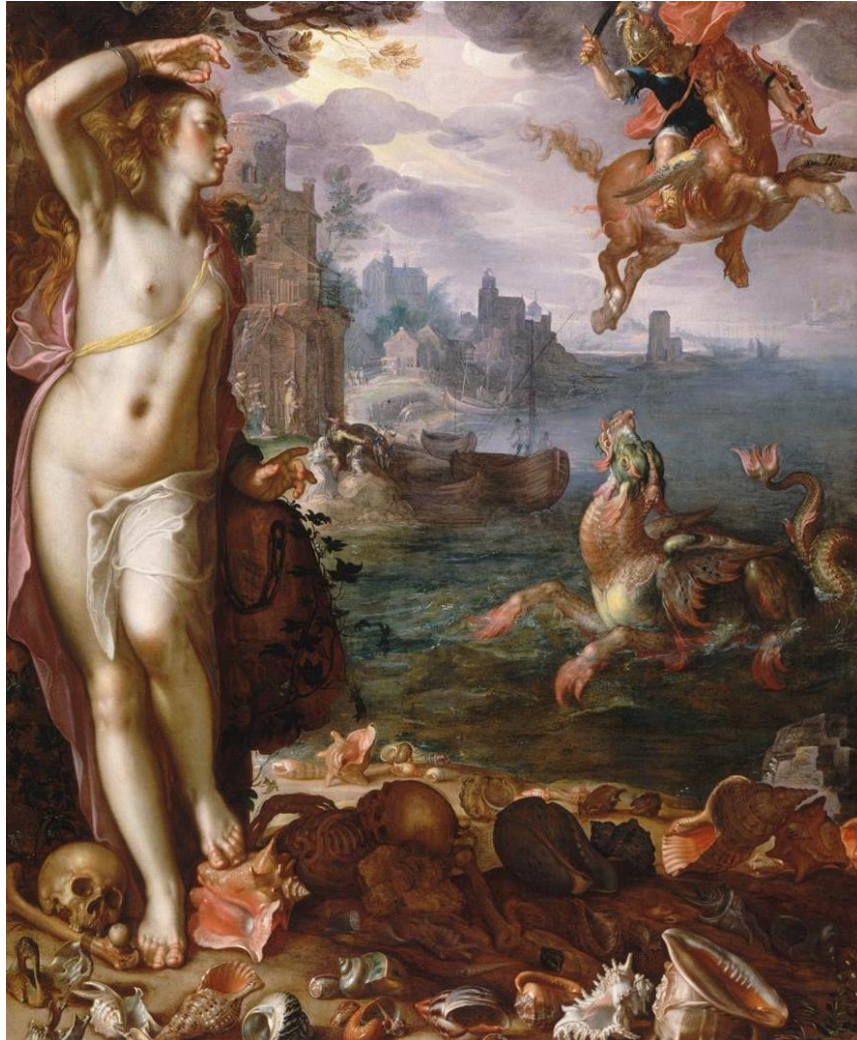


Fig. 1. Joachim Wtewael, *Andromeda and Perseus*, 1611, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Axilla, feminine noun. The hollow part of the human body that is under the shoulder at the juncture of the arm, and which ordinarily has hair.

—Antoine Furetière¹

* Versions of this paper were presented at the Early Science and Medicine Seminar, Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge University, October 2017; the Midwest Art History Society (MAHS) panel at the annual meeting of the College Art Association (CAA), Los Angeles, February 2018; and panels in honor of Celeste Brusati at the annual meeting of the Sixteenth Century Society & Conference (SCSC), San Diego, October 2021. I am grateful to the organizers—Dániel Margócsy, Judith W. Mann, and Walter S. Melion, respectively—and audiences of those events for their stimulating conversation, as well as to Marisa Anne Bass, Judith W. Mann, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful readings of drafts of the essay.

Perseus's rescue of the princess Andromeda from a sea monster was represented numerous times in the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, north as well as south of the Alps, here in examples by Joachim Wtewael (1611), Peter Paul Rubens (ca. 1638), and the Cavaliere d'Arpino (ca. 1593–94) (Figs. 1–3).² The well-known narrative, told most influentially by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, hinges on Andromeda's beauty: it was the subject of her mother's boast that angered Neptune and led to his demand for her sacrifice.³ And it was what drew Perseus's attention and provoked his difficult battle with the monster: Perseus's passion was ignited, and he was stunned by her beauty—Ovid's text literally says he was “stupefied and seized by the image” (*stupet et visae correptus imagine formae*)—and almost forgot to move the wings on his feet,⁴ so that Andromeda was able to effect, if only momentarily, the petrifying force that Medusa could not. Before he agreed to save her, Perseus demanded of Andromeda's parents that she be given to him—this was a negotiation rather than an altruistic act—and thus, as Ovid put it, she was both cause and reward of all his labor. The artist's task, then, was to present Andromeda

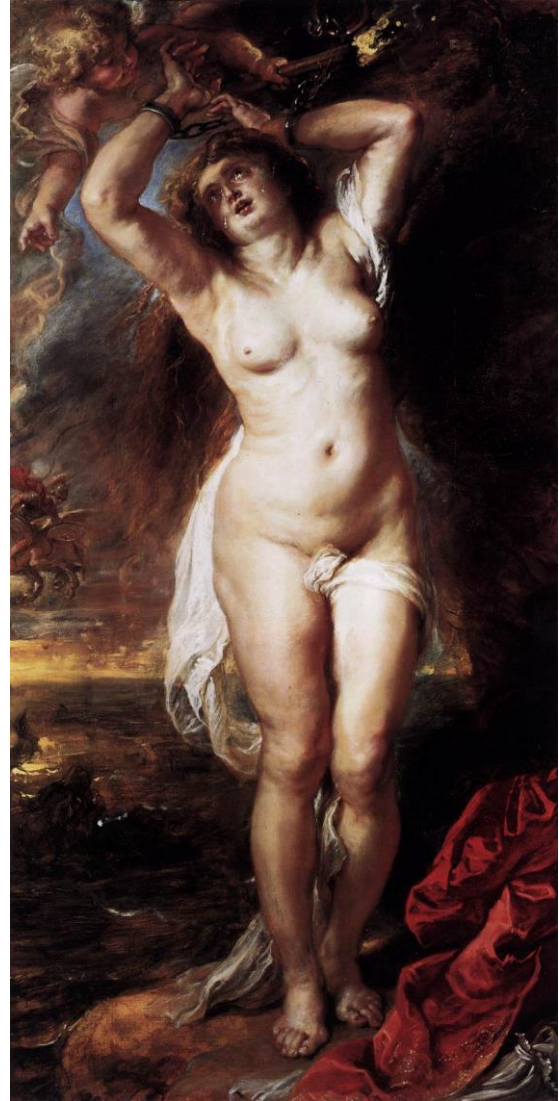


Fig. 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda*, ca. 1638, oil on oak, 189 x 94 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

as exceedingly beautiful and enticing, to both Perseus and the viewer of the artwork. Various interpretations of paintings of the subject are possible, and an artist might be able to satisfy more than one brief simultaneously—Wtewael's painting, for example, has been read as a political allegory, with Andromeda as the Dutch republic threatened



Fig. 3. Cavaliere d'Arpino (Giuseppe Cesari), *Perseus Rescuing Andromeda*, ca. 1593–94, oil on lapis lazuli, 20 x 15.4 cm, Saint Louis Art Museum 1:2000.

by the Spanish empire and liberated by the Princes of Orange, and, more subtly, as an allegory of painting in the Netherlands—but my interest here is entirely basic (or base, if you will), focused on the affective qualities of Andromeda's body and those of similar figures, consistent across a large group of pictures.

Andromeda was almost always foregrounded, depicted nude and

facing the viewer, her hands chained to a seaside cliff or large rock behind her, usually standing in contrapposto, but sometimes partially seated. These three paintings offer us the three main conventions for the positioning of her arms, which is my primary concern here: one arm down and one up over her head; both up over her head; and both down and behind her. My contention is that there is

an erotic appeal—that is, an additional erotic appeal, given the conventional nudity of the figure, its contrapposto stance, and its helplessness—in the exposing of one or both armpits (the axillae) in what I refer to as the axillary pose. This appeal has, to my knowledge, scarcely been noted in the literature on representations of Andromeda or similar figures, especially Saint Sebastian, although European art of antiquity and the early-modern era is replete with exposed axillae, from the *Wounded*

Niobid and the *Barberini Faun* to Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, and beyond. They are especially common in the work of Joachim Wtewael, a leading painter in Utrecht at the turn of the seventeenth century, who thus provides a convenient touchstone for the considerations that follow, but are in no way specific to him: *The Golden Age*, for example, features half a dozen nude figures reaching languidly upward for ever-available fruit (Fig. 4), while his various versions of Mars and



Fig. 4. Joachim Wtewael, *The Golden Age*, 1605, oil on copper, 22.5 x 30.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 5. Joachim Wtewael, *Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan*, 1604–08, oil on copper, 20.3 x 15.5 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Venus caught *in flagrante delicto* by Venus's husband, Vulcan, clearly situate the exposed axilla in an erotic context (Fig. 5).⁵ The axillary pose may not quite be the "long-suppressed matter of fact" assigned to oblivion—nor carry the theological import—of images of Christ's sexuality observed by Leo Steinberg, but the *ostentatio axillarum* abounds and deserves a reckoning.⁶

The axillary pose works in several ways: 1) lifting one arm over the head (a half-axillary, so to speak) tends to complicate and exaggerate the contrapposto of the figure, enhancing its eroticism; 2) it exposes a normally hidden, tender part of the body, enhancing the figure's vulnerability; 3) by visual analogy, it suggests other erotic parts of the body; 4) it suggests olfactory as well as visual sensations; 5) lifting both arms (a full-axillary) raises the breasts and flattens the stomach⁷; and 6) for some viewers, it may carry an inherent erotic appeal, based in part on any or all of the foregoing or other factors.

Owing to the ubiquity of works of art including the axillary pose, in depictions of Andromeda and elsewhere, it is not necessary to describe its pictorial genealogy. Yet a couple of engravings from Agostino Carracci's series known as the *Lascivie* from the early

1590s may usefully demonstrate that both the subject of Andromeda and the axillary pose were apparently considered inherently erotic in the early-modern period (Figs. 6–7).⁸ It is furthermore worth noting, with regard to Carracci's *Satyr and Sleeping Nude*, that a substantial portion of figures in the axillary pose, dating back to antiquity, are sleeping. Such figures—"perfectly passive objects of our gaze," to use Bette Talvacchia's phrase⁹—suggest not only a kind of abandonment, of un(self)conscious openness, but also of vulnerability, and this vulnerability—shared by bound figures like Andromeda—plays a role in their eroticism.

The sensuality of the axillary pose is not at all limited to the female figure, nor is it limited to figures whose iconography is inherently erotic.¹⁰ Wtewael anticipated Andromeda's pose with a painting, also monumental, of the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* in 1600 (Fig. 8).¹¹ In fact, if the attribution to Wtewael of a drawing of *Andromeda and Perseus* in Vienna is accurate, the artist initially translated quite directly the pose from the male Sebastian to the female Andromeda, reworking it later for the painted figure while maintaining its essential form and affect (Fig. 9), suggesting, perhaps, a conceptual as well as formal link



Fig. 6. Agostino Carracci, *Andromeda and the Sea Monster*, ca. 1590–95, from the *Lascivie*, engraving, 15.4 x 10.9 cm.

Fig. 7. Agostino Carracci, *Satyr and Sleeping Nude*, ca. 1590–95, from the *Lascivie*, engraving, 15.2 x 10 cm.

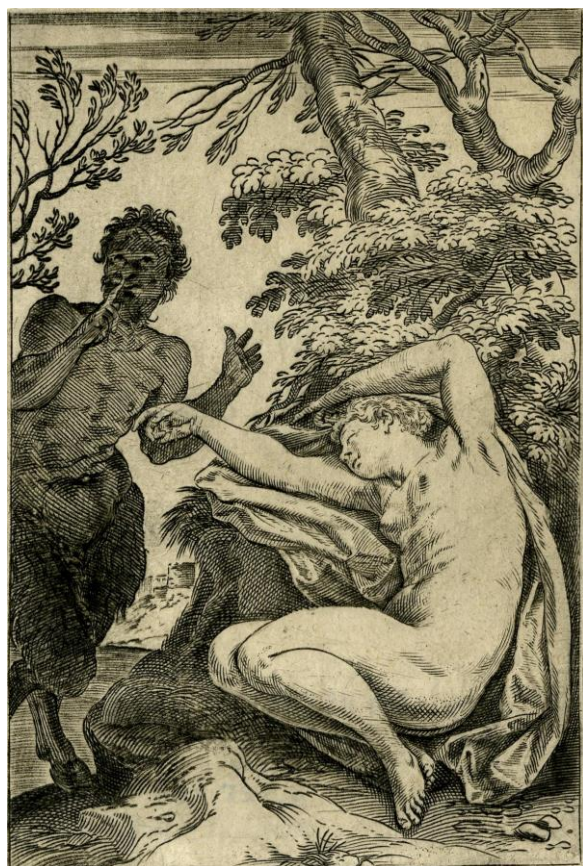




Fig. 8. Joachim Wtewael, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1600, oil on canvas, 169.2 x 125.1 cm, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.



Fig. 9. Attributed to Joachim Wtewael, *Perseus and Andromeda*, ca. 1605, pen and brown ink with brown wash and white heightening, 15.8 x 20.3 cm, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

between the Christian martyr and the pagan princess.¹² Hendrick Goltzius's 1583 engraving of *Andromeda and Perseus* has often been adduced as a source for Wtewael's *Andromeda* (Fig. 10), but Lynn Orr has suggested that it also lies behind Wtewael's *Saint Sebastian*, which might, she further suggests, explain in part what she calls "the exceedingly androgynous character" of the saint.¹³ Wtewael almost certainly knew the engraving, although there are many other potential models.

The Cavaliere d'Arpino consistently depicted Andromeda with her arms down, but he made use of the full-axillary pose in his *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, dated variously to the 1590s or around 1617 (Fig. 11).¹⁴ Like Andromeda, Sebastian is usually shown nude, standing, with his arms bound behind him—in his case, to a tree or post—with both arms down, one up, or both up. Facing the viewer in d'Arpino's painting, he carries considerable erotic force and appeal.¹⁵ With his "soft, sensual, and feminine body,"¹⁶



Fig. 10. Hendrick Goltzius, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1583, engraving, 19.8 x 14.5 cm, British Museum, London.

Fig. 11. Cavaliere d'Arpino (Giuseppe Cesari), *Saint Sebastian*, 1590s/ca. 1617 [?], oil on panel, 96 x 69 cm, Quadreria dei Girolamini, Naples.



d'Arpino's Sebastian echoes what Elizabeth Bartman has called the "sexy boys" of Hellenistic and Roman sculpture and anticipates the ephebic youths of French neoclassical painting and Thomas Mann's Tazio, whose "armpits were still as smooth as a statue's."¹⁷

As with Andromeda, regardless of which conventional pose an artist used to depict Sebastian, the compositions almost invariably present the youthful saint's beautiful nude body to the viewer and are thus about that nude body and its relationship to the viewer, even though there was no iconographic justification for Sebastian's sensuality. As Jacobus de Voragine told it in *The Golden Legend*, Sebastian was a commander of a Roman cohort attached to the emperor's personal retinue who was condemned to death when his Christianity was discovered. Bound and shot with so many arrows that his body looked like a porcupine, he miraculously survived and avowed his faith again, only to be clubbed to death.¹⁸ It was only over the course of the early-modern period that he developed from a mature man to a tender youth and the traditional reading of the Roman archers' arrows as metaphors of the plague was "contaminated" by a conflation with Cupid's arrows of love. Concomitantly, the depiction of the saint was increasingly eroticized.¹⁹

The exaggeration of the contrapposto—jutting the hip farther off-axis, deepening the figure's S-curve, twisting the body into a *figura serpentinata*—may enhance the eroticism, but that eroticism can be further amplified by raising an arm, which in Wtewael's painting may be its primary purpose: the saint's left arm is not yet bound, but it rises to expose the axilla in a gesture with no obvious narrative justification.²⁰

Sebastian's sensuality is sometimes emphasized by complete nudity, as in d'Arpino's painting and iterations of Alessandro Vittoria's sculpture of the saint, first realized as a life-sized work in stone for an altar in San Francesco della Vigna in Venice, but then circulated widely, including in the north, as copies or casts of a small bronze version.²¹ Paolo Veronese's portrait of Vittoria with a (possibly whitewashed terracotta) model for the figure reminds us of the tactile qualities of the sculpture—that it was meant to be held, caressed even (Fig. 12).²² Comparably, our eyes are meant to linger over—visually caress—the body of Saint Sebastian in paintings of the subject.

Concerns about the sensuality of images of Saint Sebastian were expressed already in the sixteenth century, most saliently in Giorgio Vasari's well-known account of a large painting of *Saint Sebastian* by



Fig. 12. Paolo Veronese, *Alessandro Vittoria* (1524/25–1608), ca. 1580, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 81.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fra Bartolomeo, executed for San Marco in Florence around 1514–15. According to Vasari, he had been criticized more than once for his inability to depict nudes and thus committed himself to demonstrate his skill in this regard, more than, one infers, to satisfy a devotional brief, his own fidelity to Savonarola notwithstanding. This life-sized nude Sebastian with a “sweet air” was removed from its place in the church by the friars who had heard in the confessional from “women who in looking at it had sinned [“were corrupted” in Vasari’s first edition] through the lovely and lascivious imitation of the living person given him by the

skill of Fra Bartolomeo.”²³ The painting is untraced, having entered the collection of King Francis I of France and subsequently disappeared, but the composition, known from a reduced copy in Fiesole, features the nude, nubile saint reaching upwards for his martyr’s palm in a half-axillary pose recalling that of the monumental *Salvator Mundi* that the Frate also completed around that time, but with far less clothing.²⁴ Toward the end of the century, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo repeated Vasari’s story and recommended that artists depict the saint shot with arrows and covered with blood so that he wouldn’t appear as the “beautiful, lovely, and white nude that he was.”²⁵ Hideous figures like a Grünewald Christ were not forthcoming, however, and Lomazzo may have underestimated the erotic appeal of the violated, bloody body anyway. What is also unstated in the sixteenth-century literature on Saint Sebastian and other male nudes that might give cause for scandal is their potential homoerotic appeal, which Richard Spear emphasized in connection with Guido Reni’s paintings of the subject, such as the canvas of around 1615 in the Pinacoteca Capitolina (Fig. 13), although others have disputed it.²⁶ The identity of the original owner of Wtewael’s *Saint Sebastian* is unknown, but it is an



Fig. 13. Guido Reni, *Saint Sebastian*, ca. 1615, oil on canvas, 130 x 99 cm.
Roma, Musei Capitolini, Pinacoteca Capitolina. © Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.
Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

unusual picture in the artist's oeuvre and was almost certainly painted for someone in particular. The patron was probably—though not necessarily—male, possibly a namesake of the saint, and, in any case, surely aware of—and receptive to—the erotic qualities of the picture. It is perhaps no surprise that male figures in an axillary pose are most often passive, disempowered, and vulnerable, enacting the feminization of the male figure, or at least the proposal of an alternative masculinity. Sebastian's axillary pose in Reni's painting merits only a glancing but perceptive mention by Spear in a catalog of the figure's qualities: his "soft flesh, full lips, defenseless armpits, supple belly, and bare groin."²⁷ I contend that the pose contributes greatly to Sebastian's eroticism, and perhaps it is no mere chance or compositional necessity that induced Reni to plunge an arrow precisely into the "defenseless armpit." Here the armpit may substitute for Sebastian's even more tender, vulnerable parts, hidden from our view. Wtewael's painting may include an additional substitution, beyond his body: the steeply foreshortened nude angel approaching Sebastian at the upper right—a more extreme version of an analogous putto in Titian's *Rape of Europa*—may also manifest a displacement

of the martyr's sexuality, offering the viewer another point of entry into the subject.

Such an extra-corporeal substitution has been discerned in Wtewael's *Perseus and Andromeda* as well, in that the conch on which Andromeda rests her foot in Wtewael's painting acts as a visual metaphor for her concealed genitalia, displaced and exposed, and thus a "startlingly direct route of entry into the figure," as Joanna Woodall has put it.²⁸ But might one also suggest that her proffered armpit—a part of the body not usually exposed—may play that role, substituting for Andromeda's unavailable pudenda, featureless in Goltzius's print and draped in Wtewael's painting?²⁹ This is not to say that the armpit cannot act on its own behalf, rather than as a proxy for some other body part. In Wtewael's *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 14), for example, the female body is presented simultaneously to the viewer of the painting and a figure within the painting, that is, Adam—who functions as a surrogate for the viewer, as it were, in both the narrative and the composition, so that the viewer interacts doubly with Eve's form. Before they ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve were naked but innocent; afterwards, they were naked and ashamed. For most Bible

commentators from Early Christian times at least through the Renaissance, the Edenic couple's sin introduced into the world sexuality as we now know it, full of lust and uncontrollable desire. In some apocryphal accounts, exegetical commentaries, and heretical versions of the Fall, Eve's deception by the serpent (who was sometimes understood as a fallen angel) included sexual intercourse, or Eve's temptation of Adam was enacted through sexual seduction.³⁰

In Wtewael's depiction of the subject, a painting on copper from around 1610—that is, contemporaneous with the *Andromeda*—Eve's right hand, aloft, holds an apple at the mouth of the serpent. Her left hand brings another apple to Adam. Her two arms form an elegant S-curve, framing her two delicate breasts. Reaching around her waist and placing his left hand on her cocked hip, Adam takes the apple from her with his right, so that their two arms are extensions of each other, joined by the Forbidden Fruit. While she looks at the apple in their hands, he gazes up into her eyes. But he is also nestled beneath her arm, confronting her naked breast, pomaceous in its shape, size, and color. Each pair of legs is an echo of the other. The two figures, though scarcely touching, work in unison, one with each other, bone of bone and flesh of

flesh. The dynamic balance of the two nude figures reads as sexual tension, anticipated union, perhaps, rather than the actual union of Mars and Venus (Fig. 5). It is reminiscent of Michelangelo's similarly meaningful compositional entwining of figures on the Sistine ceiling, albeit with the positions of Adam and Eve reversed—an entwining that unspools in the Expulsion. In Wtewael's painting, there is something specific about Eve's raised arm that makes his composition particularly compelling. To this we might contrast an engraving of the subject by Jan Saenredam after Abraham Bloemaert, from 1604, which may have been a source for Wtewael—note the relationship of the serpent, apple, and Eve's lifted right hand as she hands Adam a second apple with her left—but a source greatly transformed (Fig. 15). Bloemaert's Adam and Eve are at a distance from each other, and there is no complementarity between the figures. Adam looks down, his arms hanging limply, withdrawn into himself and away from Eve. It is as if they have already entered their post-lapsarian alienation from each other.

A still from David O. Russell's 1996 film *Flirting with Disaster*,³¹ with Patricia Arquette and Josh Brolin, may prompt one to see Wtewael's *Adam and Eve* in a whole



Fig. 14. Joachim Wtewael, *Adam and Eve*, ca. 1610, oil on copper, 39.5 x 28.7 cm, private collection.

Fig. 15. Jan Saenredam after Abraham Bloemaert, *Adam and Eve*, 1604, engraving, 27.2 x 19.7 cm.



new light and take seriously the possibility that Wtewael is using not only Eve's armpit but also Adam's proximate engagement with it to enhance the eroticism of the painting (Fig. 16).³² What is Adam's next move here?³³

Wtewael's painting, with Adam's nose nestled beneath Eve's upraised arm, evokes a sense other than sight, perhaps calling to mind references to smell like a passage from Junichiro Tanizaki's 1924 novel, *Naomi*, about the narrator's dance instructor, whom he calls "the white countess," taller than he by a head:

[H]er body had a certain sweet fragrance. "Her armpits stink," I heard the students in the mandolin club say later. I'm told that Westerners do have strong body odor, and no doubt it was true of the countess. She probably used perfume to hide it. But to me, the faint, sweet-sour combination of perfume and perspiration was not at all displeasing—to the contrary, I found it deeply alluring. It made me think of lands across the sea I'd never seen, of exquisite, exotic flower gardens.

"This is the fragrance exuded by the countess's white body!" I told myself, enraptured, as I inhaled the aroma greedily.³⁴



Fig. 16. Still from *Flirting with Disaster* (1996; dir. David O. Russell).

Most human body odor originates in the armpits; there apocrine glands produce a fluid that is broken down by bacteria into fatty acids and steroids that smell musky.³⁵ In an important article in the journal *Psychiatry* in 1975, titled “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” Benjamin Brody attempted to redress the previous lack of attention to the armpit, especially with respect to its role in sexual attraction. As he succinctly put it: “The only function of the apocrine gland is as a sexual lure or as a sexual identification.”³⁶

Most important for our purposes, Brody pointed out that “[t]he axillary hair, and the usual position of the arms hanging over the axillary cavity, creates a scent box that conserves the odor until released by sexual stimulation *and the raising of the arms*.”³⁷ He noted that in human beings, in contrast to most animals, because of our erect position, axillary odors are easier for us to detect than genital odors,³⁸ and “[t]he scented secretion is conserved within the axillae and becomes perceptible, for the most part, *only when the arms are raised*, a gesture that, for this reason, may become a sexual signal.”³⁹

The term “pheromone,” which was not used by Brody but was known from studies of non-human species since the late 1950s, was introduced into the field.

Pheromones have been defined as “odiferous substances secreted to the outside environment by an individual and received by a second conspecific individual to release a specific reaction such as a definitive behaviour or a developmental process.”⁴⁰ Whether or not human pheromones exist remains an open question,⁴¹ but great claims have nonetheless been made for their potency in enhancing sexual attraction, and the primary locus for the production of such (putative) pheromones is the armpit. Synthetic pheromones in cosmetic and aftershave additives have been marketed by the Athena Institute for decades as conspecific attractants (that is, attracting members of the same species), although the taglines differ for men and women in a stereotypical way. For men, it is “Let pheromones power your sexual attractiveness,” and for women, it is “Let the power of human pheromones increase the romance in your life!”⁴²

The early-modern sources I have adduced here in arguing for eroticized axillae have been visual rather than textual, implicit rather than explicit. In fact, textual references to armpits of any kind are scarce. For their *Vocabolario*, the Accademici della Crusca excavated from Dante’s *Inferno* a couple of bland references to the armpits of a beast.⁴³ Noting that the most

dangerous tumors (*apostumes*) are those in the armpit because they are closest to the heart, Antoine Furetière provided an example of use only in the etymology, reaching back to Catullus's well-known assertion that no woman wants to come to his rival's arms because rumor had it that he harbored a smelly goat in his armpit.⁴⁴ A passage in Seneca's Epistle 114 on the concomitant degradation of morals, dress, and verbal style is provocative: he compares those who are unreasonably elaborate in their speech to people who pluck the hair of their legs and those who are unreasonably negligent in their speech to people who don't even bother to pluck the hair of their armpits.⁴⁵ Whether this particular metaphor of style might inform the images treated here is unclear, although an intersection of corporeal form and aesthetic form within a rhetoric of style is feasible, as Elizabeth Cropper has demonstrated for the Florentine *litteratus* Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogue on the Beauties of Women*, completed in 1542 and first published, posthumously, in 1548.⁴⁶ But if we take Firenzuola's *Dialogue* as exemplary, if not definitive, no one included armpits in the catalog of beautiful body parts. In speaking of the "beauty, utility, use, reason, artifice, and proportion of all the members,"⁴⁷ Firenzuola addressed

the head and its various parts—hair, eyes, eyelashes, cheeks, ears, nose, mouth, teeth, tongue, and chin—and on down to the throat, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, breasts, legs, and feet. The arms of one of the interlocutors in the dialogue are praised as proportionate in length, very white in color with a slight shadow of carnation, fleshy and muscular, though with a certain softness—not the arms of Hercules squeezing Cacus, but of Athena disguised as a shepherd boy—full of a natural juice that gives them a certain liveliness and freshness that begets a firmness—but there is no indication that they might be lifted above her head to expose her armpits.⁴⁸ Further along a certain literary spectrum, Pietro Aretino's pornographic *Sonetti lussuriosi* have a much more limited range of *loci corporali*, focusing almost exclusively on the genitals, with occasional calls for the tongue and forays into the buttocks.⁴⁹ Several of Marcantonio Raimondi's prints after Giulio Romano's compositions that prompted Aretino's poems, known as *I modi*, provide a prominent view of the woman's armpit, but the attention of her companion is likely elsewhere, and Aretino's text makes no mention of it. The absence of written references to the eroticized (or aestheticized) armpit is no proof, of course, that

early moderns did not think of it. How could they not? Once you start looking for exposed armpits in erotic contexts, you find them everywhere. And the visual—right under our noses, as it were—should not be ignored, even if it has sometimes gone tastefully unmentioned.

The 2018 Icons session at CAA focused on the Cavaliere d'Arpino's Perseus and Andromeda from the Saint Louis Art Museum.

¹ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, & les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, vol. 1 (The Hague and Rotterdam: Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690), s.v. "Aisselle": "AISSELLE, subst. fem. Partie creuse du corps humain qui est soul l'épaule à la jointure du bras, & qui a ordinairement du poil."

² See Eric Jan Sluijter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 48–61, and Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 75–97, especially for Goltzius and his circle.

³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.687: "quantaque maternae fuerit fiducia formae." See also Hyginus, *Fabularum Liber* (Basel: Apud Ioan. Hervagium, 1535), 24 (no. 64): "Cassiope filiae suae Andromedae, formam Nereidibus anteposuit, ob id Neptunus expostulavit, ut Andromada Cephei filia ceto obiiceretur."

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.675–677: "trahit inscius ignes / et stupet eximiae correptus imagine formae / paene suas quaterne est oblitus in aere pennas."

⁵ For Wtewael's versions of this subject, see Liesbeth M. Helmus, "Love and Passion: Wtewael's Personal Statement," in James Clifton, Liesbeth M. Helmus, and Arthur K. Wheelock, *Pleasure and Piety: The Art of Joachim Wtewael* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2015), 18–21.

⁶ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 1.

⁷ One gains some sense of these shifts from Robert Douglas Lockhart's photographic attempt to demonstrate the elasticity of the skin, reproduced by James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 257.

⁸ On the *Lascivie*, see Diane DeGrazia Bohlin, *Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci Family: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1979), 289–305 (cat. nos. 176–90).

⁹ Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 153.

¹⁰ Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* is a case in point. Regardless of its iconographic meaning, presumably allegorical but already identified diversely by Vasari and Condivi during Michelangelo's lifetime, the figure's erotic affect is manifest, recognized by, *inter alia*, Christian K. Kleinbub, *Michelangelo's Inner Anatomies* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2020), 43, who describes the figure as "plunged in an internal world of sensual fantasy." I suggest that the upraised arm and exposed axilla play an important role in this sensual fantasy.

¹¹ Lynn Federle Orr, "Joachim Wtewael, *Saint Sebastian*," in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, ed. Ben Broos (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 491. Woodall ("Wtewael's *Perseus and Andromeda*," 64–66) attaches considerable significance to the similarity and also suggests, albeit tentatively, that Wtewael's *Saint Sebastian* may also be

an allegory of visual representation (193 n. 122). Sebastian's pose may derive in part from Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* and *Rebellious Slave*, already in Paris during Wtewael's French sojourn around 1590.

¹² Patrick Le Chanu, *Joachim Wtewael: Persée et Andromède* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1999), 14.

¹³ Orr, "Joachim Wtewael, *Saint Sebastian*," 491. See also Lowenthal, *Joachim Wtewael*, 93: "The saint's voluptuous pose flaunts his androgynous beauty."

¹⁴ On the painting, see Herwarth Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino: Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna* (Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore, 2002), 159, 414 (cat. no. 175).

¹⁵ Richard E. Spear pointed to the small size of Sebastian's penis in this particular painting: "In design, Cesari's *St. Sebastian* is quite similar to Reni's, although the saint's genitals are entirely exposed, potentially inviting greater arousal unless their bantam size is off-putting" (*The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money and Art in the World of Guido Reni* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 75). But, as he points out in an endnote (341 n. 115), "Most of Reni's men have quite small genitals, which was customary, especially for religious figures, in Renaissance and Baroque art, probably as a consequence of the ancient tradition that equated large genitals with satyric, animal passion, as well as the assumption that any obvious genital display connotes sexual aggression."

¹⁶ Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino*, 159: "il corpo morbido, sensuale e femminile."

¹⁷ Elizabeth Bartman, "Eros's Flame: Images of Sexy Boys in Roman Ideal Sculpture," in *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity*, ed. Elaine K. Gazda (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 249–71; cited by Jenifer Neils, "Praxiteles to Caravaggio: The *Apollo Sauroktonos* Redefined," *The Art Bulletin* 99 (2017): 23; Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice," in *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), 44. On (sometimes suffering) ephebes around 1800, see Alex Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution," *History Workshop Journal* 30 (1990): 1–21; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Vertu: Alternative Masculinities in the Crucible of Revolution," *Art Journal* 56 (1997): 55–61.

¹⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:97–101. On the iconography of Saint Sebastian, see, in addition to other sources cited here, Johanna Jacobs, *Sebastiaan: Martelaar of Mythe* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993); Jacques Darriulat, *Sebastien Le Renaisant: Sur le martyre de saint Sébastien dans la deuxième moitié du Quattrocento* (Paris: Éditions de la Lagune, 1998).

¹⁹ On the development of Sebastian's iconography, see Karim Ressouni-Demigneux, "The 'Imaginary' Life of Saint Sebastian" in *The Agony and the Ecstasy*:

Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians, ed. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 17–31. On Sebastian's beauty, see also Natasha Seaman's essay in this issue.

²⁰ On the *figura serpentinata*, a figure type associated with Michelangelo by G. P. Lomazzo in 1584, see John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 81–91; David Summers, "Maniera and Movement: The *Figura Serpentinata*," *The Art Quarterly* 35 (1972): 269–301; Paula Carabell, "Figura Serpentinata: Becoming over Being in Michelangelo's Unfinished Works," *Artibus et Historiae* 35 (2014): 79–96.

²¹ It makes an appearance in various paintings, including Jan Steen's *The Drawing Lesson* (ca. 1665) in the Getty, in which, according to Leo Steinberg, "a paragon of manly valor becomes something else: a stud with no clothes on striking a pose" ("Steen's Female Gaze and Other Ironies," *Artibus et Historiae* 11 [1990]: 113).

²² On the painting, see Andrea Bayer, Dorothy Mahon, and Silvia A. Centeno, "An Examination of Paolo Veronese's *Alessandro Vittoria*," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 52 (2017): 117–27.

²³ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piv eccellenti pittori scvltori et architettori* (Florence: Giunti, 1568), vol. 3, pt. 1, 39: "Et così sene tornò a Fiorenza, doue era stato morso più volte, che non sapeua fare gli ignudi. Volse egli dunque mettersi a prououa, & con fatiche mostrare, ch'era attissimo ad ogni eccellente lauoro di quella arte, come alcuno altro. La onde per proua fece in vn quadro vn san Sebastiano ignudo con colorito molto alla

carne simile, di dolce aria, & di corrispondente bellezza alla persona parimente finito: Doue infinite lode acquistò appresso agli artefici. Dicesi, che stando in chiesa per mostra questa figura, hauuano trouato i frati nelle confessioni, donne, che nel guardarlo haueuano peccato ["s'erano corrotte" in the 1550 edition] per la leggiadra & lasciaua imitazione del viuo datagli dalla virtù di Fra Bartolomeo: Per il che leuatolo di chiesa, lo misero nel capitolo: Doue non dimorò molto te[m]po che, da Giouan Batista della Palla co[m]prato, fu mandato al Re di Francia." Cited by Janet Cox-Rearick, "Fra Bartolomeo's St. Mark Evangelist and St. Sebastian with an Angel," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 18 (1974): 340; Spear, "Divine" Guido, 70; Karim Ressouni-Demigneux, *Saint-Sébastien* (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2000), 61; Valeska von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen des Darstellbaren: Ambiguität, Ironie und Performativität in der Malerei um 1600* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 253.

²⁴ See Cox-Rearick, "Fra Bartolomeo's St. Mark Evangelist and St. Sebastian with an Angel."

²⁵ Gio. Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittvra* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584), 366 (6:35): "Ne gli huomini altresì si uogliono hauere le medesime considerationi; percioche egualmente con gli spettacoli lasciui d'huomini, si possono contaminare gli animi delle donne; & però fanno à santo Sebastiano, quando è saetato all'arbore le membra tutte tinte & sparse di sangue per le ferite, acciò che non si mostri ignudo bello, uago & bia[n]co come egli era; come lo dipinse già frate Bartolomeo dell'ordine di santo Agostino pittore

eccellente, il qual lo fece tanto bello, & lasciuo, che le donne, & poncelle andando da i frati per confessarsi uedendolo, come racconta il Vasari, se ne innamorauano ardentissimamente; peril che conuenne leuarlo fuori della chiesa, & mandarlo à Francesco Rè di Francia.”

²⁶ Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 67–76. See also Valerie Hedquist, “Ter Brugghen’s *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9 (2017): 9–11, who adduces Wtewael’s *Saint Sebastian*. For homoerotic readings, see also Ressouni-Demigneux, “The ‘Imaginary’ Life of Saint Sebastian,” 29–30. Fiona Healy dismisses such implications in early-modern images of Saint Sebastian based on a lack of specific documentary evidence and citing Vasari’s account of Fra Bartolomeo’s *Saint Sebastian* on women (“Male Nudity in Netherlandish Painting of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Karolien De Clippel, Katharina Van Cauteren, and Katlijne Van der Stighelen [Turnhout: Brepols, 2011], 141). Healy here follows Daniela Bohde, “Ein Heiliger der Sodomiten? Das erotische Bild des Hl. Sebastian im Cinquecento,” in *Männlichkeit im Blick: Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Mechthild Fend and Marianne Koos (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

²⁷ Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 76.

²⁸ Woodall, “Wtewael’s *Perseus and Andromeda*,” 41; see also Helmus, “Love and Passion,” 23; Marisa Anne Bass, “Shell Life, or the Unstill Life of Shells,” in *Concophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marisa Anne

Bass, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer, and Claudia Swan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 87–90.

²⁹ On the depilated and featureless *mons Veneris*, see Ann-Sophie Lehmann, “The Missing Sex: Absence and Presence of a Female Body Part in the Visual Arts,” in *Fluid Flesh: The Body, Religion and the Visual Arts*, ed. Barbara Baert (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 107–22.

³⁰ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 72–143; James Clifton, “Gender and Shame in Masaccio’s *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*,” *Art History* 22 (1999): 642–45. Lucas van Leyden included the subject, unusually, in his *Power of Women* series of woodcuts; see Ellen S. Jacobowitz and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden & His Contemporaries* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 107–9 (cat. no. 33).

³¹ *Flirting with Disaster*, dir. David O. Russell (1996; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Video, 1999), DVD.

³² Of course, not all nasal/axillary proximity is erotic; one might contrast similar images of professional armpit smellers (e.g., “Deoderant Testing & Antiperspirant Testing,” Princeton Consumer Research Global Product Testing, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.princetonconsumer.com/deodorant-and-antiperspirant-testing/>).

³³ Alternatively, the relationship of the two figures might be seen as nurturing—more mother and child than a pair of lovers—in which Adam is poised to

(re-)experience the pleasurable sensory experiences of snuggling between arm and breast; the artist thus infantilizes and emasculates him, “mak[ing] visible the *pleasures* of loss and disempowerment,” as Lisa Rosenthal has suggested for Rubens’s *Hercules Mocked by Omphale* in the Louvre (*Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 135). (I am grateful to Cristelle Baskins for this insight.) One might add, however, that infantilization and the erotic are not mutually exclusive, as Richard Pryor has indicated (*Richard Pryor: Live on the Sunset Strip*, dir. Joe Layton [1982; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2000], DVD).

³⁴ Junichiro Tanizaki, *Naomi*, trans. Anthony H. Chambers (New York: Vintage International, 2001), 69. The comic passage manifests the narrator’s racialized notions of beauty and culture, exemplifying a longing for Europe in early-twentieth-century Japan. That Tanizaki uses axillary odor as a trope simultaneously raises the possibility of axillary erotic attraction and asserts (possibly ironically) its transcultural limitations. On the role of the white countess and her body odor in Tanizaki’s novel, see Atsuko Onuki, “Multiple Refractions: The Metamorphosis of the Notions of Beauty in Japan,” *European Review* 8 (2000): 598; Vera Mackie, “The Taxonomic Gaze: Looking at Whiteness from East to West,” *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 6.

³⁵ Benjamin Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 38, no. 3 (1975): 279; Irving Bieber, Toby B.

Bieber, and Richard C. Friedman, “Olfaction and Human Sexuality: A Psychoanalytic Approach,” in *Science of Olfaction*, ed. Michael J. Serby and Karen L. Chobor (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 396–409; Roy L. Levin, “Smells and Tastes—Their Putative Influence on Sexual Activity in Humans,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 19, no. 4 (2004): 455; Mark J. T. Sergeant, “Female Perception of Male Body Odor,” in *Pheromones*, ed. Gerald Litwack (London: Elsevier, 2010), 25–45.

³⁶ Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279. On axillary eroticism, see Desmond Morris, *The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 120–23.

³⁷ Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279–80; Barbara Sommerville, David Gee, and June Averill, “On the Scent of Body Odour,” *New Scientist* 111, no. 1516 (10 July 1986): 43, explained the axillary location of the apocrine secretions somewhat elliptically: “Sex hormones may influence sweat from this area [the armpits], and this secretion may well have developed a role in communication, as it comes from the group of apocrine cells most accessible to the nose of a bipedal primate.”

³⁹ Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 280 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Levin, “Smells and Tastes,” 451.

⁴¹ Warren S. T. Hays, “Human Pheromones: Have They Been Demonstrated?,” *Behavioral Ecology and*

Sociobiology 54, no. 2 (2003): 89–97; Levin, “Smells and Tastes,” 451–62.

⁴² “Athena Pheromone 10X™: Unscented Aftershave Additive for Men,” Athena Institute, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.athenainstitute.com/10x.html>; “Athena Pheromone 10:13™: The Unique Cosmetic Fragrance Additive for Women,” Athena Institute, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.athenainstitute.com/1013.html> Likewise, on a now-defunct website, Jōvan scents carried the overall tagline, “It’s what attracts.” Jōvan Musk for Men claimed to work “with your body’s natural chemistry to make a sexy scent. A blend of exotic spices and woods meets with the seductive power of musk. The result is a masculine, powerful persuasive fragrance” (“Jōvan Musk for Men,” Jōvan, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.jovanmusk.com/muskfor-men.html> [site discontinued]). And Jōvan Musk for Women offered “A delicate floral accord of jasmine, neroli, and bergamot blend[ing] with the earthy, seductive scent of musk. This mysterious fragrance unleashes your own natural powers of seduction” (“Jōvan Musk for Women,” Jōvan, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.jovanmusk.com/muskforwomen.html> [site discontinued]).

Not surprisingly, the issues surrounding body odors and their role in a sexualized market have been addressed in contemporary art. For an exhibition entitled “Smell Me” in New York in 2012, for example, Martynka Wawrzyniak collected aromatic elements of her body, concentrated into essences, to create “an olfactory-based self-portrait”; a publicity photograph on the artist’s website shows her with

raised left arm with her face adjacent to her exposed armpit (“Martynka Wawrzyniak,” Alchetron, accessed September 29, 2017, <https://alchetron.com/Martynka-Wawrzyniak-896573-W#->). Two years later, in a work entitled *Eau de M*, she inserted a fake fragrance advertisement in *Harper’s Bazaar* that included a perfume strip of her sweat essence. As she noted, “In a guerilla gesture, I used the magazine as an accessible exhibition site for the general public to view the work, which served as both art object and commodity. Invading the commercial space, *Eau de M* caused an unwitting mass market to consume art/my scent, commenting on the consumerist cultural aversion to the smell of the human body.” She said that department stores “received queries from customers interested in purchasing the non-existent perfume, proving that when presented in the form of a commercial fragrance, the scent of human sweat can actually be a desirable commodity.” In the published image, the artist presented herself—for she was the model—as an object of desire, a desire activated by her sweat (“Eau de M,” Martynka Wawrzyniak, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://www.martynka.com/eau-de-m/>). For an interview with Marynka Wawrzyniak, see “Smell Me: Capturing Sweat for Art,” ABC News Australia, broadcast March 21, 2014, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/smell-me/5299330>. See also Chelsea Zalopany, “Vain Glorious: Get a Whiff of This Girl,” *T Magazine*, October 18, 2012, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://tmagazine.blogs.ny-times.com/2012/10/18/vain-glorious-get-a-whiff-of-this-girl/>; Barbara Herman, “New York Artist Debuts Her Own Armpit ‘Perfume’ in Harper’s Bazaar,”

Newsweek, June 26, 2014, accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/07/04/new-york-artist-debuts-her-armpit-perfume-harpers-bazaar-256321.html>; Ana Finel Honigman, "Martynka Wawrzyniak Turns Daily Meals into Conceptual Art," *T Magazine*, September 5, 2014, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/martynka-wawrzyniak-turns-daily-meals-into-conceptual-art/>.

⁴³ Accademici della Crusca, *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crvzca* (Venice: Appresso Giovanni Alberti, 1612), s.v. "Ascella," citing the *Inferno* 17.13 and 25.112.

⁴⁴ Furetière, "Aisselle," citing Catullus 69: "valle sub alarum trux habitare caper." On the poem, see J. D. Noonan, "Mala bestia in Catullus 69.7–8," *The Classical World* 73 (1979): 155–64.

⁴⁵ Seneca, *Epistulae* 114.14: "Utrumque diverse genere corruptum est, tarn mercurius quam nolle nisi splendidis uti

ac sonantibus et poeticis, necessaria atque in usu posita vitare. Tam hunc dicam peccare quam ilium: alter se plus iusto colit, alter plus iusto neglegit; ille et crura, hie ne alas quidem vellit." I am grateful to Marisa Bass for this reference.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 329–54.

⁴⁷ Agnolo Firenzuola, *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (Venice: Per Giouan. Griffio, 1552), 25r: "belleza, utilità, uso, cagione, artificio, & proportion di tutte le membra."

⁴⁸ Firenzuola, *Dialogo*, 45r.

⁴⁹ The prints are now mostly fragmentary, but known through copies. For Arretino's text, with an English translation, along with the images, see Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, 198–227 (202–3, 208–9, 214–15 for the compositions featuring an armpit).

Naturalism and Archaism in Hendrick ter Brugghen's *Crucifixion* and *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*

Natasha Seaman



Fig. 1. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *St. Sebastian Tended by Irene*, 1625, oil on canvas, 175 x 120 cm. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio. R.T. Miller Jr. Fund, 1953, 53.256.

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It is entirely likely that Hendrick ter Brugghen worked on two of his most powerful paintings, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene* (Fig. 1) and the *Crucifixion* (Fig. 2), simultaneously or serially in 1625.¹ The paintings share a low horizon with a delicately colored sky, and both depict a single, holy figure accompanied by two others. They are also connected subjects—Sebastian, a saint martyred with arrows by the Roman imperial army and then miraculously revived, was viewed as a post-figuration of Christ. Yet ter Brugghen responded differently to each subject in relation both to its precedents and its religious and cultural significance. In the *Crucifixion*, ter Brugghen took his interest in archaic styles and motifs, demonstrated in several earlier paintings, to a new extreme. Christ's body is narrow waisted and his wounds ooze free-falling blood, two motifs that had disappeared with the increasing naturalism of art in Northern Europe around 1550. He also rendered in detail the specifics of Christ's bodily misery and the homely features of John and Mary. In the *Sebastian*, ter Brugghen treads new territory. While Sebastian's hands and arms share the gruesome intensity of Christ's, the rest of the scene is pleasing: Sebastian, Irene, and her maid are all handsome, and the composition is

surprising but harmonious, drawing on models contemporary to him rather than the past. Its beauty is striking in contrast to ter Brugghen's earlier works, which were distinct for their unflagging attention to the ugly realities of lived existence.

The concurrent production of the two works seems to signal or even to have spurred a turning point in the artist's development. After this year, ter Brugghen increasingly concerned himself with the effects of artificial light and produced some of his most agreeable paintings, beginning with the *Sebastian*.² The origins of this transformation in ter Brugghen's art are unknown. Ter Brugghen left no writings, there is little critical response to his work from his lifetime, and we do not know the first owner or original placement for any of his paintings.³ Examining the similarities between the *Sebastian* and the *Crucifixion*, however, offers a possible understanding of the transition in his work. In noting the links between the two paintings, the composition of *Sebastian* can be seen to narrate a transformation in ter Brugghen's artistic sensibility. To understand this development, it is essential to consider ter Brugghen's work in relation to the two terms most associated with him: naturalism and archaism.



Fig. 2. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John*, ca. 1625, oil on canvas, 154.9 x 102.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Funds from various donors, 1956, 56.228.

Naturalism

Naturalism, simply defined, is art that seeks to reproduce the visual effects of the optical world, and it was one of the objectives of Western European art beginning in the early fifteenth century in both Italy and the North.⁴ Yet with this new capacity of art came a new question that recurred over the following centuries: how closely should the world be depicted? The chief question was whether art should be made only by copying nature or by applying rules of beauty to render an idealized version of the real world. In other words, should contingent details and individual flaws be eliminated to represent a deeper truth, or embraced as a means of creating a more lifelike image? The outlines of this debate can be traced to antiquity and are found in writing on art throughout Europe in the early modern period.⁵ The spectrum of arguments on this question are diagrammed in Table 1 below.

In ter Brugghen's time, positions 1 and 5 are for the most part rhetorical fictions leveled at those in the opposite camp. Positions 2 and 4 more closely represent actual practice, though their characterization also is tinged with rhetoric from their opponents: artists who only painted what they saw without improving it seem to have no agency, presenting the viewer no more than what is offered by a camera obscura. By contrast, artists who did not work sufficiently from life could be seen as imposing excessively their notion of beauty upon the world, thus disconnecting from it.

Early participants in the debate include Alberti ("Demetrius, an antique painter, failed to obtain the ultimate praise because he was much more careful to make things similar to the natural than to the lovely")⁶ and Leonardo ("painting is most praiseworthy which conforms most to the object portrayed. I put forward this to

1 Artist looks at life and selects and even prefers ugliness	2 Artist looks at life and simply records what is seen	3 Artist looks at life and selects from it the most beautiful	4 Artist looks at life and improves upon it	5 Artist does not look at life but works entirely from an ideal
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Table 1. Categories of Naturalism and Idealism in Writing on Early Modern Art

embarrass those painters who would improve on the works of nature”).⁷ In the distinction that he made between Michelangelo (more idealizing) and Titian (more interested in nature) and thus between Venetian and Florentine art in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550, enlarged 1568), Giorgio Vasari amplified the debate.⁸ The Dutch writer and painter Karel van Mander included a translation of Vasari’s *Lives* in his useful compendium for artists, the *Schilderboeck* (1604), thus communicating such ideas to the North.⁹ Later writers adhered to the same concerns. Throughout the seventeenth century, art was assessed through this lens, with artists like Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) exemplifying those who worked from nature and others, such as Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) and Guido Reni (1575–1642), seen as improving nature in their paintings.

Ter Brugghen’s experience as an artist exposed him directly to the terms of this debate. Ter Brugghen was a student of the Utrecht artist Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651) sometime around 1604, when Karel van Mander’s biography of Bloemaert was published in his *Schilderboeck*.¹⁰ In it, van Mander admires Bloemaert’s landscapes—“not overloaded with detail”—and then identifies him as a

painter whose art adheres to the ideal: “He allows no place for portraying from life, in order for his intellect not to be obstructed by this.”¹¹ Although Bloemaert’s style transitioned during his lifetime from the Mannerism that van Mander described in 1604 to a refined classicism, he was committed to creating idealized forms throughout his career, and his teachings would have certainly centered the importance of seeking the ideal in making art.¹²

Van Mander’s biography of Caravaggio in the *Schilderboeck* presents the opposite side of the debate. Van Mander reports that Caravaggio was doing “extraordinary things” in Italy by working only from life, and that Caravaggio had even described any art not made that way as “a bagatelle, or child’s work.”¹³ Sometime around 1607, ter Brugghen traveled to Rome to continue his artistic education, remaining there until 1614.¹⁴ Although Caravaggio had already fled Rome by the time ter Brugghen arrived in the city, the reputation of the former’s art was at its peak, with many Italian and foreign painters adopting his style. Major artworks by Caravaggio were accessible in Santa Maria del Popolo (*Conversion of Paul* and *Crucifixion of Peter*), the Chiesa Nuova (*Entombment*), S. Agostino (*Madonna of Loreto*), and San Luigi dei

Francesi (*The Calling of Matthew* and *Martyrdom of Matthew*). Ter Brugghen also likely had contact with Vincenzo Giustiniani, one of Caravaggio's most ardent collectors and supporters. Giustiniani owned several of Caravaggio's paintings, including the *Doubting Thomas* (1601–2, Sanssouci, Potsdam).¹⁵ Demonstrating his attention to Caravaggio, ter Brugghen later borrowed elements from both *The Calling of Matthew* and *Doubting Thomas* for his own versions of those subjects.¹⁶

Thus exposed to two opposite ends of the debate on painting, ter Brugghen chose to work from life, like Caravaggio. In his brief biography of ter Brugghen in his *Teutsche Akademie*, a didactic history of Northern art, Joachim von Sandrart (1606–88) confirms this: “[Ter Brugghen] imitated nature and its unhappy shortcomings very well, but disagreeably.”¹⁷ None of ter Brugghen's Italian period paintings survive, and his output upon his return to Utrecht in 1614 was low. Those paintings that are known adhere to Caravaggio's “from nature” sensibility, however, even when they are not explicitly “Caravaggesque,” with half-length figures, strong light effects, or referencing the Italian painter's compositions.¹⁸ This is especially clear when comparing ter Brugghen's *Adoration of the*

Kings (Fig. 3) to the painting of the same subject by Bloemaert (Fig. 4). Bloemaert's canvas offers the same range of figures as ter Brugghen's—old and young, European and African, male and female—but in the older man's canvas, each is idealized and poised, where in ter Brugghen's they are careworn and graceless. In Bloemaert's painting, Mary is lithe and energetic, holding a precocious and charming Christ with a mop of blond hair, while in ter Brugghen's work, Mary is hunched over Christ, who is bald and sunken into rolls of flesh—suggesting the use of an unknown but very eager eater, and perhaps that same child's exhausted mother, as models.

Archaism

Archaism, the self-conscious use of a style or motif from an earlier time period, is closely related to the development of naturalism. Artists' habitual strategies for depicting the optical world became distinct stylistic markers of their time period as later artists found more effective means of capturing visual effects. Archaism has been identified in both Northern and Southern art after the disruptions of the Reformation.¹⁹ In Utrecht, archaism emerged largely in paintings created for *schuilkerken*, or clandestine Catholic churches. Although Catholicism had been illegal in the



Fig. 3. Hendrick Ter Brugghen, *Adoration of the Kings*, signed and dated 1619, oil on canvas, 132.5 x 160.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt, the Prins Bernhard Fonds and the Stichting tot Bevordering van de Belangen van het Rijksmuseum.

Dutch Republic since 1580, Catholic worship was tolerated as long as it was not public. Clandestine churches, frequently concealed behind a façade of domestic architecture, were often amply decorated. Inventories show a high number of archaizing paintings in this context. Some required close examination to determine that they were not actually older paintings; others subsumed archaizing motifs into

the style of the moment.²⁰ Ter Brugghen, by contrast, chose to include archaic stylistic elements and motifs within his otherwise stylistically contemporary paintings. In his *Calling of Matthew* (1622, Centraal Museum, Utrecht), for instance, the crumpled paper on the table and the wall and the old man with an underbite refer directly to depictions like Marinus van Reymerswaele's *Tax Collectors*

(1542, Alte Pinakothek, Munich), while the table, tilted slightly out of perspective, and play of hands around it reference Jan van Hemessen's *Calling of Matthew* (1535–40, Alte Pinakothek, Munich).²¹ In these works, ter Brugghen both embraces the effects of immediacy in his naturalism and also creates a link to the art of the past, calling attention to the time that passed between the period of his model and the style of his present.²² As Thomas

Greene noted of Renaissance poetry that referenced the Classical period, works of art with archaism acknowledge a tradition broken by an intervening period.²³ In ter Brugghen's work, this period was the turbulent years of the Reformation, when the artistic tradition was literally broken by iconoclasm. His archaism is thus inseparable from a concern with the status and function of religious art within the continuing tradition of Northern art.



Fig. 4. Abraham Bloemaert, *Adoration of the Kings*, signed and dated 1624, oil on canvas, 168.8 x 193.7 cm. Centraal Museum. © Centraal Museum Utrecht.

The Crucifixion

None of ter Brugghen's paintings is more archaizing than his *Crucifixion*, a subject that also complicates the debate over the role of depicting the ugliness of life. The humiliating death of Christ on the cross is central to Christian theology. Christ, son of God, willingly suffers and dies at the hands of his persecutors, serving as, in the words of John the Baptist, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"²⁴ redeeming humanity from Original Sin by his death. Christ's sacrifice and redemptive role is predicted in the Old Testament. Isaiah describes the forthcoming Messiah as having "no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him, despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows."²⁵ As Saint Augustine wrote, "For he [Christ] hung ugly, disfigured on the cross, but his ugliness was our beauty."²⁶ Particularly in Northern art from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, such writings are interpreted in vividly imagined pictures of the bloody and miserable crucified Christ, best exemplified in the work of the German artist Matthias Grünewald (1470–1528). Such works disrupt the otherwise standard correlations of ugliness with evil and beauty with good,²⁷ and, in order to fully honor

the description in Isaiah, adhere to extreme naturalism to mortify the body of Christ.

When this sort of art is addressed in theoretical writing, the significance of naturalism to depicting religious subjects and its effect on the viewer become part of the debate. For instance, the Amsterdam poet Jan Vos (1612–67) linked showing Christ's misery to successful art: "He who portrays the wholly misshapen Christ / Has come closest to portraying life."²⁸ By contrast, Francisco da Holanda's treatise *Da Pintura Antiga* (1548) remarked unfavorably on the naturalism of Northern religious art. His treatise takes the form of a (possibly fictional) conversation with Michelangelo in which "Michelangelo" avers that art in Flanders is overly laden with detail and made "without reason or art" or "skillful choice." Such works, in his view, appeal especially to the devout, causing them to "shed many [tears]." By contrast, Italian art is "nothing else but a copy of the perfections of God."²⁹ In this view, rather than depicting life with all of its tear-inducing, earth-bound defects, the Italian artist understands and manifests life's ideal forms. This link between religious intensity and naturalism reverses direction in other writings, which characterize unnecessary attention to naturalistic detail in general as a kind of

deranged religious devotion. The Dutch painter and writer Jan de Bisschop (1628–71) wrote of naturalist painters: “almost everything that was reprehensible to the eye was selected—indeed sought out—to be painted and drawn, *as if it were sacred and special*.”³⁰ The Italian art theorist Giovanni Bellori (1613–96) similarly described painters who followed Caravaggio’s example: “in imitating bodies, they *dwell with all their zeal on wrinkles and defects of skin and contours, they make fingers knotty, limbs altered by disease*.”³¹

In ter Brugghen’s *Crucifixion*, his devotion to naturalism and his interest in archaism merge. His Christ, with an idiosyncratically long nose, is greenish and emaciated, his torso collapsed at the waist in the pictorial schema of earlier Northern artists.³² Bright drops of blood hang from Christ’s hand, foot, and chest wounds in a manner not found in painting after 1550. The archaism of Christ is such that scholars have looked for a specific source for ter Brugghen’s painting in order to explain it.³³ Many possibilities have been proposed, including Matthias Grünewald’s *Small Crucifixion* (1528, National Gallery, Washington), which was circulated after 1605 as a reproductive engraving by Raphael Sadeler I; *The Van Rijn Calvary* (1363, Koninklijk Museum voor

Schone Kunsten, Antwerp), which has a similar low horizon and (albeit abstracted) starry sky; and a large altarpiece, also with a starry sky, from Zutphen, a village near Utrecht (1400, Stedelijk Museum, Zutphen). The large number of similar works suggests that ter Brugghen sought not to reference a work of art directly but to allude generally to the image type, including sculptures on medieval rood screens.³⁴

The specificity of ter Brugghen’s approach to the *Crucifixion* emerges in comparison to Bloemaert’s 1629 *Crucifixion* (Fig. 5), which is also archaizing.³⁵ With its pale, slender Christ, floating loin cloth, writhing thieves on the crosses to either side, and distant view of Jerusalem, the painting evokes compositions such as Jan van Eyck’s *Crucifixion* (1440–41, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). However, in contrast to the van Eyck (and others like it), Christ’s anatomy is accurate and the blood that pours from Christ’s wounds stays on the surface of his body. In contrast to ter Brugghen’s version, Bloemaert’s scene, though its motifs allude to past compositions, is rendered entirely in his idealizing style that does not brook the illogic of the archaic style.

Meanwhile, in ter Brugghen’s painting, while Christ is clearly marked as from the past, Mary and

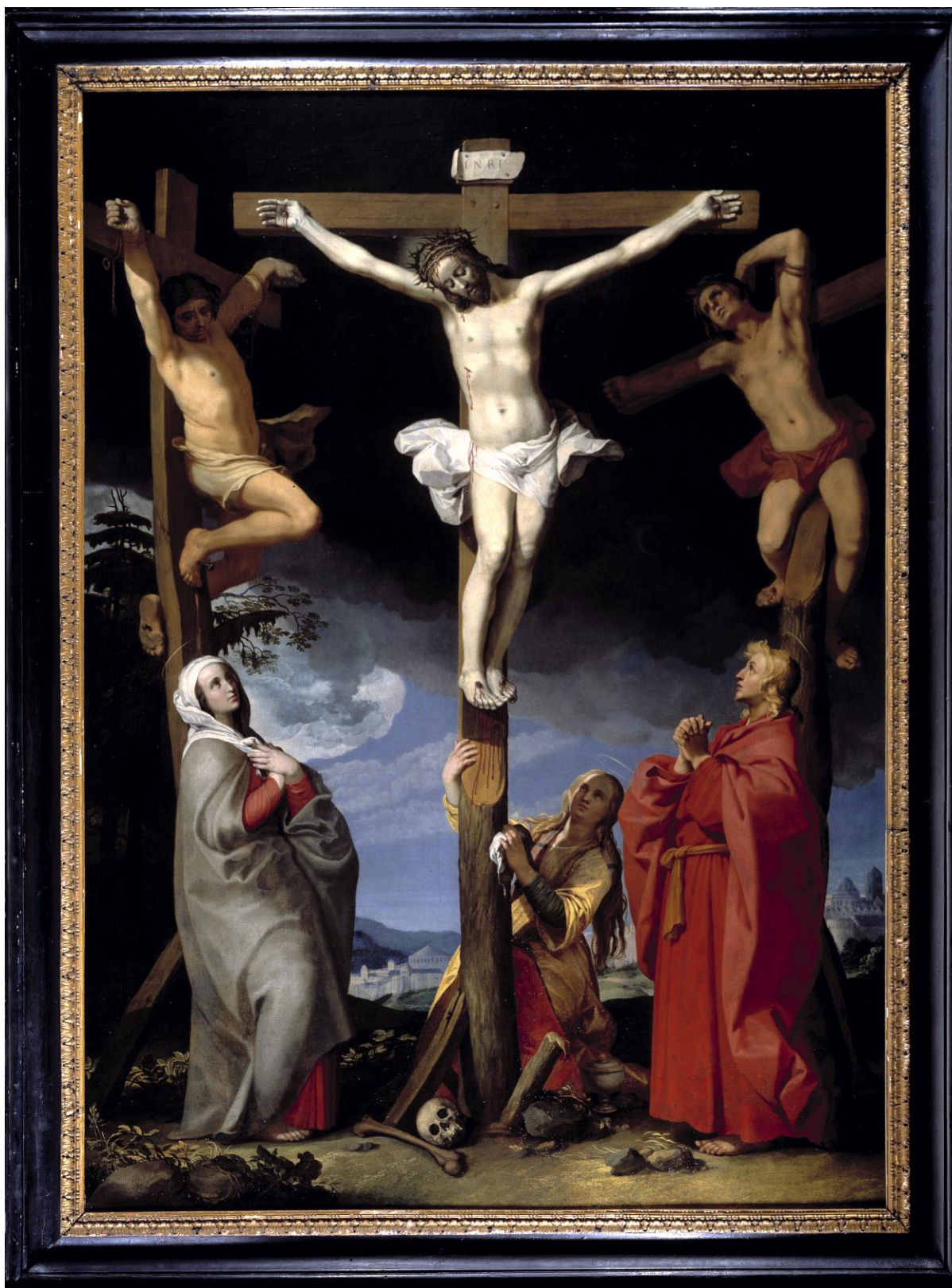


Fig. 5. Abraham Bloemaert, *Crucifixion*, 1629, oil on canvas, 230.5 x 164.5 cm, Museum het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

John are in the style of international Caravaggism, an effect intensified in the figure of John, whose red and green robes are layered around a seventeenth-century doublet.³⁶ Ter Brugghen renders the figures in his distinctively harsh naturalism. Mary's face, particular and not particularly lovely, is blanched with sorrow. John's nose is red with crying, and his face is awkward and coarse, his mouth agape. Next to them, the figure of Christ has the uncanny quality of a work of art brought to life, even as he is dead: he shares their sense of volume and careful attention to detail in the drapery and flesh. This is emphasized in the vibrant red of his dripping blood, carefully rendered to capture its viscous pendulousness. I have elsewhere described the presence of the modern figures framing Christ as protective in a context where devotional images of Christ were subject to iconoclasm.³⁷ In shifting the attention to the question of naturalism and working from life, we can see that ter Brugghen's depiction of Christ also exalts the lineage of ugliness and its affective potential in religious art, eschewing the idealizing Mannerist style of the generation just before him. By appearing in the privileged body of Christ and in the pictorial vocabulary of the great past artists, the depiction of ugliness of life as it is

lived rather than as it can be idealized is both elevated and brought into the present.

Sebastian

Contrasting approaches to naturalism also emerge along cultural borders in depictions of Saint Sebastian. The story of Sebastian was best known through the account in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, a compendium of the lives of the saints first compiled around 1265 and widely reproduced around Europe throughout the early modern period.³⁸ A member of the Roman emperor Diocletian's Praetorian Guard, Sebastian was sentenced to death by a rain of arrows for his conversion to Christianity. This he miraculously survived; he was then beaten to death and his body was thrown in the Cloaca Maxima. Although she is not included in Voragine's account, Irene, a Christian woman who nursed Sebastian back to health after the attack by arrows, is part of the tradition of the story.³⁹ Catholic Church historian Cardinal Caesar Baronius (1538–1607) emphasized her role in the account of the saint's life in his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (1592), which may have spurred her increased appearance in paintings after this date.⁴⁰ Because he survived the assault with arrows, which were associated with the plague, Sebastian was

viewed as having special powers against the disease and was frequently depicted both north and south of the Alps. Utrecht saw a surge of depictions of Sebastian as it endured plague years in 1613–17 and again in 1624–29.⁴¹

Particularly before 1600, Italian and Northern European artists depicted the saint in a manner that corresponds to the different approaches to naturalism in the two regions. A pair of engravings from around 1500 by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), who traveled twice to Italy, exemplify these differences. One, following the Northern type, depicts Sebastian slumped against a tree, his arms tied above his head to emphasize the misery of his body (Fig. 6). The other print, following the Italian type, depicts Sebastian standing in contrapposto, arms tied at his waist to a Tuscan column (Fig. 7). Confirming the differences between the types, Dürer endowed his Northern-style depiction with greater naturalism, depicting Sebastian with contemporary underpants and leg hair. By contrast, his Italianate Sebastian is shown smooth-skinned and in a classical loin cloth.

Despite his previous predilection for reviving older Northern motifs, for his depiction of Saint Sebastian, ter Brugghen looked to the work of his Utrecht contemporaries.⁴² He takes the seated pose of the

Sebastian from Gerrit van Honthorst's *Saint Sebastian* (1620–23, National Gallery, London), which may have been painted in Rome or Utrecht, but was likely seen in Utrecht after 1620.⁴³ Like the versions by Cornelis de Beer (1615, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid),⁴⁴ Dirck van Baburen (1623–24, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg),⁴⁵ and Jan van Bijlert (1624, private collection), ter Brugghen includes Irene and her maid.⁴⁶ For the play of rope around Sebastian's hands, ter Brugghen apparently drew on van Baburen's and de Beer's paintings, as well as that by Joachim Wtewael (1600, Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City).

Even beyond drawing on these contemporary sources rather than older motifs, ter Brugghen changed his approach to depicting the subject. Sebastian is slender but well-muscled. His face follows the convention of depicting Sebastian as a beardless youth, and he is handsome, with strong cheekbones.⁴⁷ Irene exudes a warm charm enhanced by her pink-tipped nose and dimpled chin. Rejecting van Baburen's and van Bijlert's characterizations of Irene's maid as a haggard old woman, ter Brugghen rendered her as a younger, fine-boned woman, intent upon her work. The composition itself has a pleasing logic. Ter Brugghen avoids the



Fig. 6. Albrecht Dürer, *Saint Sebastian Bound to the Tree*, ca. 1501, engraving, 11.6 × 7.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The George Khuner Collection, Gift of Mrs. George Khuner, 1968.



Fig. 7. Albrecht Dürer, *Saint Sebastian Bound to the Column*, ca. 1499, engraving, 10.7 × 7.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The George Khuner Collection, Gift of Mrs. George Khuner, 1968.

awkwardness of the position of Irene and her servant in both van Bijlert and van Baburen's versions, placing them instead behind Sebastian. Although Irene is largely concealed by Sebastian's body, ter Brugghen illuminates her head and her succoring hand to give them prominence and to advance the narrative. The painting has a beauty and grace as never before in his work. Yet, as is clear from comparison of the figures to van Honthorst's depiction of Sebastian and any of the faces repeatedly deployed by Bloemaert, the painting's new beauty is not based on a shift to an idealized type, but on an acceptance of the possibility of beauty—as much as ugliness—in what is before the eyes.

Overall, therefore, in contrast to his *Crucifixion*, in the *Sebastian* ter Brugghen rejected old Northern precedents. He inserted himself into the contemporary artistic mainstream and combined naturalistic detail with a tightly choreographed composition to produce an appealing scene of tender, salvific care. The subject matter is obviously important here. The motif of Sebastian had elsewhere served as an opportunity for demonstrating artistic powers and as a site of artistic innovation, while the *Crucifixion*, freighted with sacred significance, was both bound by convention and invited expressive depiction of

Christ's sufferings. Despite these differences, one key feature of the *Sebastian* links it to the *Crucifixion*: the right arm of Sebastian. Like Christ's, Sebastian's arm is emaciated, resembling an *écorché*, and it is greyish green. Ter Brugghen enhanced the connection of the two holy figures by the placement of his monogram in both paintings: at the base of the cross in the *Crucifixion* and on the tree in the *Sebastian*, near the top edge of the painting. The two supports of martyrdom (cross and tree) are further linked by the straggly twigs emanating from the main branch of each, a naturalistic and contingent detail that nonetheless clarifies their shared status. Christ and Sebastian also occupy similar roles in the painting, their wounded, almost naked bodies drawing the attention of the two other figures. The subjects of the crucified Christ and martyred Sebastian are naturally linked for reasons other than ter Brugghen's painting them at the same time. Sebastian was viewed as a post-figuration of Christ, his revivification after the arrow attack likened to Christ's resurrection.⁴⁸

The attending figures, however, provide a key point of contrast between the paintings. In the *Crucifixion*, they are John and Mary. As their prayerful gestures emphasize, the *Crucifixion* is naturally a hands-off affair. The difference in

artistic style between Christ and his mother and beloved disciple emphasizes this distance. By contrast, Irene and the servant have a very different relationship to Sebastian, more akin to how other figures relate to Christ in a Deposition.⁴⁹ One hand on Sebastian's sternum, the other delicately removing an arrow from his side, Irene directly attends the wounded man while the servant unties his bound arm. The women's contact with Sebastian creates a significant counterpoint to the distance innate to the *Crucifixion*.

The servant's action reveals even more. One of her hands plucks at the strap at his wrist, and the other is tightly wrapped in a length of the same strap. If one examines her action, there is no logical reason for her hand to be bound in the act of untying. This is rather a small act of what we could call *imitatio Sebastiani*, intended most of all to show the difference between her active hand and his inert, bloodless one. The act of untying together with her focused gaze on it call particular attention to the Christ-like arm of Sebastian, the flesh of which bulges hideously around the bindings, outdoing its source in the van Baburen. By its elevation and by its attachment to a tree, the arm evokes the *Crucifixion*, yet it is distinct from it. This is not the end: by their tender ministrations, Irene

and her servant will in fact resuscitate Sebastian. They are quite literally releasing the holy body from its suffering.

In this way, they can be seen as surrogates of the painter within the painting. Michael Fried explores the significance of hand gestures visible in some early modern self-portraits, especially those of Caravaggio—for example, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (1593–94, National Gallery, London). He identifies in them the pose that a painter might take while painting with one hand and holding a palette with another, with the tools removed to conceal the pose's origins in a mirror reflection.⁵⁰ While the *Saint Sebastian* is not a self-portrait and there is no suggestion of a mirror, the servant's fingers are posed as if holding a brush. Her gesture is similar to Irene's maid in van Baburen's version. However, ter Brugghen accentuates the sense that she holds a brush by tightening the grip of the maid's thumb and forefinger and moving her action closer to the edge of the painting. His monogram is inscribed directly to the right of her hand. This artistically self-referencing action is also precisely at the point of the painting's greatest resemblance to the *Crucifixion*. When the servant unties Sebastian's arm, she will release him from the abjection native to the Northern image. The untormented

body will be restored, and, in fact, created by their efforts. As much as it is possible to depict “becoming” in a single image, ter Brugghen shows his own transformation as an artist.

In the *Sebastian*, ter Brugghen demonstrates a new sensibility, a choice that he will make again in later paintings, religious and secular.⁵¹ His transformation is clarified in comparing his two versions of the Annunciation. In ter Brugghen’s *Annunciation* from 1624 (Fig. 8), Mary, pressed to the back of the painting, is plain and stolid, reading a prayer book with rumpled pages. A studio-worn dove with ragged feathers is suspended directly above her. We view the angel Gabriel in *profil perdu*, his body overlapping hers, his inexplicably filthy foot directly in front of our eyes. In his 1629 version (Fig. 9), Gabriel has been rotated to the left to allow a full profile view, his feet firmly on the ground. Mary faces Gabriel, her eyes downcast. Her pose reveals a more graceful form, and her face is unostentatiously pretty. The dove is sleekly feathered and gleamingly white. The comparison between an earlier *Liberation of Peter* (1624, Mauritshuis, The Hague) and a later version (1629, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin) offers similar results. This change perhaps signals a new source of patronage or simply a new artistic interest. Although

ter Brugghen’s sensibility shifted away from the ugly and the archaic, his continued commitment to depicting idiosyncratic facial types and life’s clutter show that he did not change completely—the peculiar crown-bearing angels in the 1629 *Annunciation* alone are evidence of this. However, he did slide to the center on the spectrum of naturalism to encompass the possibility of selecting more beautiful models and engineering less awkward compositions. Ter Brugghen also returned with new conviction to depictions of artificial light, an effect he attempted a few times in the early 1620s. In the last four years before his untimely death in 1629 at age 42, he painted, among others, *Old Man Writing by Candlelight* (ca. 1626–27, Smith College, Northampton, MA), *Melancholia* (1627–28, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto), *The Denial of Peter* (1626–27, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago), *Jacob and Esau* (1627, Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum, Madrid), and *The Concert* (ca. 1626, National Gallery, London). As it is not actually possible to paint by candlelight because of its effects on colors, the depiction of artificial light not only implies artistic imagination, but also, like the selection of more beautiful subjects, greater artistic agency.

A range of views on working from life could be found in writing—



Fig. 8. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Annunciation*, ca. 1624, oil on canvas, 103.8 x 84.3 cm, private collection.
Photo Collection RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague.



Fig. 9. Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Annunciation*, signed and dated 1629, oil on canvas, 216.5 × 176.5 cm, Stadsmuseum de Hofstadt, Diest, Belgium.

and in art—throughout the early modern period. Ter Brugghen's exposure to these ideas was certain and his choice of naturalism was firm, reinforced by his interest in bringing the styles and proclivities of earlier Northern art into the present of his paintings. Yet, as he worked on his most archaizing painting, the *Crucifixion*, alongside a subject in which artists had traditionally explored physical beauty, Saint Sebastian, he pointed himself in a new direction by revising the compositions of his contemporaries. In this way, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene* can be read as a pictorialization of the process of ter Brugghen's own release from concern with the qualities of the art of the North before 1550. Ter Brugghen relinquished not only ugliness, but also what some of the ugliness signified: a deep engagement with pre-Reformation religious art of the North. In its place is an interest in pictorial beauty and a different kind of artistic self-consciousness, one that relates less to metabolizing past art and has more to do with evolving his own artistic identity. *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene* is a triumph, and it is so because it is a mastering, and a synthesis, and a letting go, and a way forward.

The 2013 Icons session offered three different analyses related to Hendrick ter Brugghen's Saint Sebastian. This paper was one of them.

¹ *Saint Sebastian* is signed and dated 1625. The *Crucifixion* is signed and dated 16[2][.]—the last two digits have not been readable since the painting's acquisition, but the consensus is that it was painted the same year. See Leonard J. Slatkes and Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1629)* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 40, 106, 134.

² Slatkes and Franits, *Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen*, 23–24.

³ The first record of ownership of *Saint Sebastian* is 1668; for the *Crucifixion* it is 1657 (Slatkes and Franits, *Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen*, cat. nos. A38 and A19).

⁴ David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

⁵ For an overview, see Eric Jan Sluijter, “Rembrandt and the Rules of Art Revisited,” *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 51 (2009): 121–29; D. Y. Kim, “The Horror of Mimesis,” *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011): 346.

⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 92.

⁷ Cited in Naomi Baker, *Plain Ugly: The Unattractive Body in Early Modern Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 23.

⁸ For example, see the life of Titian in Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (London: Everyman's Library, 1963), 489–508.

⁹ Sluijter, “Rembrandt and the Rules of Art Revisited,” 127.

¹⁰ Marten Jan Bok, “Biographies,” in *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age*, ed. Joaneath A. Spicer with Lynn Federle Orr (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 379.

¹¹ Karel van Mander, *Het Schilderboek* (Haarlem: Passchier van Wesbusch, 1604), folio 297 f2., excerpted and translated in Marcel G. Roethlisberger, with Marten Jan Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and His Sons: Paintings and Prints*, trans. Diane L. Webb (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1993), 41.

¹² See Gero Seelig, *Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651): Studien zur Utrechter Malerei um 1620* (Berlin: Mann, 1997) and Roethlisberger and Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert*.

¹³ Van Mander, *Het Schilderboek*, folio 191r., excerpted and translated in Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 344.

¹⁴ Bok, “Biographies,” 379.

¹⁵ Liesbeth M. Helmus, “The Utrecht Caravaggisti: Imitation and Improvement,” in *Utrecht, Caravaggio, and Europe*, ed. Bernd Ebert and Liesbeth Helmus (Munich: Hirmerverlag, 2018), 57, 61.

¹⁶ For more on ter Brugghen in Italy and his attention to Caravaggio, see Natasha Seaman, *The Religious Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen: Reinventing Christian Painting After the Reformation in Utrecht* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), ch. 1.

¹⁷ Cited in and translated by Marten Jan Bok, "Was Hendrick ter Brugghen a Melancholic?," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2009), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2009.1.2.2, ¶9.

¹⁸ For a discussion of ter Brugghen's art in relation to Caravaggism, see Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, 12–16.

¹⁹ Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, ch. 2.

²⁰ Xander van Eck, *Clandestine Splendor: Paintings for the Catholic Church in the Dutch Republic* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2008), 24ff.; Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, 55–59.

²¹ For further discussion of ter Brugghen's *Calling of Matthew*, see Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, ch. 6.

²² Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, 21–22.

²³ Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 40.

²⁴ John 1:29 (New Revised Standard Version).

²⁵ Isaiah 53:2–3 (Douay-Rheims Bible).

²⁶ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "'To Make Women Weep': Ugly Art as 'Feminine' and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics," *Res* 31 (1997): 19–22.

²⁷ Hamburger, "'To Make Women Weep,'" 20.

²⁸ Cited in Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 199.

²⁹ Francisco da Holanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. Aubrey F. Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 15–16.

³⁰ Cited in Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*, 198 (emphasis added).

³¹ Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Alice Sedgwick Wohl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185 (emphasis added).

³² For further analysis and examination of sources related to the *Crucifixion*, see Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, ch. 4; Natasha Seaman, "Materiality and the Presence of the Past in Hendrick ter Brugghen's *Crucifixion*," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 74, no. 4 (2011): 489–516; Wayne Franits, "Hendrick ter Brugghen's Paintings of the Crucifixion in New York and Turin and the Problem of His Early Chronology," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2017), DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2017.9.1.3; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Hendrick ter Brugghen | The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John," accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435817>; Walter Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), x–xi, 109–18, no. 25.

³³ Claus Virch, "The *Crucifixion* by Hendrick Terbrugghen," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, no. 8 (1958): 217–26; Slatkes and Franits, *Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen*, cat. no. A19.

³⁴ As Benedict Nicolson wrote, "[Ter Brugghen] may have had in mind some

medieval Gothic wood carving with life-size figures which had struck him forcibly as he gazed up at it" (*Hendrick Terbrugghen* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958], 81 [emphasis original]).

³⁵ Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht, *Goddelijk geschilderd: Honderd Meesterwerken van Museum Catharijneconvent* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2003), 137–38.

³⁶ Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, 90.

³⁷ Seaman, *Religious Paintings*, 92.

³⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 97–101.

³⁹ She appears, for instance, in a panel from 1497 of Josse Lieferinx's altar-piece in the Saint Sebastian chapel of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules, Marseilles, done in collaboration with Bernardino Simondi.

⁴⁰ Caesar Baronius, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, ed. Augustin Theiner (Barri-Ducis: Guerin, 1864–83), 3:295–96. For a discussion of how Baronius's ideas may have reached artists, see Valerie Hedquist, "Ter Brugghen's *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*," *Journal of the Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9, no. 2 (2017): ¶25.

⁴¹ Ter Brugghen may have died of the plague during the 1629 outbreak. See Bok, "Biographies," 380. For an overview of Utrecht's experience with the plague and the relationship of ter Brugghen's *Sebastian* to it, see Hedquist, "Ter Brugghen's *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*," ¶5.

⁴² Ebert and Helmus, *Utrecht, Caravaggio, and Europe*, 242–47.

⁴³ Cat. no. 9 in Spicer and Orr, *Masters of Light*, 155.

⁴⁴ Wayne Franits, *The Paintings of Dirck van Baburen (ca. 1592/3–1624): Catalogue Raisonné* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013), 42.

⁴⁵ Franits doubts the autograph status of the Hamburg painting, seeing it as a late-seventeenth-century copy. He identifies several other paintings showing similar compositions as workshop copies (*Paintings of Dirck van Baburen*, 41).

⁴⁶ Cat. no. 10 in Spicer and Orr, *Masters of Light*, 160.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the transition in the depicted age of Saint Sebastian, see Karim Ressouni-Demigneux, "The 'Imaginary' Life of Saint Sebastian," in *The Agony and the Ecstasy: Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians*, ed. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon (Milan: Silvana Editore, 2007), 19.

⁴⁸ Slatkes and Franits, *Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen*, 134.

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Stechow, "Terbrugghen's 'Saint Sebastian,'" *Burlington Magazine* 95, no. 609 (1953): 71.

⁵⁰ See Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), ch. 1.

⁵¹ Slatkes and Franits, *Paintings of Hendrick ter Brugghen*, 23.

**“As I Was Perpetually Haunted by These Ideas”:
Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* and Its Influence on
Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda***

Beth S. Wright



Fig. 1. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781, oil on canvas, 101.7 cm x 127.1 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts. Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman, 55.5.A.

One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams, and what may be called the personification of sentiment.

—Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), *Aphorism 231*^{[1](#)}

Art, Science and Literature: The “Personification of Sentiment”

From its first viewing, Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (1781, Detroit Institute of Arts; Fig. 1) was recognized as a richly layered investigation of physiological and emotional ecstasy and torment.² We see a young woman whose white gown clings to her body as she lies across a bed which extends across the picture plane. Her body is so close to the spectator that her lax hand grazing the ground can almost be touched. Glowing light on her head, torso, and thigh is supported by rich gold fabric under her and a muted red drapery on the bed. Secondary attention is directed to a figure emerging from the background darkness: the head of a white horse. An incubus, crouched on her diaphragm and pelvic area, completes the composition. Even today this canonical art historical landmark has the power to entrance and to shock its audience.

In spite of its iconic status as an art historical milestone, it is worthwhile noting that the contexts in which this work was created and received include both scientific theory and fictional literature, and my essay will delve into these sources to shed light on Fuseli’s powerful work and its persisting impact. In the eighteenth century,

specialist and amateur readers and viewers of visual art were fascinated by a dream’s ability to represent not only experience but desire, including sexual desire. Fuseli’s friends Dr. John Armstrong and the botanical scientist Erasmus Darwin had already suggested an erotic context for nightmarish dreams. Fuseli’s frustrated love for Anna Landolt, which resulted in his own dream, inspired the female portrait appended to the back of the canvas of *The Nightmare* (which I will discuss as Fig. 4). Throughout his career, he created art works on themes relating to the fear of sexual attraction and domination. At times these works present attitudes which are misogynistic. Fuseli’s views and his art inspired personal and professional responses by his friend Mary Wollstonecraft and by Wollstonecraft’s daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Both were women who advocated for the right of women to full autonomy and free expression, and a significant factor in their responses was their gendered physical experience of personified sentiment. For them, women’s love and sexuality could result in catastrophe. Mary Wollstonecraft died of puerperal fever after giving birth to her daughter. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, who became Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, experienced the loss of

three young children. She grieved their deaths during the period in which she was writing two literary works which re-present Fuseli's art works with both profound insight and pointed critique: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and *Mathilda* (1819).

Fuseli's *The Nightmare*: Darwin and Armstrong

Fuseli's *The Nightmare* both reflected and inspired scientific commentary. During March–April 1781, when Fuseli was producing his initial sketch for *The Nightmare*,

Erasmus Darwin visited London and they became friends. Fuseli introduced Darwin to Joseph Johnson, his own friend and publisher, forming a relationship which continued to the end of Darwin's life. These friendships were manifested in a number of projects. Thomas Burke's authorized 1783 engraving after *The Nightmare* (Fig. 2) incorporated verses from Darwin's as-yet-unpublished poem *The Botanic Garden or, Loves of the Plants* (a book-length poetic work), that was completed in 1783, but not published until 1789



Fig. 2. Thomas Burke after Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1783, London: John Raphael Smith, 1783, stipple engraving, 22.7 x 25 cm, London: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

(anonymously) and then in 1791 under his name with another poem as *The Botanic Garden: A Poem in Two Parts; Part 1. Containing the Economy of Vegetation; Part 2. The Loves of the Plants*. Thomas Burke's etching and engraving (Fig. 3) after Fuseli's 1791 variant composition of *The Nightmare* (now in the Goethe Museum, Frankfurt am Main) appeared as an illustration in this edition.³ Darwin's text (an extended version of the lines already

printed in Burke's 1783 engraving) praised Fuseli's *The Nightmare* and explicated the subject matter which had inspired the artist: modern scientific theories about the relationship between physiology and emotion in the act of dreaming. Martin Priestman has argued that Fuseli's conversations with Darwin in 1781 influenced the initial development of the pictorial composition.⁴ Darwin's passage deserves to be quoted in full:

So on his Night-Mare, through the evening fog
Flits the squab fiend o'er fen, and lake, and bog
Seeks some love-wilder'd maid with sleep oppress'd
Alights, and, grinning, sits upon her breast.⁵
—Such as of late, amid the murky sky,
Was mark'd by FUSELI's poetic eye;
Whose daring tints, with SHAKESPEAR'S happiest grace,
Gave to the airy phantom form and place.—
Back o'er her pillow sinks her blushing head;
Her snow-white limbs hang helpless from the bed;
While with quick sighs, and suffocative breath,
Her interrupted heart-pulse swims in death.
—Then shrieks of captur'd towns, and widows' tears,
Pale lovers stretch'd upon their blood-stain'd biers,
The headlong precipice that thwarts her flight,
The trackless desert, the cold starless night.
And stern-eyed Murderer, with his knife behind,
In dread succession agonize her mind.
O'er her fair limbs convulsive tremors fleet,
Start in her hands, and struggle in her feet;
In vain to scream with quivering lips she tries,
And strains in palsy'd lids her tremulous eyes;
In vain she wills to run, fly, swim, walk, creep;
The WILL presides not in the bower of SLEEP.
—On her fair bosom sits the Demon-Ape
Erect, and balances his bloated shape;
Rolls in their marble orbs his Gorgon-eyes,
And drinks with leathern ears her tender cries."⁶



Fig. 3. Thomas Burke after Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, illustration to Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* (London: J. Johnson, 1791), etching and engraving, 22.8 x 14.1 cm, London: British Museum.
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

According to Darwin, a “love-wilder’d maid” experiences nightmares because of problems of blood circulation: her “blushing head” sinks back, her “interrupted heart-pulse swims in death.” Darwin was not the first author to connect these physical symptoms with nightmarish dreams. Fuseli’s friend, the medical doctor John Armstrong, published a poem entitled *The Art of Preserving Health* in 1744.⁷ Dr. Armstrong’s discussion of diet and blood circulation included a passage on nightmares, citing the research of Dr. John Bond (*Essay on the Incubus, or Night-mare*, published in 1753), which stated that those most likely to experience nightmares were “persons of gross full habits, the robust, the luxurious, the drunken and they who sup late.... Also Women who are obstructed; Girls of full, lax habits before the eruption of the Menses.”⁸ People lying on their left side, with their heads lower than their legs could experience blockages in the circulation of their blood which would cause them to experience difficulty breathing and make them unable to move voluntarily. Like Dr. Bond, Dr. Armstrong connected physiological and subjective experience. He warned that an unhappy love affair “unnerves the body and unmans the soul” and that excessive lascivious sexual congress could lead to impotence and disease.⁹ In addition to medical literature, libertine

fiction (most notably by the Marquis de Sade) and pornographic art (contemporary and antique, accessible in the Baron d’Harcarville’s modern, illustrated archaeological texts and produced by Fuseli himself) explored the possible control of sexual anxiety and fear of emasculation.¹⁰ The subject of an alluring woman’s nightmare was depicted by Fuseli five times; it had a strong personal relevance for him.¹¹

Fuseli’s Life and Art: Love and Sexuality

The Nightmare was inspired by Fuseli’s unrequited love for Anna Landolt, the niece of his friend Johann Caspar Lavater, the physiognomist. On the back of this canvas is Fuseli’s *Portrait of a Lady* (late eighteenth century, Detroit Institute of Arts, Fig. 4), perhaps Landolt herself. In 1779, after she had refused Fuseli’s proposal of marriage, Fuseli wrote Lavater about a dream which he had had about Anna in which his arousal had led to his staking his claim to her:

Last night I [dreamt I] had her in bed with me—tossed my bedclothes hugger-mugger—wound my hot and tight-clasped hands about her—fused her body and her soul together with my own—poured into her my spirit, breath and strength. Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest! She is *mine*, and I am *hers*. And have her I will.¹²



Fig. 4. Henry Fuseli, *Portrait of a Lady*, late 18th century, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman, 55.5.B.

In another letter Fuseli insisted, “Each earthly night since I left her, I have lain in her bed.”¹³ Given Fuseli’s description of repeated dreams of passionate sexual pleasure followed by his frustration when he awakened and recognized she was *not* “his”—he still did not “have her”—it is not surprising that Knowles, his friend, described Fuseli as “almost in a state of phrenzy” when he arrived in England in 1779.¹⁴

In that year he began work on a subject which portrayed his tormented emotions: a man brooding over the corpse of his unfaithful wife, whom he has murdered. Fuseli’s initial pen and ink drawing (inscribed “Zurico febr. 79”), *Ezzelin Bracciaferro Musing over Meduna* (1779, London: British Museum, Fig. 5) differs from the final painting exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1780 (1779, Sir John Soane’s Muesem) in that it



Fig. 5. Henry Fuseli, *Ezzelin Bracciaferro Musing over Meduna*, 1779, pen and black ink and red chalk with brown wash, 34.5 x 40.5 cm, London: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

shows the woman blindfolded and gagged.¹⁵

Fuseli's views on the problematic link between a woman's sexuality and her autonomy led to his creation of works throughout his career which represent alluring women's power to enslave, degrade, and emasculate men. In Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon is responsible for the spell, but Fuseli reinterprets the literary text for his *Titania and Bottom with the Ass's Head* (1788–89, Tate Britain) for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and presents Titania as a spell-binding Circe; one of her fairies leads a man on a leash.¹⁶ One of the most disturbing of these misogynistic works is *Brunhild Observing Gunther, Whom She Has Tied to the Ceiling* (1807, Nottingham City Museums and Galleries, Fig. 6), a subject from the *Nibelungenlied*.¹⁷ Gunther's love for "the adorable woman," his "caresses and endearments," elicit only rage. His attempt at physical domination fails; his strength vanishes, and his entreaties are ignored by a woman who, having "put a stop to his love-making" ignores him throughout the night, "lying very snug."¹⁸ Fuseli was the only artist to illustrate this subject until Alfred Hrdlicka in the twentieth century.¹⁹

In Fuseli's eyes, women's autonomy itself was a sexual threat.²⁰ His *Aphorism* 226 stated:

In an age of luxury women have taste, decide and dictate; for in an age of luxury woman aspires to the functions of man, and man slides into the offices of woman. The epoch of eunuchs was ever the epoch of viragos.²¹

Given these ideas, it is not surprising that his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), whom he termed "the assertrix of female rights," proved combustible.²²

Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli

In 1788, Mary Wollstonecraft joined Joseph Johnson's circle (which at this time included Fuseli, William Blake, Thomas Paine and William Godwin) as a reader, translator, and author of articles for the *Analytic Review*. Her acclamation of the French Revolution, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), made her famous overnight. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), she called for women's right to autonomy, their intellectual development, and the inculcation of moral principles in them, instead of their being groomed to become "the toy of man."²³

Wollstonecraft and Fuseli became friends in 1790. William Godwin (in a biography published in January 1798, only a few months after her death) believed that Mary Wollstonecraft's admiration of



Fig. 6. Henry Fuseli, *Brunhild Observing Gunther, Whom She Has Tied to the Ceiling*, 1807, pencil, pen and ink, and wash, 48.3 x 31.7 cm, Nottingham City Museums and Galleries. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

Fuseli's art, ideas, and person was due to her sensitivity to

the exquisite sensations of pleasure she felt from the associations of visible objects.... She saw Mr. Fuseli frequently; he amused, delighted and instructed her.... Mary was not of a temper to live upon terms of so much intimacy with a man of merit and genius, without loving him. The delight she enjoyed in his society, she transferred by association to his person.²⁴

Whether their friendship was platonic or sexual, in 1792 she proposed to Fuseli's wife that they live together in a *menage à trois*:

As I am above deceit, it is right to say that this proposal arises from the sincere affection that I have for your husband, for I feel that I cannot live without the satisfaction of seeing and conversing with him daily.²⁵

Mrs. Fuseli refused this offer. Mary Wollstonecraft was forbidden to return to the house.

Modern scholars have acknowledged that Fuseli's discussion of artworks with women included his erotic art. Whether his intention was aesthetic, lascivious, or a combination of the two, the result of Fuseli's relationship with Wollstonecraft was the opposite of his relationship with Anna Landolt:

rejection of a woman whose passionate emotions he had aroused.²⁶

Wollstonecraft went to France in 1792. There she fell in love with an American, Gilbert Imlay. Their child Frances (Fanny) was born in May 1794. Wollstonecraft returned to London in April 1795. After she discovered that Imlay loved another woman, Wollstonecraft twice attempted suicide.²⁷ In January 1796 she and William Godwin renewed their acquaintance and fell in love. They married in March 1797, shortly before the birth of their daughter, Mary, on August 30, 1797. On September 10, Mary Wollstonecraft died of puerperal fever—a fact that would have a profound impact on the life and literary works of her daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Fuseli's *The Nightmare*

Like her mother, Mary Shelley (1797–1851) led a life in which passionate love and idealistic views resulted in domestic upheaval. She was educated in London by her father, and knew his friends (including Fuseli, who visited the Godwin house until 1813). In 1814, she eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley, her father's disciple, who was already married to Harriet Westbrook.

For Mary Shelley, women's sexual expression was inseparable from catastrophe. She herself had inadvertently been the cause of her mother's death only days after her own birth. During the period 1815–19, three of her four children died soon after their births.²⁸ She and Percy Shelley were able to marry in December 1816 after they learned that Harriet, while pregnant, had committed suicide. This tragic link between love, birth, and death would be a significant feature of Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) and her unpublished novella *Mathilda* (written 1819).

In the summer of 1816, Lord Byron (George Gordon Byron, sixth Baron) challenged his friends John Polidori and Percy and Mary Shelley to write ghost stories. After their discussion of Erasmus Darwin's experimental attempts to reanimate a worm, Mary dreamed of a scientist who succeeded in giving life to a creature formed of body parts taken from corpses. Horror-struck, the scientist fled to his bedroom, where the creature awakened him from sleep.²⁹ This dream was the inspiration for *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, published anonymously in January 1818.

When Mary Shelley incorporated her dream into the novel, she added a crucial factor: the link between birth and death which

repulses the scientist, who has generated what he describes as "a catastrophe." Victor Frankenstein's guilt at transgressing nature's boundaries, his refusal to nurture the new life he has brought into the world ("the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life") will bring catastrophe to everyone he loves.³⁰

In chapter 5, Mary Shelley's nightmare is enacted when Victor first sees his unnamed creature:

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open, it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe...? I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body ...; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room.

Immediately Mary Shelley links this repulsive creation to love and death: to Victor's fiancée Elizabeth and his mother's corpse. Once back in his bedroom, Victor dreams of

Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but, as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought

that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.... I started from my sleep with horror.... [B]y the dim and yellow light of the moon..., I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created.... He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped.³¹

This scene of the first moment of confrontation is described in the frontispiece (Fig. 7) to the first illustrated edition of the novel (1831), designed by Theodor von Holst, Fuseli's pupil.³² When Victor learns that his younger brother William has been strangled by a thief who seized a locket bearing a picture of Victor's dead mother, he suspects that his repudiated creature—"my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave"—has been at work.³³ After Victor has broken his promise to create a mate for his creature, he is berated and warned by him:

"Shall each man," cried he, "find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn.... [B]eware!... [S]oon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness forever.... [R]emember I shall be with you on your wedding night."³⁴

In chapter 23, the dream which Victor had had at the moment of creation becomes reality on his wedding night. His bride, Elizabeth, is discovered in a scene which directly replicates Fuseli's *The Nightmare*:

[S]uddenly I heard a shrill and dreadful scream ... and I rushed into the room.... She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal biers.... I rushed towards her, and embraced her with ardour; but the deadly langour and coldness of the limbs told me, that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished. The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck, and the breath had ceased to issue from her lips. While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back, and with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife.³⁵

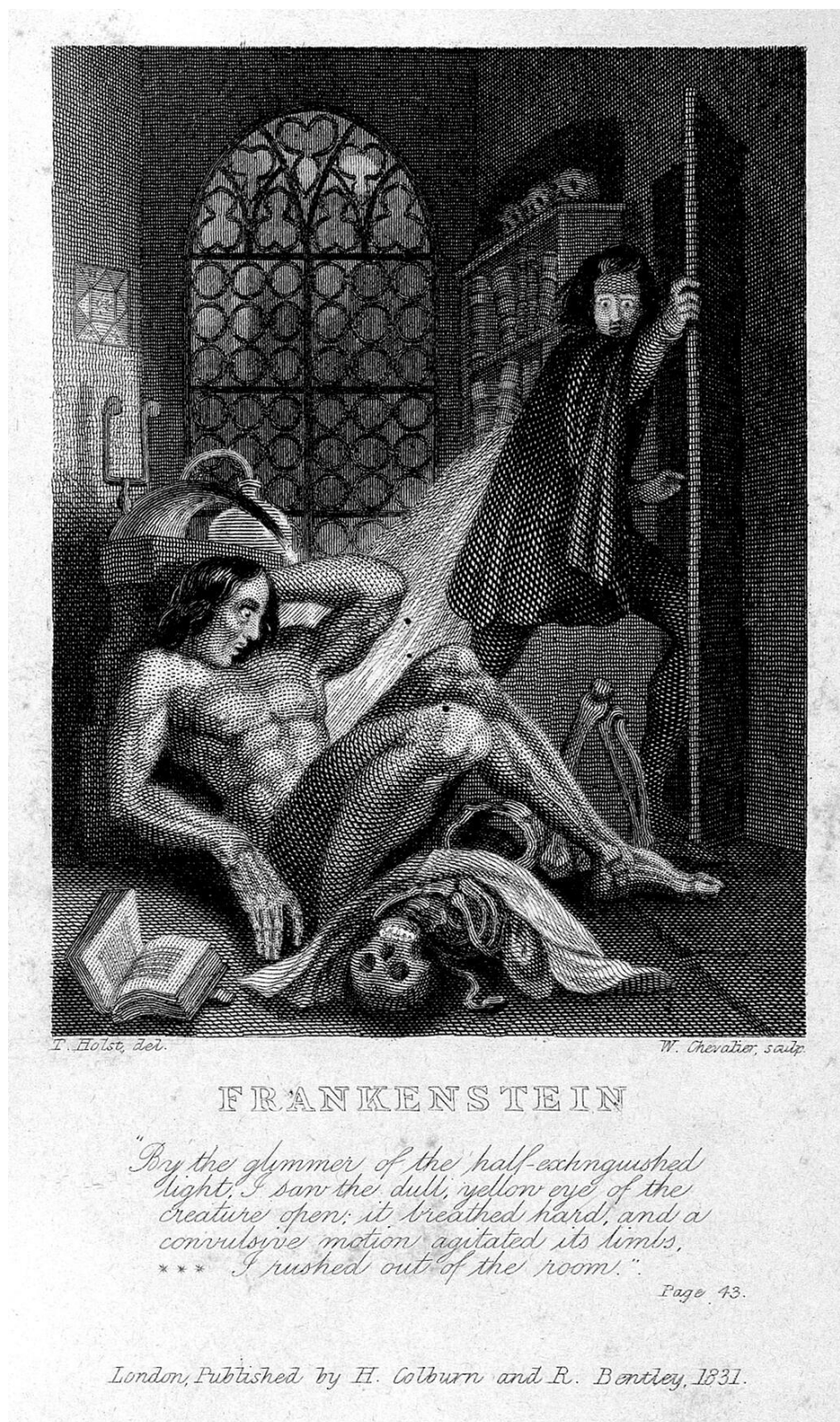


Fig. 7. "Victor Frankenstein Observing the First Stirrings of his Creature,"
W. Chevalier after Th. Von Holst, 1831, steel engraving, 9.3 x 7.1 cm.
Frontispiece to Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831).
London: Wellcome Collection, public domain.

The persisting impact of Fuseli's *The Nightmare* in pictorial variants, graphic reproductions, and satires was amplified by *Frankenstein's* illustrated editions, dramatizations, and graphic works.³⁶ At least fifteen dramas based on the novel were produced between 1823 and 1826. Spectators in theaters would have had even more reason to be awed by the physical presence of the actors and their gestures than spectators of a static painting. It is not surprising that Fuseli's *The Nightmare* was featured in an exhibition at the Morgan Library celebrating the 200th anniversary of *Frankenstein's* publication.³⁷

Although Fuseli's painting and Mary Shelley's fiction present virtually identical scenes of sexual release as physical torment, their emotional resonance is very different. Fuseli shows the viewer a beautiful woman asleep, writhing under the pressure of the incubus, in simultaneous orgasmic arousal and suffocation. When Mary Shelley shows the reader/viewer a beautiful corpse, we are complicit in Elizabeth's veiled rape/murder because we take the protagonist's viewpoint. Victor Frankenstein is the initiator of destruction, not the creature outside the room. Victor engendered life but refused to nurture it. His creature ("my own spirit let loose from the grave") has

destroyed his brother William, his family's servant Justine, his friend Clerval, and now his "more than sister," his "pretty present" Elizabeth.³⁸ This same theme, the incestuous objectification of a young woman, is the focus of Mary Shelley's novella *Mathilda* (written in 1819).³⁹ Here we see enacted Mary Wollstonecraft's description of the destructive education of women to be the pretty toys of men instead of autonomous human beings.

Mathilda and Fuseli's The Great Father and Ancient Night

Mathilda, a young woman in her twenties, narrates her tale on her deathbed. She has been molded into the reflection of her father's needs. Her yearning for his love leads to disaster for them both.

The earth was to me a magic lantern and I [a] gazer, and a listener but no actor; but then came the transporting and soul-reviving era of my existence; my father returned and I could pour my warm affections on a human heart ... joy! joy! but, alas! what grief!... [T]o my happiness followed madness and agony, closed by despair.⁴⁰

When Mathilda's mother dies days after her birth, her father (he is never given a name), unable to bear the sight of his daughter, places her in the care of his sister and leaves the country. After

sixteen years, he writes his sister that he is returning, describing his daughter as “the creature who will form the happiness of my future life.”⁴¹ Her unseen father had become “the idol of my imagination.”⁴² Their reunion is blissful. But his possessive affection cannot permit his daughter’s mature involvement with another. When a young man begins to woo her, Mathilda’s father becomes angry, melancholy, silent. She presses him to explain, eliciting his acknowledgement of his love in a scene which deserves quotation at length:

“Am I the cause of your grief?” ...

“Yes, you are the sole, the agonizing cause of all I suffer, of all I must suffer until I die.... One word I might speak and then you would be implicated in my destruction; yet that word is hovering on my lips. Oh! There is a fearful chasm; but I adjure you to beware!”

“Ah, dearest friend!” I cried, “do not fear! Speak that word....”

“Why do you ... torture me, and tempt me, and kill me[?]... I am on the very verge of insanity; why, cruel girl, do you drive me on[?]”

When I repeat his words I wonder at my pertinacious folly.... I was led by passion and drew him with frantic heedlessness

into the abyss that he so fearfully avoided....

“[Y]ou no longer love me.” ...

He began to answer with violence: ‘Yes, yes, I hate you! You are my bane, my poison, my disgust! Oh! No[!]’ And then his manner changed, and fixing his eye on me with an expression that convulsed every nerve and member of my frame— “[Y]ou are none of all these; you are my light, my only one, my life.—My daughter, I love you!” ... “Now I have dashed from the top of the rock to the bottom. Now I have precipitated myself down the fearful chasm!... Oh, Mathilda, lift up those dear eyes in the light of which I live.... Monster as I am, you are still, as you ever were, lovely, beautiful beyond expression.... [D]evil as I am become, yet that is my Mathilda before me whom I love as one was never before loved: and she knows it now.... We have leapt the chasm I told you of, and now, mark me, Mathilda, we are to find flowers, and verdure and delight, or is it hell, and fire, and tortures? Oh! Beloved One, I am borne away; I can no longer sustain myself; surely this is death that is coming. Let me lay my head near your heart; let me die in your arms!” ...

[A]t one moment in pity for his sufferings I would have clasped my father in my arms; and then starting back with horror I spurned him with my foot.⁴³

Her father has referred to a metaphorical precipice which will

destroy them. In her nightmare, she pursues him; he flees from her and leaps to his death from a precipice into the sea. This ominous dream is followed by his suicide in real life. In his suicide note, he accepts his responsibility for their catastrophe: jealousy of her suitor had caused “the fiend [to waken] within me.”⁴⁴

Since Mathilda has only existed as the reflection of her father’s desires, she is unable to behave as an autonomous being. She insists that “I alone was the cause of his defeat.”⁴⁵ Mathilda is “perpetually haunted by ideas” of guilt and shame: “polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired ... a creature cursed and set apart by nature ... a pariah, only fit for death.”⁴⁶ Death, which “will unite me to my father,” is all that she desires; to have her shroud serve as her wedding gown.⁴⁷ Her father had chosen to

kill himself. She awaits an “innocent death”: consumption and heart failure as a result of exposure overnight in the rain.⁴⁸

Sophia Andres has compared the scene in which Mathilda spurns her father with her foot to Fuseli’s pencil and wash drawing *The Great Father and Ancient Night* (1800–1810, Art Gallery Auckland, Fig. 8), in which an impassive maiden looks down upon a mature male who holds onto the edge of a precipice.⁴⁹ While Gert Schiff identified the drawing as an allegory of Justice, Peter Tomory pointed out the influence of contemporary scientific literature: Armstrong’s *The Art of Preserving Health* and Erasmus Darwin’s *The Temple of Nature*, published in 1803 with illustrations by Fuseli.⁵⁰

Armstrong described empires toppling over “the desolate abyss”:

Time shakes the stable tyranny of thrones,
And tottering empires rush by their own weight....
The sun himself, shall die; and ancient Night
Again involve the desolate abyss
Till the great FATHER thro’ the lifeless gloom
Extend his arm to light another world.⁵¹



Fig. 8. Henry Fuseli, *The Great Father and Ancient Night*, ca.1800-1810, pencil, grey wash and blue wash, 45 x 30 cm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1965.
Permission of the Auckland Art Gallery must be obtained before any reuse of this image.

Tomory identified the male figure as Oceanus from Hesiod's *Theogony*, who offers pearl-seeded oysters (symbolizing the fertilization of new life), a reference to Darwin's *The Temple of Nature*:

Organic life beneath the shoreless waves
Was born and nurs'd in Ocean's pearly
caves⁵²

Mary Shelley's Mathilda, like Fuseli's female figure of *Ancient Night*, is caught between compassion and rebuke, between love and horror. Filled with contradictory passions, she could well be contemplating a leap into the abyss herself.

Fuseli's painting had a protean impact on his audience. He himself depicted the subject multiple times, and graphic reproductions helped to amplify its impact throughout the world in multiple media. Fuseli had declared that his passionate dream about "staking his claim" to Anna had determined her future for her: "Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest! She is *mine*, and I am *hers*."⁵³ Fuseli's art inspired Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*—literary works in which Fuseli's vivid representation of love's link to torment was transformed into insight and critique of the disasters which ensue when fathers fail to nurture those they

have generated, when they deny autonomy to those they profess to love: murder, incestuous objectification, suicide.

The first session of "Icons of the Midwest" was held at the Los Angeles 2012 CAA meeting. It focused on Henri Fuseli's The Nightmare in the Detroit Institute of Arts.

¹ Henry Fuseli, "Aphorisms on Art," in John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), 3:145. Project Gutenberg e-book #38591, released 2012. Fuseli wrote his "Aphorisms on Art" between 1788 and 1818. They were first published by Knowles in 1831.

² Gert Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli 1741–1825*, 2 vols. (Zürich: Berichthaus; Munich: Prestel, 1973), 1:496 (see cat. no. 757); Nicolas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, Art in Context (New York: Viking, 1972).

³ Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare* (Goethe Museum, Frankfurt am Main); see Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli*, 1:525 (cat. no. 928); engraved by Thomas Burke; published as a separate print in 1791 (see David H. Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations by and after Henry Fuseli: A Catalogue Raisonné* [Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994], cat. no. 68). The illustration appeared in Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden: A Poem in Two Parts; Part 1. Containing the Economy of Vegetation; Part 2. The Loves of the Plants*, 2 vols. (London: Johnson, 1791), vol. 2, facing p. 126 for *The Loves of the Plants*, canto 3, ll. 51–76. The British Museum example is the proof before letters and frame. The British Museum credits Thomas Burke with this engraving; Weinglass states that the engraver was Thomas Holloway (*Prints and Engraved Illustrations*, 60 [cat. No. 68]).

⁴ "So confident does this passage seem about Fuseli's intentions that it is conceivable that Darwin had discussed these theories with him before *The Nightmare* was painted, rather than

simply reading them into it afterwards" (Martin Priestman, "'Fuseli's Poetic Eye': Prints and Impressions in Fuseli and Erasmus Darwin," in *Romanticism and Illustration*, ed. Ian Haywood, Susan Matthews, and Mary L. Shannon [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 96–97).

⁵ These first four lines were those printed in Burke's 1783 engraving. See Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations*, 55 (cat. no. 67).

⁶ Darwin, *Botanic Garden*, 2:126–28, cited in Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Industrial Revolution 1750–1800*, vol. 1 of *A Social History of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 289–90. Darwin discussed the physiological derivation of dreams in his section on the cherry laurel, which he identified with the Pythia, the ancient priestess of Apollo, who experienced prophetic visions. See Asia Haut, "Reading Flora: Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, Henry Fuseli's Illustrations, and Various Literary Responses," *Word & Image* 20, no. 4 (2004): 243–44.

⁷ John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health: A Poem in Four Books* (London: Millar, 1744), republished numerous times separately and in Alexander Chalmers, ed., *Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper* (London: Johnson) in 1795, 1806, and 1810.

⁸ Doctor John Bond, *Essay on the Incubus, or Night-mare* (London: Wilson and Durham, 1753), 46–51, cited in Christopher Frayling, "Fuseli's *The Nightmare*: Somewhere between the Sublime and the Ridiculous," in the catalog of the exhibition *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake*

and the Romantic Imagination, ed. Martin Myrone, with essays by Christopher Frayling and Marina Warner and additional catalog contributions by Christopher Frayling and Mervyn Heard (London: Tate, 2006), 16, 20 n. 33.

⁹ Armstrong, *Art of Preserving Health*, 125–27 (book 4, “The Passions,” ll. 368, 390–97, 404–7; e-book 11214074 ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Art_of_Preserving_Health - A Poem in Four Books](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Art_of_Preserving_Health_-_A_Poem_in_Four_Books))).

¹⁰ For recent discussion of Fuseli’s pornographic drawings, see Camilla Smith, “Between Fantasy and Angst: Assessing the Subject and Meaning of Henry Fuseli’s Late Pornographic Drawings, 1800–25,” *Art History* 33, no. 3 (June 2010): 420–47; Andrei Pop, *Antiquity, Theatre, and the Painting of Henry Fuseli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Smith relates Fuseli’s drawings to the Marquis de Sade’s libertine sado-masochistic novels *Justine* (1791) and *Juliette* (1797), as well as Pietro Aretino’s “Sonnetti Lussuriosi” (1524) illustrated by Giulio Romano. Pop sets Fuseli’s engagement with Wollstonecraft’s feminist ideas into the context of “Neopaganism,” especially Pierre François (“Baron”) d’Hancarville’s *Recherches sur l’origine, l’esprit et les progrès des arts de la Grèce* (London: Appleyard, 1785).

¹¹ In 1827, Raddon and Colnaghi published an engraving in London after a painting at that time in the collection of the Countess of Guilford but since lost from view. This version was dated by Schiff to 1782–90 (*Johann Heinrich Füssli*, 1:496 [cat. no. 758]). Peter Tomory (*The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* [New York: Praeger, 1972], 248)

suggested a later date (1792?). The engraving quoted the lines from Darwin which had appeared in the Burke authorized 1783 print. See Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations*, 57 (cat. no. 67D). The other two variant paintings are described in Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli*, 1:604 (cat. no. 1502, 1810–20, Zurich, collection of Martha Maag-Socin); and 1:637 (cat. no. 1789, 1800–1810, Vassar Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York).

¹² Fuseli’s letter of June 16, 1779, to Lavater, in Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, 60, emphasis original. Powell cited Horst Janson, “Fuseli’s *Nightmare*,” *Arts and Sciences* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1963): 28, which includes a passage from another letter; unfortunately, Janson provides no citations.

¹³ Janson, “Fuseli’s *Nightmare*,” 28.

¹⁴ Knowles, *Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 1:56.

¹⁵ Lavater admired Fuseli’s characterization of Ezzelin: “Fettered by remorse of conscience ... he deplores his madness, but repents it not; he detests it, and yet still applauds himself for it” (Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy: Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, trans. Henry Hunter, 3 vols. in 4 [London: Murray, 1789–98], 2.2:294. A 1799 edition of Lavater’s *Essays in Physiognomy* contained an illustration of Thomas Holloway’s engraving after the painting *Count Ezzelin Bracciaferro Musing over Meduna Slain by Him for Infidelity While he was Away on a Crusade* (Weinglass, *Prints and Engraved Illustrations*, 103).

¹⁶ On the “emasculating imagination disguised as an erotic fantasy” of this work, see Nicola Bown, “The Enchantments of Tradition: Men, Women and Fairies in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 10, no. 3 (1999): 308–25 (here at 320).

¹⁷ Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli*, 1:587 (cat. no. 1381).

¹⁸ *The Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200), trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1965), cited in Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares*, 67 (cat. no. 27). Fuseli’s teacher Johann Jakob Bodmer discovered, published, and translated manuscripts of this text. Fuseli owned the first full German edition of it (published in 1782 by Bodmer’s pupil Myller) and wrote poems based upon it. Christian Klemm has pointed out the importance of the poem’s portrayal of beautiful, powerful and vengeful women (“Friedel’s Love and Kriemhild’s Revenge: Fuseli’s Revels in the Kingdom of the Nibelungs,” in *Füssli: The Wild Swiss*, ed. Franziska Lentzsch with essays by Christoph Becker, Christian Klemm, and Bernhard von Waldkirch, catalog of an exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich [Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2005], 149–74). For example, Kriemhild betrays the secret of Siegfried’s invulnerability to the treacherous Hagen and cuts off the head of Hagen’s brother Gunther to force him to disclose where the treasure of the Nibelung is kept. Klemm describes Fuseli as “the first, most inspired and most significant illustrator of the epic” (150), and describes *Brunhild Observes Gunther Hanging in Chains from the Ceiling* (1807) as a work “in which Fuseli’s central obsession found perhaps its most astonishing expression” (161).

¹⁹ D. H. Weinglass, “‘The Elysium of Fancy’: Aspects of Henry Fuseli’s Erotic Art,” in *Erotica and the Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Wagner (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), 302–3. Hrdlicka’s work is entitled *Brunhild Chastises Fuseli*.

²⁰ Martin Myrone interpreted Fuseli’s misogynistic representations of women “as an imaginative working through of the fears about women’s authority experienced in Fuseli’s time: women’s real claims to power being translated into much simpler (and ultimately degrading) sexual hunger” (*Henry Fuseli* [London: Tate, 2001], 70–71).

²¹ Fuseli, “Aphorisms on Art,” 3:144 (Aphorism 226).

²² “You have not, perhaps, heard that the asserter of female rights has given her hand to the *balancier* of political justice” (“Fuseli to William Roscoe [25 May 1797],” in David H. Weinglass, *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* [Millwood, NY: Krauss, 1982]), 170.

²³ “Women are told from their infancy ... that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience ... will obtain from them the protection of man ... How grossly do they insult us who thus advise us only to render ourselves gentle, domestic brutes! ... Gentleness, docility, and a spaniel-like affection are ... consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex;... She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle” (“Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” in *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, ed. and with an introduction and commentaries by Miriam Schneir (New York: Vintage: 1972), 6, 12.

²⁴ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Johnson, 1798), 86, 89, 90 (ch. 6: 1790–1792; Project Gutenberg e-book #16199, released 2005). Godwin included details of Mary Wollstonecraft's sexual liaison with Imlay, the birth of their illegitimate child, her suicide attempts, and his own premartial affair with her. Wollstonecraft had insisted her friendship with Fuseli was platonic. Fuseli continued to dine with William Godwin until at least 1813 but refused to give Godwin Wollstonecraft's love letters after her death. In 1826, Mary Shelley tried to help Godwin retrieve the letters to Fuseli from the deceased painter's executors (see Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley, Romance and Reality* [Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1989], 262). Her grandson purchased and then destroyed them (see Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* [New York: New American Library, 1974], 88).

²⁵ Blake wished Wollstonecraft to enter into a *menage à trois* with himself and his wife. See Tomory, *Life and Art of Henry Fuseli*, 40.

²⁶ According to Tomalin, Fuseli "enjoyed talking and writing about sex" and "certainly continued the process started by the Kingsboroughs, of arousing her [Wollstonecraft's] erotic imagination" (*Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 88, cited by Maryanne C. Ward, "A Painting of the Unspeakable: Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* and the Creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 33, no.1 (Winter 2000): 25.

²⁷ She attempted suicide with laudanum in May 1795 and threw herself into the Thames in October 1795; a passerby saved her from drowning. Her daughter Fanny Imlay would commit suicide with laudanum in October 1816.

²⁸ Their daughter Clara, born prematurely on February 22, 1815, died days later on March 6. Their daughter Clara Everina Shelley, born on January 12, 1817, died on September 24, 1818. Their son William Godwin Shelley, born on January 24, 1816, died on June 7, 1819. Mary Shelley herself almost died from hemorrhage after a miscarriage on June 16, 1822.

²⁹ See Mary Shelley, introduction to *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover, 1994), vii. This text is the revised 1831 edition.

³⁰ Shelley, introduction, ix.

³¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 34–35.

³² Theodore von Holst (1810–44) designed the frontispiece to the revised edition (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831). See Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares*, 71 (cat. no. 30).

³³ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 50–51.

³⁴ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 122–23.

³⁵ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 144–45.

³⁶ Published anonymously as *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, and Jones, 1818); the second English edition (London: Whittaker, 1823) credited Shelley as the author. The novel's first translation was into French by Jules Saladin (Paris: Corréard, 1821).

The first French dramatic adaptation, *Le Monstre et le magicien* by Jean Toussaint Merle and Antoine Nicolas Beraud, opened in Paris in June 1824 at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin and ran for 96 performances.

³⁷ *It's Alive! Frankenstein at 200*, Morgan Library & Museum, New York (October 12, 2018–January 27, 2019), co-curated by John Bidwell (Astor Curator and Department Head of the Morgan's Printed Books and Bindings Department) and Elizabeth Campbell Denlinger (Curator of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle at the New York Public Library), with a catalog by Elizabeth Campbell Denlinger (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum; London: Giles, 2018).

³⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 17–18.

³⁹ Mary Shelley gave a copy of the manuscript of *Mathilda* to Maria Gisborne (a friend of the family) in 1820, asking her to give it to Godwin so that he could assist in its publication. According to Maria Gisborne's journal, Godwin found the subject "disgusting and detestable" (*Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams, Shelley's Friends: Their Journals and Letters*, ed. Frederick L. Jones [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951], 44, cited in Terence Harpold, "'Did You Get Mathilda from Papa?': Seduction Fantasy and the Circulation of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*," *Studies in Romanticism* 28, no. 1 [Spring 1989]: 63). Godwin ignored repeated requests to return the manuscript. Mary Shelley herself worried that its publication could cause her to lose custody of her son Percy Florence Shelley (born November 12,

1819) to his grandfather Sir Timothy Shelley, particularly after Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned on July 8, 1822. The novella remained unpublished until 1959. See two essays published in Syndy M. Conger, Frederick S. Frank, and Gregory O'Dea, eds., *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley after "Frankenstein"; Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley's Birth* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997): Judith Barbour, "'The Meaning of the Tree': The Tale of Mirra in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" (98–114), and Ranita Chatterjee, "*Mathilda*: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Ideologies of Incest" (130–49). As Chatterjee points out, Percy Shelley's tragedy *The Cenci* (centering on incest, rape and murder in that Italian Renaissance family) was published in 1820 with Godwin's approval (130).

⁴⁰ Mary Shelley, "*Mathilda*," in *The Mary Shelley Reader: Containing Frankenstein, Mathilda, Tales and Stories, Essays and Reviews, and Letters*, ed. Betty T. Bennett & Charles E. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 173–246 (reprinted with corrections from Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Mathilda*, ed. Elizabeth Nitchie [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959]), here at 245.

⁴¹ Shelley, "*Mathilda*," 186.

⁴² Shelley, "*Mathilda*," 185.

⁴³ Shelley, "*Mathilda*," 200–203.

⁴⁴ Shelley, "*Mathilda*," 209.

⁴⁵ Shelley, "*Mathilda*," 197.

⁴⁶ Shelley, "Mathilda," 238–39, 240.

⁴⁷ Shelley, "Mathilda," 244.

⁴⁸ Shelley, "Mathilda," 243.

⁴⁹ Sophia Andres, "Narrative Challenges to Visual, Gendered Boundaries: Mary Shelley and Henry Fuseli," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 272–73.

⁵⁰ Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füssli*, 1:639–40 (cat. no. 1804), described as "Allegory of Justice" ca. 1800–1810, derived from Plato, *The Republic* (book 2, 359c–360b). Tomory (*Life and Art of Henry Fuseli*, 123) identified the subject as stemming from Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744). Tomory curated the exhibition *The Poetical Circle, Fuseli and the British: Henry Fuseli and James Barry, William Blake, John Brown, John Flaxman, James Jefferys, John Hamilton Mortimer, George Romney, Alexander Runciman; Australia, New Zealand, April – November 1979* (Florence: Centro Di; Australian Art Gallery; Auckland City Art Gallery, 1979), where the work appears as cat. no. 28. "In No. 28 Oceanus (the Great Father) raises pearls to Night who points to breaking Day, and Charon (Death) flees like the bat in Guercino's fresco of Night in the Villa Ludovisi, Rome" (55). This work appeared in Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares* as cat. no. 117.

⁵¹ Armstrong, *Art of Preserving Health*, book 2, ll. 551–58.

⁵² Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or The Origin of Society: A Poem with Philosophical Notes* (London: Johnson, 1803), canto 1, ll. 295–96.

⁵³ Fuseli's letter of June 16, 1779, to Lavater, in Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, 60, emphasis original.

Is Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* a Cubist Painting?

John Klein



Fig. 1. Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 181.6 x 221 cm. Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr. 24:1964. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The answer to the question posed in my title—I'm happy to give it away up front—is *no*, but that doesn't make the question invalid or any less

interesting. It is a valid question if we understand one of the central contributions of Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's collaboration in the period 1908–12 to be a

* I presented an early version of this paper in the Midwest Art History Society session "Icons of the Midwest," held at the College Art Association Annual Conference in Chicago, February 2014. I thank Simon Kelly, the session chair, for soliciting my contribution, and Judy Mann for her encouragement.

visual argument about the arbitrary nature of signs—that these painters were engaged in an exposure and manipulation of the artistic conventions for making pictorial meaning. This disruptive candor about pictorial convention has long been accepted as a hallmark of their Cubism. The question is interesting because Henri Matisse's painting *Bathers with a Turtle* (Fig. 1) contains just such a visual argument about conventions of signification, as I will demonstrate. As seen in the painting, this argument is not programmatic, it is not central to the painting's expressive content, and it may not even have been intentional at the time of its making. But *Bathers with a Turtle*, just as surely as a Cubist painting does, asserts the arbitrariness and inherent ambiguity of the visual sign, and it does this with the help of an ambiguity in a verbal sign, in the very role of the word "bathers" in this and related compositions. To show this I will consider some other bathers paintings by Matisse and other artists, and review briefly the dominant iconographic mode of approach to *Bathers with a Turtle*, because the kinds of questions that most authors have asked about this painting require the viewer to look outside it, to seek sources for Matisse's enigmatic imagery in anterior stories that might illuminate

the artist's intentions. This will not be my approach.

To ask if *Bathers with a Turtle* is a Cubist painting entails looking in a different direction, away from sources, iconography, and comparanda. Rather than seek to solve the puzzles of meaning in this painting—the unexplained presence and significance of three nude female figures, in a featureless landscape, clustered around a turtle—I intend to illuminate and accept its formal ambiguities. I will focus on what the painting shows us and how it shows that, revealing ambiguities not in the painting's meaning, but in its painted language of representation, with special consideration of how transparency can be represented in oil paint. The actuality of Matisse's work on the canvas produced a visible uncertainty about what is transparent and what is opaque that cannot be resolved. And this means attention to an externality that is not a source or an iconographic precedent. When we look outside *Bathers with a Turtle*, I believe that one of the most productive comparisons that can be made is with a painting from the same year that has no figures in it, that has no iconographic tradition, and that is routinely asserted to be the first Cubist painting. That painting is Georges Braque's *Houses at L'Estaque* (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Georges Braque, *Houses at L'Estaque*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern, Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation. © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Elsewhere I have written about how the ambiguities and enigmas in *Bathers with a Turtle* and related artworks contributed to Matisse's ongoing elaboration of a decorative aesthetic, how the anti-narrative quality of such a composition stopped time and refused to refer to anything outside itself, in accord with one of the artist's stated goals for his art.¹ Matisse's directive that a work of art must contain its complete significance is to be found in his foundational theoretical text, "Notes of a Painter," which he wrote in late 1908, a few months after completing *Bathers with a Turtle*.² In an entirely appropriate defiance of this polemical and patently impossible claim of hermeticism for a work of art, scholars have made strenuous efforts to link *Bathers with a Turtle* to things outside itself, to sources both textual and visual, in what I suspect is a never-ending impulse to dispel the intellectual discomfort produced by the enigma of three female nudes gathered around a small creature on the ground.

These efforts have taken three principal forms:

(1) Considering *Bathers with a Turtle* as a link in a chain of moves made by Matisse and Picasso in the period 1906–10 with the growth of each artist's consciousness of the other, specifically their challenges to traditions of representing the

female figure. This interpretive field unfolds events in the historical present—that is, Matisse's and Picasso's present time.

(2) Linking the painting to a variety of textual sources, principally antique in origin, that feature a nude woman, or women, or bathers, or goddesses, or nymphs, or dryads. These efforts are in long-term retrospection, and they project their ancient textual sources into contemporary concerns, in this case both the present of Matisse and Picasso and the recent time of acts of interpretation.

(3) Connecting Matisse's composition to a tradition of painting female figures, nude or semi-clothed, in a landscape near water. This involves a largely short-term retrospection into earlier modern artworks and their treatment of the theme of bathing women.

With respect to the first area of interpretation, the relationship between Matisse and Picasso has been thoroughly explored in recent decades in books by Françoise Gilot and Jack Flam, and in the two exhibitions devoted to this dueling duo: the enormous show at New York's Museum of Modern Art and sites in London and Paris in 2002–3, organized by a team of prominent Picasso and Matisse scholars; and Yve-Alain Bois's remarkable exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum in 1999,

conceived in the shadow of the tri-national juggernaut but managing to pierce through with bright and fresh interpretive gambits that both theorized and complicated the artistic relationship between these two central figures of modern art.³ Both exhibitions were accompanied by important publications.⁴

Some of the key elements in this relationship in the period that concerns us here are found in the call-and-response sequence initiated by Matisse's *Joy of Life* (1905–6; Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia), followed by his about-face in the primitivizing *Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* (1907; Baltimore Museum of Art), through Picasso's higher-stakes *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York), then via *Bathers with a Turtle* to both Matisse's and Picasso's further distortions of the female form in numerous reclining and standing nudes in 1908 and 1909. Variations on this sequence are key features of most accounts of their relationship in this period. These and other canvases (and sculptures by both artists) constitute a productive dialogue between the two artists, in a back-and-forth, tit-for-tat ratcheting up of each artist's challenges to the other.

We turn now to the second interpretive context for *Bathers with a Turtle*, focusing on the subject of bathers and its alleged antecedents. Most efforts in the pursuit of iconographic sources in ancient texts have focused on variations of the birth of Aphrodite from the sea. Part of the impetus for this exploration of themes from antiquity comes from the sense expressed by many viewers of *Bathers with a Turtle* that the setting is timeless or primeval, or in any case is vague and empty enough that it may be filled with elements of any number of origin stories. License for this approach also comes from acknowledgement of Matisse's high level of learning and his respect for the art and culture of the past, evident even in periods of extreme innovation in his art. Such themes were also important components of the European academic tradition at the time of Matisse's formation as an artist, as in paintings by Alexandre Cabanel, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, and Jean-Léon Gérôme, among other Salon stalwarts.

As for the tradition of paintings of bathers or women near water *not* obviously authorized by ancient literature, the modern archetype is the repeated treatment of this theme by Paul Cézanne, who was acknowledged by many artists, including Matisse

and Picasso, as a kind of father figure. Cézanne's bathers have the awkward, enigmatic character that endorses their parentage of Matisse's no less strange figures. And Matisse felt a particular affinity for Cézanne, to the point of buying a painting of bathers by him (Fig. 3) when he could ill afford it, and cherishing it over many years as a source of sustenance amounting to a kind of trust. But bathing women were a pervasive stock theme in

the nineteenth century, featured in the art of Paul Baudry and (again) Bouguereau, among others on the academic side, while also engaging such independent artists as Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean-François Millet, and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.⁵

Featuring most elements of these approaches, and adding the first focused study of the painting's patronage context, the most concentrated occasion of



Fig. 3. Paul Cézanne, *Three Bathers*, 1879–82. Oil on canvas, 55 x 52 cm. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, Gift of M. and Mme. Henri Matisse, 1936.

research and thought about *Bathers with a Turtle* was presented in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin*—sadly the last appearance of this fine publication. Even while attempting to peel away layers to reveal a core of meaning, its three articles added several more layers to the onion surrounding Matisse’s painting. Laurie Stein’s essay on the painting’s first owner, Karl Ernst Osthaus of Hagen, Germany, includes a great deal of new material, based on original research in German sources, on this fascinating collector.⁶

In his contribution, Yve-Alain Bois places great stock in the relationship of Matisse’s painting with Cézanne’s, showing how Matisse’s Cézannism plays out in a series of his paintings up to 1908.⁷ This leads to a rehearsal of the more elaborate theses of his Kimbell exhibition catalog. Along the way Bois makes several stabs at accounting for the turtle—in fact his text begins and ends with the role this animal plays in the painting—all of them suggestions, some of them probably not serious. His strongest thrust is to assert that the turtle reinforces his claim that “the painting is about an irremediable absence of communication, about the impossibility of telling stories.”⁸ Matisse’s painting begs for interpretation, but thwarts it, a

bait-and-switch process that both acknowledges academic traditions and defies them, but more subtly than Picasso had just done in the equally monumental *Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

John Elderfield comes to a similar conclusion in his essay—he characterizes Matisse’s painting as a “failed allegory,” a husk for a story without a nourishing message. Like Bois, Elderfield is utterly convincing on this point about frustrated interpretation, but he arrives there by different means than Bois’s.⁹ For Elderfield, as for other interpreters, the myth of Aphrodite was the origin of Matisse’s composition of women posed near water; but the artist later suppressed this antique source, leaving a latency that is deflected by the presence of the turtle. Elderfield then proposes mythological sources that may plausibly explain the turtle’s presence. Finally, he gives close attention to the physical alterations Matisse made in his representation of the women, especially the central figure, and he attributes this process to Matisse’s suppression of the outward signs of Aphrodite and the introduction of the turtle, which the changes appear to accommodate. The most difficult questions here are why the suppression, and why a turtle? Elderfield’s intricate iconographic study

does not offer satisfying answers to these questions. Like Bois, Elderfield attributes Matisse's motivation for making this large painting in the first place to his rivalry with Picasso, as a response to that artist's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, an echo of that painting's interpretive challenges.

As indicated above, I propose to move the examination of *Bathers with a Turtle* in a different direction. To this end, I would like to ask a very Bois-like question: what is the sense of the position of the proper right arm of the central figure? The extensive pentimenti in this area, evidence of the difficulty Matisse had with the size and placement of this body, which he revised repeatedly, compel us to acknowledge something that I believe has never been remarked upon: that this arm is represented simultaneously as part of a figure who stands at some distance away from the water, and as a limb immersed in the water itself (see Fig. 4). However illogical, this is what the painting shows. I am not using this observation in the service of a claim that this dual condition of the elbow collapses the space of the painting, snapping the bands of land, water and sky together into modernist flatness. It does do this, very effectively, but that is not really my concern here. I would also not claim that Matisse set out to



Fig. 4. Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908 (detail).

create this dual sense of the arm. It is obvious that he reworked this passage extensively, as he did elsewhere in the painting, repeatedly moving the figures, notably the central figure, into different positions.¹⁰ In many areas of revision, most obviously in the channel separating the crouching figure at the

left from the central figure, Matisse “vigorously opaqued”—this is Elderfield’s phrase—the areas of correction.¹¹ But the top paint layer is much thinner over the arm, only veiling the elbow, conspicuously leaving it visible through the film of lighter blue pigment. The water, represented as opaque across most of its expanse, has here been allowed some transparency. The duality of the central woman’s elbow is an artifact of this process of revision, but Matisse accepted it as he did all the other laboriously worked areas, as part of “a mindful practice of incorporating change,” in the words of Stephanie d’Alessandro, one of the most recent interpreters of the painting.¹² That elbow is represented as being in two places at once, but what does that mean? Is it just another enigma?

Both before and after *Bathers with a Turtle*, Matisse was uncertain about how to show the limb of a figure dipped in water, as is evident in awkward passages of paint in other bathing subjects (see Fig. 5). In *Nude Washing Herself*, of 1907, Matisse’s representation of the water in the tub fails to envelop the figure’s legs convincingly. Here the artist had considerable trouble rendering in opaque oil paint any sense of the water’s transparency. But he seems to have embraced this representational challenge

arising from the variable visual character of water, because he returned to the motif repeatedly. And his explorations of such material duality weren’t confined to water. A dialogue between transparency and opacity, with translucence as a sometime middle term, is a feature of Matisse’s work at many moments in his long career, right down to his insistence on both transparent and translucent yellow glass in the windows for his Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, in southern France.

A few examples of Matisse’s ongoing interest in both representing and signifying transparency with oil paint are instructive. In *Goldfish and Palette* (1914–15; Fig. 6), extensive revisions and the resulting pentimenti play a central role, as they do in *Bathers with a Turtle*, and the assigned meaning of areas of blue paint is slippery.

In the course of its execution, Matisse reduced what was once a complete figure of an artist at work to a residual artifact of a thumb inserted into the painter’s palette. The color blue, apparently representing both the sky outside the window and the goldfish’s water inside, spreads transgressively across several surfaces and spaces, shuttling arbitrarily between opacity and transparency. But Matisse also rendered the water seen through the side of the goldfish



Fig. 5. Henri Matisse, *Nude Washing Herself*, 1906–07. Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Private collection.
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Archives Henri Matisse, all rights reserved.

bowl in white (it had previously been blue), an alternative sign of transparency, since it does not occlude the fish within.

The dialogue between the transparent and the opaque is especially pronounced, even playful, in the later tapestry design called *Window in Tahiti* (Fig. 7). The curtain at the left is opaque across the balustrade and the quay of the port of Papeete below, seen from the artist's upper-floor hotel room; sheer against the tree on the quay; and opaque again to obscure the horizon and the shoreline of the neighboring island of Moorea—and everywhere the curtain is a blue of the same color as the water below, a consistency that abets this transition from opacity to transparency, and back again. Such visual legerdemain reveals Matisse's heightened sense of the conventionality of representation, and how easily it may be disrupted.

The challenge of representing transparency in the context of figures with limbs dipped in water intrigued many painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and informs a subset of bathers pictures more generally. In fact, these partial immersions might as well be called “dippers” rather than “bathers.” That all such paintings are considered to show “bathers,” however, indicates just how conventional this assignment

of meaning is. Such figures are bathers even when they are not bathing. Matisse's figures are bathers even though they are nowhere near the water—except for that disruptive elbow. (As an aside, it is significant that calling Matisse's figures “bathers” brings a temporal element in by the back door—such figures being assumed either to have already bathed or to be about to bathe.)¹³ Matisse's fellow Fauve Henri Manguin practically made such tentative or incipient bathing a subspecialty (see Fig. 8). But Manguin's representations of water around limbs, and limbs in water, are more straightforward and unilateral than Matisse's. Manguin played by the rules of pictorial representation. In *Bathers with a Turtle*, Matisse did not.

To return to the disruption of spatial logic made by the central figure's elbow, I propose that what this passage of paint does is to question the very process of representation. In other words, this elbow dipped in water and at the same time part of a body dry and far away from it challenges the viewer to acknowledge the conventionality of the usual rules for how objects and the relations between objects and their surroundings are shown in a painting. And it does this just as surely as the kind of painting that is usually credited with this kind of questioning of the

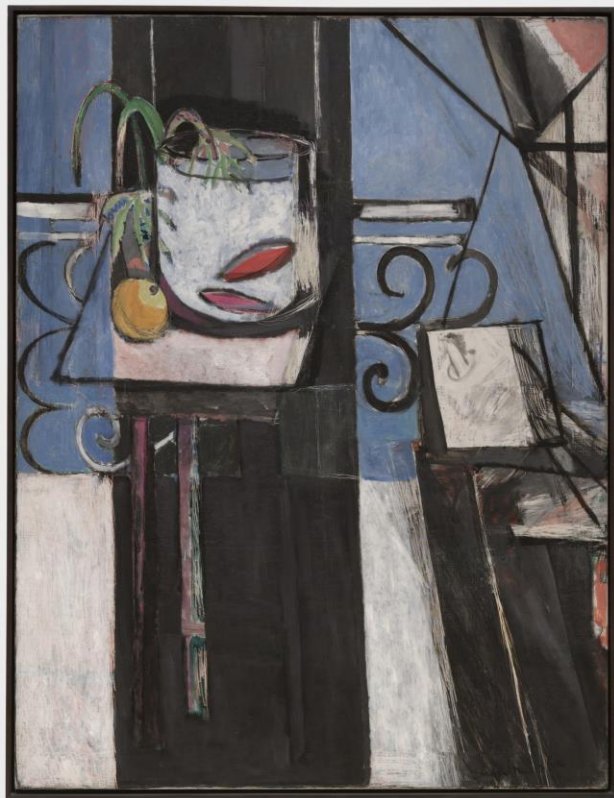


Fig. 6. Henri Matisse, *Goldfish and Palette*, 1914–15. Oil on canvas, 146.5 x 112.4 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift and Bequest of Florene M. Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Fig. 7. Henri Matisse, *Window in Tahiti* (or *Tahiti II*), 1936. Cartoon for a tapestry for Marie Cuttoli (never woven). Gouache on canvas, 238 x 183 cm. Musée départemental Matisse, Le Cateau-Cambrésis, Gift of the artist, 1952. Photo: Claude Gaspari. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Archives Henri Matisse, all rights reserved.



rules of representation—that is to say, Cubism—and at the same moment. There are other ambiguities in the painting, as many observers have remarked—what, for instance, could the woman at the right be sitting on? But the area of the standing figure’s elbow is conspicuous in its central position and its beckoning downward in descent like a slightly shaky plumb line leading to the turtle itself. The elbow exhibits, to re-use a phrase by John Onians, writing about Michael Baxandall’s work on Cubism, “the attention-grabbing power of ambiguous forms,” a power at the heart of Cubism’s visual syntax.¹⁴

So now to Cubism we go, but not to Picasso—let’s give him a rest—instead to Braque’s *Houses at L’Estaque*. This painting and Matisse had an interesting relationship, which helped to give rise to the very idea of Cubism. It was one of Braque’s submissions to the Salon d’Automne in 1908. All of his canvases were rejected by the Salon jury, of which Matisse was a member. Until this year, Braque had been associated with Matisse and the other Fauves, and his new manner, exemplified in *Houses at L’Estaque*, was widely recognized as a shift in his allegiance toward Picasso. Pointedly snubbed by Matisse and the other Salon d’Automne jurors, Braque then included the painting in his solo

show at Kahnweiler’s gallery in November 1908, where it prompted the first published reference to “cubes” in painting, by the critic Louis Vauxcelles, who had also baptized Matisse and other expressive colorists as “Fauves” in the Salon d’Automne of 1905, three years earlier. Another version of the origin story of the word “Cubism” has Matisse, piqued by Braque’s defection from his orbit, uttering the epithet in Vauxcelles’s presence.¹⁵ In any case, Braque and Matisse were in a prickly relationship of mutual awareness, if not a dialogue.

If *Houses at L’Estaque* shows what the title asserts, then the painting immediately poses a potent representational ambiguity. As in *Bathers with a Turtle*, the crucial passage of paint in *Houses at L’Estaque* is served up by its prominent position close to the center of the canvas, by being framed in various ways, and by its brightness. I mean, of course, the large house form immediately beyond the curve of the tree. About this house we have to ask: how could two walls, meeting to form a convex, projecting corner of the exterior, be in shadow, while adjacent areas of both walls are brightly lit? Such a doubly shadowed corner should, logically, be concave. Braque’s deployment of the painterly signs of shadow in an

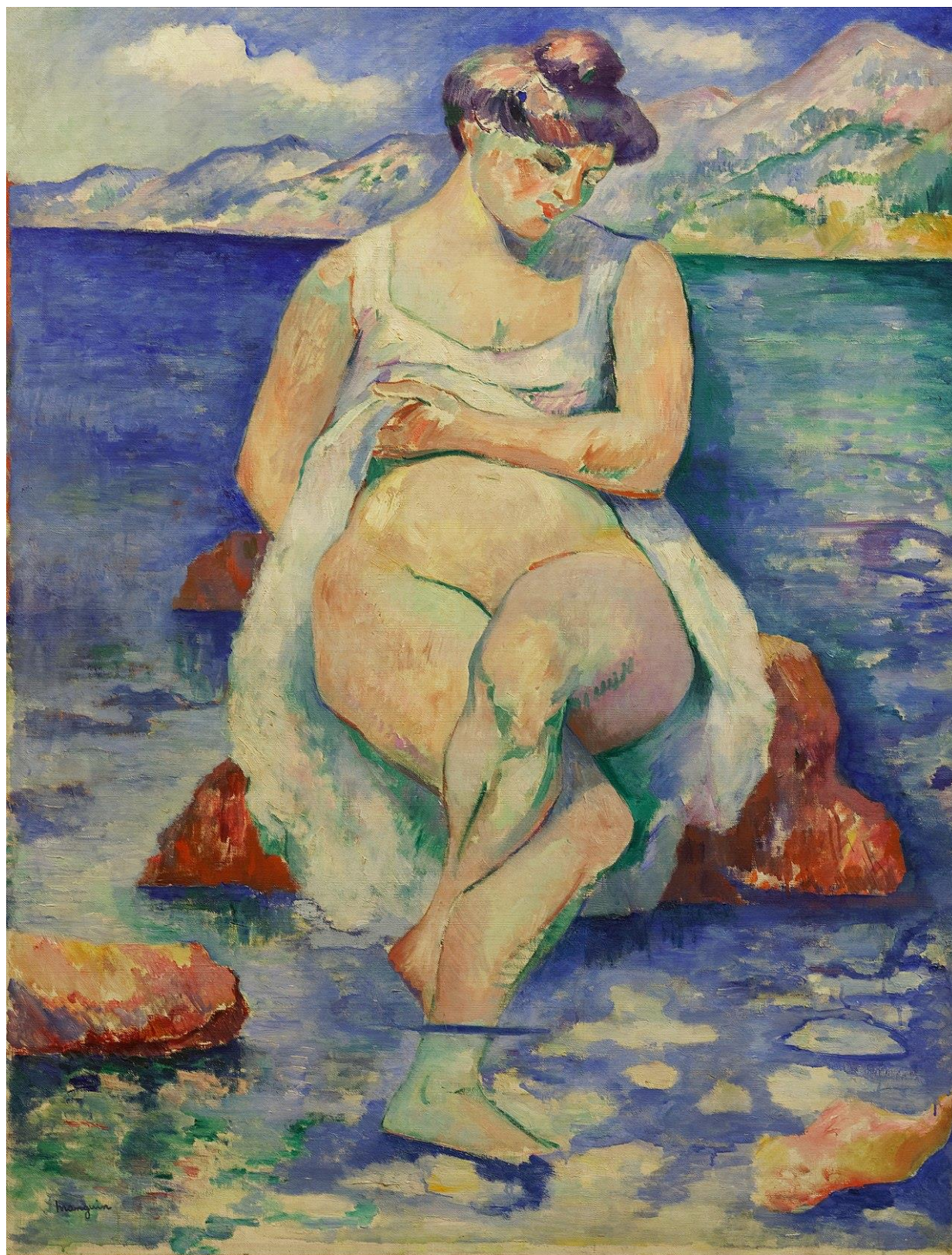


Fig. 8. Henri Manguin, *Bather at Cavalière*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 116.5 x 89.5 cm. Musée de Grenoble, Agutte-Sembat Bequest, 1923. Photo: Ville de Grenoble/Musée de Grenoble-J.L. Lacroix.

area where it is not possible to have a shadow, if you are playing by the rules, acknowledges the conventionality and arbitrariness of this formal element in a system of representation.¹⁶ Impossible in nature, but possible in art, and once deployed, such deviations might seem imperative, a declaration of pictorial self-consciousness. By extension, Braque's illogical shadows call out *all* conventional elements of representation.

It is widely acknowledged that Matisse did have a Cubist period, generally speaking the four or five years from 1913–17, when he pondered and essayed in his painting and sculpture what he later called “the methods of modern construction.”¹⁷ During this period he worked and reworked paintings with the same intentness as in *Bathers with a Turtle*, none more thoroughly than *Bathers by a River* (1909–17; Art Institute of Chicago), whose composition was originally intended to form the third in a series of paintings for Matisse's Moscow patron, Sergei Shchukin. Here in this monumental painting, even in the face of the artist's extensive revisions, at least one of the figures can reliably be said to be bathing. The other figures, nearby but neither dipped nor immersed, conform to the conventional association between women and water in natural

settings, even if no actual bathing is taking place.

Matisse's engagement with Cubism, which may have reached a peak of directness with *Bathers by a River*, was profound and lasting. It has not been generally acknowledged that Matisse was also engaged in some of the major pictorial ideas of Cubism before there was Cubism. This is really what the elbow shows. And the elbow disrupts in yet another way. Whoever heard of a bather going into the water elbow first? This deviant immersion, in both narratological and signifying capacities, asserts that what is going on here is not bathing, and that this non-bathing occurs in ambiguous space, which is not the same thing as modernist flatness; and in ambiguous time, which is not the same thing as being timeless. In *Bathers with a Turtle* Matisse was working hard, without grasping all the implications of his efforts, on artistic matters more profound than Aphrodite iconography, or generic bathers in art, or the challenge posed by a younger rival.

Finally, a few words about the “turtle” of the painting's title. First, practically everyone who has written about *Bathers with a Turtle* has assumed, or argued, that the turtle was a late addition, with various interpretive implications flowing from that idea of revision to

introduce a new element. For some scholars, the turtle was an agent of the occlusion of a comprehensible narrative; others have sought iconographic explanations for the introduction of the reptile. But a recent technical examination demonstrates convincingly that the turtle was there from the beginning of Matisse's conception of the painting, because initially he painted it directly on the prepared ground.¹⁸ All the iconographers need to go back to the drawing board.

Second, "turtle" is the common name—that is, what is in use in everyday language—for both terrestrial and aquatic or semi-aquatic creatures of the order *Tes-tudines*. Judging by the way Matisse has represented his turtle, with a raised and deeply segmented carapace, this creature is technically a tortoise, that is, a terrestrial reptile. That in both French (*tortue*) and English a single word conventionally comprises animals of this order from both habitats testifies to a convenience in usage. As with "bathers," we are faced with another ambiguity in a verbal sign, an ambiguity that gives way to a convention born of convenience. It is part of the perennial allure of *Bathers with a Turtle*, attracting many interpreters over many years, that it is replete with both verbal and

visual ambiguities that engage the attentive viewer.¹⁹

Over many years of showing this painting to students in the Saint Louis Art Museum, or as a slide in a classroom, and asking them what the woman at the left is doing with respect to the turtle, I have found that 100% have said that she is feeding the animal. Not a single person has responded that she is teasing the turtle, or that she is taking food away from it. And yet, strictly from the point of view of what the painting shows, all three actions are equally plausible. Convention tends to prevent us from considering any action other than—well, the conventional one. Violation of the convention produces ambiguity and, therefore, inconvenience that leads to interpretive uncertainty. An ambiguity is firmly weighted to one side so that alternatives are eclipsed by that convention. Unraveling the conventions brings the ambiguities back into the light. So it is with Matisse's bather's wet-not wet elbow and Braque's strangely shadowed house.

The 2014 CAA meeting in Chicago included a session on the Matisse painting from the Saint Louis Art Museum. When possible, the society selects works from the location of the upcoming MAHS annual meeting which, in 2014, was St. Louis.

¹ John Klein, *Matisse and Decoration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 46–49.

² Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” in Jack Flam, ed., *Matisse on Art*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 37–43.

³ Françoise Gilot, *Matisse and Picasso: A Friendship in Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Jack Flam, *Matisse and Picasso: The Story of Their Rivalry and Friendship* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2003). To these one could add the Matisse-Picasso chapter of the more recent book by Sebastian Smee, *The Art of Rivalry: Four Friendships, Betrayals, and Breakthroughs in Modern Art* (New York: Random House, 2016).

⁴ Elizabeth Cowling et al., *Matisse Picasso* (London: Tate, 2002); Yve-Alain Bois, *Matisse and Picasso* (Paris: Flammarion; Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1998).

⁵ For bathing in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century paintings on the theme of Arcadia, see Joseph J. Rishel, ed., *Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse: Visions of Arcadia* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012).

⁶ Laurie A. Stein, “The History and Reception of Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle* in Germany, 1908–1939,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 50–73.

⁷ Yve-Alain Bois, “Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 8–19.

⁸ Bois, “Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” 11.

⁹ John Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite: On the Genesis of *Bathers with a Turtle* by Henri Matisse,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 20–49.

¹⁰ This revision process is thoroughly analyzed by Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite,” 33–42.

¹¹ Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite,” 40.

¹² Stephanie d’Alessandro, catalog entry for *Bathers with a Turtle*, in Stephanie d’Alessandro and John Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 71 n. 16.

¹³ A thoughtful, more “front door” approach to the temporal implications of the painting—that the abundance of pentimenti testifies to labor over time—was presented by Camran Mani in “‘A Moment of the Artist,’ a Moment of the Viewer: The Pentimenti in Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” at the College Art Association Annual Conference in Chicago, February 2014.

¹⁴ John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 183.

¹⁵ For Vauxcelles’s characterization of Braque’s “geometric diagrams with cubes” in his short review of Braque’s exhibition, see William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 33. For several versions of

Matisse's role, see Rubin, 354–55 and 435–36 n. 62.

¹⁶ Matisse may have recognized what Braque was doing in flouting pictorial logic in this way, because he said that in another Braque painting from that year “the drawing and values were decomposed,” and he retrospectively associated this disjunction with Cubism (“Statements to Tériade: Matisse Speaks” [1951], in Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 204).

¹⁷ The most thorough and intelligent consideration of this period of Matisse's work is d'Alessandro and Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention*.

¹⁸ d'Alessandro and Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention*, 67–71.

¹⁹ For a recent example of this fascination, see Sebastian Smee, “Mysterious Matisse: What Are These Three Strange Figures Doing?,” *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2020; URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/entertainment/herri-matisse-bathers-with-a-turtle/>.

American Couturier Elizabeth Hawes and the Feminine Mystique

Cynthia Amnéus



Fig. 1. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress and Jacket*, 1931–39, silk, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1992.125a-b.

In the 1930s and 1940s, fashion designer Elizabeth Hawes was a household name. Most people knew her work, having read her advertisements in *The New Yorker*¹, for instance, and having seen images of her in various newspaper articles and familiar magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.² Thousands read her best-selling, but controversial, book *Fashion Is Spinach*, published in 1938.³ It was a diatribe that denounced the fashion industry and its seasonal summons to women to purchase the newest Parisian-designed fashions. She was an outspoken critic of fashion and a proponent of style, and, once she closed her own design house in 1940, she continued to write and became involved in union work as a vocal advocate of women's rights.

Individualistic in everything she did, Hawes took a conceptual approach to designing clothing—an approach that led her to distinguish between style and fashion. In Hawes's mind, fashion had no rhyme or reason. Fashions changed because the fashion industry needed them to change. If fashions did not change, why would anyone need to buy another dress until the one they had wore out? In *Fashion Is Spinach* she states, "I don't know when the word fashion came into being, but it was an evil day."⁴ Hawes

compared fashion to spinach. Just as she saw the "objectional" vegetable being forced down the throats of children because it was good for them, so was French fashion forced upon American women because it was purportedly the only way they could look attractive. In *Fashion Is Spinach* and her other writings, Hawes exposed the sordid side of the French fashion industry and challenged American women to look beyond the label. Style, however, was another matter. Style had a logic to it. When a design was so perfect it needed no further change, then it had style. According to Hawes, style was the perfection of design expression.

Hawes's concepts about dress were rooted in psychology. In a subsequent book titled *Why Is a Dress?* (1941), she references J. C. Flugel's publication *The Psychology of Clothes*⁵ as well as Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, in which he equates clothing to "a warm movable House."⁶ Their theories coalesced with hers around the concept that to be successful, you must understand the psychology of your customers. She stated that "women want to wear what they do because of what goes on in their heads."⁷ Hawes felt it was imperative that designers know the women whom they were dressing. A designer must, in essence, *be* the woman for whom they were

making clothes, because only then can they be sure what their customer wants to wear.⁸ Because of this psychological concept, Hawes's designs were singular. She preferred dressing women who knew who they were and where they were going in life. In reality, this meant she dressed well-to-do White women, and she encouraged the wealthy socialites for whom she made couture to dress more individualistically, to dress for themselves rather than society. She helped them understand their own tastes instead of following fashion trends. In fact, those she dressed tended to be more independent, progressive women.

Four of her primary clients were anthropologist Diana S. Field, Brooklyn Museum trustee Hollis K. Thayer, fellow women's rights activist Elinor S. Gimbel, and Dorette Kruse Fleischmann, who was a stockholder in Hawes Inc. (Fig. 1). How they dressed, and the fact that they supported Hawes's philosophy, defined who they were. Hawes was certain that, when push came to shove, they would gladly give up discomfort and decoration on a garment to wear a design of hers that was functional and practical. Comfort was paramount above all. She was not interested in fashion over style. Her raised waistlines and loose full skirts were not fashionable or trendy in

the 1930s. Well before her time, she created clothes that were meant to flatter the individual rather than follow fashion trends.

Born in 1903 in Ridgewood, New Jersey, Elizabeth was influenced throughout her life by her mother, Henrietta Houston Hawes, who could be described as her driving force. Henrietta was born in 1870 and attended Vassar, then an all-women's college. There she was exposed to both members of the faculty and a founder who were interested in advancing the rights of women.⁹ Graduating in 1891, she emerged dedicated to women's rights. The fact that Henrietta settled into the conformity of her generation's respectable lifestyle by marrying John Hawes in 1897 was not unusual. Many suffragists felt it was important to dress well and maintain a respectable lifestyle. Rather than being too manly or forward in their dress, they resolved to be more prudent in presenting what was considered a proper demeanor, while still working outside the mainstream towards women's rights. However, Henrietta remained a socially conscious progressive who was attracted to the arts, the avant-garde, and the unorthodox. She was the first woman, for instance, to serve on Ridgewood's Board of Education and the first corresponding secretary for the Village Improvement

Association. She invested her own money in the stock market and, as the first licensed female plumber in New Jersey, became an honorary member of the Ridgewood Plumbers' Union. Henrietta served as the Bergen County Director of the Emergency Relief Administration during the Depression; she helped found the Bergen County Tuberculosis and Health Association; and in 1923 she developed a section of land known as Oakcroft, which offered affordable, cottage-like houses for families trying to move into the Ridgewood community.¹⁰ She was aware of how those less fortunate than herself lived, and she worked towards alleviating some of the more egregious inequalities.

Henrietta Hawes was also an early Montessori education enthusiast who taught her children to be independent thinkers.¹¹ Her offspring were encouraged to work independently, and they each had their own responsibilities. Despite societal prejudices that devalued women, Henrietta took on strong leadership roles. She engaged in this first wave of feminism with fervor during a transitional time in history when primarily White, upper-class women began to branch out of their traditional roles and find a new voice. Needless to say, she was a powerful role model for her daughter.

Elizabeth was the second of four children and by the age of ten was beginning to sew her own clothes. By twelve she was making and selling clothing for the children of her mother's friends. Undoubtedly, she was influenced by the facts that a dressmaker regularly called at the home to make clothing for the family, that she received a Paris-made dress from her grandmother annually, and that she took biannual trips to New York City with her mother to window-shop for fashionable outfits. Although Hawes described her upbringing as average middle-class, these events, and the fact that her mother had time for her numerous social reform activities, point to a higher annual income than simply middle of the road.

Elizabeth, like her sister Charlotte before her, attended Vassar College. With no program at the college for teaching dressmaking or design, however, she took a short course at Parsons School of Design in New York City after her sophomore year. The following summer she apprenticed at Bergdorf Goodman department store. But needing an appropriate theme for her thesis and having been exposed to economics earlier in her time at Vassar, she completed her essay on the British socialist and Labour Party leader Ramsey MacDonald. Economics was part of the

sociology department at the college at the time and was focused on the betterment of society rather than simply the production and consumption of wealth. This self-determined combination of fashion design with economics would prove a driving force later in her career and an approach that combined social reform and dress in a meaningful way.

Fashion, however, was Hawes's first love. Believing that Paris was where she must train to learn the trade, she sailed for France in July of 1925, shortly after graduating from Vassar. As an American in Paris, it was difficult to find employment, but, by 1926, she landed a position as a sketcher for a copy house—an illegal activity. Her job was to gain admittance to couturiers' fashion shows, take notes, sketch surreptitiously, and sometimes simply memorize the looks. These designs would then be duplicated and sold for a much lower price than the original. She subsequently became a full-time fashion correspondent, contributing regular articles that appeared in various US newspapers. This led to a regular column for *The New Yorker*, written under the nom de plume Parasite. Among various other positions, she finally found employment with fashion designer Nicole Groult, sister of the famed French couturier Paul Poiret.

Because it was a smaller house, she was permitted to develop her own designs. But after about six months, she decided that she had learned everything she needed to know about designing dresses and sailed for the US.

Hawes returned to New York and opened her own couture salon in 1928—about a year and a half before the stock market crash. There was only one other couturier working in New York at this time—Jessie Franklin Turner (1881–1956), who presided over a thriving business established in 1922.¹² Valentina Nicholaevna Sanina Schlee (1899–1989)—known simply as Valentina—opened a small couture house the same year as Hawes.¹³ Having been brought up with the concept that “all beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers and all women want them,”¹⁴ Hawes, like so many other women, believed this. But having seen how French clothes were designed and made, she realized that there was no reason this could not be done on American soil with a better outcome for the American woman. Prior to this, Paris was the acknowledged fashion capital of the world, and each season's fashion trends originated there. Garments designed in New York were copies—either pirated or licensed—or adaptations of French designs. Hawes, like Turner before her and



Fig. 2. Madeleine Vionnet (French, 1876–1975), *Dress*, 1926–27, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.199, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.



Fig. 3. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1938, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.208.

Valentina, a Russian émigré, was one of the very first couturiers to produce original designs in America.

Influenced by the French couturier Madeleine Vionnet, whom she admired, Hawes's couture designs were ideal for the American woman, who was more active than her European sister and valued comfort and practicality above all else. Vionnet pioneered the bias cut, a construction that allowed a garment to mold to the body without requiring the usual tight, confining undergarments (Fig. 2).¹⁵ Following Vionnet's lead, Hawes used the bias cut to produce clothes that were smooth and form-fitting but not restrictive (Fig. 3). Most often the fabric around the bust was softly gathered to provide support without restrictive brassieres. Rejecting constricting girdles, she tailored the back with gored fullness over the hips, accentuating the *derrière*, and the sexuality, of the wearer (Fig. 4). Her clothes were soft and easy, flattering, and classic. They were so classic when created that at times she sent dresses from past collections down the runway in the midst of her new designs and challenged the audience to determine which was which. Modern in her thoughts about surface decoration, Hawes felt it was permissible only when integral to the design. Used

in any other way, she believed it was simply clutter. The majority of Hawes's clothing lack any surface embellishment at all—there are generally no frills, no bows, no sequins. She wanted her clients to look elegant but be comfortable doing so (Fig. 5).

Having become a successful couturier, Hawes was not interested in becoming inordinately wealthy. She paid her seamstresses, and herself, a good wage but did not wish to be greedy and found the idea of profit turned to avarice repulsive.¹⁶ As early as 1933, Hawes began working with Seventh Avenue manufacturers to create a line of mass-produced designs. She did so partly to afford her new E. 67th Street salon but primarily because she was interested in the democracy of clothing. She felt strongly that all women deserved to wear well-designed, well-made clothing whether they were paying \$400 or \$4 for a dress. Hawes believed that clothing, for those who needed to buy items off the ready-made rack, should be affordable and well-designed, and should fulfill the needs and ideals of the American middle-class.¹⁷ Drawing on the socialist ideology fostered at Vassar, Hawes was sympathetic to the possibilities of mass-production. Could she improve the glove? Could she design a better handbag? Could she create



Fig. 4. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress (detail)*, 1938, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.208.



Fig. 5. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1930s, silk, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.202.

a stylish but inexpensive dress? She believed that a satisfactory life came from doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Ultimately, however, Hawes was frustrated by the fact that makers of mass-produced clothing were only interested in the bottom line. They cut all the wrong corners, ignoring her specifications—the colors were different, the sizing was wrong, the fabrics were inappropriate. Merchandisers cheapened her original designs to save a miniscule amount of money and then underpaid their workers, who were generally women, to produce profits for overpaid executives.¹⁸ In the end, Hawes decided not to engage with Seventh Avenue manufacturers, not only because they would not follow her design stipulations, but because they treated their female employees so poorly.

Although she got enormous artistic satisfaction designing custom clothing under the umbrella of Hawes Inc., her couture salon, by 1936 she was working on a plan to extricate herself from the business. She was feeling restless. Seeing war on the horizon, she felt uncomfortable making expensive clothes for the few who could afford them. Hawes realized she was working within a system she simply did not believe in. She also saw the politics of mass-manufacturing and the connection between class and

clothing. Low-cost clothing for the masses meant there must be high-volume sales, condemning the working woman to tasteless and poorly made clothing.¹⁹ Only the well-off could afford stylishness and quality. Classic, well-made clothes were not on the agenda of Seventh Avenue. This was an arrangement in which she refused to engage.

In January of 1940, she closed her shop, much to the chagrin of her customers. Her aim in doing so, however, was to see the greatest number of women happily dressed, not just those who could afford her custom-made, high-priced designs. She wanted to solve the “clothing problem” and see the world become a better place.²⁰ Hawes had been advocating clothing reform for both men and women as she wrote her second book, *Men Can Take It* (1939). She deplored the stiff shirt fronts, uncomfortable neckwear, and weightiness that made up men’s clothing, condemning them to a life of rigidity. Hawes encouraged the freedom that trousers brought to womenswear and created gender-crossing designs such as dresses with “suspenders” (Fig. 6). She also advocated for more colorful clothing and even skirts for men. In fact, in 1937 Hawes held perhaps the first all-male fashion show to focus attention on revising menswear.



Fig. 6. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1939, silk, linen, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.218a, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.

Many of these ideas were ignored or ridiculed until the 1960s, when American designer Rudi Gernreich revived them, celebrating unisex clothing and more avant-garde concepts. Designing in California, Gernreich famously designed the monokini—the topless bathing suit—and the sheer No-Bra bra in 1964 and was an advocate of freedom in women's clothing, working primarily for Harmon Knitwear (Fig. 7).²¹ Hawes and Gernreich were honored with a joint exhibition titled *Two Modern Artists of Dress* in 1967 at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology.²²

In 1940 Hawes became an editor for *PM*, a New York liberal-leaning newspaper, which ran from 1940 to 1948. *PM* was advertisement-free and addressed the concerns of average citizens. Staff writers included Washington correspondent Isidor Feinstein Stone, theater critic Louis Kronenberger, and film critic Cecelia Ager. Contributors included authors, writers, and photographers such as Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss); Ad Reinhardt, one of the founders of Abstract Expressionism; photographer Arthur Fellig, better known as WeeGee; Mary Morris, one of the first female commercial photographers; and many other well-known luminaries. Hawes wrote for the most innovative section of the paper, called "News for Living,"

which offered articles on rent control, childcare, Food and Drug Act violations, and, of course, fashion. This section of *PM* gave Hawes the opportunity to reconfigure the traditional woman's page as seen in the standard newspaper. Here she began to speak out more aggressively about the oppression of the fashion industry, gender issues, and the plight of women both at home and in the workforce. This venue also provided her with a forum for exposing the unnecessary expense and absurdity of fashion trends, for focusing on her ideas about the democracy of clothing, mass-production, and clothing reform for men and women. Some of her articles were titled, "Hats: Why Bother?," "Girls in Slacks Have More Fun at Coney Island," and "You Can Be Plenty Attractive in a \$2.00 Homemade Dress."²³ She continued to write throughout her career, publishing nine books in all, advocating a new society built on feminism, equality between men and women, cooperative home management and childcare, and radical clothing reform.

Women spent the years during World War II patriotically performing what had traditionally been men's work. Adopting a masculine look, they wore overalls, coveralls, and trousers while working in factories, and uniforms if they joined the military service. They



Fig. 7. Rudi Gernreich (American, 1922–1985), *Dress and Belt*, 1971, wool, leather, metal, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Kim Klosterman and Michael Lowe, 2006.145a-b, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.

then spent the last years of the 1940s, after the war, readjusting to the kind of life they had lived beforehand—sometimes better. As husbands returned home from the front, government assistance in the form of the GI bill enabled couples to purchase a home, start a family, and begin to live the American Dream. Postwar Americans retreated to the security of an idealized homelife in suburbia.

Although women of the 1950s were encouraged to join the work force after marrying or after their children were grown, it was clear from messages in popular culture that a woman should not like her job too much. As Debbie Reynolds's character states in the film *The Tender Trap* (1955), a career is "no substitute for marriage."²⁴ Fired, laid off, or willingly giving up positions they previously held in factories, after the war women were encouraged to accept employment in lower echelon positions. The hourly wages of men soared between 1947 and 1960, while those of women remained low. Nevertheless, women were warned not to earn more than their husbands, or they would emasculate them. Marriage was an attractive prospect for a woman who could then share in the wealth of her spouse. In the end, there were more full-time female homemakers supported by male breadwinners than ever before. The female sex

was viewed as fundamentally maternal and domestic to the point that no satisfying life, other than traditional motherhood and homemaking, was an alternative.²⁵

The change in women's clothing after World War II coincided with this concept and was undoubtedly desired by both women and men. Women of the 1950s wanted to look more feminine again after working in dirty, male-inspired factory clothes and wearing the rather "vanilla" fashions of the war years outside their jobs.²⁶ Parisian couturier Christian Dior acquiesced with his "New Look"—a term coined by Carmel Snow, then editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*—in 1947 (Fig. 8).²⁷ Padded shoulders, cinched waists, and full skirts were introduced in this new, very feminine-looking line, flouting the fabric restrictions that were imposed during the war in Britain and the United States.

Introduced in April of 1942, regulations by the US War Production Board demanded the use of less fabric, regulating that skirts and blouses have a slimmer cut, suit jackets be shorter, and hemlines rise to the knee. As the war dragged on, there were also controls on the use of metal zippers and particular materials for buttons and buckles.²⁸ But Dior's feminine New Look was dependent on confining undergarments. In fact, corsets, or



Fig. 8. Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957), “Bar Suit” Jacket and Skirt, 1947, silk, wool, Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958, C.I.58.34.30, 40; Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

corselettes, last used in the nineteenth century, were revived. Structured brassieres and shoulder and hip padding were required to create this fashion. Because this was a couture creation, it was far too expensive for most women to afford, but US manufacturers copied the look, and women themselves created similar garments. Boxy jackets of the 1940s were nipped in at the waist by home sewers, skirts were lengthened,

and yards of tulle for self-fashioned petticoats made skirts look fuller, mimicking Dior’s creation. Pattern companies jumped at the chance to produce a fresh look in their offerings to boost their sales, as did department stores, which eagerly gobbled up the copies that Seventh Avenue created.

But this change in fashion also made women more impotent. Tight undergarments limited their ability to complete all but the

most basic tasks—a condition that Hawes ridiculed.²⁹ With men earning the household salaries, why would women need to be capable and hardworking? They slipped back into roles reminiscent of the nineteenth century's separate sphere ideology, aided by the new labor-saving devices around the home—vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, and electric ovens.³⁰ But in this seemingly perfect setting, in which men brought home the bacon and women cooked it up on their sparkling new electric range, something was missing. This suburban ideal was the veneer concealing roiling unrest on many levels—culturally, politically, and ideologically. The Cold War was dawning, troubles in Southeast Asia were beginning to bubble up, the Civil Rights Movement was underway, and women were not content. They had tasted independence, they had worked to earn a real wage in order to support themselves and their families, and they chafed in this renewed and confining feminine role.

In the preface to her landmark book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan states,

I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today. I sensed it first ... in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children ...

almost in spite of myself.... There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform.³¹

Women's rights were at the forefront of change in the 1960s, alongside the Civil Rights Movement. The decade was a time of great social and cultural development, and many women and minorities were realizing the power they had. Friedan's book presented an analysis of what she called "the feminine mystique." She wrote not only about women having a real purpose in society and creating a new plan for their lives, but also about a revived set of values that literally turned the clock back to Victorian times.³²

In her first chapter, titled "The Problem That Has No Name," Friedan describes this feeling as

a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning.... Each suburban housewife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, and lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—"Is this all?"³³

These activities—limited to taking care of their husbands, children, and homes—left women facing a crisis

in terms of identity, self-development, and social expectations. Friedan's examination of women's silent dissatisfaction is recognized as the beginning of the second wave of feminism. As Daniel Horowitz discusses in his publication, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique* (1998), Friedan defined the issues, helped millions of women comprehend them, and empowered them to change.³⁴ Through her work, women recognized the roles assigned to them, which included sexual passivity, a limited career cut short particularly when they had children, restricted educational ambitions, motherhood, and housekeeping—an activity that certainly was not enough to fulfill them as human beings.

After closing her design house in 1940, Hawes fed her artistic appetite by continuing to create couture garments for close friends, family, and particular clients. But by 1941, Hawes became involved with the Committee for the Care of Young Children in Wartime. This group, which was composed of many of her friends and clients, campaigned for government-funded childcare centers—a much needed program with so many parents working away from home on the war effort.³⁵ This was an issue that particularly affected women, who not only worked outside the home but

were expected to maintain the household and take care of their children at the same time, as tradition dictated. In early 1943, Hawes took a position on the night shift as a machine operator at Wright Aeronautical in Paterson, New Jersey. Her intent was to engage with real people, to be part of the working world, and to see the average woman's problems close-up. Here she experienced hazardous working conditions, racism, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and the issues that affected married working women and mothers. Who offered adequate childcare? How could a woman take time off to care for a sick child? How could they manage to work full time *and* be a traditional housewife?

Hawes left Wright Aeronautical in 1944 and took a position in Detroit in the education department of the United Auto Workers (UAW), writing for the *Detroit Free Press* at the same time. Here she again faced racism, anti-Semitism, sex discrimination, and sexual harassment, as did the women in the factories and unions with whom she had contact. She was confounded by the majority of women who needed to be convinced that they had rights at all and should therefore join the union.³⁶ Hawes addressed women's issues in her books *Hurry Up Please Its Time* and *Why Women Cry or Wenches with Wrenches*. She

warned her male readers that there was a revolution brewing in their kitchen and proclaimed,

I have never met a contented housewife. But as there are such a vociferous bunch of people constantly preaching that woman's place is in the home—I must force myself to assume that somewhere there is a female who is perfectly contented with the lot of housewife.... Never does she feel like throwing all the dishes on the floor instead of re-washing them for the millionth time.... Never does she ask herself why she married this man.... There must be a woman like this somewhere—or how could intelligent, civic-minded people keep saying: "Woman's place is in the home!"... We've never seen such a female—we never hope to see one—and under no circumstances would any of us want to be one.³⁷

In the epilogue to *Why Women Cry*, she wrote a declaration that called on women and men to recognize that twentieth-century American household management closely resembled that of the seventeenth century. She suggested that instead of dividing labor, husband and wife should work together to demand fair housing and equal educational opportunities, and to practice cross-class and cross-gender cooperation in childcare and house-keeping.³⁸

Hawes titled her seventh book, published in 1948, *Anything but*

Love, focusing on the plight of women in the post-war era. She satirizes social expectations of women and states in the publication's introduction, "We are going to tell why women exist."³⁹ Successive chapters lead the reader from her teens to age 35, at which point, having fulfilled her mission as a wife and mother, "she is no longer worth a nickel."⁴⁰ The pre-teen girl, for instance, is lectured regarding the use of cosmetics to falsify her appearance—"because there are no naturally pretty girls in America"⁴¹—and she is reminded, "your Beauty Quotient is supposed to be twice your Intelligence Quotient."⁴² She explains how to relate to boys—"He wants your lips kissable so use plenty of lipstick"⁴³—and encourages girls to engage in meaningless consumerism.⁴⁴ Hawes tells them, "It is necessary for you to develop a deep sense of inferiority, so deep you will eventually never know it is there. Your inferiority, if properly developed, will blossom beautifully later in life."⁴⁵

Hawes insists that young women get a job with the express intent of meeting men they might marry.⁴⁶ She notes that women who never marry will suffer a dreadful fate and subsequently recounts the simultaneous suicide of three New York spinsters who shared an apartment.⁴⁷ Hawes encapsulates in two short sentences the very

nineteenth-century contemporary attitude about women: “Husbands, homes, and children are the only accepted sources of complete female satisfaction. Every American girl must get a husband.”⁴⁸ Of course, the most important years of a woman’s life, she says, are between the ages of 18 and 35, when her crucial responsibilities are childbearing, utilizing labor-saving devices, buying and preparing food, home decorating, and childcare. “If you throw yourself wholeheartedly into these things, nothing else will be necessary.”⁴⁹ Suzy—one of the fictional characters that Hawes follows throughout the book as a means of animating her points—innocently asks, “Do I gather, that now I’m 35 I am permitted to think?”⁵⁰ In the midst of this, Hawes mentions a “nameless fear” that women experience; Betty Friedan uses a similar phrase and alludes to this same dissatisfaction in women’s lives in *The Feminine Mystique*.⁵¹

Friedan’s work was, as she said herself, a coming together of all the pieces of her own life for the first time. Although she characterized herself simply as one of millions of unhappy homemakers, whose experiences in her marriage and as a mother had led to the writing of her book, Friedan was far more informed about important issues of the day, as her own past makes clear. In the early 1940s, she was a

journalist for leftist and union publications. From 1946 to 1952, she worked for the United Electrical Workers (UE) and wrote for the UE News. She had consistently championed social causes in her writing and was working as a freelance journalist when she wrote *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan, however, was not without her influences, and one of these was the largely forgotten Elizabeth Hawes, who recognized and articulated these same feminist issues long before Friedan put pen to paper.

Shortly after Hawes published *Why Women Cry*, Betty Goldstein (later Friedan) was writing a regular column about women’s wartime situations called “Wartime Living” for Federated Press, in which she mixed practical solutions and political analysis, much like Hawes’s work for *PM*. Like Hawes, she addressed issues relating to women. Forecasting Dior’s New Look, and the restrictive undergarments that went with it, Friedan told women to expect elastic to be re-introduced into girdles, brassieres, and garters. This coincided with the lifting of regulations on the use of certain materials during the war. In a 1944 article entitled “A Woman’s Place Is Where?,” she applauded the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) for including women in their community councils and raising the issue of childcare for working

mothers. And one of her articles was about Elizabeth Hawes and her recently published book, *Why Women Cry*. Friedan began her article with, “Men, there’s a revolution cooking in your own kitchens—revolutions of the forgotten female, who is finally waking up to the fact that she can produce other things besides babies.”⁵² These words mimicked Hawes’s own, with only a slight rewording, in her introduction to *Why Women Cry*.⁵³

These direct connections between Hawes and Friedan are not surprising. It was clear that Friedan thought highly of Hawes and the previous work she had done to promote feminist issues that concerned Friedan as well. While there were differences in their upbringings—Hawes came from an upper middle-class family with a very progressive role model, while Friedan grew up in Peoria, Illinois, the daughter of Jewish immigrants—in other ways their paths were remarkably similar. Both were active journalists, passionate union organizers, and progressive feminists and writers. They could have met at some point as Hawes traveled the country in her position in the education department of the UAW, frequently returning to New York where Friedan lived at the time. In addition, Hawes mentions the UE in both *Why Women Cry* and *Hurry Up Please Its Time*, noting that the UAW and the

UE joined forces to affect an equal pay for equal work decision from the National War Labor Board. But whether they met or not, Friedan was aware of Hawes’s writings and her political work and referenced them, almost literally, in some cases. Both recognized a problem in women’s lives. They both saw the issues with women combining employment with domesticity, racial and sexual harassment, lower wages for the same work, and non-existent childcare for women in the workforce.

Long before Friedan’s book, Hawes was debunking the myths of the happy American housewife. In fact, she addressed “the problem that has no name” in *Why Women Cry*, recounting the story of Lucinda, whose “work” is reduced to cooking and cleaning. Her husband states, “Something has come over my wife.”⁵⁴ Hawes spanned the gap between first-wave feminists who fought for the right to vote and the second wave that followed in the 1960s. Throughout, she was operating in the White, middle-class world that dominated both of those stages of the American feminism movement. Although she had closed her couture house and had given up on collaborations with Seventh Avenue manufacturers of well-designed, mass-produced clothing, Hawes continued to think about and make clothes until her death in 1971. Her

foray into factory work at Wright Aeronautical resulted in an attempt to make safer and more comfortable clothes for women in that setting. In *Why Women Cry*, she states, “Everything I’d ever been interested in, from child care to clothes, landed me up against the factory gate.”⁵⁵ During World War II, she was contracted by the US Army to construct a nurse’s uniform. Although it was attire designed to be easy to move in and practical for the work nurses needed to perform, it was rejected.⁵⁶ Hawes also designed garments that were based on the basic kimono shape, with deep armholes for comfort and using rectangles and squares of fabric to eliminate waste. She used the vernacular of clothing as a vehicle to espouse her ideas of female freedom both during and after World War II.

Both Friedan and Hawes, in their respective times, laid the groundwork for a struggle that continues still today. Each attempted to bring women’s issues to the fore. While Friedan’s work was primarily with White women—an aspect of first and second-wave feminism that continues to generate controversy—Hawes worked with and simultaneously advocated for Black and White women’s rights, while employed by both Wright Aeronautical and the UAW. Hawes feared that women’s concerns would fall

by the wayside once World War II was over. She pushed hard against the status quo with a rather acerbic tone in her writing that became more pronounced over time. In spite of some forward strides that her work accomplished, Hawes’s voice ended up being muted by the war and by the rampant fear of communism that ran throughout US society at the time. She saw the latter as a cover for attacking women activists and downplaying their concerns. In general, both Black and White women continued to be discriminated against and their issues were devalued. Hawes primed the pump for Friedan, whose volume, published twenty years later, was certainly better researched, took a calmer tone, and was less shrill than Hawes’s books. Society, no longer at war and experiencing a revolution in social norms, was more open to hearing the message in the 1960s than it had been in the 1940s, perhaps because of women like Hawes who raised the issues years earlier. Society had heard these cries before, and social change takes time.

The 2019 CAA session was titled “Elizabeth Hawes at the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Development of American Fashion,” tied to the 2019 MAHS meeting that was held in Cincinnati.

¹ See, for instance, *The New Yorker*, October 29, 1932 and June 3, 1933.

² See, for instance, *Life*, May 2, 1938, 2–3 and *Look*, August 2, 1938, 1–2, 7–8.

³ Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach* (New York: Random House, 1938).

⁴ Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach*, 5.

⁵ Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?* (New York: Viking, 1942), 44.

⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in Three Books*, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Odyssey, 1937), 42; cited by Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 38.

⁷ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 44, 52.

⁸ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 52.

⁹ “A History of Vassar College,” Vassar College, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.vassar.edu/about/history>; “More Than a Brewer,” Vassar Encyclopedia, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/matthew-vassar/more-than-a-brewer/>.

¹⁰ Bettina Berch, *Radical by Design* (New York: Dutton, 1988), 7–9; Alexandra Hoey, “Henrietta Hawes: A Pioneer in Ridgewood’s Education,” *The Ridgewood News*, September 2, 2016, accessed September 16, 2021, <https://www.northjersey.com/story/life/community/2016/09/02/henrietta-hawes-a-pioneer-in-ridgewoods-education/92985866>.

¹¹ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 8.

¹² Jan Glier Reeder, “Jessie Franklin Turner: An Intimate Affair,” in *The Hidden History of American Fashion: Rediscovering 20th-Century Women Designers*, ed. Nancy Deihl (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 7–22.

¹³ Kohle Yohannan, *Valentina: American Couture and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009).

¹⁴ Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach*, 333.

¹⁵ Betty Kirke, *Madeleine Vionnet* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2012).

¹⁶ Gavrik Losey, interview by Rebecca Arnold, September 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZkZTxWgMO8>.

¹⁷ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 56.

¹⁸ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 3; Berch, *Radical by Design*, 59–60.

¹⁹ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 60–61.

²⁰ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 4–5, 8–9.

²¹ Peggy Moffit, *The Rudi Gernreich Book* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999).

²² Exhibition invitation at FIT Library, Special Collections and College Archives, US NNFIT SC.FITA.10.2.2.

²³ Paul Milkman, *PM: A New Deal in Journalism 1940–1948* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2016), 78–81; “New York: *PM* New York Daily: 1940–48,” *The Eye of Photography*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://loeildelaphotographie.com/en/new-york-pm-new-york-daily-1940-48/>; Berch, *Radical by Design*, 92.

²⁴ *The Tender Trap*, dir. Charles Walters (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Archives, 2021), Blu-ray.

²⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 59–64.

²⁶ Jennifer M. Mower and Elaine L. Pederson, “Pretty and Patriotic: Women’s Consumption of Apparel During World War II,” *Dress: The Journal of the Costume Society of America* 39, no. 1 (2013): 50.

²⁷ *Dior: The New Look* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2006), coinciding with an exhibition of the same title.

²⁸ For further information regarding fabric restrictions in the US, see Mower and Pedersen, “Pretty and Patriotic,” 37–54; for information regarding fabric restrictions in Britain, see Peter McNeil, “‘Put Your Best Face Forward’: The Impact of the Second World War on Dress,” *Journal of Design History* 6, no. 4 (1993): 283–99.

²⁹ Losey, interview.

³⁰ Cynthia Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere: Dressmakers in Cincinnati’s Golden Age 1877–1922* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 10–15.

³¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 9.

³² Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 338–42.

³³ Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 15.

³⁴ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

³⁵ Elinor Gimbel is designated as the founder or co-founder of the Committee for the Care of Young Children in War-time, depending on what source is accessed.

³⁶ Elizabeth Hawes, *Hurry Up Please Its Time* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), 79–80.

³⁷ Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Women Cry* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943), xi, 3–5.

³⁸ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 219–21.

³⁹ Elizabeth Hawes, *Anything but Love: A Complete Digest of the Rules for Feminine Behavior from Birth to Death* (New York: Rinehart, 1942), 6.

⁴⁰ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 257.

⁴¹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 22.

⁴² Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 14.

⁴³ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 24.

⁴⁴ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 72–73.

⁴⁵ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 14–15.

⁴⁶ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 43.

⁴⁷ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 71.

⁴⁸ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 69–72.

⁴⁹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 135.

⁵⁰ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 272.

⁵¹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 232;
Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 33.

⁵² Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*, 107–9.

⁵³ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, xi.

⁵⁴ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 167–70.

⁵⁵ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 56–57.

⁵⁶ Losey, interview.

La Grandeza de México

Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City

Curated by Karina Romero Blanco, Baltazar Brito Guadarrama, et al.

September 2021–August 2022

Reviewed by Delia Cosentino

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An expansive definition of the Midwest tickled at the edges of the concept of a Greater Mexico in an extraordinary year-long exhibition primarily at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City (September 2021–August 2022). Installed in honor of the two hundredth anniversary of Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, *La Grandeza de México* (Mexican Grandeur) was an artistic celebration of the nation's cultural history, from its pre-Classical indigenous roots to the florescence of modern nationalism in the twentieth century. An enormous display of a complicated history through more than 1500 artworks, the show extended into a secondary venue: The Salón Iberoamericano, the nave of a former Spanish colonial church that now forms part of the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico City's historic center.

Why is a review of an exhibition on Mexican art history included in a journal focused on art historians working in the Midwestern United States? Among the many answers to this question are two crucial ones. First, the Midwest has a significant history of social and artistic interaction with Mexico, including shared interests that make its concerns relevant to the US at large and to this particular region. A few specific works of art featured in the show materialize aspects of such exchanges, including a repatriated sculpture from a Midwest institution as well as works once featured at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago. Second, and more importantly, Mexican art is American art. An overdetermined border between the US and its southern neighbor does not negate the fact that Mexican visual culture transcends North American boundaries.

In the Midwest, this is most visible in neighborhoods like Chicago's Pilsen where street art publicizes some of that nation's most iconic imagery and where the National Museum of Mexican Art has highlighted the continuities between Mexican and Mexican-American artistic expression for 40 years. Beyond Illinois, which is home to the Midwest's largest Mexican population, a recent exhibition at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, *Box of Visions: Modern and Contemporary Art from Mexico in the Midwest* (September 2021–January 2022), demonstrated a broader regional transcultural reality of which every art historian should be aware.

The artworks gathered to create *La Grandeza de México* represented some of the finest examples from Mexican art history, particularly almost 400 pieces showcased at the National Museum of Anthropology. In this venue, about ten percent of the pieces were international loans, mostly from France, including objects from the Musée du quai Branly, the Bibliothèque nationale, and the Musée des Amériques in Auch. The show also featured a number of objects from US venues, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Tucson Museum of Art. Too extraordinary to sum up in anything less than several extended

essay-length reviews, I can only offer here the smallest taste of its range and significance.

Near the beginning of the show, four recently unearthed, large basalt sculptures from the ongoing archaeological excavations in the pre-Aztec city of Tehuacán, Puebla (established circa 1000 CE) were early showstoppers. Among them was a superbly wrought standing eagle warrior with a skeletal face that emerges from the gaping maw of a bird whose wings drape down the figure's back with intricately-carved feathers. Museum officials operated under the cover of darkness to bring these works to the capital city in order to avoid disruptive protests because locals in Tehuacán were rightfully skeptical of government intentions, concerned above all that the pieces would not be returned. Less controversial but similarly symbolic of the hybrid concepts and virtuosic artistry that characterizes ancient Mesoamerican visual culture was a dazzling sculpture of a coyote head completely covered in feathers, each carefully formed from mother of pearl. The animal's mouth opened to reveal the face of a man embellished with bone and seashells, whose general appearance is consistent with other objects from the post-Classic Toltec city of Tula.

Mexico's most dramatic transformation was registered when visitors moved from an imperial Aztec feather shield to several stunning feather mosaic paintings, the latter group a sacred union of a native artform that was later used to represent Christian subjects in the sixteenth century. One particularly foundational vehicle for this religious transformation was on display in the form of a painted banner carried by the Spaniard Hernán Cortés when he landed in the Gulf of Mexico and proceeded inland towards Tenochtitlan in 1519. This painting presented the conquerors' most promising weapon, the benevolent face of the Virgin Mary, a visual justification for their invasion and a deceptively gentle relic of the history-altering moment. This painting has its parallel in another immeasurably important standard that was featured in the exhibition, the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe under which Father Hidalgo marched as he called for Mexican independence from Spain in 1810. Between these two visual bookends was a stunning collection of paintings from the colonial era, all of them considered gems among the art of that period. They included a massive Asian-influenced *biombo* (folding screen) depicting the Conquest, as well as a large painting of Mexico City's main plaza bustling with

mercantile activities and other performances of social position—more evidence of the nation's central position within the early global economy. Other highlights included a *casta* painting codifying Mexico's racial hierarchy, and the well-known posthumous portrait of the rebellious intellectual nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, by the important eighteenth-century painter Miguel Cabrera.

The showcase of modern works was no less impressive, with paintings like David Alfaro Siqueiros' 1929 *Proletarian Mother* capturing on rough burlap that artist-activist's darkly expressive outlook on the social situation following the Revolution of 1910. Another astounding standout was the juxtaposition of the 1949 award-winning painted vista of Mexico City by Juan O'Gorman with the Uppsala Map, the only known sixteenth-century view of the early colonial city. In the foreground of his modern vista, O'Gorman painted an image of the Uppsala Map, but he clearly copied it from a facsimile since the original has resided in Sweden for at least several hundred years. With this loan from the Uppsala University Library, then, the large map by an unnamed native artist was temporarily back in its place of origin for the first time since it was made around 1540, a stunning detail in itself. In sum, in

gallery after gallery *La Grandeza de México* felt like a stroll through a three-dimensional textbook survey of Mexican art.

A significant subtext of this narrative was the demonstration of Mexican resiliency and self-determination despite the nation's tumultuous history, including its repeated violation by foreign entities. To this end, one component emphasized especially in the material presented in the Salón Iberoamericano was the repatriation of objects and thus an ethical restoration of cultural patrimony. Almost 900 of the nearly 1150 pieces on display in that venue were objects that had been repatriated from other countries in just the three previous years. One particularly relevant example came directly from the Midwest in the form of a painted urn, measuring one meter high, from Chiapas that had been in the collections of Albion College in Michigan for decades. Believed to be at least 500 years old, the polychrome ceramic urn originally came from the Maya site of Laguna Pethá, and its repatriation was facilitated by Mexico's consulate in Detroit. Together the college and the consulate signed an agreement in April 2021 that insured its ultimate return to San Cristóbal de las Casas, where it will be displayed alongside a twin urn from which it has been too long

separated. Its first stop, however, was the *La Grandeza de México* exhibition in Mexico City. A similar story of repatriation and artistic reunion comes out of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; that institution also just returned a carved stela from the ancient Maya city of La Mar. After its display in the Salón Iberoamericano, it will also rejoin two stone siblings on display in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. A list of the countries participating in this mass repatriation project provides something of a guide to the places implicated in the plunder of Mexico across time: the US, Italy, France, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Other items on display reminded us of some more foundational (and ongoing) connections between Mexican art and the Midwest. One early but important site of convergence was at the 1893 World's Fair, when the renowned landscape painter José María Velasco arrived in Chicago to lead the Mexican delegation as a Commissioner for Fine Arts. Mexican artists provided 80 paintings for display in the fair's Palace of Fine Arts, including many works by Velasco himself. Some of these same works were on display in *La Grandeza de México*, but several had also been back in Chicago after 125 years for *Arte Diseño Xicágo: Mexican Inspiration from the World's Columbian*

Exposition to the Civil Rights Era, at the National Museum of Mexican Art (March–August 2018). As curator Cesáreo Moreno then explained, Mexico exhibited items in nearly all the great exhibition halls and won over a thousand awards at the Fair. At least one such award-winning item was on display in *La Grandeza de México*, a tabletop diorama featuring a group of musicians and dancers under a rambling nopal cactus by Cristino Ramirez of Guanajuato, whose 1893 prize is mentioned on an attached plaque.

By way of conclusion, I mention one final object that was in the show—a newly discovered pre-Hispanic sculpture of a native woman—whose story highlights the shared challenges of American history and the ways in which Mexico’s unique cultural heritage has been rallied to address them. As we are all well aware, protesters have toppled statues of Christopher Columbus across the United States or, as happened in Chicago, officials under the cover of darkness have preemptively (at least temporarily) removed such monuments. A similar situation unfolded in Mexico City in 2020, when Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum ordered the removal of the 1877 Monument to Columbus on a roundabout along the elegant Paseo de la Reforma, citing the

need to “decolonize” the prominent civic space. After some controversy over what might replace the statue atop its extant neoclassical plinth, the earth itself offered up a solution. In January of 2021, as farmers in the town of Hidalgo Amajac prepared their citrus field for tilling near the Tuxpan River in the state of Veracruz, a two-meter-tall standing limestone figure suddenly appeared from the ground. Perhaps carved even as Columbus gathered his resources in Europe for his trans-Atlantic voyage, the so-called *Young Woman of Amajac* (*La Joven de Amajac*) is adorned in Huastec style to suggest elite status and political engagement. Her inclusion in *La Grandeza de México* preceded the announcement, made on October 12, 2021, Mexico’s “Dia de la Raza” or “Day of the Race,” which replaced Columbus Day, that a six-meter-tall replica of this sculpture would assume the position once occupied by the Italian explorer.

Mayor Sheinbaum sees the replacement of a prominent public sculpture honoring a European man with the image of a much larger indigenous female figure as an act of social justice that honors especially the innumerable dispossession suffered by native women in the conquest and colonization of Mexico. Native rights advocates see political opportunism in such

calls for decolonization since they are often unaccompanied by policies that might actually change the livelihoods of indigenous workers today. Nevertheless, it is exciting to think that a sculpture of a prominent woman from the past has surfaced in the present, not only to be shown as part of *La Grandeza de México*, but ultimately to occupy, in monumental scale, a very public position.

Mexico City is in the very same Central time zone as much of the Midwest, and in that sense, as well as in geographical and historical terms, it is no distant territory. *La Grandeza de México* offered us much to consider in terms of our midwestern connections, and it demonstrated an enormous effort by our Mexican colleagues to curate a truly monumental exhibition, even in the midst of a global pandemic. Above all, the agents behind the show rallied an incredible array of resources to display Mexican grandeur, its expansiveness, and its futurities.

Megan Rye, *Foundling: 100 Days*

Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Curated by Megan Rye and Diane Mullin

January 19–May 22, 2022

Reviewed by Ashley E. Kim Duffey

PhD Candidate, Department of Art History

University of Minnesota

Foundling: 100 Days is comprised of 100 portraits, based on my own and my fellow adoptee's adoption file photographs. These images of waiting children bear witness to who we were as foundlings; before we were given names, before we were claimed by families, before we left the countries of our birth and traveled around the world to our new homes.

—Megan Rye, 2020

Based on one hundred referral photographs, the first and sometimes only photographs of available children that prospective adopters receive, *Foundling: 100 Days*, engaged timely questions of identity, kinship, and race through the unique lens of transnational adoption. After the birth of her second daughter, artist Megan Rye gained new insight into photographs from her own infancy. An adoptee from South Korea, Rye realized that the small, black and white referral photographs were likely the only ones that existed of her from her birth country. In stark contrast with her own daughter, whose hours-long life was already thoroughly documented, Rye's few photographs taken between her

birth and her adoption seemed to represent the loss of so much information about her birth nation and her birth family.

In the show, which was seen in its second venue at the Weisman Art Museum (the first occurred at the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas), each of the 100 paintings was displayed next to a copy of its source photograph. Painted against the utterly quotidian surface of paper shopping bags from Target, each of the children gazed upon, sometimes past, viewers as they entered the gallery. The kraft paper and red ink support of the bags, printed with a variety of versions of the store's iconic red bullseye logo and slogan "expect more, pay less," showed through

sparse applications of white and black oil paint. The paintings were arranged in a grid around the single room, recalling the orderly formation of bassinets containing newborns that would be placed around the floor of a hospital nursery. The source photographs took up the role of identification card, labelling the children only through image rather than text.

On the wall to the right of the gallery entrance was a television screen playing a slideshow with excerpts of the adoptees' testimonials, occasionally alongside those of their adoptive parents. At the Spencer Museum, which hosted the exhibition pre-pandemic, these stories were presented in their entireties, enclosed in a binder that visitors could page through as they walked among the portraits. Of course, public health guidelines restricted this practice during the exhibition's run at the Weisman. However, at the Weisman, the television felt more integrated, occupying the same plane and visual space as the paintings themselves. On the screen, the adoptee's name, birth name, birth year, arrival year, and country of origin appeared as a header, along with an enlarged version of their referral photograph and, shrunk to smaller scale, the attendant painting. Each story described where the now-grown adoptee was vis-à-vis education,

career, and family-building. Some stories reflected on adoptees' returns to their nations of origin, sometimes accompanied by their adoptive parents, and their reunions with their pre-adoption foster parents or caretakers. Some, like Meghann McLouth's, reflected poignantly on their ambivalence towards adoption; these stories shared the joys of having a loving family, of having found professional and academic fulfillment, and of having friends, but also the sorrows of being immediately marked as racially "other." Meghann, for instance, revealed her childhood encounters with racial slurs, levied easily on the playground by White classmates, and her feelings of not belonging as either a "real American" or a "real Korean."

Meghann's feelings, so thoughtfully shared with Rye and displayed among these many portraits, reflected common ones shared by adoptees. This uncertainty came to bear on the work itself. In part, the exhibition celebrated the practice of transnational adoption, in keeping with the dominant narrative of it as a positive means of family building. South Korea, the most heavily represented source country in the exhibition, has sent some 200,000 children abroad, with at least 120,000 landing in the United States (including Rye). Most have been heavily concentrated in

Minnesota. Certainly, the association with Target, arguably Minnesota's most recognizable business enterprise, was obvious given the paintings' surfaces. The stories told around these paintings, too, reflected a culture of gratitude and joy in finding adoptees' "forever homes." Much of the written text surrounding the exhibition, from its introductory panel to the exhibition's page on the museum's website, reinscribed this narrative. For example, the website described "images of waiting children ... before given names, claimed by families, and traveling around the world to what the adoption community calls 'forever homes.'" ¹ Rye's artist talk, given on April 27, 2022, was steeped in similar language, which painted adoptable children as pitiable and in need of rescue, and adopted children as lucky, blessed, chosen. This messaging, though, elided the trauma of pre-adoption rupture. Adoptee advocates and activists online often call attention to the fact that all adoption starts with loss—of family, of origins, of nation. It is not that these children don't have names or families or homes, but rather that they are in transition between their first names, families, and homes, and their adoptive ones.

Like Rye, I myself am an adoptee from Korea. I found this framing changed my interaction with the portraits themselves. Described in

the gallery and on the website as "returning the viewer's gaze with a direct, unflinching stare," the painted faces seemed to me haunted by the uncertainty of their social position within the world. ² Such direct gazes from children ranging from newborns to toddlers seemed less defiant when you accounted for what they had already lost and only hoped to gain. Instead, they seemed haunted, afraid, and even traumatized. Painted over the bullseye of the Target bags, their tiny hearts are thus framed as something aimed at, as a goal to reach. Undergirding the search for adoptive families, in which the referral photograph plays such an integral role, was the uncomfortable reality of adoption as a marketplace and the adoptee as a commodity. Though Rye did not intend such a connection, adoption scholars Dr. Kim Park Nelson and Dr. Elizabeth Raleigh both drew attention to it during a March 2 roundtable hosted by the Weisman in conjunction with the exhibition. On, rather than in, the shopping bags, the adoptees became items to be brought home, to the so-called "forever home." After all, the photographs are presented to prospective adopters to show them what their future child *might* look like, should they agree with the adoption workers that the photographed child is their match. Even the refrain "expect more, pay less," which peeked

out from several of the portraits, drew attention to the market forces of transnational adoption; many adoptive parents, my own included, are told that adopting internationally is less costly but just as rewarding as adopting domestically.

These were hard, tricky conversations that Rye and the Weisman staff facilitated in the exhibition itself and its related programming. While the term “forever home” may be a fraught one for some adoptees who challenge it for its erasure and elision of birth families and for its practical failures given the all-too-common practice of rehoming adoptees, it was an appropriate one here: The Weisman has acquired the entirety of *Foundling: 100 Days* for its permanent collection, a gift facilitated by three adoptive families who are also Friends of the Weisman. I look forward to the ways in which the museum and Rye’s important work will continue to facilitate conversations around identity, family, and race, as they come to bear in the practice of transnational adoption.

¹ “*Foundling: 100 Days*,” Weisman Museum of Art, accessed June 14, 2022, <https://wam.umn.edu/calendar/foundling-100-days/>.

² “*Foundling: 100 Days*.”

***Wealth and Beauty: Pier Francesco Foschi
and Painting in Renaissance Florence***

Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Curated by Nelda Damiano

January 28–April 24, 2022

Reviewed by Heidi J. Hornik

Professor of Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art History

and Chair, Department of Art & Art History

Baylor University

This was the first exhibition dedicated to the lesser-known, but significant, Florentine painter Pier Francesco Foschi (1502–1567). Organized by Nelda Damiano, Pierre Daura Curator of European Art at the Georgia Museum of Art, the exhibition was both forward thinking and beautifully executed. *Wealth and Beauty* was an exceptionally insightful and timely show in Athens that was on exhibit from January 28 to April 24, 2022. In the wake of four masterful shows (*Cinquecento in Florence*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2018; *Michelangelo Divine Draftsman*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017–18; *Maniera*, Frankfurt, 2016; *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2014) and postponed by a global pandemic, this informative four-gallery exhibition revived

momentum for a continued appreciation of sixteenth-century Florentine painting.

Pier Francesco Foschi clearly has one foot in the early Cinquecento painting tradition of his teacher Andrea del Sarto while the other is in *La Maniera* (Mannerism) or the “style of the day” being practiced by contemporaries Agnolo Bronzino, Giorgio Vasari, and Michele Tosini. Prior to entering the first of the four galleries, the viewer was met with a projected video installation of a nearly empty Piazza Santo Spirito. Silent drone footage shot by Matteo Nannelli during the early months of the pandemic captured the location of Foschi’s home parish and workshop. A part of us returned to thinking about pandemic days (perhaps reminded of the city of Florence which we could not visit for usual

study) while at the same time we were being pulled toward the reason we had come to the city of Athens, Georgia—the Foschi exhibition.

This exhibition strategically demonstrated Foschi's success in executing three altarpieces for Santo Spirito, his popularity in receiving private commissions for subjects such as the Madonna and Child (with or without St. John the Baptist and/or Joseph), and his mastery of lifelike portraiture. It reminded us of the contemporary importance placed on drawing or *disegno* and offered glimpses into contemporary life through a selection of period objects. These included a hunting sword from the Cleveland Museum of Art that accompanied his *Judith and Holofernes* from the Spier Collection; a Savonarola chair and manuscript account book from the Morgan Library; and a watch, an ink well, and a signet ring from the Ashmolean Museum. The walls of each gallery alternated between a deep rose and earthen grayish green, both of which complemented, rather than competed with, the works of art. It was well lit and visually appealing, encouraging visitors to linger and learn.

There were twenty-three paintings and fourteen drawings brought together from significant collections throughout the world. The Samuel

H. Kress Collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC lent *Charity* by Andrea del Sarto and *Portrait of Niccolò Ardinghelli* by Pontormo, which, along with two portraits of aristocratic women by Bronzino (Cleveland Museum of Art) and Puligo (David Owsley Museum of Art, Muncie, Indiana) and *Portrait of a Florentine Nobleman* (Saint Louis Art Museum), offered exceptional comparisons with Foschi paintings in American museums and galleries. These included *Portrait of Bartolomeo Compagni* (Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida) and *Portrait of Gualterotti* (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Also from Philadelphia was the *Portrait of a Man* by Jacopino del Conti, another student of Andrea del Sarto in the 1520s. Pier Francesco Foschi and Jacopino del Conti were most likely not in the del Sarto workshop at the same time. Foschi was an independent master by 1525 and Jacopino studied in the bottega later in the decade. International loans brought together exquisite works from the Gallerie degli Uffizi (Florence), the Accademia di Firenze (Florence), the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid), the Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford), and the Royal Collection Trust (London).

Although the catalog was not yet in print at the writing of this review, the Georgia Museum of Art

curatorial staff generously provided a draft version. It promises to be an important contribution to sixteenth-century Florentine published scholarship. The catalog will contain four essays, each of which will undoubtedly add to the viewer's experience of the period and knowledge of the art of Foschi. Essays by Simone Giordani, David Franklin, Elizabeth Currie, and Nelda Damiano will offer distinct contributions to the study of Foschi and his times.

Giordani's "Rediscovering Pier Francesco Foschi: His Life and Works" does exactly what its title suggests in an informative and readable way, suitable for all levels of familiarity with the painter. It presents a thoughtful and nuanced introduction to the essence of Foschi in words that supplement the artist's work in paint. David Franklin sets out, according to his title, to situate Pier Francesco in sixteenth-century Florence and establish the artist's continued influence from Andrea del Sarto. Franklin's essay could have gone further with an expansion of Foschi's true contemporaries. When considering the birth years of the five "contemporary" painters discussed by Franklin (Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, 1493; Pontormo, 1494; Bronzino, 1503; Salviati, 1510; Vasari, 1511), the latter three are, in fact, very close in age. This was an opportunity to

expand the reader's knowledge of other, lesser known but significant, contemporary Florentine painters. For example, to say that "Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, operating in close collaboration with Michele di Tosini, provides the closest parallel with Foschi, active within an esteemed tradition, regressing to the past" and then not to cite any Tosini scholarship and barely anything for Ridolfo, leaves the reader wanting clarification. In fact, Michele Tosini (1503–1577), discussed by Vasari in *Le vite* as Michele di Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, was a direct contemporary of Foschi (1502–1567). Tosini lived longer and progressed into the Mannerist style, applying its principles far beyond Foschi. The illustrated San Salvi altarpiece should be attributed to both Ridolfo and Michele as it has been for many years. Franklin does correctly note that, in 1563, Foschi, alongside the painters Bronzino, Tosini, and Vasari and the sculptors Montorsoli and Francesco da Sangallo, formulated the rules for the founding of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence. The inclusion of a Tosini painting in the exhibition would have provided a comparison between equals as well as with an exact contemporary of Foschi.

Incorporating primary source material (*The Book of the Courtier* [*Il Cortegiano*], 1528; *Dialogue on*

Colors, 1566), health manuals, and contemporary sumptuary laws, the third essay by Elizabeth Currie gives us unexpected documentation for color gradation, sleeve quality, neckline appearance, and textile usage. The history of fashion and textiles is expanded in several catalog entries and enhances our understanding of not only Foschi but also the values and priorities of Florentines in the Cinquecento. Nelda Damiano's essay was not available at the time of this review.

Wealth and Beauty was well publicized through daily advertisements placed strategically at the top of the electronic version of *The ArtDaily Newsletter* for the duration of the show. Pier Francesco Foschi's *Portrait of a Woman* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza) represented the forty-nine works (twenty-three paintings, fourteen drawings and twelve objects), enticing the potential visitor with the grace and elegance achieved by this significant Florentine master. This exhibition may inspire other curators and museums to venture into displaying the contributions of these very fine, but mostly unknown, masters in formulating a more thorough understanding of the artistic world of Cinquecento Florence.

Soundwaves: Experimental Strategies in Art + Music

Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University

Curated by Alison Weaver

January 28–May 14, 2022

Reviewed by Susan J. Baker

Professor of Art History

University of Houston Downtown

The Rice University Moody Center for the Arts celebrated its fifth anniversary this year as a site for multi-media creative experimentation and expression. Its post-modern architectural home became more than just a building when it hosted the recent exhibition, *Soundwaves: Experimental Strategies in Art + Music* (January 28–May 14, 2022). The show examined sound as medium, although the curator thought expansively about sound and presented it not merely as something heard by an individual outside of a context, but rather as it can be encountered in a particular physical and social space. In this case, the work was experienced in the stylish Moody Center, located in a wealthy, elite academic setting, within the multi-cultural, warm and humid southern city of Houston. Sound may be generated by a concrete object—a commonplace, lesser-known, or even invented

instrument—but it must be sensed by a visitor who necessarily hears and sees from a unique psychological and cultural perspective shaped by one's background as well as one's present mindset and location. If experienced with a colleague or friend, the encounter is further altered since it is shared. The exhibition examined the fluidity of experience, something that media such as sound and color can express well, given their actual physical fluctuations.

The exhibition considered two aspects of sound and visual form: one philosophical and one sociopolitical. The curator cited philosopher Hermann Schmitz as well as theorist Brandon LaBelle as their inspirations. The former is known for his concept of "atmosphere," having argued that affect is not something only housed within the mind of an individual and experienced solely by that individual, but also something with an

objective reality that, according to philosopher Rainer Kazig, is “poured out over a wide area.”¹ Similarly, LaBelle examined sound as something that can be shared, and to which appropriate reactions can even be learned, carrying cultural, economic, and political meanings beyond the generator or the perceiver of that sound. The echoes and sites encountered when walking through different parts of a city, for example, necessarily indicate the cultural values of the peoples who reside in each neighborhood.

It is important, then, to consider the physical and social space in which *Soundwaves* was experienced, the presentation of the art having been divided between two exhibition halls in the Moody Center. One side of the initial exhibition space was all glass, so that its location on the Rice campus, with its bright sun and green lawns that disguise its urban location, acted as backdrop to Anri Sala’s 2017 one-person installation, titled *The Last Resort*, that was housed in this first gallery. Outside light sparkled onto the metal rims of thirty-eight snare drums that were suspended upside down from a square steel grid on the gallery ceiling, a good distance above the viewer’s head. The drums seemed to stand at attention in rows, their drummers missing. It was up to the person

looking to fill in the blanks. Each was autonomously struck by mechanized drumsticks that, according to the gallery text, were triggered by the vibrations of frequencies emanating from a speaker embedded in the drums. Simultaneously, a modified version of Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in A major played loudly from a second speaker within each drum. According to the artist, the concerto score was altered in conjunction with British explorer James Bell’s mapping of wind patterns during an 1839 ocean crossing from London to Australia. Notes of music were heard in the space, expanding or shortening as if tossed about by the wind on which they were carried. In this way, the artist challenged an Enlightenment-era belief in objective, measurable data (in that Bell believed he could map concretely something that in actuality is not altogether fixed) with contemporary understandings of observation as relative, shaped by place, position, and time.

One moved from the very open, sound-filled space of the first gallery and its drums installed by a single artist, through glass doors into a darker, windowless rectangular space where the work of several artists could be experienced. It was as if the initial space were the opening solo in the first movement

of a complex orchestration that continued into the next gallery. It was difficult not to think of this second space as one of variation and change, riffing in some ways off the Sala installation in that the works addressed the fluidity of sound in different ways. Both two- and three-dimensional art appeared in this second gallery along the walls and across the floor, either directly or on small groupings of pedestals. Artists represented included Jason Moran, Naama Tsa-bar, Christine Sun Kim, Jamal Cyrus, Jorinde Voigt, Jennie C. Jones, Idris Khan, Charles Gaines, Spencer Finch, Nevin Aladağ, and Nick Cave. Several artists in this room used sound as a means for exploring the fixed, or not-so-fixed, character of knowing. Others addressed the social aspects of visual form and sound in connection to race or gender. Some did a little of both.

Jorinde Voigt, Spencer Finch, and Idris Khan created works that challenged traditional assumptions about how music is perceived and experienced, questioning any notion of a solitary intention or reception. Voigt's arduous creative process, for example, asserted alternative ways of considering an aural event that opened possibilities that logic might shut down. Her *Beat + Wave* studies were comprised of delicate graphite lines

that created a visual dance across a white page from top to bottom and left to right in response to the artist listening to music. Her marks resided somewhere between a pictorial translation and an interpretation of what she has heard, offering a constructed alternative to a concrete musical score.

Idris Khan recognized the complexity of experience but sought to find some shared essence that he hoped could be achieved by using the color blue. It was reminiscent of Yves Klein. In Khan's *Each Second and Second* (2020), the artist sought to unify multiple experiences into a universal, and perhaps spiritual, one. At a distance, Khan's pieces looked like enlargements of musical scores written in blue or sometimes black. On closer observation, however, one could discern multiple layers of solid marks along with ghostly ones that together created the effect of forms fading in and out of view. The notes lost their function as musical score and were instead given a visual resonance. The effect resisted specificity while at the same time being visually unified by the blue color.

Spencer Finch is best known for considering the allusivity of human perception of any color. His installation, *Reflections in Water (After Debussy)*, was a series of just over two-foot-long LED tubes that

aligned across the entire east wall of the Rice gallery like railroad tracks, but in the S-shape curve of a meandering river drawn on a map. In general, each tube glowed purple, but the hues fluctuated the more they were studied. Finch considered Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*, of 1905, and in doing so was examining the work of a composer whose music contained similar atmospheric sensations that have been compared to the fluid color combinations in an Impressionist landscape. Finch expressed his fascination with the inevitable subjective component of scientific inquiry into color by stating, "You try to do something again and again to get closer to the essence. Because the experimenter's perception is a little off, the subjective comes into it, which is fascinating to me."²

Other artists in the exhibition, like Nick Cave, Jamal Cyrus, and Nevin Aladağ, considered ways in which the intersection of visual art and music meets the social intersectionality analysis of human society. Cave's *Soundsuit* (2013) looked as if it comprised an array of objects found on a New Orleans Street after a Mardi Gras parade. Mangled webs of beads that were given structure by using wire supported flowers and painted ceramic birds of all sorts, including a small redbird and large rooster. Also seen were leaves that

approximated the *fleur-de-lis* motif but were painted white. This tangle of material was supported around the head and shoulders of a mannequin clothed in an ornate body suit that was designed, according to the artist, to obscure racial identity. The suit was meant to be worn as part of a performance and is one of several wearable sound suits from a series created by Cave since at least 2005.

Nevin Aladağ's *Body Instruments* (2021) likewise offered objects to be worn, suggesting one could wear one's communal sound systems like clothing. Aladağ explored instruments used to make music in the streets and activated by the wearer's body movements. A drum attached to a marching band that could be worn on the head, while accordions attached to one's arms emitted sound as they were moved up and down like wings. Silver bells attached to leg guards jingled when the wearers moved their feet. By making the musical sounds completely dependent upon body movement, Aladağ was examining long traditions of street music and assumptions made about the people who perform it.

Racially motivated violence was exposed by Jamal Cyrus's church pew with sandbags underneath, entitled *Medicated Shield* (2021), which addressed a shooting in a

Black church in Detroit in 1969. This work was coupled with Cyrus's piece *This Was Nearly Mine* (2022), which referred to a Houston nightclub in the historically Black Third Ward. Together the pieces considered the role of music in Black culture and how it at times provided creative and spiritual solace, or at other times defined identity or generated pride.

Other artists in the exhibition, such as Naam Tsabar and Jennie C. Jones, exposed the absence of women and persons of color from Western artistic movements such as Minimalism. Tsabar's *Transition* (2020) was made from a disassembled amplifier that was part of a performance piece. The amplifier still functioned, although it had been restructured to appear more like a Minimalist artwork hanging on the wall. A microphone was provided in front so that visitors could contribute their own sound to the room. That microphone was a charged focus for inviting participation, recalling power inequalities over who has access to that "voice" enhancer, including women.

While Tsabar's work often brings attention to the absence of women in the Minimalist movement, Jones similarly addressed the lack of women of color within that style. Her *SHHH, The Red Series #1* (2014) consisted of a noise

cancelling instrument cable, along with cable ties and endpin jacks, mounted to the wall. The cancelled "noise" in this case was perhaps the voices of women. Focus shifted to the minimalist form of the cable at the expense of its function, thus undermining its ability to quiet. Jones also placed an acoustic panel on the floor in *Wedge/Crushed Cords* (2020), appearing like a textured version of a work by Carl Andre. The draping and textural play in these two artworks by Jones was reminiscent of Eva Hesse's Minimalist sensibilities, although the neutral tones of Hesse's work have been replaced with shades of muted color.

In general, those works in *Soundwaves* that struggled philosophically with how knowledge is acquired and absorbed seemed more at home in the academic setting of Rice University. Those works motivated by social critique were inevitably diluted there, especially when many of them were remnants from art performances intended to be viewed in the streets or on location. Visual art's focus by its nature usually excludes sound and reduces human experience of the world to a cyclops-like perception. By foregrounding sound, this exhibition forced visitors to open their minds to that "absence" in our perception: the blind spots, or deafened

corners, of our life. The metaphors we choose, the language and turns of phrase, inevitably recreate those lapses in our understanding.

¹ Rainer Kazig, "Presentation of Hermann Schmitz's Paper, 'Atmospheric Spaces,'" *Ambiances: International Journal of Sensory Environment, Architecture and Urban Space* 2 (2016): 1, <https://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/709>.

² Quoted in Hilarie M. Sheets, "Spencer Finch's Art Makes Light Speak Volumes," *ArtNews* (June 18, 2014) <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/spencer-finch-art-makes-light-speak-volumes-2460/>.

***Lands, Real and Imagined: Women Artists Respond
to the Art and Travel Writings of
Maria Graham (1785–1842)***

Fisher Gallery, Otterbein University
Curated by Patricia Frick and Janice Glowski
February 1–July 15, 2022

Reviewed by Nicholas Hill
Professor Emeritus, Department of Art and Art History
Otterbein University

L*ands, Real and Imagined: Women Artists Respond to the Art and Travel Writings of Maria Graham (1785–1842)*, on exhibit from February 1 until July 15, 2022 at the Fisher Gallery, Otterbein University (Westerville, Ohio), presented the work of five women artists and their contemporary responses to Maria Graham's life and work in their respective countries. Graham, a nineteenth-century English writer, artist, and scientist, traveled to Chile, Italy, India, Spain, and Brazil during her prolific career. The artists were Isabel Cauas (Chile), Francesca Genna (Italy), Kavita Shah (India), Paula Bonet (Spain), and Leila Danzinger (Brazil). All five artists work in the media of print-making and paper-related processes, a link to Graham and her drawings and works on paper.

The curators who conceived of the exhibition and brought the artists together were Victorian scholar Patricia Frick, PhD, Professor of English at Otterbein University, and Asian Art Historian Janice Glowski, PhD, Director of Museums and Galleries at Otterbein University. Marking the bicentennial anniversary of Maria Graham's arrival in Chile, Dr. Frick and Dr. Glowski collaborated with the five artists, sharing research and video discussions of Graham's writings and life story. Dr. Frick and Dr. Glowski worked with each artist to find a point of connection with Graham's life or work that resonated with their individual studio practices.

Isabel Cauas responded to Maria Graham and her Chilean travels with twelve vignettes, an evocative visual narrative including eight

atmospheric monotypes punctuated by four objects that referred to Graham's daily life in Chile. Each image and object was presented with a quotation from Graham's Chilean journals. The quotations, in chronological order from April, 1822 through February, 1823, represented the time period from Graham's arrival in Chile to her departure.

The monotypes (each approximately 16" x 20") were landscapes and seascapes balancing specificity with fleeting, gestural mark making. The painterly prints had an atmospheric quality that suggested the watercolors of Emil Nolde. Each composition, with its distinctive point of view, implied a human presence while being devoid of figuration.

The objects that Cauas selected to illustrate Graham's experiences were referred to in her journals. They included a traditional mug and metal straw for drinking mate (an indigenous herbal tea), a chamomile bouquet hung in an inverted manner as if to preserve the blossoms, a piece of indigenous pottery, and a chunk of lava signifying the catastrophic earthquake that Graham described with scientific precision in her journals.

The prints and objects complemented one another as metaphorical and tangible responses to Graham's tumultuous time in Chile. It

began with the death of Graham's husband, the captain of the ship that brought her to Chile. It continued with the development of Graham as an independent woman, defying cultural conventions and gender-based expectations. Loss, adjustment, independence, clarity of purpose, and determination are traits that one identifies when reading Graham's Chilean journals. Cauas captured these essential aspects of Graham's character in her installation. Choosing titles such as "Arrival" and "Solitude" for the monotypes, Cauas incorporated biographical information that allowed Maria Graham to become more than a historical figure.

Cauas created a cinematic quality as one followed the sequence of images and objects across a gallery wall. The accompanying texts, below the images, were like the subtitles in a silent film. Reading the journal entries drew the viewer into the images and into Graham's personal narrative. The use of text was an effective tool for setting a pace for viewers as they moved from image to object to image through the installation. This approach was a subtle nod to the reality of the Victorian era, when daily written communication and reflection was a way of life for women of Graham's background.

By entering the exhibition through the lens of Isabel Cauas's

work, the stage was set for viewing the other artists' approaches to Maria Graham.

Francesca Genna (Palermo, Italy) responded to Maria Graham's expertise as a scientist, specifically in the area of botany. Genna found resonance in her own exploration of organic pigment sources, handmade papers, and innovative book-binding solutions.

Like Cauas, Genna presented her work in an installation format. In a gallery area that suggested a shallow studio or library, Genna created large-scale woodcuts that hung horizontally across the back wall of the space. The prints were dominated by cross-sectional, organic shapes of wood that were printed in naturalistic colors. Some of the irregular shapes overlapped in the prints, creating secondary colors. The woodcuts had the dynamism and fluidity of Helen Frankenthaler's relief prints. These expansive, abstracted landscapes provided the backdrop for the installation. Moving forward in the space, Genna installed a collection of small-scale books on narrow, transparent shelves. The shelves were suspended from the ceiling with thin filament that suggested weightlessness. The papers and pigments used in the folded books had a delicacy that illustrated the artist's embrace of the ephemeral.

Genna did a masterly job of developing the middle ground between these two distinct series of works with a collection of woodcuts printed from cross-sectional pieces of a tree. The circular shapes were printed repeatedly, in violet tones, on a horizontal paper surface. The prints were suspended in a manner like the bookshelves. Although the patterning and texture of the prints were visually engaging in themselves, Genna was also documenting specific Italian trees, plants, and vegetation.

Genna's in-depth engagement with materiality and organic material sources, and her thorough knowledge of botany, offered a contemporary counterpoint to Maria Graham's botanical drawings and studies.

Kavita Shah (Vadodara, India) chose to create a tableau for her contemporary installation. The setting suggested a sitting room, with a Victorian upholstered chair, an ornate table on which rested an array of photographic portraits of individuals dressed in traditional Indian attire, and a mannequin displaying an elaborate and colorful sari. Framing this stage set were long, draped pieces of white translucent fabric.

In preparing for the installation, Shah traveled to Mumbai and photographed specific monuments

that Maria Graham had visited during her travels in India. Shah printed the images using the nineteenth-century photographic process cyanotype. She tinted the prints with tea to suggest the subtle tones of early photography. Less obvious, yet astutely considered, Shah photographed both historical buildings and sculptures in a manner that suggests the “picturesque” point of view valued by Westerners when looking at India.

Having established a setting out of the Raj, Shah proceeded to negate its colonial assumptions. She did so by using the traditional printmaking technique of woodcuts and imagery associated with Indian culture such as animals, birds, and organic patterns. Shah’s insightful insinuation into this nineteenth-century setting took form by boldly overlapping the tinted cyanotypes that covered the back wall of the room with her colorful woodcut prints.

Similarly, she printed the bird, flower, and pattern motifs on the gauzy fabric that framed the tableau. By using intense colors and distinct shapes, Shah infused energy and dynamism into a static environment. The woodcut imagery advanced visually while also overwhelming the staid setting.

Shah’s deft use of understatement to comment on Western visual tropes succeeded because of

her clarity of purpose and careful selection and placement of both found objects (such as the furniture pieces) and her ability to take traditional sources and repurpose them through a contemporary lens.

The last two artists in the exhibition, Paula Bonet (Barcelona, Spain) and Leila Danzinger (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) presented their work in a traditional gallery manner, using the grid as a means of organizing their narratives.

Paula Bonet chose an episode from Graham’s history of Spain as the impetus for her series of watercolor drawings. (Graham wrote a history of the country. She did not keep journals of her travels in Spain.) In one episode, Graham wrote about a citizen army of women led by a woman named “Kennava.” The women fought valiantly against the Spanish in the “Siege of Haarlem” in 1572–73.

In response, Bonet created a grid of drawings in three rows of twelve images, each approximately 18” X 24”, presented in a horizontal configuration. The images employed three motifs: rock or stone forms, gestural bunches of branches or arrows, and face or mask imagery. Each drawing presented one of these motifs painted centrally on a blank sheet. Fluid brushstrokes conveyed immediacy in Bonet’s palette of variegated grays and browns. Bonet’s manner

of painting the face/mask images echoed the figural work of Marlene Dumas.

The grid of drawings acted as visual shorthand for the battle that Graham described. The powerful movement in the brush marks offered graphic clarity. Within the three rows one saw variations in the sequencing of the motifs. They varied in shape and size from panel to panel. The brushstrokes suggested the urgency of the moment. Bonet's choice of heavy, yet slightly warped sheets of paper lightly pinned to the wall communicated both decisive action and vulnerability.

The grid of drawings functioned as a minimalist history painting, employing only essential elements to suggest that one was in a moment of battle while also being in a moment frozen in time.

Leila Danzinger examined Graham's Brazilian journals as well as her own grandmother's writings about Brazilian history for her work in the exhibition. Danzinger's silkscreen prints focused on images of significant women in Brazilian culture, all named "Maria."

Creating six poster-like screen prints, Danzinger used the image of Maria Graham as well as the Brazilian "Marias" in gridded formats. Wallet-size images were assembled onto horizontal surfaces approximately 32"x 40". The stacked registers of portraits filling each

panel echoed Warhol's "Marilyn" screen-printed paintings.

The grid was constructed with six rows of portraits and twelve faces in each row. As each face was repeated, the images evolved from distinct to misregistered to abstracted. Images of the historical "Marias" appear in the subsequent panels. The visually arresting prints were presented as a frieze dominating one wall. Danzinger effectively employed color as a means of transformation. The dominant colors in each panel transitioned from blue-greens to red-violets to panels of violet, red, and blue. Danzinger described the printing process and the material nature of creating as a "form of thinking" that has an intuitive basis. This concept was communicated in her use of loosely registered images that could be read as a visual journal where Danzinger's images represented her autographic content, paralleling Graham's journal pages.

Lands, Real and Imagined: Women Artists Respond to the Art and Travel Writings of Maria Graham (1785–1842) maintained the spirit of Maria Graham's travels. Although its run at the Fisher Gallery has ended, the exhibition will be presented in a second venue in Valparaiso, Chile in spring 2023. An illustrated catalog will be available at that time.

**Enrique Chagoya,
*Detention at the Border of Language***

Edgewood College Gallery, Madison, WI

Curated by David Wells

February 9–March 20, 2022

Reviewed by Levi Sherman

PhD Student

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Printmaker and Stanford professor Enrique Chagoya keeps a reviewer honest. Any mystification or jargon that a critic may employ in assessing his work might wind up quoted and lampooned in a future artwork. Chagoya turns the tables on critics who are used to having the final word—part of a strategy he calls reverse anthropology. Fortunately, he balances this critical look at the art world with access points for general audiences, including pop culture and current events. As for the more esoteric references, they are hardly anything for art world insiders to be proud of. Nods to Albert Bierstadt, George Caleb Bingham, and Karl Ferdinand Wimar show the long entanglement of Western art and settler colonialism. This makes the Edgewood College Gallery exhibition, *Detention at the Border of Language*, which closed in

March, a fitting contribution to the Southern Graphics Council International conference, around which the show was organized. This year's theme was "Our Shared Future" and the conference website proclaimed: "Printmaking can deepen our understanding of the world, inherently challenge systems of oppression, and can push against histories of colonization, unwarranted violence, and systemic racism."

Chagoya is a 2022 recipient of the SGCI Lifetime Achievement in Printmaking Award, and the exhibition naturally showcased virtuosic printmaking. In this regard, the most recent works were the most impressive. Three dazzling codices, completed in 2021 at Magnolia Editions, feature layer upon layer of acrylic ink and varnish on *amate* (a pre-Columbian form of bark paper). Industrial meets

indigenous, as these pieces preserve the tactile quality of the amate while evoking the glossy sheen of a comic book. Nevertheless, the exhibition foregrounded Chagoya's message rather than his technical accomplishments and managed to distill his primary preoccupations in only ten works. Some were accompanied by the artist's own statements. These texts were free of the artspeak he satirizes, but also of the oblique references in his work—in them, he flatly condemns racism and xenophobia and warns viewers that systemic problems run deeper than any one president or pandemic.

Chagoya's frank remarks spared curator David Wells the need for didactic heavy lifting; the introductory text was largely biographical. However, the exhibition layout cleverly enacted Chagoya's strategy of reversal. Viewers circulated the intimate gallery counter-clockwise and read the codices from right to left. In addition to directing the viewer through the space, displaying the full length of the accordion-folded codices (some nearly eight feet long) also allowed more than one viewer to comfortably take in the details. Some codices, like *The Waters of Oblivion in Mictlán* (2021) and *Procession: Tales of the Post-Conquest* (2021) functioned as panoramic

compositions even if their text could not be read from afar. *El Popol Vuh del la Abulita del Ahuizote* (2021), on the other hand, benefited from the closer, sequential reading offered in the exhibition, since it does not quite cohere compositionally from a distance. In either case, the atmospheric gestalt achieved by layer upon layer of ink, varnish, and historical references is as important to the work as the details that emerge at arm's length.

If reading from different distances and directions proved disorienting, viewers had recourse to the codices' page numbers, which are rendered in the Mayan system rather than Arabic numerals. These signposts need no translation, which is more than can be said for the artspeak quoted throughout the codices and the earlier work, *Illegal Alien's Guide to Critical Theory* (2007). In Chagoya's reverse anthropology, it is critical theory that requires scrutiny, not Spanish or pre-Columbian pictographs. The jargon that typically signals insider status is made strange while Chagoya's multi-cultural verbal and visual vocabulary is made familiar with humor and pop relatable references.

It may be easy for an artist to poke fun at critics, but Chagoya is equally unsparing when it comes to art, especially the Western art historical canon. Though *El Popol*

Vuh de la Abuelita del Ahuizote is based on a specific Mayan codex, Chagoya reverses the usual patterns of representation and appropriation in art. *The Ghosts of Borderlandia* is conspicuously Surrealist, a desolate wallscape populated by fragmented figures. There, however, Chagoya breaks with tradition. The figures are pilfered not from Africa or the Pacific Islands but from Europe. Portraits by the likes of Botticelli and Picasso are violently cropped across the eyes, blinded by physical and metaphorical borders. In *Detention at the Border of Language* (2019), Chagoya borrows from art that predates avant-garde appropriation—the straightforwardly racist representations in Wimar’s painting *The Abduction of Boone’s Daughter by the Indians* (ca. 1853). With “Border Patrol” emblazoned on their canoe, the indigenous characters seem to be lawfully detaining rather than kidnapping Boone’s daughter, who has taken the form of Daisy Duck. Borders, identities, and fortunes are fluid.

Chagoya’s references to Wimar and Bingham make connections between contemporary border issues and the long colonial history of the United States. This was especially important for an exhibition in the Midwest, where the border may seem far away. In *The Pastoral or Arcadian State: Illegal Alien’s*

Guide to Greater America (2006) the boatmen from Bingham’s *Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846) are lifted from the Mississippi River and placed in a meadow scene by Bierstadt. The title speaks to the invention of America as a nation and its construction as a state, simultaneous projects driven by displacement and migration. Chagoya replaces Bingham’s original boatmen with a diverse cast of characters that demonstrate the many migrations that have shaped the United States since the time when the Mississippi River was the border, not the heartland.

This dialogue between the past and the present is another reversal. Just as comics and artists’ books echo medieval manuscripts and Mayan codices, Chagoya reminds the viewer that current events are anything but. His darkly humorous *The Seven Deadly Sins: Sheltering in Place* (2020) updates James Ensor’s 1904 satirical series on the same subject for the COVID-19 era. Chagoya combines timely references, like Black Lives Matter and Fox News, with images that recall not only Ensor’s modernism but also centuries of Christian art. Indeed, the skeleton that appears throughout the print cannot help but conjure a previous pandemic, the Black Death.

Chagoya’s playful reversals of time, as were evidenced in the

exhibition, are ultimately ambivalent. On the one hand, he celebrates cultural heritage and history. In *Travels of Fortune* (2021), a contemporary Mayan migrant is guided through a militarized border by mashed-up Mesoamerican comic heroes. The migrant girl's stories and traditions not only help her survive her journey but will also enrich the community where she eventually settles. On the other hand, we seem doomed to repeat the same mistakes. We fight wars and build walls; we make others into strangers and then fear them. Chagoya's art helps us learn from history so that we can break free from its destructive cycles.

What the SGCI conference got wrong is that printmaking doesn't *inherently* combat colonialism or challenge systems of oppression. In fact, Chagoya shows that art has long been complicit in these systems. It is by holding art and art history accountable—always with a sense of humor—that Chagoya successfully confronts racism, xenophobia, and violence.

Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine

Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago

Curated by Diana Tuite

Installation Organized by Jennifer Carty with Orianna Cacchione

February 15–May 15, 2022

Reviewed by Carl Schmitz

Independent Art Historian

In Chicago, museum patrons recently had the rare opportunity to experience two generations of twentieth-century artists through the presentation of two distinct retrospectives. Just as the major Cézanne retrospective opened at the Art Institute of Chicago, *Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine* was ending its run across town at the Smart Museum of Art on the University of Chicago campus. While the influence Cézanne bore on modern art's development is universally recognized, the standing of Thompson (1937–1966) has largely been uncertain since his untimely passing. Both artists produced significant bodies of work.

This House Is Mine came almost a quarter-century after the Whitney Museum of American Art and Detroit Institute of Arts organized the last retrospective for Bob Thompson, and featured over eighty paintings and works on

paper. As a Black painter, Thompson walked between worlds with a unique vision that was formed during a crossroads in the history of art when midcentury party lines between figuration and abstraction were drawn. Thompson expanded his repertoire even further by remixing compositional sources from as far back as the Quattrocento.

The Kentucky native evolved quickly; his student years at the University of Louisville's Hite Art Institute (1957–58) ended with summering in the Provincetown art colony (from 1958) and led to his falling in with the New York art scene. In Provincetown, Thompson came into contact with Abstract Expressionists Mark Rothko and Jack Tworkov, although he was ultimately more struck by the Figurative Expressionist work of Jan Müller. New York City expanded his creative circle to include musicians like Ornette Coleman, whom

he befriended at the legendary jazz clubs Five Spot and Slugs' Saloon.

Three formative stays in Europe also brought Thompson closer to his most frequent collaborators: artists from earlier periods whose influence on him was profound. In Paris (1961–62), he absorbed Poussin. Ibiza (1962–63) unleashed Goya. The final stay in Rome (1966) enabled trips to Arezzo, where he internalized Piero della Francesca. (Thompson's first attempted grand tour was with fellow travelers Red Grooms and Jay Milder in 1959. Although the trio aimed for Mexico, they only made it as far as Milder's hometown of Omaha, and this less formative stay was marked by the director of the Joslyn Art Museum's inability to accommodate their request for exhibition space.)

As was seen throughout the exhibition, Thompson's lived experiences distinctively blended together on canvas. A sweeping painterliness common in the era of Abstract Expressionism brushed up against the drive to picture allegorical scenes that matched the social passion of Müller. These impulses then passed through the prism of devotion to Old Masters like Poussin, Goya, and Piero, inspiring adaptations of their compositions. All of which was highlighted by a vital sense of color that

draws comparisons to both Gauguin's *The Yellow Christ* (1889) and the Fauvist aspect of Hans Hofmann. As Robert Colescott saw it, this potent combination of content, composition, and color resulted in "a surface you can taste."¹

The Funeral of Jan Müller (1958), painted only two years after Thompson had been studying medicine at Boston University, was one of the few works in *This House Is Mine* that showed the artist's early development. The composition did not stylistically forecast the painter that Thompson would become, but it did illustrate a place-staking vision. As opposed to representing the funeral of Müller, it could be viewed as a funeral "for" Müller in the sense that it affirmed his passionate belief in showing life on the canvas. Thompson accordingly struck out against pure abstraction by using its vocabulary—thick, textural brushstrokes and drips that make their own spontaneous gestures—as a means of figurative and social representation.

A leap forward in figurative style from the monolithic block figures of the previous works, *Self-Portrait in the Studio* (1960, [Speed Art Museum](#)) showed Thompson in his studio with a background mélange of canvases, books, and other studio miscellanea. The artist's treatment of his hands was

reminiscent of Rothko's widely known self-portrait of 1936, but perhaps the most remarkable feature of the painting was the prominent positioning of snare and conga drums in the middle ground. Music-making as inspiration morphed into the depiction of musicians in two other paintings that were included in the exhibition. *Ornette* (1960–61, [Birmingham Museum of Art](#)) is a rough impasto with fragmented Arcadian scenes spinning out from an off-center stereo view of the saxophonist and composer that is an experiment in translating the overhead view of a chapel fresco onto canvas. *Garden of Music* (1961, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford originally entitled "Homage to Ornette"—reverts to planar design with a horizontally aligned ensemble cast of performers including Coleman, Don Cherry, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Ed Blackwell, and Charlie Haden, surrounded by an audience, all of whom are essentialized in nude outline within a polychromatic pastoral expanse.

From hot to cool, the refined *Blue Madonna* (1961, [Detroit Institute of Arts](#)) might be the apex of Thompson's use of movement. A syncopation of trees, figures, and sinewy insinuations of biblical serpents that frame the Madonna with the infant Jesus, Thompson pushed figures and setting through a

zoetrope-like layering of foreground-background ambiguity. His trademark *repoussoir* in a black hat also guides the eye, in a way similar to Jan Müller's Faust, albeit with the additional dynamic of edge tension. Through a committed adaptation of Poussin's *Bacchanale à la joueuse de guitare* (ca. 1625, Louvre), *Homage to Nina Simone* (1965, [Minneapolis Institute of Art](#)) has the *repoussoir* more centrally placed than the titular figure herself. Another product of the artist's loaded palette, the use of color—particularly its cloud-filled sky—evokes Allen Ginsberg's citation of Thompson as "the most original visionary painter of his days, a first natural American psychedelic colorist."

The use of vibrant colors in light-drenched scenes conveys Thompson's underlying enthusiasm for life. Perhaps the only thing that Thompson was incapable of was slowing down. It's said that he created over a thousand artworks in his final seven years, and yet questioning what could have been is unavoidable. Fellow painter and friend Anne Tabachnick felt that it was "painful to think of the forty or fifty years of paintings he will never make."² Thompson gave enough of himself on canvas that what survives warrants study and celebration on its own, but also

further contextualization within art history.

Painted the year after Thompson's death, Faith Ringgold's *The American People Series #20: Die* (1967) notably also dates from between the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. A visceral statement on the interracial and gender-based violence that also emerges within Thompson's work, *Die* is a jarring portrayal of unhinged bloodshed and vacant desperation that moves through a circuit of figures who are closely paired despite differences in race, gender, and generation. *Die* became a highlight of the New York MoMA's collection shortly after its acquisition in 2016, but not solely because the diptych is one of Ringgold's iconic works in the medium. With the rationale that Ringgold acknowledged the influence of viewing *Guernica* (1937) during the period it was entrusted to the museum, *Die* was part of a 2019 permanent collection rotation that placed it in a gallery of other works by Picasso. This placement—especially the uneven treatment of including one work by Ringgold in a gallery full of Picassos (a Louise Bourgeois sculpture being the only other gate-crasher)—led some critics to charge that Ringgold's masterpiece was being instrumentalized in a drive to maintain hierarchical

relationships between collection artists. Even though the first post-humous Cézanne retrospective cast an irrevocable spell of influence on Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) and *The Bather* (ca. 1885) have generally lived separate lives in the museum's galleries. With *Die* taking its own place as a flagship painting in the retrospective for Faith Ringgold that is also currently traveling, a similar independent context should follow.

Had Ringgold's *Die* otherwise been detached from its Picassoan context, a more equitable pairing from the Bob Thompson retrospective could have been *The Hanging* (1959, [Chrysler Museum of Art](#)), an early painting that has been rarely exhibited. Both works are denotatively titled, with Thompson locating a group of onlookers within a forested area at a short distance from the hangman's tree. This raw and foreboding composition employs little of the sublimity found in later paintings and predates Thompson's extensive use of the Old Masters. Between the shocking directness of Ringgold and the haunting ambiguity of Thompson, these works could facilitate an instructive conversation about the United States in the Jim Crow era, ranging from the murder of Emmett Till and institutional racism, down to the mass shootings

and regional curtailment of civil rights occurring in the present-day. Such a pairing, however, would miss the mark as an illustration of influence, as the artists were contemporaries whose circles did not significantly overlap.

Privileging sources of influence when an artist lives a life as short as Thompson's—without the time given to prolifically inventive artists like Picasso and Ringgold—could overwhelm the presentation of a body of work, but *This House Is Mine* uses a different model for illustrating influence. In the same way that the artist invited features of their artworks into his compositions, the curators invited Goya and Poussin into the exhibition, where comparative works hung alongside those by Thompson. Museum visitors may one day relate more to the work of Ringgold and only come to know Picasso through her body of work, while some art students are likely discovering Piero today through *This House Is Mine*.

With two major museum retrospectives and their monographs forming part of the bridge, the art of Bob Thompson has outlived those who were critical of his methods. Building on the foundational work of the Whitney retrospective (particularly texts by Judith Wilson, Thelma Golden, and Shamim Momin in the regrettably

out of print catalog), *This House Is Mine* was free to explore in further depth how Thompson abstracted narrative forms from the Old Masters. In doing so, the exhibition joined similar projects that looked at Willem de Kooning's use of letters as an impetus for ostensibly non-objective compositions, Hans Hofmann's employment of still lifes in modeling push-pull dynamics, and Grace Hartigan's own free-study exorcisms of the Old Masters. Beyond method, our means of interpreting these compositions takes us through the history of art, the life of the artist, and down to drawing our own connections to the present-day. Thompson's avowed preference for private symbolism remains generative. Meyer Schapiro observed that Thompson's paintings are "an innocent soliloquy without thought of an audience."³ *This House Is Mine* offered a special opportunity to be that audience.

This House Is Mine has left the University of Chicago, but the Smart Museum created exhibition content that lives online. A series of videos highlighting works from the exhibition ("Object Chats" on the [exhibition webpage](#)) contain succinct and thought-provoking reflections. Chicago was also an opportune venue within the context of jazz, and the museum commissioned an [artist-created playlist](#)

that includes many whose paths crossed with Thompson, including Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Nina Simone. With a soundtrack that hints at Thompson's musical tastes outside of jazz, the freewheeling documentary *Bob Thompson Happening!* (1965) by Dorothy Levitt Beskind (played on a loop in the Smart Museum galleries and currently available through the [High Museum website](#)) splices together Thompson in the course of a day in New York City and Provincetown and the artist at work in the studio. In the video, initial pigment layers are applied to *The Carriage* (1965, [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#)), an ominous painting also featured in the retrospective that is a variation on Poussin wherein Thompson has turned the reaping of a harvest from the field into flesh.

Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine was organized by the [Colby College Museum of Art](#), where the exhibition opened last year. The retrospective traveled to the [Smart Museum of Art](#) at the University of Chicago from February to May, opened recently at the [High Museum of Art](#) (remaining in Atlanta through September 11), and in October makes its final stop at the [Hammer Museum at UCLA](#). The accompanying catalog has been co-published by the Colby College Museum of Art and [Yale University Press](#).

¹ Robert Colescott, "An Artist's View: Robert Colescott on William H. Johnson and Bob Thompson," in *Novae: William H. Johnson and Bob Thompson*, ed. Lizzette LeFalle-Collins (Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum, 1990), 33; cited in Lowery Stokes Sims, "A Tale of Two Bobs," in *Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine*, ed. Diana Tuite (Waterville, ME: Colby College Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 137.

² Ann Tabachnick, "Bob Thompson; 1937–1966," 1967. Bob Thompson papers, 1949–2005, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

³ Meyer Schapiro, quoted in "Bob Thompson Retrospective Exhibit Honors Late Black Artist," *New School for Social Research News* (February 1969), 1 (New School Archives and Special Collections object title PR#3748, Bob Thompson Retrospective, https://digital.archives.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/NS030107_001509).

***The Dirty South: Contemporary Art,
Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse***

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR

Curated by Valerie Cassel

March 12–July 25, 2022

Reviewed by Elyse Dianne Mack

Research Assistant for African Art

Saint Louis Art Museum

On its final tour stop at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* (on view from March 12–July 25, 2022) served up a resounding success. Contrary to the current trend of highlighting the “global” nature of contemporary art, this show shined a spotlight on the often ignored, marginalized, and appropriated Black American South. Valerie Cassel, exhibition organizer and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, simultaneously demonstrated harshness and beauty in the region’s history through glittering video, abundant assemblage, and poignant print media.

Though each section in the tripartite exhibition structure (Landscape: The Politics and Poetics of Dirt; Systems of Thought: The

Vision of Envisioning; and The Black Body: Repository/Site/Agent) warranted its own rich exhibition, Cassel’s insistence on Southern artists and Southern subjects provided cohesion. The first work immersed viewers with this notion via Lexington, Kentucky-born Allison Janae Hamilton’s 2019 video [Wacissa](#). Its inverted camera angles and aquatic audio announced that even Florida’s sinister so-called Slave Canal (named for the enslaved people who built it as a channel for the cotton industry), holds beautiful visions for resilient futures.

Many artists proved that the sounds of Black Southern joy are not restricted to the future. In the case of [Red Rambling Rose Spring Song](#) (1976), Alma Thomas (born in Columbus, Georgia) brought Nat King Cole’s “Ramblin’ Rose” to the canvas with sky blue and new green bursting between patches of

poppy red. Others brought quotidian sounds to the ear. Earlie Hundall Jr. (born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and working in Houston, Texas) photographed daily life, such as [Flipping Boy, 4th Ward, Houston, TX](#) (1983), evoking screams of childhood joy, revving engines, and chatter on the block. [Blackwater Baptist Church, Mississippi](#) (1990) offered an entirely different visual encounter with the sonic. Hundall revealed only the back of a figure entering a wooden church through overgrown pines, eliciting solitary stillness rather than sounds on the street.

For a more direct auditory experience, the exhibition also included a playlist. As diverse as the visual art in the exhibition, [the official Dirty South Playlist](#) swings from Solange to Charlie Parker and concludes with Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Speech from 1895.¹ Though highly attuned to Cassel's regional and joyful thesis, the addition felt underutilized at Crystal Bridges, as visitors had to access the songs by scanning a QR code on their own devices. Though there were no silent spots in the show—the low hum of nearby video never disappeared—more prominent presentation of the playlist would have elevated this contribution as the work of art it is.

Even so, Cassel dismantled the hierarchy of media throughout *The Dirty South*. Giants of painting like

Sam Gilliam (born in Tupelo, Mississippi) and Jacob Lawrence (born in New Jersey, but a famous student of Ashville, North Carolina's Black Mountain College) stood near the more experimental or lesser-known practitioners, like assemblage artist Anderson Johnson (born in Lunenburg County, Virginia) and Dapper Bruce LaFitte, aka Bruce Davenport Jr. (born in New Orleans and working with markers). All reminded us as art historians that museum organizational structures like geographically-based curatorial departments, Eurocentric presentations of a single art-historical narrative, or even medium level divisions between "sculpture" and "decorative arts" are descendants of a White supremacist system—and that, like these artists, we can resist their stranglehold.

The Dirty South showcased nearly 100 years of Black Southern artistic resistance through joy, marking a time span as long and as intellectually dense as the "longue durée" of nineteenth century France.² Artists born into slavery, artists drawing directly on histories of enslavement, and artists inspired by hybrid African and African diasporic spiritualities set the stage for artists working today in response to ongoing racial injustice and continued celebrations of identity.

The most obvious celebration of personhood was the exhibition's abundant portraiture. Washington, DC-born Elizabeth Catlett's undated sculpture, *Portrait*, dazzled the eye with a bronze finish and a knowing gaze. Sheila Pree Bright's similarly glittering photographs, [*Terence \(Memphis, TN\)*](#) and [*Tony \(Memphis, TN\)*](#), both from 2009, celebrated the shining pride of grills.³ Sister Gertrude Morgan also unabashedly celebrated herself through her 1965 [*Self Portrait/Revelations*](#), which showed her in all-white, sent to earth to evangelize and testify, verbally and visually.

Still, the aural animated all. Charlotte, North Carolina-native Romare Bearden's [*Three Folk Musicians*](#) (1967) portrayed two guitarists and a banjo player in the artist's signature collage, connoting both the music of the figures and the ripping and shuffling of paper combined in the creation of the work. Bill Traylor, born into enslavement in Benton, Alabama, also evoked violent voices with the open mouth and knife-like finger in *Untitled (Blue Man, Red Dog)* (ca. 1939–42). The unmistakable slaveholder's hat of Traylor's *Blue Man* and its unidentifiable canine companion forecasted screaming White police and snarling German Shepherd dogs that, just fourteen years after the artist's death, would become national emblems

for opposition to the Civil Rights Movement.

The power of voice, the poignancy of its loss, and the urge to physically see its presence was also well-represented. Inspired by the parallels between the family separation crisis at the US-Mexico border in 2019 and the impact of the aftermath of the Civil War on Black communities, Bethany Collins (born in Montgomery, Alabama) honored missing family members through [*In Mississippi*](#) (2019). The artist embossed segments of newspaper ads seeking lost loved ones on black paper, matted and framed in black, reinforcing the racialized dimensions of these losses and nodding towards all-black funeral attire. Likewise, Houston-born Jamal Cyrus's *A Witness* (2019) visualized absence through sewn strips of blue denim, sporadically interrupted by undyed, white streaks. The work reconstructed National Women's Political Caucus co-founder, Mississippi Freedom Summer co-organizer, and Freedom Democratic Party co-chair Fannie Lou Hamer's censored FBI witness testimony regarding racialized police violence against Black voters.⁴

The sounds of Civil Rights history provided the springboard for Fulton, Missouri native Nick Cave's *Soundsuit* (2010), alongside a variety of African and African diasporic

masquerade traditions. The horrific 1991 beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police inspired Cave's first in a series of wearable, performing, and audible full-body coverings, which the artist has likened to protective armor.⁵ The suits also make oblique allusions to many African masquerading traditions, many of which utilize full-body coverings in woven fiber and are used in a diverse range of celebrations and ceremonies. Renée Stout's [*She Kept Her Conjuring Table Very Neat*](#) (1990) offered more specific references to central African divination practices and homages to ancestors through the presentation of portraiture and ritual offerings.⁶ Like Cave's, Stout's assemblage was also inspired by violent White supremacy and the necessity of human presence to activate works of art.⁷ These notions provide particular power in relation to the "verbal/visual nexus" of African arts, the concept whereby an understanding of a rich revue of oral tradition is necessary to interpret visual art across the continent.⁸

During a rise in scholarship on European modernism's roots in African arts, there is a strong desire to identify the specific African visual traditions quoted by contemporary Black Southern artists.⁹ But throughout the exhibition, allusions like the literal Black skin and

white mask of [*Dobale to Spirit*](#) (2017) by Fahamu Pecou (born in Brooklyn, New York and living in Atlanta, Georgia) stood in Fanonian defiance of such identification.¹⁰ Its visage recalled a stylized but slender Dan mask from Côte d'Ivoire,¹¹ but its whiteness was incongruous with the type. By taking pieces from multiple African and African American visual cultures, the artist obscured the painting's roots, reclaiming the forced obfuscation of enslaved individuals' histories. What emerged from the acrobatic pose, contemporary attire, and masked figure was a celebration of a new, distinct identity.

The crown jewel of celebrating identity in the exhibition, however, must be awarded to Rashaad Newsome's [*King of Arms*](#) (2015). Through a rich tapestry curtain and underneath a larger-than-life-size crown, the video gave a five-minute sampling of the New Orleans Museum of Art's staging of the artist's annual King of Arms Art Ball.¹² The performance exalted the resplendent joy of high school homecomings, Mardi Gras, and Carnival, complete with sweet rides, brightly feathered Afro-Brazilian costumes, marching major-ettes, and sharp voguing. Video served as the perfect vehicle to emphasize the musical, multidimensional nature of Black art in the South.

Given the strength of the show's regional focus, one is prompted to ask why Crystal Bridges was the final tour stop. Regional tourists (like this author) and the mostly-White, wealthier-than-average residents of Bentonville should celebrate the beautiful and complicated histories of Blackness presented by *The Dirty South*.¹³ But the show could have elevated Black Southern joy for more Black Southern people if it had ended its tour in Memphis, New Orleans, Birmingham, Montgomery, or Atlanta instead of at an institution funded by corporate money (money gained through the labor of imprisoned people, who are disproportionately likely to be Black men).¹⁴

Perhaps the complicated realities of places and spaces for art made Mississippi native Arthur Jaffa's ubiquitous [*Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death*](#) (2016) an even more apt ending for *The Dirty South*. Sitting with an unbroken, seven-and-a-half-minute string of fast-paced clips, flashing joy, death, dancing, violence, performance, memes, and Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter protests in rhythm with contemporary hip-hop provided the perfect opportunity to reflect on everything.

¹ The playlist in its entirety is not even available on Spotify—but it is listed in the exhibition catalog.

² The oldest work in the exhibition is the painting *Untitled (Dreamer)*, ca. 1930, by Palmer Hayden, aka Peyton Cole Hedgeman (born in Widewater, Virginia), or possibly Green Cove Springs, Florida native Augusta Savage's plaster sculpture *Gamin*, modeled in 1929 and put into plaster by 1940. Certainly, specific works referenced earlier periods: Kara Walker (born in Stockton, California) titled her 2008 multimedia work *A Warm Summer Evening in 1863*.

³ An actual grill—a gilded, removable dental covering—created by King Johnny of Johnny's Custom Jewelry in Houston, Texas was also on view.

⁴ Cyrus' commemoration of Hamer's legacy in denim pays homage to the activist's past as a sharecropper and to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's use of denim overalls to show solidarity with rural and working classes (see "Fannie Lou Hamer," Federal Bureau of Investigation, June 10, 1963, <https://vault.fbi.gov/fannie-lou-hamer/Fannie%20Lou%20Hamer%20Part%2001%20of%2004%20/view>)

⁵ Nichole Bridges, *Currents 109: Nick Cave* (Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 2014), n.p.; Ann Landi, "Dressing for Excess," *ARTnews* 111, no. 6 (June 2012), 67.

⁶ For more on assemblage and commemoration in West African Vodun, see Suzanne Preston Blier, "The Art of Assemblage: Aesthetic Expression and

Social Experience in Danhomè," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 45 (Spring 2004): 186–210.

⁷ This particular work was created simultaneously with a narrative the artist wrote about a fictitious colonel who collected "fetishes." For more, see Michael D. Harris, "Resonance, Transformation, and Rhyme: The Art of Renée Stout," in *Astonishment and Power*, by Wyatt McGaffey and Michael D. Harris (Washington, DC: Published for the National Museum of African Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

⁸ Coined as such in Herbert M. Cole and Doran H. Ross, *The Arts of Ghana* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1977), 9–12, the term was originally employed for the use of proverbs, riddles, jokes, folktales, and praise songs in visual Akan arts. To this day, oral traditions play a vital role in shaping visual arts across Africa.

⁹ See for instance Suzanne Preston Blier, *Picasso's Demoiselles: The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon's seminal 1952 volume, *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the individual and systemic effects of White supremacy on the construction of global Black identity. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008).

¹¹ For example: Dan artist, *Face Mask*, wood, 8 3/4 x 4 7/8 in, accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/310746>.

¹² Rashaad Newsome, “King of Arms Art Ball,” accessed June 15, 2022, <https://rashaadnewsome.com/king-of-arms-art-ball/>.

¹³ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Bentonville City, Arkansas,” accessed June 15, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/bentonvillecityarkansas>

¹⁴ Derek Gilna, “Prison Labor Boosts Wal-Mart’s Profits Despite Pledge,” *Prison Legal News* (September 2014): 48. For more statistics on the racial disparities and history of labor contributed by imprisoned people, see Prison Policy Initiative, “U.S. Incarceration Rates by Race and Ethnicity, 2010,” <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/raceinc.html>; *13th*, dir. Ava DuVernay (Netflix, 2016); Mumia Abu-Jamal and Johanna Fernández, “Locking Up Black Dissidents and Punishing the Poor: The Roots of Mass Incarceration in the US,” *Socialism and Democracy* 28, no. 3 (September 2, 2014): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2014.974983>.