HKUAH

HKU Art History Student Journal

October 2022

Cover image
(Detail)

Kaigetsudo Doshin 懐月堂度辰, *Courtesan Writing a Letter* 文を書く遊女図, c. 1715.
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper.

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the
Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015.

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Fine, Art History?

Ye Xinyi

In 2020, our department changed its name from The Department of Fine Arts to Art History. It saves department staff a lot of time in answering numerous inquiries about if students can take studio art courses here, and also triggered my curiosity in answering these grand questions: What is art history? Why we call ourselves art historians? Art history is becoming increasingly inclusive in its subject matters and the boundary between disciplines is getting more obscure. For example, many scholars embrace new (sub)fields such as visual culture and material culture as part of their art historical writing. The diversity of subject matters is directly reflected in the different names and structures of art history departments and programs in various universities, for example, art history/theory/criticism (UCSD), history of art and visual culture (Oxford), history of art + architecture (Harvard), and archaeology & history of art (Sorbonne), to name a few.

I have not yet found the best way to explain what I am studying within a few sentences in a casual conversation with people who do not study humanities. It seems easier to answer more specific questions such as "How is it different from history?" "Do you do archaeology or art conservation?" "Do you have to paint a lot?" After speaking with many classmates, I found that such confusion in defining our discipline is shared among us. Hence, it is crucial for us to circulate our ideas and speak for our subject and our own "academic identity," and the most direct way is to distribute what we write.

The idea of starting our own journal came to me when I failed to find an academic platform for me as an undergraduate student to share my work, as many journals state their scope of submission as "university faculties, curators, independent scholars, and graduate students." Inspired by other undergraduate student publication such as HASTA (University of St Andrews) and Columbia Undergraduate Journal of Art History, I had the vision of filling the gap by starting our journal in HKU for students, especially undergraduates, to circulate their writings. It is true that the time dedicated to research, often counted by years, and the experiences gained in the process of editing and publishing are prominent for the growth of a scholar. However, our undergraduate student status does not necessarily mean that our works are not worthy to be published. Neither does it indicate an absolute lack of originality and innovation in our research. Practicing writing as a student is the only route to become a scholar and every expert has once been here. Thus, our position now cannot stop us from seizing every opportunity to make our works more visible and eventually find our voices as both a writer and an individual.

Our journal is predominantly an academic one that includes book reviews, exhibition reviews, and research papers. Meanwhile, commentaries, art-related internship experiences, and our unique section, artist of the issue, are also indispensable to our journal. The primary goal is to create opportunities for students to engage in the academic writing and publishing process for both art historical research and art criticism. In other sections, we also aim to cultivate our abilities to write in different forms for a variety of audiences, from scholars to those without prior knowledge of the field. Based in Hong Kong, whose vibrancy as a global art center is attested by the recent opening of M+ and Hong Kong Palace Museum, our journal aspires to align with both the local and international art scene, and therefore encourage submission of writings on art from all regions and time periods.

The publishing practice of a journal creates a more active and interactive experience of writing that involves proofreading, editing, and reviewing, which prepares students for their future career in the art world or the academia. It is particularly challenging to study art history at a time when humanities subjects are generally shrinking at an institutional level and surviving the academic world has become exceptionally hard. Nevertheless, there are rising opportunities for art historians to explore, for the art world is becoming increasingly integrated with contemporary economy and lifestyle. In the age when exhibitions can be distorted into spectacles of Instagram stories and YouTube videos like "Understand Mona Lisa in 1 Minute" are getting millions of hits, it is art historians' mission to reclaim the intact art viewing experience and writing as the medium in response to it. Our writings published with open access online testify our dedication to art history as a subject that demands constant interrogations on its definition, methods, and theories. No matter how much influence we can make, I hope that our writings can at least raise some meaningful

questions that push the development of our discipline further.

Without the tremendous efforts of those who engaged in and helped with our initial founding process, the journal is impossible to exist. Though it is impossible to list every name here, I hereby represent the editorial team to express our sincerest gratitude to all of you. It is my great fortune to have an extremely passionate editorial team initiated by my friend and co-founder Lan Chang who joined us without hesitation. Our department demonstrator Ms. Nicole Fung gave us valuable support by guiding us to the archives of the former HKU Fine Arts Society student journal. Special thanks go to Dr. Vivian K. Sheng, who generously offered help with fundings and advice on our editorial process even when our idea was not yet on paper. Last but not least, I am more than grateful to the caring, supportive, and encouraging environment created by every student and teacher in HKU Art History Department, which made it possible for us to build a safe and open platform for sharing our works.

The reason why we study art history, perhaps, includes the ambivalent nature of writing about artworks that may or may not have the right interpretation, as different approaches and theories usually lead to diverging conclusions. However, the writings should be visible to make it possible for scholarly debates to happen. Here comes the platform for us to write, share, and review. As Roland Barthes famously argued, "The fact is…that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction'; rather, it designates exactly what linguists…call a performative, a rare verbal form, in which the enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered."[1] Where my words end, the journey of our journal commences.

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1 Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 146.

Riya Chandiramani:
Cereal Boxes Filled with Food for Thought

Lui Wing Yan Renee

Every morning before we set off to complete our routines, sugary and filling cereals are likely to be a handy option for us to fuel ourselves for the tedious day ahead. But what if…cereals are not packed with sugar and carbohydrates but instead, an artist's critique on gender issues?

Born and raised in Hong Kong, artist Riya Chandiramani is known creating cereal boxes that contain not cereals, but paintings and mixed media works that nourish one with food for thought. By fusing a multifold of elements and iconographies from Indo-Persian and Tantric miniature paintings, advertisements, and Chinese Maoist-propaganda posters, Chandiramani explores religion, and gender issues. She also explores intricate issues about nourishment and female representation under censorship and sexualization of their bodies.

Growing up with an ample passion for art, Riya Chandiramani first started her artistic journey when she was a student at German Swiss International School. Her studies at University of Pennsylvania furthered her understanding of media consumption, popular culture, and gender discourses, which later became the critical elements in her oeuvre.

Chandiramani's work, however, contains much more than her manifestations of her understanding of different greater discourses. The artist's personal encounters, and her relationship with food also fuels her creative renditions.

> *"At university, I was a young woman with little to no self-esteem—a completely high-strung, a straight-A perfectionist, never feeling like what I did was good enough. In my second year, I was sexually assaulted, and soon after, I developed a severe eating disorder. Two years later, I was close to death and told to leave school for hospitalized treatment."*

Upon her recovery, not only had her body and her relationship with food changed, but a raging anger was also planted in her, which later became part of the themes that she manifests in her art.

> *"I became stronger, mentally, and I was angry. I wanted to scream to the world that I did not develop this eating disorder because I 'wanted to be thin like a model'—it was due to the societal conditioning that women experience, telling them to shrink themselves away—be quiet, serve others, not to be assertive or strong-voiced," said the artist.*

Chandiramani also thinks that the female body is subjected to being stigmatized and sexualized for consumption. Parts of the female body like periods, breastmilk are seen as "flaws" yet they are also the body parts that enable women to "give life and feed."

Working around the major themes of feeding and nourishment, Chandiramani's recent body of works feature three key elements—branding of food, female representation in Mughal miniature paintings, and Maoist propaganda posters.

Her inspiration from Mughal miniature paintings stems from her wish to reimagine how women were depicted in the miniatures.

> *"During the Mughal period, women were kept in closed quarters and were not actually visible to court painters. The lack of differentiation of women depicted, and their lack of*

representation over history made me want to reimagine this style by portraying strong warrior mother goddesses who fight and feed."

She also takes on capitalism, advertising, and propaganda in her own voice. As the artist comments, "advertising and propaganda are two sides of the same coin. The fusion of Western branding, and Indian and Chinese art are representative of my mix as a Hong Kong born Indian woman with an international upbringing."

Among a plethora of compelling works that she created, Chandiramani chose two of her works to share with us.

Behind Every Man (Fig. 1) is a painting that explores the themes of female power and the nurturing of life. Referencing the phrase "behind every man is a great woman," Chandiramani celebrates the female body by reminding us that even though the society is male-dominated, every one of us was given life by a woman, and we came to life from the female body.

"The male mascot of Frosties, Tony, sits as a teacher of sorts, with the chakras, the energy points of our bodies, running through him, the top one (Crown chakra), traditionally connected with consciousness, being replaced with a vagina. Tony sits on a lotus flower, a symbol of purity that features throughout my work. And behind him is the strong woman—the goddess—that he originated from. Tony holds a breast in his right hand—in Taoist texts, it was believed that breasts emit medicinal fluids to relax the body and mind, causing energy to flow. Sanskrit letters surround him on left and right, the sounds of the universe stimulated by feminine energy."

Created this year, Chandiramani's *Where Do Babies Come From* (Fig. 2) depicts women being freed from society's expectations and constructs.

"At the front of this reimagined cereal box, a woman holding a husk of corn rides Cornelius, the male cockerel mascot of Kellogg's cornflakes, away from the willow pattern scenery. She is independent, embracing her own nature away from society's expectations of her. According to the history of the blue and white willow pattern, two lovers were not allowed to be together and were killed in their attempts to do so; here, the woman is allowed to be whatever she wants to be and with whomever she would like to be with, away from the confines of constructs that limit her freedom, and this is what gives her power."

"On the back (Fig. 3), a multi-headed and armed goddess is perched on a lotus, showering

Riya Chandiramani in her studio.
Photo by courtesy of Young Soy Galley.

> *children beneath her with the nourishment they need. Her energy permeates all of us. She is the provider, creator, and sustainer of the universe. The characters* 我们 wǒmen *meaning "we, us" play with the English word "women"—representing that women create us, women require freedom to do so, and this answers the question that titles the piece. This came to me quite suddenly, I had been stuck on what to include on the back and was reading something, and the word 'women' popped out at me as 'wǒmen' and I immediately wrote down the Chinese characters and pinyin knowing I would incorporate it somehow."*

Chandiramani's works certainly shake her audience with how she carefully weaves a web of diverse visual elements that speaks of her thoughts on broader issues in society.

Being an active young artist who is contributing to the ever-expanding Hong Kong art narrative, her creative voice almost encapsulates how Hong Kong as a city has a culture that is too diverse to have a rigid and homogenized definition.

> *When asked to define "Hong Kong art," Chandiramani says, "I don't think there really is one specific definition for Hong Kong art—Hong Kong culture itself is hard to define—which can be considered both a strength and a weakness."*

Instead of defining "Hong Kong art" geographically by saying that only art produced in the city is "Hong Kong," the artist believes the "lived experience" of the artist will filter into their works in different forms—ranging from what the artist would want to share with the public, to how they create their works.

She also added that even though she considers Hong Kong her home, and that she was born here and have lived here her whole life, her inability to speak Cantonese makes some doubt her identity of being a "true" Hong Konger and hence—she herself may fit under the concept of being a "Third culture kid," and so does her art.

Figures

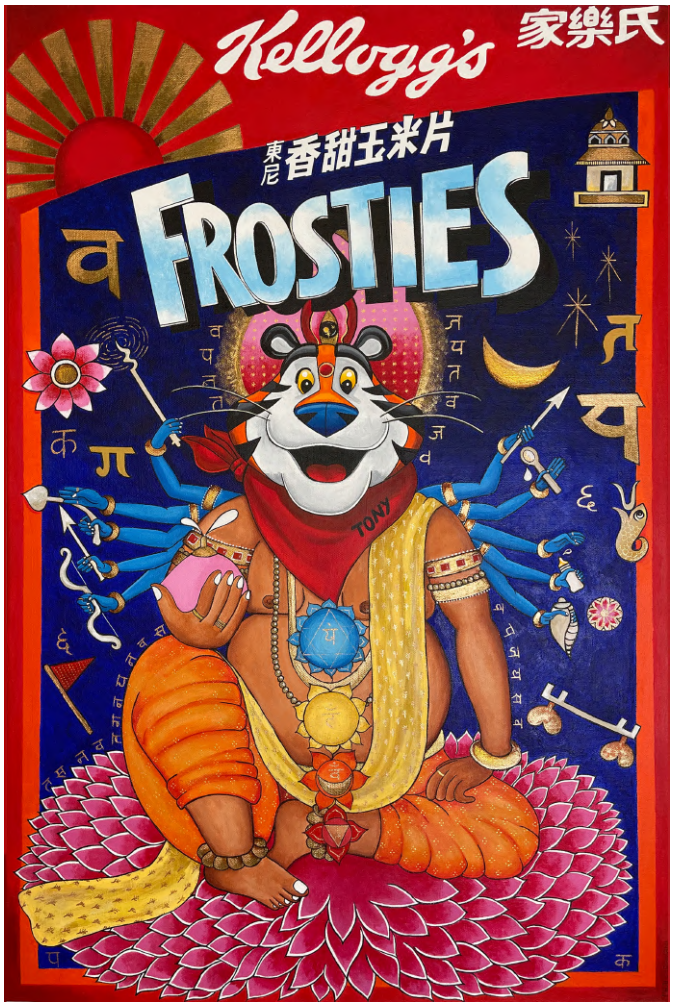

Figure 1
Riya Chandiramani, *Behind Every Man*, 2021.
Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 91.4 cm.
Image provided by the artist.

Left
Figure 2
Riya Chandiramani, *Where Do Babies Come From*, 2022.
Acrylic on wood with Perspex Box, 47 × 30.5 cm.
Image provided by the artist.

Right
Figure 3
Details on the back
Riya Chandiramani, *Where Do Babies Come From*, 2022.
Acrylic on wood with Perspex Box, 47 × 30.5 cm.
Image provided by the artist.

"Sail Forth": Tourism, Myth, and Postindustrial Regeneration in Titanic Belfast

Ye Xinyi

The Titanic Experience, Titanic Belfast, Belfast, permanent.

Located on Queen's land at the entrance of Belfast Lough once used for shipbuilder Harland and Wolff, Titanic Belfast is known as "Northern Ireland's signature tourism project and one of the most dramatic tourism projects" and received World Travel Award in 2017.[1] Advertised primarily on James Cameron's film *Titanic* (1997), the museum stands right at where the RMS Titanic was built. The plan was announced in 2005 to mark the centenary of RMS Titanic's maiden voyage in 1912 and attract tourists back to the derelict land after its industrial decline. Along with the *Game of Thrones* themed tour, Titanic Belfast has become one of the main tourist attractions in Belfast, which reflects its recent development in film and media industry. It has also become part of the Titanic Quarter, one of Europe's largest urban waterfront regeneration projects, which also includes Titanic Studios, luxury apartments, and riverside entertainment.

The insightful curation transformed the Titanic from popular culture into a motif that uncovers the maritime history and the rise and fall of economy of Northern Ireland. *Titanic* (1997) is central to the public outreach of the museum and is the main reason for tourists, including myself, to visit. Despite its explicit emphasis on the film as an eye-catcher in its advertisement strategy, the exhibition actually provides the viewers with a truthful and powerful sensory engagement in the real grandeur of RMS Titanic and its tragic sink. Signs related to the ship making history of Northern Ireland are significantly present in the museum architecture. The building, with its non-vertical angular lines and reflective metal surfaces, mimics the front of a huge ship sailing towards the sea (Fig. 1). The high-rising escalators in the tall empty atrium resemble the center of a cruise ship, but in an abstract and simplified form. In the interior, the man-made rusted walls present the postindustrial decay of its past glory.

To be frank, I expected Titanic Belfast to be another superficial simulacra featuring famous films as tourist attractions primarily due to spectacles on social media. In fact, quite unexpectedly, only one out of six galleries in the exhibition are about films. In the first section, *Boomtown Belfast*, tourists are carefully guided by photos and posters about the economic glory of 20th century Belfast. Juxtaposed are the tough living situation, abuses, and mistreatment of the laborers who constructed this maritime city. Though it was still criticized for overlooking the history of inequality, exploitation and violence of Catholic workers, this honesty and transparency to the historical truth adds to the depth and humanism to the exhibition.[2] Following this section is *The Shipyard*, a Disneyesque ride to the 20-meter-tall scaffold for the construction of Titanic (Fig. 2). Instead of replacing the experience inside the cruise, the ride takes viewers from a construction worker's perspective to the iron and fire of building this immense cruise. The voice narration and animated process of construction around reveal the excitement for this miracle and the exploitation behind.

After turning at a beautiful spot with a nice view of the harbor, the journey continues to unfold the history of the Titanic (Fig. 3). The display highlights original artefacts from the Titanic, including its brochures, a first-class ticket, the menu for the guests (which is surprisingly similar to the dinner I had in Belfast), as well as replicas of three classes of cabins (Fig. 4 & Fig. 5). Also, visitors can board SS Nomadic, a former tender built to transfer passengers and mails to and from the Titanic, and fully explore the ship. It not only presents fragments and traces of history but also provides an interactive and immersive experience of it. The most powerful part, however, is in *The Sinking*, where the telegram between the Titanic and other ships are printed in typewriter font on dark blue paper, with the background sounds of morse code (Fig. 6). Walking in the gallery towards the images of the sink, one can sense the desperation gradually creeping all over in the echoes of those calm narrations of survivors on their personal experiences. The engagement of sound truly heightens the emotional power. When unfolding the event, the curational statement

1 Titanic Belfast, "Experiences," accessed July 30, 2022, https://www.titanicbelfast.com/experiences/.

2 Ipek A. Celik Rappas, "From titanic to game of Thrones: Promoting Belfast as a Global media capital," *Media, Culture & Society* 41, no. 4 (2019), 8.

also stays critical in displaying the confusing or deceptive words by journalists of the time (Fig. 7). At the end of the exhibition, the Ocean Explore Centre draws the focus to marine biology, which expands the scope of exhibition beyond a human tragedy to ecology.

Truly as advertised, Titanic Belfast is a must-go exhibition in Northern Ireland. The cleverest idea of the curation is that the Titanic serves as a thread to unveil a broad picture of the maritime history and industrial development of Northern Ireland, rather than narrowing down to the event as a myth itself. It is not only about the ship, but also "the people and the city that made her, as the accumulation of artefacts constructs a broader sense of history."[3] After walking out, the clear view of the harbor opens up, and the present moment of the quiet seafront and the past of the tragedy overlap. While the the carefully selected excerpts of first-hand sources arouse the viewers' interest and empathy, they are also critical to the injustices in history and the exaggeration and confusion in the documentation of the tragedy itself, which makes the exhibition more judicious.

Designed as a leisure quarter for family gatherings to boost economy, Titanic Belfast is an example of Bilbao effect that boosts postindustrial local economy by combining art, architecture, tourism with lifestyle. It indeed attracts tourists by virtue of the myth or sign of the Titanic. However, considering the broad history that the exhibition unfolds, is it really problematic to promote the museum in such a seemingly superficial way? Modern culture of consumption, tourism is sign-drive anyways.[4] It marks the significant economic shift of Belfast, after the Good Friday agreement, from its declining shipbuilding industry to film, media, and tourism, but only time will tell if this is a sustainable economic structure to bring back glory to this post-industrial city.

For an art historian's perspective, it is a challenge to write an exhibition review for such a museum, which paradoxically uses this popular culture sign of the Titanic excessively while endeavors to unfold the truthful history. It can be easily written in the form of a travel log, like this essay does, but contemporary museums are primarily tourist-driven by nature. Are we naturally positioned as tourists, rather than art historians when we enter those museums? As the borderline between artefacts, historical records, and everyday life objects is more and more intangible, I hope that the curatorial practices of these "non-high-art" museums could be discussed more in future writings of art history.

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Figures

Figure 1
Outside of Titanic Belfast. Photo by Sze Chun Yuen Alex.

3 Titanic Belfast, "Experiences."

4 G.L. Watson and J.P. Kopachevsky, "Interpretations of tourism as commodity," *Annals of Tourism Research* 21 no. 3 (1994): 645, as cited in Pavlos Paraskevaidis and Adi Weidenfeld, "Sign consumption and sign promotion in visitor attractions: A netnography of the visitor experience in Titanic Belfast," *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 31 no.4 (2019): 1945.

Figure 2
The ride in *The Shipyard*. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

Figure 3
The view at the corner after the ride. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

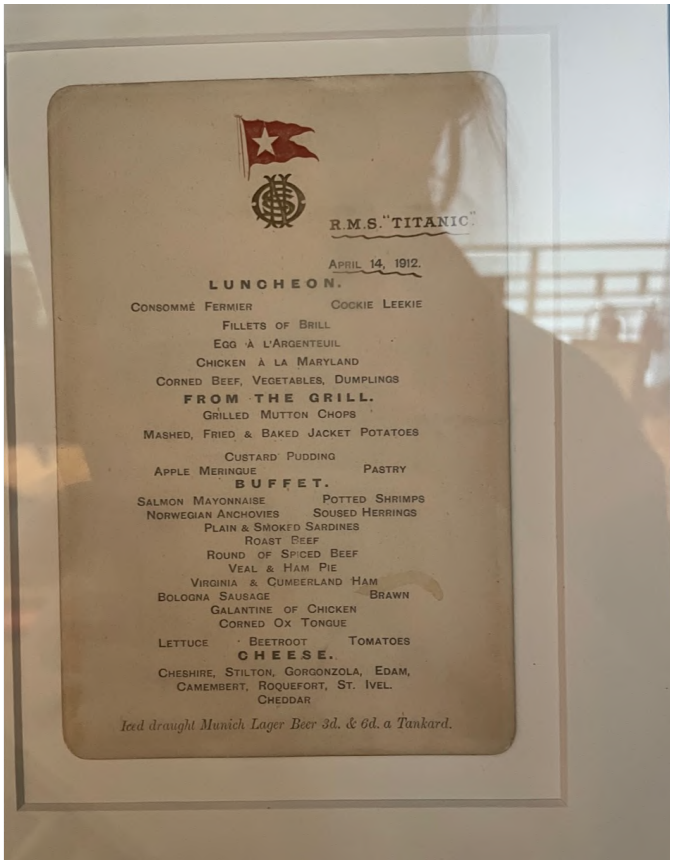

Figure 4
Menu on the Titanic. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

Figure 5
Reconstructed first-class cabin on RMS Titanic. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

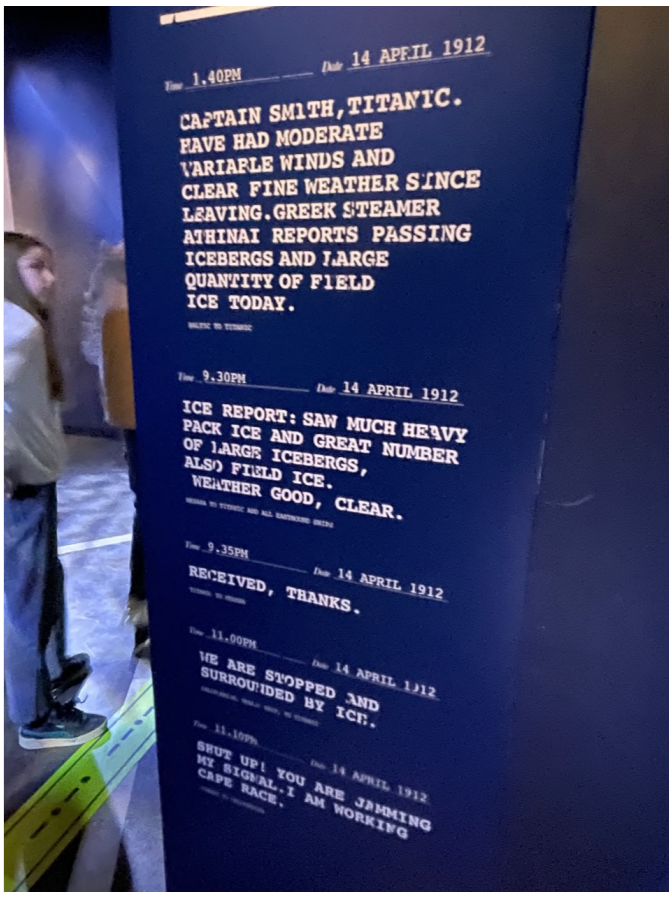

Figure 6
Morse code communication between RMS Titanic and other ships. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

Figure 7
Critical engagement to the historical record. Photo by Ye Xinyi.

Turner's Interpretation of His Modern World

Wu Yuxin Stella

Turner's Modern World, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston, March 27–July 10, 2022.

John Ruskin remarked, "modern landscape painters have looked at nature with totally different eyes, seeking not for what is easier to imitate, but for what is most important to tell."[1] This quote echoes one of Britain's greatest artists, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), who was praised as "a modern phenomenon in the art of landscape."[2] With life spanning the steam age, Napoleonic Wars, the expansion of British Empires with political reforms, Turner witnessed the gradual formation of modern time and embraced these changes with an innovative painting style. The exhibition *Turner's Modern World* explores how Turner embarked on updating the language of art and transforming his style and practice to produce revelatory interpretations of modern subjects.

Entering the first exhibition room entitled *Signs of the Time: Early Work*, viewers can perceive the spectacle of landscapes and industries and the spectrum of imagination and reality in Turner's early works. Fourteen-year-old Turner entered London's Royal Academy as a student in 1789, but the Academy's traditional approach contributed little to Turner's modern outlook. His 1805–6 grand oil painting *Fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen* serves as a distinguished illustration, in which Turner dedicated himself to modernizing Edmund Burke's concept of *Landscape Sublime* (Fig. 1).[3] In the foreground, *Fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen* showcases the contemporary local color of the Swiss Alps, depicting an ongoing human drama where a woman rushes to move her child away from a fight between two cart horses. However, as commented by John Ruskin, "Turner never drew anything that could be seen without having seen it."[4] With Turner's rough and expressive painting style, the human drama lies in its physical vulnerability as human beings are dwarfed by the overwhelming waterfall behind. Using flattening thick paint with a palette knife, Turner captured the driving force of the water, and the work's grand scale enhances the prominence of the white, foamy strokes, forming the rudiment of his modern painting technique.

Glimpses of modern life also appeared in Turner's exploration of the industrial sublimity, which serves as the counterpart of the sublimity in nature. After tours to Wales and northern England, where iron ore was mined and smelted, a handful of Turner's early drawings and watercolors demonstrate his fascination with industry, including *The Interior of a Cannon Foundry and Interior of a Forge: Making Anchors* (1797–8). Both watercolors depict dark, hot and noisy industrial spaces, again echoing Burke's definition of sublimity—"whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror." By capturing the spectacle of landscapes and industries in his modern world, Turner gradually developed an omnivorous visual appetite for new features and current affairs.

The subsequent sections further reveal multiple aspects of Turner's response to modern Britain's social and industrial reality. In the chamber of *War and Peace*, curators present Turner's recollections of pre-war, wartime, and aftermath to viewers. Apart from the broad time frame, he also reflected on miscellaneous people involved in the war, including war leaders such as Lord Nelson, Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington, as well as ordinary soldiers and civilians. With interior walls painted in dark blood red, the showroom displays Turner's works in the style of 19th-century London Royal Academy—with large-scale paintings hung eight feet high above the ground and smaller ones below (Fig. 2). Above the sizable works hang

1 Lorenz Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism, 1750–1850: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 236.

2 This praise comes from an 1854 Letter by the American landscape painter Robert S. Duncanson (1821–72). Wall text, *Turner's Modern World*, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts.

3 Edmund Burk's Landscape Sublime considers "the most efficient and efficacious cause of sublimity was fear or terror, an emotion which could be raised most efficiently by direct confrontation with nature." For a more concrete definition, see Gerald Finley, "The Genesis of Turner's 'Landscape Sublime'," *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 42, no. 2/3 (1979): 142.

4 Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism*, 238.

only empty frames, which might serve as a reminiscence of Art Heist in Boston, or as Schwartz comments, "a sly art-historical joke." This wall with dense installations reflects how Turner took pains to record modern military history by depicting distant history to allude to current campaigns, showcasing triumphant ships from different perspectives, or recording the aftermaths of war combined with his self-written epic poem, *The Fallacy of Hope*.

The third room, *Causes and Campaigns*, grants the viewers a bit of breathing space, with the most salient *The Slave Ship* occupying an entire wall (Fig. 3). This 1840 oil painting spanned across different periods. In the past, it alludes to 1781 atrocity on the slave ship *Zong*. In the present, it echoes in his epoch's current affairs that the British Empire ended the horrors of slavery. In the future, it continues its influential afterlife in contemporary works about Black Lives Matter, urging us to confront historical legacies of enslavement, exploitation and genocide. *The Slave Ship* thus serves as an epitome of how Turner "stood upon an eminence, letting every work of his hand be a history of the one, and a lesson to the other."[5] Shifting from geopolitical affairs to technology, *Steam and Speed* concentrates on Turner's pioneering treatment of steam technology, presenting how Turner followed his early interest in industrial advances until his later career, when he depicted steamboats and railways with a greater profundity.

The final gallery, *Modern Painter*, showcases both Turner's finished and unfinished works in the last decade of his career. While the guiding text attempts to attribute Turner's modernity to his painting techniques, it fails to wrap up the essence of the whole exhibition.[6] An underlying grander theme could be how Turner displayed the modernity of his world. Turner is characterized as a modern painter neither because his late works foreshadow modernism with their "impressionistic" or "abstract" qualities, nor because he is a proto-modernist validated by later artists and critics. His modernity exists in his ceaseless effort to respond to the current issues. In forms of sketch, oil painting and watercolor, Turner used his expressive brushstrokes to react to ongoing events such as Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840, French king Louis-Philippe's visit to Britain in 1844, and the 1848's revolt in Naples. As the idea of modern artists' individual engagement with modern experience had not yet taken root in Britain, Turner's responsiveness to current issues made him prominent among his contemporary painters. Moreover, instead of merely registering complex phenomena with his unique techniques, Turner also captured the spectator's interaction with the world as in his 1845's oil painting The Arrival of Louis-Philippe at the Royal Clarence Yard, Gosport. Turner's works thus have an additional meaning of "presence," which shows viewers' perception that shapes what they experience, rather than offering disciplined scrutiny of an unchanging nature. To capture the dynamism and modernity in this era of transformation, Turner did not turn to abstraction, but toward "a fusion of the concrete with the spiritual, the elemental and the sublime.[7]

To summarize, *Turner's Modern World* focuses on the facet of modernity in Turner's paintings as narration, presenting how Turner resolutely and consistently accommodated his paintings to an innovative age. With over 100 pieces of Turner's works, the exhibition clearly articulates its central theme: Instead of being a mere painter, Turner was also an interpreter who seemed to shoulder the responsibility to create images that speak for and define his epoch. Other sub-themes, such as Turner's seascape, are also appropriately intertwined, ultimately forming an informative and eye-popping feast for visitors who join the exhibition.

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5 Eitner, *Neoclassicism and Romanticism*, 240.

6 The guiding text on the room's wall ultimately concludes: "His exploration of color and loose brushwork anticipates later artistic movements, from the Impressionists in the 1870s to the Abstract Expressionists in the mid-20th century. In his final years, Turner expressed modernity not only in his choice of subjects, but also in his revolutionary approach to the very act of painting."

7 Ian Warrell and Franklin Kelly, *J.M.W. Turner* (London: Tate, 2007), 250.

Figures

Above Left
Figure 1
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen*, 1805–6.
Oil on canvas, 148×239 cm. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts. Photo by Wu Yuxin.

Below
Figure 2
Installation view of *Turner's Modern World* at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Photo by Wu Yuxin.

Above Right
Figure 3
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Slave Ship*, 1840.
Oil on canvas, 91×123 cm. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts. Photo by Wu Yuxin.

When History Involves in Contemporary Dialogue: Craftmenship and Design

Zheng Jingwen Jane[1]

The Quest for Originality: Contemporary Design and Traditional Craft in Dialogue, Hong Kong Palace Museum, Hong Kong, permanent.

The exhibition *The Quest for Originality: Contemporary Design and Traditional Craft in Dialogue* in the newly opened Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM) shows an endeavor to connect the past and the present, crafts and designs, by juxtaposing ancient art relics borrowed from the Beijing Palace Museum with Hong Kong local designers' responses. However, there is no clear definition for *design* and *craft* when this exhibition tries to bridge them together, and the exhibition's narration dubiously links *design* to the contemporary and *craft* to the tradition. As a result, the whole exhibition narration conflates the usage of both terms and generates the following issues: the definitions mix *design* and *craft* as long-existing activities with their modern appellations, and some artifacts are decontextualized to fit the exhibition's narration. As a result, while the exhibition intends to equally evaluate craft and design, only the latter becomes the focal point, showing no vital connection with ancient crafts.

As an opening to elicit the whole narrative, the first room does not provide coherent definitions of craft and design in their textual and conceptual division. The introduction text first points out that the etymology of *design* comes from eighteenth-century Europe, but long before the invention of the word *design*, Chinese craft had been maturely developed. Later, this exhibition mainly uses *craft* to describe objects from the past, even though sometimes its intent is to refer to the ancient *design*. This inappropriate wording seems to be the default mode of this exhibition to which design has a modern connotation, while craft belongs only to the tradition or the past. Such an impression is the result of an intermixing of the two terms as both practices and theoretical terms. It should be noted that not only *design* as a word has its modern origin, but also *craft*, describing a category or discipline, only became widely used after 1888 in Britain.[2] Ultimately, both *design* and *craft* as human activities should not be limited to a certain period, given that the actual action they describe existed long before these words emerged. Rather forcibly, this exhibition uses *design* as a modern word while using *craft* as a practice from ancient times, attempting to justify its intention to highlight the difference between periods.

Apart from this problematic binary temporal relationship, the first room also fails to give a precise definition of how the exhibition sees *craft* as a practice. Instead, it begins to illustrate four important creative principles of contemporary design in the wall text, such as modern design needs to value the beauty of nature. Then the curators place several showcases exhibiting ancient crafts in the shape of mythical beasts and waterfowl next to this part of the text to visualize this point (Fig. 1), indicating that contemporary design principles have long been present in craft-making. However, this comparison is not based on a clear definition of craft. According to the art historian Larry Shiner, there are two different sets of definitions for craft as a practice today. Some institutions and art critics, such as The American Craft Museum who changed its name to the Museum of Arts and Design, regard craft as a lower-ranked abject of art because it is considered a means-ends process.[3] On the other hand, some celebrate craft as it absorbs young craft-makers' innovative "do-it-yourself" attitude into the field.[4] The first (and the most common) idea sees craft-making as a repeatable process that can be separated from the design, whereas the second treats craft-making as creative studio work that acknowledges the artisans as both designers and producers. Paradoxically, the exhibition uses the second definition of craft as creative work to compare the crafts' *design* to contemporary design principles but regards craft and design as two separate parts from the beginning.

Carrying the confusion made by the first room and

1 Special thanks to the editors, Lan Chang, Wang Ding Ocean, and Ye Xinyi, for their good comments and dedicated editing.

2 Larry Shiner, " 'Blurred Boundaries'? Rethinking the Concept of Craft and Its Relation to Art and Design," *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 4 (2012): 232–233.

3 Shiner, "'Blurred Boundaries'," 230–231.

4 Shiner, "'Blurred Boundaries'," 231.

continuing the trip, the second room imitates a "time tunnel," visualizing the genealogy of Chinese craftsmanship tradition. However, this display method risks the original historical contextualization, as it takes one of the displayed objects out of its original historical context and forces it to fit into the exhibition's narration. With walls covered with excerpts from ancient literature from Western Zhou Dynasty (1047–772 BCE) to Qing Dynasty (1636–1911), the room presents the achievements and inventions made by Chinese artisans. Overall, the wall text tries to impress viewers with the continuing historical narrative of Chinese craft-making, which leaves precious practical experiences forming a rich treasury for contemporary designers to explore. In the center of the tunnel, the most significant work, *The Mixed Glass with Flaring Mouth* 攪玻璃撇口瓶 (Fig. 2) was a masterpiece produced by the Imperial Glass Workshop 玻璃廠 in the Qianlong 乾隆 period (r.1736–1796).[5] Unlike traditional Chinese patterns with auspicious decoration such as dragons and phoenixes, this glassware has a geometric design, reminding us contemporary viewers of a barber's pole. Together with the wall text, this glassware reiterates the artisans' mastery at the pinnacle of ancient Chinese craft-making and expresses the influence of the long-inherited design ideas generated by the intelligent Chinese ancestors. Yet, the history behind this work puts a question mark on the attempt to present it inside this narration. In fact, this craft was based on modern Western design and glass-making techniques. The birthplace of this glassware, the Imperial Glass Workshop, was established with the help primarily of German missionaries.[6] They arrived in China shortly after the ease of *haijin* 海禁 policy, with international trading recovered in 1684.[7] Later, Venice-originated filigrana glass 纏絲玻璃 was introduced to China, which transformed into a new type of glassware called mixed glass 攪玻璃.[8] Nevertheless, the second room omits the rich historical context behind this modern-looking object. Although mixed glass was modified in China, its pattern is doubtful to reflect anything related to the ancient design, but more like exotic foreign curio to please the emperor. Curators now try to surprise the audiences by using this work without unveiling its historical background.

After the tunnel, the largest chamber of the exhibition demonstrates how material culture flourished in ancient China, and how contemporary Hong Kong local artisans respond to this craft-making tradition. The strength about this part is that some glass cases in the corridor holds the raw materials, semi-finished pieces, and craft-making tools (Fig. 3 & Fig. 4). By showing the often-invisible process, this area attracts the audiences by demystifying the production of the flawless final products. Next to these glass cases are clips of recorded interviews with local artisans who provided these tools for this exhibition.[9] Though in different life stages, these artisans all become supportive narrators to illustrate the traditional way of making crafts by hand, and their intimacy with materials does not change. For instance, Law Chi Kwong and Kwan Hung Fai, the older generations working in the Hong Kong craft industry for decades, modestly remark that they do not consider themselves as artists, but merely successors to inherit craft-making techniques. Altogether, the artisans address mostly practical issues, such as a sense of duty to develop the industry and cultivate newcomers, worries about the inheritance of traditional craft-making techniques during the recession in the craft-making industry.

The exhibition ends with a colossal screen that occupies a whole wall (Fig. 5), playing interview videos of four representative contemporary designers in Hong Kong.[10] This final room hits a weak note to end its narrative. While interviews with the artisans in the previous room highlight the inheritance of techniques, designers in the last room rise to stardom by illustrating their connection with the traditional interest of Chinese literati and how they borrow and adjust ancient visual elements to their designs. Their voices fail to echo with the artisans' and make this part somewhat isolated. Each video inside is conceptual, using visually pleasant images, elegant music, and highly abstract but vague terms such as "beauty" and "harmony," which make the presentation mysteriously eulogizing, as designers are closer to a superior kind of "art." Those who stick to craft making shown in the previous room are instead presented as antiquarians, though not intentionally. This hidden and obscure comparison reminds us of the first attitude Shiner observed in many art institutions, that is, to see craft as the inferior, which seems to conflict with the original intention of this exhibition.

In conclusion, although this exhibition tries to present its arguments in a conversation between ancient crafts and contemporary design rather than passively juxtaposing all the artefacts, it fails to generate a cogent narration to demonstrate their exact interrelation. There is never a clear and coherent definition of the two essential terms, *craft* and *design*. Instead, this exhibition only uses *design* as a modern term and *craft* as a long-existing activity to prove their temporal attribution to different periods. The incoherence in definition makes the subsequent narration

5 Zhang Rong 張榮, *Luster of Autumn Water: Glass of the Qing Imperial Workshop* (Beijing: The Forbidden City Publishing House, 2005), 24.

6 Zhang, *Luster of Autumn Water*, 14.

7 Shi Zhihong 史志宏, "China's Overseas Trade Policy and Its Historical Results: 1522–1840," in *Intra-Asian Trade and the World Market*, ed. A.J.H. Latham and Heita Kawakatsu (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 9.

8 Zhang, *Luster of Autumn Water*, 14.

9 They are Dr. Sunny Wong, Ho Lok, Law Chi Kwong, Kwan Hung Fai, and Wong Hoi Cheung.

10 They are Kai-Yin Lo, Kan Tai-keung, Lo Chi Wing, and *anothermountainman*.

even more confusing, as the second room neglects the cross-cultural background of the central exhibit as a craft. Although the exhibition generates an effect celebrating its unconventional design and quality, it does not trace the whole historical context of how this design appeared. The final room eventuated as celebrating or advertising Hong Kong's local "star" designers, which makes this section unnaturally forced in its connection with the whole exhibition. Altogether, the exhibition consists of many high-quality and attractive ancient crafts, but its narrative has a strong sense of patchwork, and the emphasis on localization is somewhat deliberate.

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Figures

Figure 1
Some of the crafts in the first chamber that imitate animals. Photo by Zheng Jingwen.

Figure 2
The Mixed Glass with Flaring Mouth in the "time tunnel"connecting the first and the second chambers. Photo by Zheng Jingwen.

Left
Figure 3

Right
Figure 4
Raw material, semi-finished products and tools used in the production of glass and sculpture, borrowed from the artists who also introduced the craft-making technique in the related videos, with an introduction. Photo by Zheng Jingwen.

Figure 5
In the last room, audiences are listening attentively. Photo by Zheng Jingwen.

Book Review

The Image on the Wall

Wang Ding Ocean

Norman Bryson. *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990. 192 pp.; 65 color ills., 11 b/w. Price: $25.

Readers may find this title reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall*, in which the female narrator in her living room contemplates how "the masculine point of view" governs women's lives by imposing itself as a standard.[1] Rather ironically, by the end of this piece, a male voice informs her that the mark on the wall is in fact a snail. Similarly, we ask: What is the image on the wall? Why is it ever there in someone's house? In *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, Norman Bryson answers these questions by putting the history of the table under the spotlight, sharing Woolf's rumination over a seemingly trivial subject with a feminist critique.

As stated in his introduction, this four-essay book aims "not just to settle for the inherited discussion but to try to move that discussion into our own time and to ask what still life might mean, for us now."[2] Bryson eventually champions the still life as a node of the grand historical narrative and our mundane, creatural existence, two conditions he describes with Charles Sterling's terms 'megalography' and 'rhopography.' While some of his arguments deserve more challenges from our time, many others can still inspire the critical discourse within art history.

In the first essay, *Xenia*, Bryson reviews the decorative scheme in ancient Rome to highlight the issues of representation and power. His analysis starts from the texts of images. While paintings mentioned in these texts are lost in antiquity, they still hint at a mode of seeing that divides nature and culture. In Philostratus' *Imagines*, a local art historical guidebook for Roman students, one mural translates the cultural interaction between the host and guests into food, which originates from nature. Another wall painting reverses the dynamic by showcasing how the prey becomes processed by human hands for later consumption. Following this thread, Bryson brings up a story of competition between two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasios, in *Natural History*. Staged in a theater, this story has a narrative device that ultimately blends nature with culture. Bryson then wraps up his analyses in the first half of this essay with *The Republic*, emphasizing how paintings, in the simulation of the Idea and material reality, can cross different boundaries.

As such, Bryson echoes the culture-nature division as he moves to discuss how power manifests itself in the representation of specific scenes in murals. Perhaps aware that his re-representation of paintings based on text alone is somewhat problematic, in the second half of *Xenia*, he shifts his focus to surviving images in Campania, a small town in Southern Italy. Together, these images are on the wall to blur the boundary between the exterior and interior, nature and culture. The wall paintings also reflect the taste of aristocrats and imperial patrons in tribute to the Greek model. With sufficient material wealth, the upper-class Roman viewers have the power to control and define reality. Even the wall paintings they patronize could absorb and resituate the original religious meanings of murals in Greece into Roman patterns of consumption. Transcending from the content, the mural as a medium becomes a transition from the artificial to the natural.

In the second essay *Rhopography*, Bryson challenges the predominance of power in *Xenia*. He proposes a second mode of seeing that reverses the traditional hierarchy: It focuses on the overlooked—our routine and domestic life, instead of the unique, heroic narratives. As in the case of all binaries, routine life defines itself in the presence of greatness. By guiding the viewer's attention to the everyday, these still life paintings, in their lack of individual drama, are on the wall with the potential to overturn the dominance of megalography. In the example of Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560–1627), Bryson suggests there is little human presence in his larder (cantarero) still life. To Cotán, who lived a monastic life, painting itself was a ritual-like discovery, utterly reverent to the creation of God. In comparison, the ceramics depicted by Francisco

1 Virginia Woolf, "The Mark on the Wall," in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), 77–83.

2 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 7.

de Zurbarán (1598–1664) evoke the familiar touch of the human hand, but with the strong chiaroscuro shading, they appear fragmentary, alien to our vision. Regardless of their differences, these two artists share an ambition to position still life to a comparable level to religious paintings.

Unlike the Spanish approach, Caravaggio inherited the prospect of *Xenia* in his theatrical artworks. Bryson attributes such theatricality to what Stephen Bann suggests as 'presentation,' in which the paintings distance themselves from the real world and reinvent another set of reality within the frame. Cubism finds such a capacity to be useful, as it seeks to isolate a purely aesthetic space under the consciousness of artists. Entirely out of its practical function, all kinds of food make their way into the painting as signs from the real world. Bryson then introduces the final solution for a trade-off between the grand and the trivial—being nonchalant. Chardin (1699–1779), for example, pays equal attention (or inattention) to each brushstroke in his still life. The blurry effect of his paintings fits into the discussion of vision mechanism at his time, once again returning our vision to a creatural level. All these artists embody the conflict between rhopography and megalography, and it seems there is no middle ground or possibility to compromise.

Before tackling the grand-trivial conflicts, in the third essay, Bryson turns away to examine the role of consumption in still life production. Entitled *Abundance*, this chapter focuses on the seventeenth-century Dutch still-life. With the oversupply from prosperous trading, the Dutch found themselves wrestling with the moral implication of lavish consumption. Paintings of homemaking, flowers, and meals in the Netherlands were hung on the wall to help this thinking process. Bryson divides the domestic scenes into paintings of order and disorder: while the former promotes the ethical codes of families, which justify the sumptuousness enjoyed by the household, that of disorder expresses its anxiety over consumption, though itself was one of the very products. These paintings with human action hint at varying degrees of affluence at the time, contemplating how to understand the plethora of material possessions.

In parallel to the homemaking scenes, Bryson retrieves the nature-culture divide in the still life of flowers and vanitas, but builds up tension by examining the consumption of these self-contradictory paintings per se. In the Dutch tradition, flower paintings are usually a miscellany of diverse types in full blossom, drawn from the vast colonial network and expanding economic spaces, which cannot be possible without human operation. The exchange of cash as well as the scientific accuracy made both the subject matter and the paintings loaded with values, not only monetary but also intellectual. The same applies to vanitas, paintings that signify the brevity of life, but turn out to be more ironic. The motifs of vanity in these paintings are replicas in verisimilitude, to the degree of substitutes, of their originals. The more realistic they look, the more indulgent they can be to the viewers. Bryson proposes such an internal paradox as the "fundamental semiotic structure" of the still life,[3] where the signified and the signifier contradict. Only in such contradiction can the transcendental truth, such as *memento mori*, reveal itself.

So far, megalography and rhopography never come into dialogues on the same picture plane, but in the fourth essay, *Still Life and 'Feminine Space,'* they finally reunite. Deemed as waste, objects in the still-life had a hold of familiarity to viewers as part of our cultural memory. Their everlasting shapes have a solid presence in history, which in some ways are the imperishable version of megalography. Some artists are even bolder in juxtaposing the two into one scene, just as Velázquez did in *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (Fig. 1). Contrary to such a grand title, it seems the two ordinary women in a kitchen matter more in the foreground, while the resurrection of Lazarus went unnoticed in the corner as an image on the wall. The spatial separation reminds us that the great and the mundane either never collide, or are always one, in the miracle of God.

Aware of the intricate relationship of all the binaries he has examined thus far, Bryson concludes that these divisions are all cultural constructs. Culture for a long time preferred to celebrate heroic individuals, which are usually male. The female sex, confined in the household routines such as the two in Velázquez's painting, gains little justice and attention from history. Under a patriarchal ideology, the space within the still-life is women's domain: domestic, near to our body, trivial. The genre itself is also the most appropriate for women artists, according to the male-dominated canon. But as Bryson points out, the domestic space under the hands of male artists, and women's position in the hierarchy of artmaking, carry a sting of irony as they are "imagined through the values of the 'greater' existence from which they were excluded."[4] The subjects in paintings and the female artists under critique register little agency.

To build on that, I assume it would be more provocative if Bryson had indeed turned his attention to women still life painters, the truly overlooked. In the last chapter, though he gives them credits for the sheer volume and excellency of their works, not much of these artworks goes into his list of illustrations, let alone analysis. Without going too far into the debate about how problematic the gender binary itself is, I imagine it would be more intriguing to cast new light on both sexes with a more balanced weight under Bryson's razor-sharp analysis. Possible questions for new directions are: In the works of female still-life artists, is there a similar sense of 'the uncanny,' as Bryson quotes from

3 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 150.
4 Bryson, 178.

Figure 1
Dieogo Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, c. 1618.
Oil on Canvas, 60 × 103.5 cm. London, National Gallery. Bequeathed by Sir William H. Gregory, 1892.

Freud? Do they have a slightly different semiotic structure? What do they say about the conflict between megalography and rhopography? How do women art critics and scholars view and react to the position of still life in the hierarchy of arts? These hovering questions are the internal paradox of *Looking at the Overlooked*. They guide us to ponder on the mission suggested by the book title, about how we position ourselves in viewing the image on the wall—after all, we may as well be trapped in a similar living room as Woolf's narrator does, but this time we can at least stand up and observe the snail by ourselves.

In conclusion, though the four chapters in *Looking at the Overlooked* seem to be relatively independent, they are still connected by shared concepts and progressive logical links. It is best to understand these essays as the layers of a sphere, each nearer to the core of analysis than the previous one. In Bryson's inquiry about still life paintings, which are conventionally petty and unremarkable, he muses over the issue of representation, the word-image relationship, the culturally constructed nature of dichotomy, and gender ideology. With his crisp, elaborate proses, he pushes the readers to think again about the connotations of still life, and reflect more on the past of art canon.

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Lineage of Eccentricity: A Kōrin-Kenzan Pottery Collaboration as the Nexus

Katsushika Hokusai II

1. Introduction

Rinpa, or the Kōrin School, is usually considered to embody the decorative nature of traditional Japanese art. The attributed Rinpa founder, Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716), as well as two of his most identified predecessors, Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558–1637) and Tawaraya Sōtatsu (c. 1570–c. 1640), is most renowned for paintings that feature motifs such as flowers, deer, and famous local places. While art historians have long centered around these artworks to celebrate their ornamental aesthetics, other Rinpa practices only seem to receive attention in recent years, one of which being the pottery-making collaboration between Kōrin and his younger brother Kenzan (1663–1743). In this paper, I will examine a pair of plates depicting the Zen monks Kanzan and Jittoku made by the brothers to discuss their transmedia endeavor.

Relevant scholarly discussion about the Kōrin-Kenzan collaboration on ceramics has focused on family history, brotherly love, and the production technique. Combining these attempts, I argue that the Ogata brother's collaboration is symbiotic with various interconnected elements in the Genroku era (1688–1704). For Kōrin and Kenzan, their personal history and social context are interwoven, which guides them onto a life path they might have never imagined. The pair of plates made by the brother can be not only a witness to their ups and downs in life, but also a nexus that builds a lineage of eccentricity, particularly with Kōetsu and Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828). As such a lineage is not commonly attached to Rinpa, I hope to challenge the past interpretation which limits this school of artists in the decorative mode, and shed new light on their heterogeneous artistic practices.

2. The Context of Production: Personal and History

Before turning to the artwork, it is worth reviewing the personal life and social context that eventually led the Ogata brothers to collaborate as artists. Kōrin and Kenzan were born as the second and third sons when their family textile business was still prosperous with the lavish patronage mainly from Tōfukumon-in (1607–78), a consort of the emperor.[1] Because of its material wealth, the Ogata family occupied a social status called city merchants (*machishū* 町衆). The political and economic regulation over this social class made it a cultural rebel against the Tokugawa authority, as *machishū* could only invest its resources in culture and aesthetics.[2] Naturally, Sōken (1621–87), the patriarch of the Ogata house and a cultured man himself, cultivated Kōrin and Kenzan with Nō drama, Chinese and Japanese literature, as well as the Kano school artistic training.[3] While both Kōrin and Kenzan lived a carefree early life, pursuing art more as a hobby than a serious career option, they develop different personalities: Kōrin is a libertine spending his money on Nō drama and pleasure quarters.[4] Kenzan, on the other hand, is an introspective Sinophile devoting himself to practicing Chinese literati values and behaviors, which made an appeal to live an idealized but eccentric reclusion life (*insei* 隠栖; *inton* 隠遁).[5]

However, the death of Tōfukumon-in in 1678 brought the family fortune to an end, which preceded the death of Sōken for nearly a decade.[6] Their death resulted in a definitive twist for the brothers' career. It is also an epitome of social changes that occurred to the upper-tier in that ten years, with court patronage dwindling and the samurai class running out of money to pay their loans to *machishū*.[7] After the declining family business was passed to the eldest

1 Masahiko Kawahara, *The Ceramic Art of Ogata Kenzan*, trans. Richard L. Wilson (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd. and Shibundo, 1985), 53–54.
2 Kawahara, *Ceramic Art of Ogata Kenzan*, 54.
3 Frank Feltens, *Ogata Kōrin: Art in Early Modern Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 2–5.
4 Feltens, *Ogata Kōrin*, 17–25.
5 For Kenzan's character, see Kawahara, *The Ceramic Art*, 54. For the life of reclusion, see a more detailed discussion in W. Puck Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness: Eccentricity and Madness in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 25.
6 Kawahara, *Ceramic Art of Ogata Kenzan*, 53–54.
7 Kawahara, 53–54.

son, Kōrin and Kenzan departed with their inheritance of estates, money, and cultural mementos. The life of the brothers seemed to be vastly parted as they followed their early life traces, albeit both strived to establish themselves as artists. Kenzan under the Chinese influence adopted a rather deviant lifestyle of hermitage near a mountain in northwestern Kyoto, changing his birth name into Shinsei, literally meaning 'deep reflection.' Thanks to his physical proximity to a master kiln in front of the Ninnaji temple, Kenzan learned a great deal about ceramics and eventually built his first kiln in 1699.[8] Nevertheless, his first take on the career seemed to exhaust rather than build up his inherited fortune. In parallel, while Kōrin in the 1701 Edo made his name as a *hokkyo*, a title attributed to high-profile artists nationwide, he continued his playboy living style, which led to an illicit love scandal, eventually costing him almost all his inheritance.[9] It was until 1709 when Kōrin returned to Kyoto that the brothers crossed their paths again to solve their financial problems, and they figured out the way to do it was through collaboration, namely Kōrin painting the pottery made by Kenzan.[10] The mingling of economic, political, and cultural elements eventually yielded the production of this pair of plates, which I will turn to in the next section.

3. Transmedia Endeavor: an Analysis of the Plates

Carrying the history of its producers in a changing time, the pair of plates under analysis epitomizes the personality of artists as well as its various sources of inspiration. Mimicking the quality of poem cards (*shikishi* 色紙), the plates have a flat and square shape, with a paper-like yellowish undertone. Though it is not clear whether these two plates were made together, they still exhibit certain symmetry in composition. The plates contain the images of two Zen monks from the Tang Dynasty, namely Kanzan and Jittoku. Accompanied by their own poems, these two figures demonstrate the bold and confident artistic hand of Kōrin. Kōrin's signatures, at the bottom left and right respectively, are *Seisei* 青々 and *Jakumei* 寂明. Kōrin adopted these two pseudonyms following his brother's advice, an act that shows their brotherly love and the reciprocal construction of their professional identities.[11] The pseudonyms also help date the piece roughly to 1709.[12]

The *shikishi* format is an attempt to combine painting and calligraphy. Inscribed with poems, *shikishi* is traditionally pasted onto painted screens or albums.[13] It is a classical practice within Rinpa, as Kōetsu and Sōtatsu produced some for tea gatherings (e.g., Fig. 1).[14] Being a devoted potter artist, Kenzan takes a step further by transforming the paper medium into his signature ceramic type called *kakuzara* 角皿, probably used for sweets or portions of food.[15] He uses the techniques of iron underglaze and white slip to facilitate delicate surface decoration for Kōrin: The iron oxide-bearing pigment, imitating Kōrin's diffuse ink washes, sits atop the white slip, which covers the foundation clay. Then an extra layer of a transparent glaze will be applied above the pigment to yield a translucent quality for the ceramics.[16]

With such a solid technological foundation, the figures of Kanzan and Jittoku appear vivid and lively on the ceramics. While these two Zen monks have been popular motifs in Japan for their distinguished eccentricity and the enlightened nature underneath, Kenzan, well exposed to Chinese paintings and manuals, may also come across their original looks in printed illustrated manuals such as *Marvelous Traces of Daoist Immortals and Buddhist Masters* (*Senbutsu kisō* 仙佛奇踪), which documents the life of these two mythical recluses.[17] The story goes that these two Zen masters with divine qualities live together by scavenging left food from a nearby temple, pursuing freedom and inner peace.[18]

Rendered in a deliberately abstract and stylized manner, these two characters appear ageless and cartoonish on the plates. In an almost empty background, only a few

8 Kawahara, *The Ceramic Art*, 51.

9 Feltens, *Ogata Kōrin*, 17–18.

10 The dating of the Kōrin-Kenzan collaboration is still under scholarly debate. As noted by Hiroshi Mizuo and several others, the artistic collaboration started in 1699, when Kenzan opened his first kiln. But Feltens suggests that while they started to help each other sometimes between 1699 and 1701, it is only about logistics. Only when Kōrin returned to Kyoto in 1709 that their artistic collaboration began. For Mizuo, see Hiroshi Mizuo, *Edo Painting: Sotatsu and Korin*, trans. John M. Shields (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1978), 143–4. For Feltens, see *Ogata Kōrin*, 144. Given that Feltens proposes this dating based on newer evidence, I adopt his in this paper.

11 Feltens, *Ogata Kōrin*, 144.

12 Feltens, 146.

13 Feltens, 147.

14 John T. Carpenter, *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 14, 62.

15 Richard L. Wilson, *The Potter's Brush: The Kenzan Style in Japanese Ceramics* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 62.

16 Kawahara, *The Ceramic Art*, 68–70.

17 John T. Carpenter, *Designing Nature*, 88. Carpenter suggests that Sōtatsu atelier and his followers may be quite familiar with books such as this.

18 Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa, *Zen Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, trans. Andreas Leisinger (Zürich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1996), 142.

washes at the bottom indicate that they are in the wild. Kanzan, identified by the scroll held in his hand, occupies the bottom left of the picture plane. He wears an ambiguous smile hinted by a slight twist of his mouth, eyes seemingly peering at his own poem at the top right: "I live in the mountain, with no one knowing my presence. Amidst the clouds, I am in solitude." A similar composition is reiterated in the Jittoku plate. Holding a broom in his hand, Jittoku looks up to the poem at the top left corner. As he faces back at the viewer, his expression is also ambiguous, but the color tonal gradation on his face is not as distinctive as Kanzan's. Jittoku's poem is longer than his companion: "Always called as Foundling, my name is not by chance. Without any other relatives, Kanzan is my only brother. Our minds resonate, our emotions deviant. [If anyone asks] 'How old are you'? [I will reply] 'How many times has the Yellow River turned limpid'?" Kenzan may empathize with these two figures on their shared pursuit of spiritual freedom and individuality, and it is worth noting that his pseudonym Kenzan coincides with a similar phonetics to that of Kanzan. The extracted two poems can also be a reference to Kenzan's own brotherly bond with Kōrin, for they, too, struggle to earn a living and go through life hardships as each other's witnesses and supporters.

To conclude, the choice of subject matter can be a direct expression of Kenzan's identity as a Sinophile hermit, while it also hits the keynote of eccentricity popularly pursued by Rinpa artists. The balanced composition between imagery and calligraphy signifies the equal importance of Kōrin and Kenzan in the production. In this pair of plates as in many other collaborations, the brothers actively make references to past practices within and outside the artistic lineage they identify with, and are brave enough to transcend traditional media to achieve their own creative ambition. Their boundary-crossing act would later become an inspiration for future artists, which reinforces their critical position in the genealogy of eccentricity.

4. Before and After: a Nexus in the Genealogy of Eccentricity

Albeit the pair of plates are decorative in the sense that artists paint descriptively on the tableware, it inherits more legacy from the Kōetsu-Sōtatsu production and inspires later Rinpa artists such as Sakai Hōitsu. Nevertheless, I do not suggest that the artistic trace of eccentricity is a linear one. Instead, as Lillehoj points out, premodern Japan developed a cyclical time model, where the past is integral to the present, and the future can reiterate what is before it.[19] Following this model, I argue that Kōrin and Kenzan's cooperation incarnated in this pair of plates serves as one of the interlocking layers in Rinpa history. Though Kōrin and Hōitsu both consciously construct a sense of continuity with the past, their ideas of art marketing and self-invention are not what some consider to be modern subjectivity.[20] It is more an art-historical awareness to situate themselves in a more advantageous position to confront the changing social order.[21]

For Kōrin and Kenzan, they are familiar with Kōetsu due to their family connection and artistic practices. They share a distant bond by blood, as the Ogata great-grandfather married Kōetsu's sister.[22] Politically, both the Ogata family and Kōetsu built a relationship with Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the rival of Tokugawa Ieyasu, which made them the political outcast once Ieyasu established his reign in 1603.[23] Intended to remove Kōetsu from any further political participation, Ieyasu in 1615 granted Kōetsu a marginal area in Kyoto named Takagamine,[24] which later developed as an artistic hub—Kenzan would eventually inherit a cottage there and build his first kiln nearby.[25] Hence, a pursuit of independent artistic expression is very much a family tradition for Kōrin and Kenzan under Tokugawa's censorship and political dominance.

The Ogata brothers are also connected with Sakai Hōitsu, the successor and revivalist of this eccentric lineage. Five generations before Hōitsu, the head of the Sakai family endowed Kōrin with notable employment as an artist and naturally collected many of his works.[26] The family collection then inspired Hōitsu to study and commemorate Kōrin, as he eventually exhibited and compiled works by the two brothers on the centennial of Kōrin's death, among which are books such as *Kōrin hyakuzu* 光琳百図 (One hundred works by Kōrin) and *Kenzan iboku* 乾山遺墨 (Paintings and calligraphy by the late Kenzan).[27] In the meantime, Hōitsu is no less eccentric than his Rinpa

19 Elizabeth Lillehoj, "Introduction," in *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600-1700*, ed. Elizabeth Lillehoj (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 10.
20 Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness*, 17.
21 Lillehoj, "Introduction," 11.
22 Mizuo, *Edo Painting*, 80.
23 The Ogata great-grandfather Dohaku was said to be a retainer of Asai Nagamasa, whose daughter became the mistress in Hideyoshi family, while Kōetsu himself is Hideyoshi's former retainer. For Dohaku, see Ibid. For Kōetsu, see Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness*, 42.
24 Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness*, 42.
25 Kawahara, *Ceramic Art of Ogata Kenzan*, 53.
26 Feltens, *Ogata Kōrin*, 128–9.
27 Yūzo Yamane, "The Formation and Development of Rimpa Art," in *Rimpa Art: From the Idemistsu Collection, Tokyo* (London: The British Museum Press, 1998), 44.

forebears, for he also withdrew from official life to join a monastery, but finally quit it in the pursuit of leisure and aesthetics.[28]

Therefore, the three generations of Rinpa artists construct their lineage of eccentricity with similar elements: political ostracism, aesthetic pursuit, and a constant awareness of interpreting the past. All three generations can be viewed as the social dropout of their time, with their distinct individualities contributing to a much more diverse artistic spectrum than traditional interpretation.

5. Conclusion: More than a Decorative Mode

Rinpa, traditionally considered a school of artists that excels in their decorative paintings, is in fact a later construct primarily in Meiji Japan.[29] Since then, the scholarly attention on Rinpa artists has rested on its decorative attempt, while the nuanced aspects under cover of decoration are downplayed. This paper aims to challenge the previous understanding by discussing the lineage of eccentricity within Rinpa. While the Kōrin-Kenzan collaboration on pottery still has an ornamental nature by painting on utilitarian wares, some of the select motifs such as the Zen masters discussed in this paper have an undertone of individuality and eccentricity that connects three generations of artists in this school. The transmedia collaboration is a nexus of this lineage, but it is by no means the only one in the spectrum. We still need deeper reflection on our rather linear understanding of Rinpa art, if not Japanese art in general, which in fact has the potential to question an underlying hierarchy of representation that trivializes decoration in visual culture.

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28 Brecher, *The Aesthetics of Strangeness*, 18.

29 Yamane, "The Formation and Development of Rimpa Art," in *Rimpa Art*, 13.

Figure

Figure 1
Hon'ami Kōetsu (calligraphy) and attr. Tawaraya Sōtatsu (underpainting), *Poem by Kamo no Chōmei with Underpainting of Cherry Blossoms*, 1606.
7 15/16 × 7 in. (20.2 × 17.8 cm). Ink, gold, and silver on paper.

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Harry G. C. Packard Collection of Asian Art, Gift of Harry G. C. Packard, and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick, and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and The Annenberg Fund Inc. Gift, 1975.

Research Article

Narrating an Ambiguous Dream: Diminishing Border between Private and Public in *Woman Plucking Flowers* (1994)

Lan Chang

1. Introduction

Narrating pictures is perhaps one of the most frequent acts throughout Indian history, from Pata-Chitra tales to Hamzanama paintings, even to Ramayana TV series. All heroic legends require storytellers: the Patua artisans, Mughal courtesans, or Doordarshan actors and actresses, to re-enact the legendary plots and complete the pictorial representation with their speech. The word *narrate* then raises the following questions: Who is the agent of the narrating act? Who is the recipient/addressee? What kind of stories are narrated? What is the impact of this narration, allegorical, memorial, or even political?

In the following sections, I would argue that Arpita Singh provides her own answers to the previous questions on *narration* in her 1994 oil painting, *Woman Plucking Flowers* (Fig. 1). Combining oil paint, a modern medium, with the ornamenting techniques frequently used in local textiles, Singh fabricates her narration of a female protagonist surrounded by various repetitive signs, including domestic (e.g., flowers, gardens) and exogenous ones (e.g., guns, planes). However, these ambiguous and contradicting signs separate Singh's narration from the allegorical aims mentioned above, with her narration itself resting in the illusionary subconscious field but at the same time reflecting certain aspects and events of the reality, especially how violence intrudes and blurs the boundary between public and private space.

2. Integrating Oil Paintings and Bengal Textiles

Selecting oil painting as her medium, Singh sets her narration on a rectangular stage of blossoms in shades of blue and purple impasto, filling every inch of the central canvas with sumptuous details in a near *horror vacuii* manner.[1] Through the cross-marks and hatch lines inside every circular flower pattern in the central garden space, one could almost imagine how the artist applies touches of paint onto the canvas, which Geeta Kapur likens to a pastry chef icing cakes and a mason smearing mortar.[2] With the thick and uneven layers of paint highlighting the surface texture, the gleaming softness of oil pigment also connotes both the equally smooth female skin or woven textile, emphasizing its tactile quality.[3] Yet, the luminescent colors constantly question the physical existence presented by the thick paint layers, indicating the abstract, unearthly side of the pale female body glowing soundlessly inside the bed of flowers.

The border, also formed by white flowers in triangular pots, defines the garden's spatial boundary with curvy stems and leaves. The triangular pots, or mere triangle patterns, continue to appear inside and divide the encompassed space into an organized and flattened grid. Dalmia associates the triangular forms with "sexual symbols," possibly relating to the downward-pointing trikona that symbolizes femininity and the *yoni*.[4] Evenly spaced, these triangles form a rhythmic composition and recall specific decorative Bengal textile patterns, with reference to Singh's early working experience inside the fabrication faculty during the Rural Cottage Industry revitalization in Nehru's first five-year plan.[5] Here, the integration of textile patterns into oil painting becomes Singh's answer towards the opposition between modernity and local art practice. Recalling previous figures like K. G. Subramanyan, who adopts terracotta in the public mural-making, Singh's textile choice suggests a closer relationship with the artist's female identity, connoting the minute

1 Geeti Sen, "Woman In Red: Arpita Singh" in *Image and Imagination: Five Contemporary Artists in India* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Pub. Pvt., 1996), 114–5.

2 Geeta Kapur, "Body as Gesture: Women Artists at Work," in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), 40.

3 Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Transitions/Tensions*, (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996), 41.

4 Yashodhara Dalmia, "Arpita Singh: Of Mother Goddesses and Women," in *Expressions & Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1996), 73. Dahmen-Dallapiccola and Anna Libera, *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 199.

5 Ella Dutta, *Tying Down Time* (New York: Talwar Gallery, 2018), 6.

embroidery and stitching of the female's domestic labor. Whether Bengal *kanthas* or *pichhavai*, Singh adopts the method and logic of textile narration through fabricating her stories on the surface of repetitive motives, similar to Sheikh's comment, "for Arpita our tapestry weaver, repetition is the warp of invention."[6]

3. Ambiguous Narration: Presenting Pata-Chitra Without Narrating Patua

Against the sea of repetitive blossoms, two contrasting figures emerge on the diagonal line: one is a naked woman carved out in explicit contour in the upper-left corner of this ethereal garden, and the other is an armed man in fine suits with his outline blending into the bluish background. As the man points his gun in the direction of the woman, the artist suggests certain tension between these two characters, yet both characters' gestures remain ambiguous. The suited man might either attempt to shoot, with his eyes closed in hesitation, or have already performed the shot, since only the gun is present while the bullets are absent. Meanwhile, the woman might either be bending down her back, "plucking flowers" as her final gesture before the gunshot, or lying on her side, eyes closed and blood lost, as a consequence of this violence.

Time is ambiguous inside this narration of violence: This gunshot might be an event about to happen, a documentation of scenes already happened, or a fantastic illusion not going to happen. Singh only captures a transient moment and isolates it from its original story with an artificial frame, which "signify the process of completion" but "in itself incomplete."[7] Elongating the transient moment into a delicate painting, this act of narration in frames reminds the viewers of the narrative Pata-chitra scrolls that construct the tale of Hinduism Pantheon in successive scenes and reappearing characters.[8] However, Singh does not provide a clear storyline or a recording of plots accompanying her painting. Her images remain open to interpretations as she detaches the reoccurring objects from their original context, repeating and transforming them into assimilated patterns. Though providing plentiful clues in forms, narration, and signs, Singh's narration in nature defies the attempt to grasp a definite, chronological, linear interpretation, with "many beginnings and no end."[9] Viewers only perceive the painting as an ambiguous part of a Pata-Chitra painting without the patua's fluent and continuous narration. The frame defines the painting's border and declares the termination of the scene, but the viewers, perplexed by Singh's ambiguous narration, are now eager to find a previous and the next frame, other scenes, as an explanation for this violent act.

4. The Evolving Signs inside a Lucid Dream

Phillip S. Rawson describes the Indian painting practices as revealing "something hidden somehow behind the surface."[10] In the same way, Singh also reveals the motions hiding inside the originally inanimate objects: Plants spread and overgrow on every inch inside the border, with the visible brushstrokes capturing their dynamics. Inanimate objects also transform and assimilate with each other, as we see the trikona similar to flower pots, airplanes similar to flying fish. Kapur compares this animism with Alice in Wonderland and describes her narration as "living in Alicetime."[11] Singh performs subverting treatments, animating the initially motionless objects and freezing the acts of the initially moving human figures, as the woman sleeps and the agent hesitates. Sheikh ascribes Singh's contrasting representation to her overt expression as "the celebration" of liveliness and imagination at the surface, but a "disguise" for her fear of death.[12]

As a metaphor for transiency itself, flower, especially white ones, is a sign that frequently appears throughout Singh's works for over 50 years: Living-room cut flowers in *Apples and Chairs* (1968), magnolias in *Figures & Flowers* series (1971), the decorative patterns on the female protagonists' clothes in her 80s watercolors, potted flowers witnessing the mourning moment of the Kidwai family (*Munna Kidwai and her Dead Husband*, 1992), and in Durga's hand for the praying woman (*Durga*, 1993). Kapur associates these flowers with a "gesture of grief" or "funeral postures" of soundless mourning, often co-occurring with lying bodies, white sari, widowhood, and closed eyes.13 In *Woman Plucking Flowers*, however, the blossoms are not withering but replicating everywhere inside the garden, though its tendency to bury the lying woman still echoes the mourning practice of offering bouquets.

In her oil paintings and watercolor series, Singh also reuses her characters throughout the series, as we witness her

6 Kapur identifies these two kind of textiles in her article, see Kapur, "Body as Gesture," 42; Nilima Sheikh, *Arpita Singh* (New Delhi: Vadehra Art Gallery, 1994), 2.

7 Sheikh, *Arpita Singh*, 4.

8 Frank J. Korom, *Village of Painters: Narrative Scrolls from West Bengal* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006), 32.

9 Sheikh, *Arpita Singh*, 1.

10 Though this sentence comes from "Thematic issue #2" in lecture slides, I consulted the copy of Art Now in India in Asian Art Archive to find the exact page number, but there is no article under Philip S. Rawson's name.

11 Bernhard Fibicher, Gopinath Suman, and Kunstmuseum Bern, *Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art* (New York: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 19.

12 Sheikh, *Arpita Singh*, 2.

13 Kapur, "Body as Gesture," 48.

naked woman growing through her puberty, adulthood, and motherhood.[14] Unlike the distorted and infinitely elongated time in narration, the female protagonist experiences time on an earthly scale. Though her strength wavers between the bellicose Martial Goddess and the vulnerable nude, the female protagonist substitutes the male gods and heroes in previous narrated legends, as Singh, self-identified as a female artist, departs her open-ended narration filled with textile patterns.[15]

5. Borders Violated: Between the Public and Private Space

Concerning "flowers" in the title, viewers often interpret the setting as a garden in the same way as the inscription "GARDEN" at the top of the painting. On a closer inspection, this seemingly plausible interpretation might lack solid visual evidence like consistent perspectives or architectural structures. Both characters float above an abstract bluish space where the floral motifs repeat in unearthly fluorescent colors fantasy, as an illusionary and dream-like space without a firm surface. Though still figurative and storytelling, *Woman Plucking Flowers* differ from her contemporary artists, especially the narrative works exhibited in *Place For People* (1981). While Singh's paintings, as discussed before, often include abstract and thus non-referent backgrounds, the figurative and narrative works inside *Place For People* are often situated in specific cities or open-air plazas, with realistic architectural detail depicted in miniature perspectives.

Reasons for explaining this contrast could lie in either Singh's textile practices, or her dreamy narration deprived of buttressing tales, but I would like to attribute their setting difference to another layer of gendered distinction, as Singh depicts the private space that receives the intrusion from the public space to document the constantly dissolving border between these two spaces.

The intruding elements are clearly recognizable, as they all cross the garden border. Planes fly across the inscription, ready to perform an emergency landing; The suited agent stands outside the garden but holds out his gun, aiming inside. These symbols, heterogeneous to the native domestic signs inside (e.g., flowers), pose a threat to the peaceful garden with the woman's quiescent repose. The question then becomes: When and where does Singh adopt them? With her paintings' dream-like quality, Singh possibly regards the machinery as exogenous stimuli, based on the consistently ongoing conflicts and riots in Indian, and then weave these warp of invention inside her painting as a subconscious reaction, recognizing them as potential sources of threat with their accompanying violence. If one recalls Indira Gandhi's death in 1984, a decade before this painting's completion, then the garden setting and the armed agent in *Woman Plucking Flowers* might coincidentally echo Gandhi's private garden and her Sikh bodyguards who committed this assassination. Yet, Singh substitutes the working prime minister, a public figure, with an anonymous crouching woman, her nakedness resisting any interpretation of her social economic class. In addition to the violent commotion against the Sikh community triggered by this assassination, the violence might relate to the Ayodhya Riot in 1992, another religious conflict between Muslims and Hindus.[16] Regardless of sources, the artist might visualize her own traumatic experience of violence into the incursion across one's private border in this painting.

On the other hand, Singh might also be reclaiming public space through her illusive representation mingling the subconsciousness and reality together. Karode and Sawant define the external space as the "space of the urban realm" and the internal space as "space of individual subjectivity," leading us to categorize dreams about urban life.[17] Similar to the violence's intrusion inside the private gardens, we could interpret Singh's Wonderland-ish depiction of enlivened cities without time, gravity, and perspective, as the reversed intrusion from the internal space to the external one.

6. Conclusion

To summarize the previous discussion, the artist integrates the repetitive and decorative patterns of Bengal textile into oil practices, which responds to the ongoing modern-local confrontation from the perspective of a female domestic labor. While the traditional textiles and scrolls often depict stories with straightforward plots about male protagonists, Singh's oil painting narrates the female protagonist's story with a rather ambiguous approach, playing around transforming signs and animated objects. In *Woman Plucking Flowers* (1994), specifically, the abstract and luminously bluish background without any consistent perspective embellishes the painting with an illusionary, dream-like setting, in stark difference to its contemporary solid architectural structures. Numerous symbols float above this illusionary background, including the interspersing trikona, overgrowing flowers, and garden borders. Though the tension between the two characters remains open to discussion, Singh arranges definite contrast between them: one is a naked and vulnerable woman, the other is an armed and properly-dressed man. Instead of a mere coincidence,

14 Kapur analyzes the protagonist's growth thoroughly in her essay. See Kapur, "Body as Gesture," 49–50.

15 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 41.

16 While Sen refers back to the 1984 Delhi riot as assassination aftermaths, Poshyananda attributes the violent stimuli to the 1992 Ayodhya Riot, see Sen, "Woman In Red," 119; Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 41.

17 Roobina Karode and Shukla Sawant, "City Lights, City Limits: Multiple Metaphors in Everyday Urbanism," in *Art and visual Culture in India*, 1857–2007 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2009), 203.

this gender distinction is more likely becarefully arranged, as Singh reacts to the external stimuli of traumatic conflicts and reflects them through the intruding elements like planes and armed agents.

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Figure

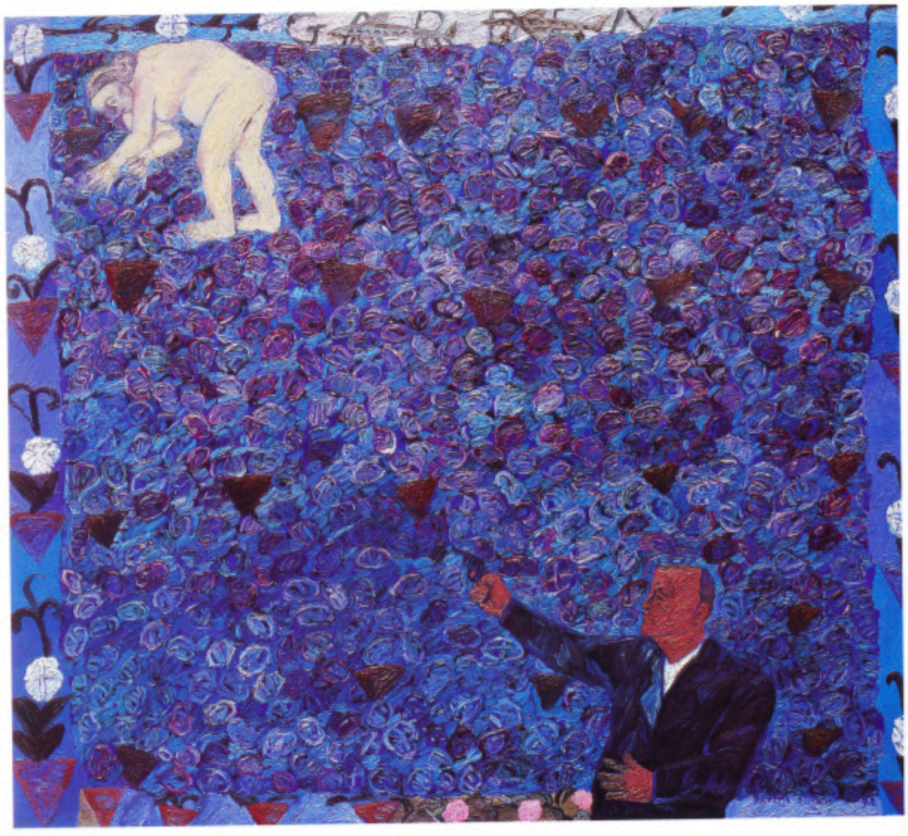

Figure 1
Arpita Singh, *Woman Plucking Flowers*, 1994
Oil on canvas, 60" × 66", New Delhi, Vadehra Art Gallery. Image by courtesy of the artist.

Research Article

Femininity and Masculinity: Jacques-Louis David's and Angelica Kauffman's Self-Projection on Gender Representation

Wu Yuxin Stella

"There really is no such thing as Art; there are only artists."[1] The representation of gender, particularly female figures, in Neo-classical artworks largely correlates to the artist's personal identity and gender ideology. As the coagulation of artists' subjective and artistic identity was under a wider process that is historically and aesthetically specific, the idea of psychological projection—at once individual and collective—contributes to the production of artworks.[2] Mainly focusing on Neo-classical painters Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) and Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), this essay investigates the similarities and differences in the two artists' depiction of masculinity and femininity in history paintings, further elaborating on how the representation of gender serves as a projection of their own identities and gender beliefs, based on their different cultural and political backgrounds.

The social gender doctrines in the late 18th century were based principally on the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who claimed a "natural woman" should carry out traditional duties as daughter, wife and mother, being "dependent and subordinate in the patriarchal family."[3] Physiologist Pierre Roussel further explained the biological principles that women's softer organs contributed to their emotional and weak personalities.[4] As Michelle Facos remarks, it seems that "men were utilizing their physical and legal ability to dominate women in order to assert control where they could."[5] Such male-dominated gender beliefs were also reflected in artworks of that period, as male figures prevailed in the discourse of heroic representation, whereas female figures were often "consigned to silence, to the interior, to reproduction."[6]

David's pre-revolutionary artwork alludes to such vaunted male visual discourse, with the most representative of his Neo-classical oil painting *Oath of the Horatii*, exhibited in Rome in 1784 (Fig. 1). While technically speaking, the *Oath* is a pivotal work that "signaled a decisive departure from the predominant Rococo style," it serves the patriarchal subject in terms of the topic, with females portrayed as marginalized objects and victims without political authority under the patriarchal mandate.[7] The artwork depicts the august and patriotic scene of Horatius presenting weapons to his three sons and receiving in return their pledge to protect the safety of Rome.[8] While the men are in rigid triangular geometric poses with sword-like outstretched arms, the women on the right weep sentimentally, thus showcasing a strong gender division.

Through the enclosed circuit of reciprocal gazes and body language, David intentionally established the patriarchal linkage between the father and sons in the *Oath*. However, the female characters, overwhelmed by excessive sadness for which they can barely support their bodies, are confined to their separate zones, without the ability "to mobilize any resource of language or image that might challenge the males."[9] Camilla is the female figure in white drapery who leans against her sister feebly. She was marginalized as an affiliated sign of the male enemy to whom she was betrothed and fell victim to the chain effect of patriarchy, as she ended up being killed by her brother who returned in triumph.[10] Such a distinct gender disparity in

1 E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 2021), 1.
2 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 138.
3 Susan Moller Okin, "Rousseau's Natural Woman," *The Journal of Politics* 41, no. 2 (May 1979): 393-416, 407.
4 Anne C. Vila, "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's Système Physique Et Moral De La Femme," *Representations* 52 (1995): 76–93, 82.
5 Michelle Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Art* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 40.
6 Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73.
7 Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 58.
8 Thomas E. Crow, *Jacques-Louis David's "Oath of the Horatii": Painting and Pre-Revolutionary Radicalism in France* (Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1986), 8.
9 Bryson, *Tradition and Desire*, 74.
10 The story of the Horatii comes from Roman histories which took place when three Horatii sons were chosen as the representative of Rome to fight against three Curiaii sons representing the rival kingdom of Alba. After slaying all three of his rivals, Horatius, the eldest of the Horatii sons, killed his sister Camilla as she was betrothed to one of the Curiaii sons, reflecting the chain effect of patriarchy.

the *Oath* epitomized the belief of "separate spheres" at that time: men were physically and mentally strong, appropriate for the public sphere, whereas women were emotional and weak, restricted to the domestic home.

Although the *Oath* had initially been a royal commission, the artwork serves as a self-projection of David's own thought. During his creation of the *Oath*, David did not follow the size commissioned by the royal, claiming that "I ceased to make a picture for the king, and did it for myself."[11] This decision, as a proclamation of independence, expressed his autonomy as an artist.[12] Therefore, the *Oath* is much closer to David's personality and gender ideology, as "part of David recalcitrantly subscribes to the imagery of male heroism."[13] Levey remarks that "perhaps the deepest conviction behind this picture is that violence will provide a solution, and tension comes from violence suppressed in the actual paint surface as if there was an almost hysterical determination to remain calm." David's past experiences, such as his hunger strike in 1772, his various collapses in Paris and Rome, seem incredibly relevant to the *Oath*, where "the small, inarticulate, violent and vulnerable David came this fantasy of strength, calm and power."[14] Inserting himself psychologically into the *Oath*, David implied his consent of the masculine-centred gender ideology, expressing his patriarchal personality and eventually standing up for the high morality of patriotism which supersedes even family ties.

While David's pre-revolutionary works reinforced the contemporary gender doctrine and epitomized David's self-identity, the Swiss female artist Angelica Kauffman devoted herself to deconstructing the assumed norms of the contemporary history painting and the male-dominant visual discourse.[15] In her 1789's work *Odysseus Discovers Achilles Amongst the Daughters of Lycomedes*, Kauffman re-created the ancient Greek mythology about Achilles' recruitment into the Trojan War (Fig. 2).[16] Similar to David's *Oath of the Horatii*, Kauffman restricted the composition of her work to a shallow stage-like space with a simple setting and invested the characters with figurative monumentality. However, while David's stark composition provides an explicit gender division, Kauffman creatively blurred such separation through the androgynous figure.[17] The central figure, cross-dressing Achilles, is considered an icon that maintains both feminine grace and masculine strength, as *she* is dressed in a long robe while seizing the sword and wielding it over *her* head forcefully. Two columns behind Achilles echo the duality of *her* gender, thus emphasizing Kauffman's intention of combining femininity and masculinity. By creating male figures masquerade in femininity, Kauffman demonstrated her adherence to promoting gender balance and equality.

Angela Rosenthal points out that "the cross-dressing Achilles mimics Kauffman's own act of painting as she exerts the brush to capture this heroic scene."[18] To some extent, the metaphor of using the brush to the sword aligns Kauffman with the gender-ambiguous figure of Achilles. Just as Achilles grabs her weapon and strides forward, Kauffman utilized her brush to reconstruct the male-imposed gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. Under the male-dominated gender discourse, the late-18th-century art field kept women from becoming "great" like the male artist, and "both male and female commentators roundly condemned women who sought prominence of any kind."[19] Kauffman experienced all these social pressures but was still privileged enough to enjoy her membership in the British Royal Academy, receiving assistance from her male counterparts. With acceptance in the masculine realm and fully understanding her role as a woman artist, Kauffman embarked on bringing a new perspective to history painting, exploring the idea of neutrality between genders by portraying figures into gender-neutral spheres.

While Kauffman devoted her whole artistic career to advocating gender equality in history paintings, David's gender ideologies seem to reorient in his different life stages. In David's post-Thermidorian production, the female position was renewed with women's attempt to mediate the masculine discourse. After his imprisonment in 1795, David created the 5-meter-across oil painting, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, which was publicly exhibited in his studio in 1799 (Fig. 3). The *Sabine Women*

11 Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David, Revolutionary Artist: Art, Politics, and the French Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 16.

12 Roberts, *Revolutionary Artist*, 17.

13 Bryson, *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix*, 76.

14 After his second loss of Prix de Rome in 1772, David went on a hunger strike, which lasted two and a half days before the academy encouraged him to continue painting. The quotation is cited from Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), 74.

15 Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman: Art and Sensibility*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 23.

16 The Greek mythology tells Achilles disguised as a female and being sent to the court of King Lycomedes by his mother, who was told that his son would die if sent into battle. Being sent to find Achilles, Ulysses disguises himself as a tradesman offering jewels and weapons to women in court. Achilles, unable to repress his masculine desires for arms, quickly picks the sword over the jewels, revealing his gender to Ulysses and is recruited into battle.

17 Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman*, 202.

18 Rosenthal, 201.

19 Caroline Chapman, *Eighteenth-Century Women Artists Their Trials, Tribulations & Triumphs* (London: Unicorn, an imprint of Unicorn Publishing Group LLP, 2017), 18.

depicts a great Roman female figure, Hersilia, leading the Sabine women to the battlefield and intractably placing herself between Tatius (the left male figure), leader of the Sabines, and her arrogant husband Romulus (the right one), ruler of Rome. As interpreted in his pamphlet, David diverged from the antique ignominious theme of abduction or kidnapping, and focused on Sabine women's current role as wives and mothers. Their familial responsibilities have inspired Sabine women's intervention, which subsequently spreads "the feelings of conjugal, paternal, and fraternal love rank to rank in both armies."[20] Therefore, Johnson interprets that one of the central themes of this painting is "the significance of women's primordial and essential role in the creation of civilization."[21]

However, despite David's zealous public pronouncement that his new history painting empowered the feminine subject, his transformation in gender depiction was a passive result of politics. As Roberts points out, "his lifetime coincides with the most tumultuous period of history that France and the Western world had yet experienced."[22] A decisive rupture in David's artistic career is associated with the Thermidorian Reaction, which symbolized the collapse of Robespierre and the end of the Terror. It also brings a cultural crisis of embodiment by casting doubt on the cultural status of heroic male ideals inherited from the Jacobin period, thus marking a significant inner cultural rupture during the formation of the Republic's identity.[23] Having been intimately involved in the political and cultural apparatus of the Jacobin Republic and a supporter of Robespierre, David was imprisoned owing to the violent infighting among Republicans. He thence suffered a crisis of identity, especially in terms of his masculinity. It seems that he could no longer speak in the visual language of clear gender opposition, which previously allowed him to clarify ethical and political issues in pre-revolutionary paintings, as in the *Oath*.[24] Norman Bryson concludes that "the aim of the *Sabine Women* is after all, exculpation: in obedience to political pressure, David must produce a work that can slide over and conceal his aberrant Revolutionary production from 1789 to 1794."[25] Therefore, the *Sabine Women* reflects a nervous post-Thermidorian David attempting to redefine his professional status and consolidate his position by lending agency to feminine-gendered figures.

After analyzing the historical background of David's creation, female figures in the *Sabine Women* function more as a signifier disorganizing the visual coherence of the male discourse *from within*, similar to the unpredictable political event driving a wedge into David's masculine self-projection. Part of David recast his identity on the representation of nude male bodies, which he eloquently defended in his pamphlet, asserting his intention was to "paint antique customs with such precision that the Greeks and Romans, seeing [his] work, would not find [him] alien to their ways of doing things."[26] By following the antique predecessors, David demonstrated his transformation of the historical narrative into a personal vision of imagination, as nude male characters derive from art rather than life. Moreover, as Ewa Lajer-Burcharth points out, the aesthetic and erotic advantage of masculinity appears to situate Tatius and Romulus out of the family circle, locking them into "a mirror-like relation with one another—apart from and regardless of women."[27] Hence, the intervention of the Sabine women is confined to physical interference rather than shaking the male-dominated discourse of civilization.

Unlike David's shape of heroic female figures that physically enter the male vision, Angelica Kauffman explored the authentic power of femininity through gender reversal. Her 1783's oil painting, *The Sorrow of Telemachus*, depicts Calypso, the central female figure, thoughtfully noticing Telemachus's sorrow and motioning her nymphs to stop playing songs, while the young male Telemachus props his head on the arm in a melancholic pose with effeminacy.[28] Kauffman subtly captured the deep pensiveness caused by sorrow that becomes palpable, while such sentimentality manifests in a male figure. With Telemachus and his Mentor enclosed by female characters, the artwork's composition is similar to David's *Sabine Women*, whereas switching the gender position. However, it is not males' intervention into femininity, as women tenderly attempt to offer guidance to the depressed hero.[29] Therefore, by depicting androgynous figures and transforming the stereotypical natures of gender, Kauffman assiduously endeavored to promote gender equality.

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20 Jacques-Louis David, "The Tableau of the Sabines, Public Exhibition at the National Palace of Arts and Science," exhibition pamphlet of *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (France: n.p., 1799), 2.
21 Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*, 124.
22 Roberts, *Revolutionary Artist*, 3.
23 Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, 1.
24 Lajer-Burcharth, 3.
25 Bryson, *Tradition and Desire*, 90.
26 Jacques-Louis David, "Note: On the Nudity of My Heroes," exhibition pamphlet of *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (France: n.p., 1799), quoted in Elizabeth Holt, *From the Classicists to the Impressionists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 11.
27 Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, 138.
28 *The Sorrow of Telemachus* is based on the first four chapters of the *Odyssey*, when the nymphs strike up the songs of the heroic deeds of his father Odysseus, sorrow overtakes Telemachus; Calypso notices his melancholy and commands nymphs to interrupt their play of music in the background.
29 Rosenthal, *Angelica Kauffman*, 29.

Through the reinterpretation of the ancient subject-oriented with subjective purpose, both David and Kauffman projected themselves on their history paintings, indicating their personality and gender ideology. Despite similarities in Neo-classical techniques, the divergent historical and cultural backgrounds contribute to the distinctness of the two artists' representation of gender. By inserting himself psychologically into the ancient Roman figures of masculinity, the pre-revolutionary David envisioned a patriarchal self through the visual language of apparent gender opposite. During the Post-Thermidorian period, the *Sabine Women* witnessed David's anxious attempts to recast his identity, in which the nude male figures seem to serve as an insecurity-fueled compensation surrounding his own masculinity. Unlike David's self-construction of masculinity, Kauffman pursued gender equality and the deconstruction of male-imposed stereotypes by emphasizing cross-dressing and gender reversal, thus integrating masculinity and femininity into the gender-neutral spheres. David and Kauffman, representing the advocates and rebels of contemporary male-dominated gender discourse respectively, serve as the epitome of how Neoclassical artists psychologically demonstrate their personal identities and gender beliefs in their artworks showcasing different representations of masculinity and femininity.

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Figures

Figure 1
Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatti*, 1784.
Oil on canvas, 330 × 425 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Public Domain.

Figure 2
Angelica Kauffman, *Odysseus Discovers Achilles Amongst the Daughters of Lycomedes*, 1789.
Oil on canvas, 116 × 129.5 cm. Helsinki: Finnish National Gallery. Public Domain.

Figure 3
Jacques-Louis David, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799.
Oil on canvas, 385 × 522 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre.
The original work is in Public Domain, image file licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 international license. Photographer: Mbzt. Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:F0440_Louvre_JL_David_Sabines_INV3691_rwk.jpg

Figure 4
Angelica Kauffman, *The Sorrow of Telemachus*, 1783.
Oil on canvas, 83.2 × 114.3 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900.

Research Article

The Authenticity of Representation and Visual Distortion: Rodchenko's Use of Perspectives in Photographic Portraits

Anonymous Author

In his essay *The Paths of Contemporary Photography*, Alekansdr Rodchenko advocates the use of the modern and industrialized perspectives "from the bottom up" and "top down" in photography works to create a new vision that is faithful to the modern people's visual experiences.[1] The artist has highlighted the relationship between the use of these severely skewed angles and the attainment of authenticity for multiple times. This paper aims to examine the effects of the defamiliarizing perspectives on the authenticity of Rodchenko's photographic portraits through the analysis of *Pioneer with a Bugle* (Fig. 1), a portrait of a Soviet socialist Pioneer produced in 1930. In this work, the artist's experimentation with the extremely low viewpoint amplifies the formal distortion and spatial limitation of photography. How does the use of perspective negotiate the two seemingly paradoxical artistic characteristics, authenticity, and distortion? What are the implications of applying this type of experimental viewpoint in a photographic portrait with a strong ideological undertone? This essay will attempt to answer these questions in the following paragraphs.

Many writings on Rodchenko's photography, either by the artist himself or art historians, have discussed how his iconic technique of taking photographs from the bottom-up or top-down is not only an artistic innovation but also an approach to the realness of representation in different aspects. In an article demonstrating his purpose of deploying unusual viewpoints, Rodchenko argues that this type of perspective is the most suitable for documenting the real because they manifest the true visual experiences of an urban resident living contemporary life.[2] The bottom-up or top-down perspectives stand for the new vision rooted in industrialized modern life, where pedestrians have to frequently look up and down to capture the city's view due to the construction of multi-storey buildings. Another reason Rodchenko prefers the extremely high and low shooting positions is that they help to address the issue of posing and unnaturalness in conventional portraits with mid-level viewpoints.[3] Taking photographs from unusual and unexpected positions stimulates people to get rid of their habitual mode of posing, allowing the photographer to capture their "natural mode," according to Todd Cronan's analysis of Rodchenko's writings.[4]

While Rodchenko and Todd Cronan focus on how the perspective improves the naturalness of the vision and the human subject being photographed, this essay aims to supplement their discussions by analysing how Rodchenko's utilization of the defamiliarizing perspectives adds to the photograph's authenticity by revealing the distortion inherent in the medium of photography, exemplified by *Pioneer with a Bugle*. The connotation of authenticity here designates the photograph's frankness about its "suspicion of fakery."[5] Rodchenko's use of the bottom-up perspective in this work exaggerates the image's formal distortion and spatial limitation, avoiding constituting an integral and distinguishable vision of the subject figure. In this way, the photograph breaks what Tom Gunning coins as photography's "truth claim,"[6] the idea that photography is an accurate representation of the photographed object's physical appearance because of its indexicality and iconicity.[7] This illusion of objectivity has been maintained and utilized in conventional photographic portraits, which adopt mid-level perspectives to present an easily readable picture of the human figure that is natural to the eyes. Rodchenko's unsettling abstract and largely skewed vision of the bugler,

1 Aleksandr Rodchenko, "The Paths of Contemporary Photography" in *Rodchenko*, ed. Gerhard Steidl and Peter MacGill (Göttingen: Steidl; New York: Pace/MacGill Gallery, 2012), 2–8.

2 Rodchenko, "The Paths of Contemporary Photography," 4.

3 Rodchenko, "Paths of Contemporary Photography," 5.

4 Todd Cronan, "Rodchenko's Photographic Communism," in *Photography and Failure: One Medium's Entanglement with Flops, Underdogs, and Disappointments*, ed. Kris Belden-Adams (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 33–34.

5 Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs," in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Redrobe Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 39.

6 Gunning, "What's the Point," 39.

7 According to Gunning, photography's indexicality is assumed as the objective "physical relation between the object photographed and the image finally created." See Gunning, 39–42.

on the other hand, deliberately transgresses this paradigm of photographic portraits.

This contrast is well manifested when juxtaposing *Pioneer with a Bugle* with Semyon Fridlyand's *Kirghiz Cavalry Fighter* (1937) (Fig. 2), another photographic portrait created in the 1930s. The viewpoint in the latter work is positioned slightly lower than mid-level and to the left of the central point, presenting a view of the young man's face that is somewhere between front and profile. Despite the image's intensely narrow cropping, the traditional three-quarter perspective preserves an intact view of the soldier's face and guides the viewer's attention to it. It also allows a legible representation of the soldier's appearance and identity. All the physical features that are necessary to constitute the identity of a steadfast and allegiant socialist fighter, including the man's determined eyes, his frowning brows, and the tip of the five-point star badge on his cotton cap, are shown. Conversely, Rodchenko's bottom-up viewpoint in *Pioneer with a Bugle* flattens the subject figure to the degree of being undistinguishable. The Pioneer's elongated eyes, nostrils, and lips pack together on the bugler's head, which is squeezed into an uneven ellipse. The bugle's mouthpiece protrudes from the boy's clenched lips, further disrupting the audience's view and making it impossible to imagine the pioneer's countenance. In addition to the extreme abstraction, the image highlights the spatial limitation of the camera by cropping the bugle and the flag in the background abruptly. Compared with *Kirghiz Cavalry Fighter*, Rodchenko's undistinguishable and fragmented work voluntarily gives up being a valid visual identification of the bugler. Its intentional abstraction repudiates the fake naturalness and objectivity in traditional portraiture and reveals the possible photographic distortions despite the medium's indexicality.

The representations of human figures that have been rendered legible and "objective" in photographic portraits with conventional frontal or three-quarter viewpoints, like Fridlyand's *Kirghiz Cavalry Fighter*, provide visual evidence that verifies the presence of a communist ideal that meets the increasing ideological requirement of art during the Stalinist period. As Rodchenko's extreme perspective abstracts the representation of the bugler and prevents viewers from falling into the illusion of "truthfulness" confirmed by photography's indexicality, it also means that the work does not create a socialist persona that is legible, "truthful," compelling, and appropriate, failing to accomplish the political mission that portraits of socialist figures are burdened with. According to Peter Galassi, although the *Pioneer* series manifest the artist's efforts to "remake himself and his work in the image of Stalinism" in terms of its theme and content, art critics still accused the photographs of stylistically deviating from ideological paradigms.[8] The attack was not limited to the Soviet art circle. In 1932, workers' criticism of the photographs was published by *Proletarskoe Foto*.[9] Based on the fact that the radical perspectives that deform the socialist Pioneers' appearances have been adopted throughout the creation of the *Pioneer* series, we could infer that this type of perspective was a significant stylistic component that leads to the criticism. The viewpoint's deviation from the middle symbolically demonstrates how the work departed from the Soviet society's expected image of socialist figures in the 1930s.

Rodchenko's *Pioneer with a Bugle*, with its twisting perspective, achieves a certain degree of authenticity by acknowledging the inescapable distortion and incompleteness of photography as a mediated representation, as the aforementioned arguments suggest. Yet it is worth noting that to achieve the defamiliarizing effect of this extremely low viewpoint, the photographer is still imprisoned by the dilemma of posing towering over photography's "truthfulness." In a crowd of scouts, the shooting position that is nearly right below the subject figure's chin would be difficult to attain organically. To acquire this bottom-up perspective, Rodchenko probably had to squat beneath the bugler, hold the camera close to the youngster's face, and ask the boy to keep playing the bugle regardless of what he was doing. In other words, the photograph that strives to get rid of "fakery" is still as staged as a conventional portrait, like *Kirghiz Cavalry Fighter*.

With an extremely low viewpoint, *Pioneer with a Bugle* exhibits a disturbingly abstract and fragmented representation of the Pioneer bugler, which radically departs from the clearly distinguishable and seemingly natural vision of the subject figure in traditional photographic portraits. This experimental approach not only brings provocative visual effects but also challenges the idea that considers photographic portraits as an objective visual record of the appearance and identity of the human figure. In this way, the photograph manifests its relative authenticity, which lies in its honesty about its nature as a biased and limited representation, avoiding the illusion of truthfulness embedded in the representation of constructed human identities. This authenticity of bold frankness and transgression is unavoidably at odds with the propagandist function of photographic portraits, which is to serve as visual evidence for the formation of political role models, despite the photograph's socialist subject. Thus, this work embodies two layers of paradox: its relative authenticity in comparison to prior works and the photography medium's unobtainable truthfulness; its efforts to create a communist ideology statement and its failure to construct the appropriate socialist ideal.

8 Peter Galassi, "Rodchenko and Photography's Revolution," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Leah Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 126.

9 Alexander Rodtschenko et al., *Aleksandr Rodchenko* (Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 309–310.

Figures

Figure 1
Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Pioneer with a Bugle*,1930.
Gelatin silver print, 23.5 × 18 cm. New York, Museum of Modern Arts (moma.org).

Figure 2
Semyon Fridlyand, *Kirghiz Cavalry Fighter*, 1937.
Vintage gelatin silver print, 41.9 × 27.9 cm. New York, Nailya Alexander Gallery.

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My working experience in M+

Timothy Lo

As a person who is fond of working with children and art, I am grateful that I can be a part of the M+ community since August 2021. I have long believed in the therapeutic value of art and currently aspire to be an art therapist. I am a part of the Learning and Interpretation Team at M+ and one major duty is to coordinate school tours and facilitate exchange with children. In the past year, I have worked with primary schools and kindergartens and I find profound joy working with them. Every conversation with children carries a significant meaning to me. Children deliver imagination and creativity with no boundary.

> *"Which colour do you like the most?" I asked a 5-year-old during an activity designed for kindergarten tours.*
>
> *"Oh, yellow is my favourite colour!" The little boy replied with barely any hesitation.*
>
> *"Is it so?* Why*?" I hoped to know why he liked it.*
>
> *"I* simply *like it." The boy smiled at my question, perhaps thinking if there has to be a reason for him being in favour of something.*

Conversations like these make my day. Grown ups have a habit of justifying every action that they do—even the act of being in favour of something. But in the world of children, being in favour of something doesn't require a reason. They like it simply because they do. Viewing the world through the eyes of children provides an interesting perspective and this is more so if we are to view art. M+ and its school tours create an environment where children are encouraged to share their thoughts on the art they view and foster exchange with their peers. Being a facilitator of such exchanges is a meaningful task and I enjoy every conversation I share with them. The way children view the world and art inspires me at times.

Regarding exchanges and conversations on art, one event that I particularly enjoyed is the Stamp Making Workshop. It was held on a weekend and many families took part in it. Upon collaborative effort, children and their parents created a stamp unique to their memory of spending their day at M+. While I was assisting their creation process, I admired the beautiful picture of the families exchanging ideas of making a perfect stamp. Art creates shared experience and memory amongst people and their loved ones. The embodied experience of children and parents at M+ leaves a mark on them and working together on a piece of art makes such an experience more memorable.

Stamp Making Workshop is one of the collaborative activities curated by M+ that encourages the participation of children and parents, and virtually all interested visitors. Other similar activities I enjoy taking part in are Model Making Session in East Gallery, Building of Idea Sculptures in Learning Hub and Community Workshop held during weekends. These events share a common objective of fostering artistic exchanges and creating shared memory amongst people and their treasured ones. Some of the values that M+ advocates are similar to mine. Art bridges people and can be therapeutic for some individuals who wish to express themselves through mediums of art. If I am to work as an art therapist, I hope to incorporate some values I have learnt here at M+ and inspirations from these events into the projects that I may pursue.

The Beauty of Inconvenience

Keith Hui King Yin

Why light scented candles when you can buy diffusers? Why listen to LPs when you can digitally stream music on Spotify or Amazon? Why visit galleries or museums when images of many of the artworks throughout human history have already been uploaded digitally to every corner of the Internet? Why, in essence, would we sometimes prefer these things that are more inconvenient? The answer to these questions may not necessarily come down to the quality of the end-product we receive and perceive, but to our attitude towards the idea of an "experience."

To start with, my definition of the term "inconvenience" is a lifestyle inseparable from the concept of "the past." As time progresses, our society proposes new ideas to bring about technological innovations and development in general, subsequently leading to the emergence of products and services that allow the world to operate more quickly, efficiently, and effectively. Nevertheless, as we move forward and continue to improve our quality of life, this "inconvenience of the past" is also inevitably disfavored, forsaken, and eventually eliminated.

However, it is also exactly this association of "the past" to inconvenient things that may captivate some of us, for it to be capable of either reminding us of collective memories or convincing us that these outdated things are genuinely better. If you are familiar with the Renaissance and/or the Enlightenment, it is not difficult to notice people's tendency to appreciate the past over contemporary times for its claimed virtues—the Renaissance would look back at Dante; and in the 18th century, Johann Winckelmann would return to the idealized beauty belonging to ancient Greece. Similarly, some people nowadays would argue that the past is better because "things required hands-on efforts and hard work" or "it boasts a slower-paced lifestyle where people can actually sit down and enjoy things." What history (particularly art history) has taught us is that such judgments are neither benign nor malign. It simply demonstrates the endless possibilities of individual preferences—to think that traditional scented candles are better because of the warmth absent in diffusers, or that the plates of LPs are better because they play analog music which retains more details compared to its digital counterpart.

Of course, there can also be a more pragmatic reason for people to favor inconvenience: social capital and pride. People often feel superior when they prove themselves to be distinct from others. As I have discussed earlier that inconvenience is a past lifestyle already abandoned by the mainstream, it becomes a perfect implement to show individual taste and uniqueness. "Sorry you guys could enjoy your Nespressos, but I'd like my coffee meticulously aged, roasted, and then served by a barista."

There are so many more reasons accounting for people's fondness for "inconvenience," but for now we must first return to a discussion more art related: why would we shed off a few hours just for visiting a certain gallery and museum to view art? It should not be about preferring the old ways, and certainly not for pride—then why? In her article *Looking at Ophelia: A Comparison of Viewing Art in the Gallery and in the Lab*, Sandra Dudley presents an interesting and useful study for us by comparing audiences' viewing experience of the famous 19th-century work Ophelia.[1] Dudley observed that those visiting the exhibiting museum in person spend more time scanning the entire canvas, while those in the lab looking through a digital screen fixates longer on Ophelia herself. How I would comprehend such a phenomenon is that museumgoers and gallery-goers focus more on "experiencing" art, as if wandering around a sacred, liminal space produced by the artwork in front of them; as opposed to those looking at digital screens who are finding specific subject matters—targets—to "investigate." In the comparison of "experiencing" versus "investigating," the former is provoked to art in real life. It may shock us with the work's immediate size, it may inspire us with historical importance and connotations with the real work presented right in front of us. It may also intensify our senses as the work gives off the smell of its paint or its wooden frame, or it may simply captivate us by providing a large, open, clean, and calming viewing space isolated from the outside world. Whatever the cause, or however these causes add up to each other, these many unique qualities that only an on-site visit can provide prove the importance of "inconvenience" to

1 Sandra Dudley, "Looking at Ophelia: A comparison of viewing art in the gallery and in the lab," *Advances in Clinical Neuroscience and Rehabilitation* 11, no. 3 (July/August 2011): 15.

art. And for art to be an experience-based subject matter itself, "inconvenience" seems necessary as well on the other way round.

As inconvenient as some things may be, like museums and galleries in contrast to online viewing rooms, they always have unique elements and features that their counterparts cannot provide. And thus, there will always be individuals that prefer this beauty of inconvenience.

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