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Volume 5

ARTHattack!

Volume 5

University of Guelph Art History
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Welcome

I'm writing to give you some exciting news. **ARTHattack!** is gaining strength and, with our e-journal, we are adding a new virtual dimension to our environment. This edition of the **ARTHattack!** journal showcases some of the most promising young art historians selected by jury for the **ARTHattack!** undergraduate student conference.

ARTHattack! has been integrated into the fabric of university life since its foundation in 2007. The journal features six papers presented at the **ARTHattack!** conference 2012, papers which offered the opportunity for students to reveal their professional skills and perceptions in a spirit of fellowship to parents, academic, and peers.

ARTHattack! offers students the chance to meet and exchange ideas and opinions with a wide variety of art historians, curators, critics and other international professional through informal encounters. Guest lecturers over the years have included specialists in issues related to appropriation art, Canadian art, and national museums, among others.

ARTHattack! offers students the possibility to make a positive impact on Guelph students by enhancing and enriching their academic life.

ARTHattack! is inspired and powered by the enthusiasm, hard work, and dedication of former and current undergraduate students who genuinely appreciate your faith in our mission to engage with Canadian culture through art historical subject at the University of Guelph. We hope you enjoy our publication.

Dr. Susan Douglas

ARTHattack! Executive Director

Forward

The study of art history and visual culture is alive and well at the University of Guelph. The creation of **ARTHattack!** in 2007 and the continued efforts of students and faculty members have allowed undergraduate research and discussion to thrive. Several motivated undergraduates and Dr. Susan Douglas inspired **ARTHattack!** as we see it today. The conference and publication engages the community and students at the University of Guelph every March and remains the only art and visual culture outlet for undergraduate research.

This year's conference was held on March 9th at the MacDonald Stewart Art Centre. As always, the topics of our spectacular student papers varied greatly. The eclectic mix ranged from papers on the Venetian painter, Titian, all the way to more contemporary issues including the question of the relationship between Dadaism and the internet. The 2012 presenters continued to raise the bar on excellence for **ARTHattack!** and also displayed the varied areas of study available to art history students at Guelph.

Over the years **ARTHattack!** has fostered collaboration, created a sense of community, and promoted the exchange of scholarly ideas. Our success couldn't have been possible without the generous endowments from our sponsors and donors. Noor and myself would like to extend many thanks to all of those who have attended **ARTHattack!** over the years and the continued support of the faculty. Also unique to this year, we must thank student band, The Darling Oiseau, and our keynote speaker Dr. Derek Fincham for their presentations. With this year's recording-breaking attendance one can only anxiously anticipate the arrival of next year's **ARTHattack!** symposium.

Candice Napoleone & Noor Alé

ARTHattack! Undergraduate Co-Chairs 2012

“Interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art:”¹

Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love*

Sarah Carter

There are many different interpretations of Titian’s *Sacred and Profane Love*.² Each scholar gives a different, but convincing analysis of what the mysterious painting means, reflects or references. Titian scholarship began with Giorgio Vasari’s biography of Titian in *The Lives*, written in the sixteenth century. Recent scholarship continues to reinvent old masterpieces, and it is arguably through the development of methodology in art history that there is something left to say about Titian’s work. Curiously, scholarly publications that discuss Titian help us to understand

more about the development of art historical studies than to disclose the hidden meaning of any subtle detail in *Sacred and Profane Love*. As Seymour Howard writes, “[e]ach age, generation; person recreates Antiquity, or indeed Raphael, Manet, Apollo Belvedere, or Mona Lisa – partly or largely in his own image, and necessarily so, given the reflexive nature of thinking and perception.”³ *Sacred and Profane Love* is constantly recreated by the viewer, the scholar, and the society which values it. Foremost, this paper will evaluate the role of the art historian. Secondly, I will review earlier publications and ideas, including Walter Friedlaender’s *La tintura delle rose (The Sacred and Profane Love) by Titian*,⁴ and Erwin Panofsky’s ‘Paysage Moralisé.’ Two contemporary sources that deal with Titian’s work from a feminist point of view will also be explored. Rona Goffen and Giles Roberston consider the material culture of the Renaissance and the role of the patron.⁵ The image remains static, but connotative meanings change. How then does art history interpret the enigmatic in art?

The paint on the canvas ages slowly, sometimes cracking or flaking off, it fades in colour and deteriorates, but the image never changes. The paint is silent, but the picture that it creates is the primary source for interpreting what the artist intended to express. The art historian, although secondary, mediates this expression by contextualizing art in its respective period or movement and applying a variety of methodologies to its interpretation. In *On Iconology, Intention, Imagos, and Myths of Meaning* Seymour

Howard describes the role of the art historian:

Historians, trusted explorer-emissaries into a dimmed past, function as dedicants with our values, now ostensibly including objectivity. By ritual immersion they retrieve for us, with an allied vision, what has meaning for a constituency now, in the only time there is. As successive waves of publications show, each age, like a conqueror survivor, remakes the past in terms of its own image and interests, as well as inheritance.⁶

Although Howard's words are dramatic, he recalls how art history becomes problematic in reflecting the present, and not the past. Present scholarship incorporates the scepticism of postmodern thought, as noted by Howard and further developed by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard in their book *The Expanding Discourse*.⁷ They write:

Along with feminism, one of the greatest influences upon the practice of art history in the late 1980s has been the advent and application of postmodern theory... the influence of postmodern scepticism about absolute values, truth claims, and universalizing explanations permeates all humanistic disciplines with rationalist and positivist roots in Enlightenment thinking.⁸

A feminist reading is an example of a thought provoking methodology that responds to a contemporary discourse not shared, or even conceptualized, by Renaissance Italians. Although

Titian and the patron's wife Laura may have expressed something exceptional that could be explained through Laura's life or involvement in the creation of the work, all theories are conjectures. Art historians contribute to the work through research and publication; however, analyses are tentative and tend to reflect the discipline.

In the case of *Sacred and Profane Love*, the title, although not given to the work by Titian, is significant in understanding the subject matter. Allegorical or philosophical meaning is suggested, and the first theories that developed through the Renaissance and into the early eighteenth century relied on a binary opposition between two types of beauty or love. The poet Scipione Francucci was the first author to comment on Titian's painting. In 1613 he refers to the two women as *Belta ornate* and *Belta Disornata*, and he writes, "The noble heart loves and reveres unadorned beauty whereas the barbarous heart delights in barbarous ornament," and he likens beauty "poor in gold and rich in innate grace" to the sun whose only garments are his own rays.⁹ Panofsky asserts that the notion of unadorned beauty, clothed only in celestial radiance, was considered superior to adorned beauty among the educated in the Renaissance. Furthermore *Belta ornate* and *Belta Disornata* corresponded to two types of love, according to Panofsky. However, this theory was rejected in favour of textual analysis in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰ Giles Roberston, in the literature review of her article *Honour, Love and Truth, an alternative Reading of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love*, names Franz

Wickhof as the first art historian to approach the enigmatic pictures of the Venetian school through classical texts. He came to the conclusion that the *Sacred and Profane Love* was an account of Venus counselling Medea to ally herself with Jason, in the seventh book of the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus.¹¹ Robertson delineates the new methodology. He writes, “[t]his unsatisfactory identification is now universally rejected, but it opened a new approach to the interpretation of the picture, and other texts have been brought forward for which it is claimed to be the illustration.”¹² Of the prominent analyses based on text, Walter Friedlaender’s is the most convincing.

In 1938 Friedlaender argued that the painting depicts a story from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. He relies on a text that reproduces the ancient myth of Venus and Adonis. This method is iconographical and explains art through traditions of representation and associations to texts. Although it is uncertain to what extent Titian read and was aware of contemporary or ancient literature, it is possible that he was familiar with the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* if not directly influenced by it, as it was published in Venice fifteen years before he painted *Sacred and Profane Love*. Friedlaender asserts Titian’s knowledge of it, stating that he made woodcuts himself in his early career and therefore would have known the illustrators of the book.¹³ It is true that Titian made woodcuts, but what Friedlaender assumes is not necessarily true.

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, (The Strife of Love in the Dream of Poliphilo) was a popular work of fiction, written by Francesco

Colonna and published in 1499. It included 171 woodcuts and appealed to the educated men associated with the courts of Italy. The book recounts the experiences of Poliphilo, who in a dream within a dream, searches for his beloved, the nymph Polia, and in his quest, encounters ancient architecture, sculpture, Latin and Greek inscriptions, hieroglyphs, and mythological and allegorical personages.¹⁴ The associations to antiquity in the text may have inspired the artist to invent the marble relief in the painting.

A short summary of the myth will help to explain the interpretation. Polia is a frigid, chaste girl devoted to the cult of Diana, and one day her childhood friend Poliphilo approaches her and begs to become her lover. She refuses and he is reduced to lying on the floor, apparently dead. Polia drags him to a corner of the temple and leaves to go home. She then experiences a strange and terrifying nightmare which convinces her to abandon the cult of Diana and flee with Poliphilo to the kingdom of Venus. They are brought to her sanctuary where they find a marble sarcophagus adorned with reliefs that contains Adonis's ashes and water, the very place where Venus emerges once a year to perform *la tintura delle rose* – a re-enactment of when she, running to save Adonis from a jealous Mars, pricks her calf on a rose bush and the trickling blood turns the white roses red.¹⁵ Friedlaender begins his visual analysis by comparing the details on the sarcophagus in *Sacred and Profane Love* with woodcuts that accompanied the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.¹⁶ A woodcut depicts *la tintura delle rose* and the relief in Titian's painting presents three figures – a

male attacking another figure who is lying on the ground, and a distressed female nude running towards them.

In Friedlaender's view the second portion of the relief on the sarcophagus is related to Polia's dream. Here Titian depicts a man pulling the hair of a female child who clings to a horse. Although there is no horse in the story of Polia's dream, it recalls the statue of a (winged) horse, in an earlier chapter of the *Hypnerotomachia* described as standing in front of the gate of a town and which is also represented in a woodcut.¹⁷ Friedlaender suggests that the discrepancy between text and image may be explained through a greater sense of monumentality achieved in the representation of a mighty horse. The representation of a bed, which conforms better to the narrative would be lacking in visual impact.¹⁸ Titian may have wanted the image to convey mood or emotion, but the strict method of associating art with text denies this possibility. Finally, the identities of the female figures are revealed, and he writes:

Venus herself, the goddess, who, coming naked from the bath in the basin, is sitting on one edge of the sarcophagus, the tomb of Adonis. She ritualistically raises the incense bowl and supervises the mystery of the *tintura delle rose*. The figure sitting on the other side of the sarcophagus (somewhat lower) can only be Polia, Venus's newest adept. Her whole appearance follows the text of the novel - the rich clothing, the loosened hair with the wreath and the flowers in her hand. She is represented as if in the very moment

when she is asked by the nymphs to tell her story.¹⁹

The nude figure is likely to be Venus, as the presence of cupid, a rosebush, nudity and associations made to Adonis allude to the goddess. However to suggest that Polia is the clothed figure allows too many questions to remain unanswered. Why are the figures identical? Where are the nymphs awaiting to hear her story? Why is she engaged with viewer, seemingly unaware the goddess beside her?

Rona Goffen criticizes the adherence to the art historical tradition, exemplified by Friedlaender, of finding a text within a painting. She writes, “[o]ccasionally art historians may be too eager to find in a particular text relevance to visual imagery, for no other reason than the contemporaneousness of the written and visual sources.”²⁰ There is more expressive freedom in Titian’s secular narratives. That the artist wishes to express mood or poetic feeling rejects a neo-platonic interpretation. Meyer Shapiro writes of the “[p]oetic unity based on his [the artist’s] love of the quality that attracts him”²¹ and Edgar Wind shares the same belief, stating “the poetic mood completely absorbs the philosophical construction.”²² Determining the subject matter as ‘Poesie’ and rejecting Friedlaender’s textual analysis continues the discussion about Titian’s painting. It creates a new dialogue between art historians, still determined to contextualize.

Cupid is particularly interesting to examine through the *Hypanerotomachia Poliphili*. Friedlaender writes, “[h]e places the blood of Venus, which he has caught in the oyster shell into the

sarcophagus, and by this act changes the white roses into red. In the painting he seems to be taking out of the water the newly coloured flowers.²³ Cupid, his arm elbow deep in the basin, looks pensively downwards, but nothing suggests that he is holding an oyster shell or that he is removing flowers from the water. In fact he appears as a naive child fascinated by the fluidity of the liquid.²⁴ Without narrative, the viewer is drawn to a simple moment in which a child, motivated by his curiosity, plays with water. Titian is able to express Cupid's psychological presence. Without solving the mystery, the viewer is able to appreciate the delicate rendition of Cupid.

Erwin Panofsky coined the term *paysage moralisé* in an article published in 1936, which described the visual elements in Renaissance landscapes that symbolized a binary opposition between virtue and vice. He further developed the theory in his book *Studies in Iconology*, where his analysis of *Sacred and Profane Love* identifies the juxtaposition between a sublime and less lofty principal of love. However, Panofsky emphasizes that *paysage moralisé* is not neo-medieval moralism, but rather characterizes neo-platonic humanism. Panofsky begins interpreting Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* by noting that the picture does adhere to an artistic tradition in composition and iconography. Titian and his contemporaries were aware of the two Venuses sculpted by Praxiteles, a draped version and an earlier nude. Furthermore, the two women resemble a pair of personifications, Eternal and Transient Bliss, described and explained by Cesare

Ripa. Panofsky writes that “*Felicita Eterna* is a resplendently beautiful blonde woman, whose nudity denotes her contempt of perishable earthly things... [while] *Felicita Breve* is a ‘lady’ whose dress of yellow and white signifies satisfaction. She is adorned with precious stones and holds a vessel full of gold and gems, symbols of vain short-lived happiness.”²⁵ Panofsky acknowledges the merits of an explanation that defines *Sacred and Profane Love* as the opposition between eternal and temporal values; however, he dismisses it, stating that Ripa’s text “proves that an educated beholder of the sixteenth century had no doubts as the loftier nature of the nude figure.”²⁶ Panofsky criticizes the title *Sacred and Profane Love*, noting that it is right in its contrast of love, exalting one over the other, however it implies a false dichotomy.²⁷ He proposes *Geminae Veneres* or *Twin Venuses* as a more appropriate title. The nude figure becomes the *Venere Celeste*, symbolizing the principle of universal and eternal beauty. The draped figure is the *Venus Volgare* symbolizing the perishable yet visible and tangible beauty on earth.²⁸ As mentioned earlier, beauty and love are synonymous. Panofsky emphasizes that the figures are not a contrast between good and evil, rather together symbolize one principle, love, in two modes of existence or grades of perfection.²⁹ And this contrast is mirrored in the landscape which Panofsky refers to as a *paysage moralisé*. Love, according to neoplatonic belief, acts as an intermediary between heaven and earth, He writes, “And Cupid, stirring and, as it were, “homogenizing” the water, may be presumed to symbolize the principle of harmonization by virtue of which the two forms of

love represented by the two Venuses, though different in rank, are one in essence.”³⁰

The critic Patricia Emison discusses how and why art historical methods fall in and out of fashion. Panofsky’s *Paysage Moralisé*, applied to the landscape in *Sacred and Profane Love*, was considered an insightful interpretation during the 1930s, but by the 1960s its influence had diminished.³¹ The evolution of methodology tends to reject previous interpretations and practices of looking, as exemplified in Panofsky’s theory. Emison argues that this process may harm our understanding of the work. She writes, “[i]t suggests the possibility that by eliminating a set of interpretations justly seen now to be faulty, we may actually have created a greater distortion in our understanding of Renaissance art than while labouring under those less-than-utterly-grievous misapprehensions.”³² The viewer and the art historian must understand the development of methodology to appreciate what the most recent criticism argues. *Sacred and Profane Love* is now considered a marriage portrait, but this conclusion could only be drawn after Panofsky’s idea was rejected.

Emison describes Panofsky’s method of dividing the landscape into a "dimly lighted scenery with a fortified town and two hares or rabbits" and a "more rustic and less luxurious, but brighter landscape with a flock of sheep and a country church," in an attempt to derive morality from symbolism. For her, this is problematic for two major reasons. Lighting is considered crucial in an uncleaned painting, and the symbolism of the landscape on

the side of Profane love is considered negative, whereas in other Renaissance landscape paintings, these elements are given different, even opposite meanings. Emison is critical of Panofsky's symbols and she writes, "[t]he fortress that sometimes signifies valiant virtue is here taken as negative; the rabbit that Titian elsewhere puts in proximity to the Virgin here signifies lasciviousness."³³ Another art historian noticed Panofsky's error and brought attention to the presence of lovers behind the Sacred Love and for Panofsky's purpose, the side that was considered celestial and of a higher morality.³⁴ Moreover, A.R. Turner provides a plausible, more contemporary explanation for the landscape. He writes that the seemingly divided landscape was intended to create mood rather than to contain any sort of symbolism that would allow the viewer to understand the moralistic nature of the painting.³⁵ This reinforces the argument that Titian was interested in conveying emotion and mood.

The dismissal of Panofsky's *Paysage Moralisé* came with Charles Hope's 1976 paper *Problems of Interpretation in Titian's Erotic Paintings*. Hope identifies the dress worn by Profane Love as a Venetian wedding gown.³⁶ The study of material culture and the biography of the patron became a new avenue of research through which one could examine and derive meaning in art. Giles Robertson considers the biography of the Niccolo Aurelio and his wife Laura Bagarotto, confirming first Alice Wethey's investigation that revealed the coat of arms of both individuals in Titian's painting. Aurelio's crest can be clearly seen on the

sarcophagus next to the spout. Laura's is hidden inside the bowl sitting on the ledge.³⁷ This discovery led to the conclusion that *Sacred and Profane Love* was painted to commemorate a wedding.

Emison asserts that the conceptualization of Renaissance art is variable and flexible, and that evidence of this can be seen in the pictures. In her view, limiting the investigation to formulae, even complex formulae of hidden symbolism, limits the possibilities of meaning.³⁸ Meaning continues to change, and although Panofsky's theory is now rejected, it still contributes to our understanding of the work. As Seymour Howard wrote, "the subhistory of responses to...any of our acclaimed masterpieces is as important as the objects themselves, inasmuch as these responses reflect states and changes not only of reputation but of understanding."³⁹ The history of Titian scholarship becomes part of the art work. *Sacred and Profane Love* is an object through which Renaissance art historiography can be examined. The multiplicity of connotative meanings is evidence of this since the denotative meaning remains unchanged.

Contemporary interpretations approach Titian's work through methodologies that have recently been applied to art history. Women's Studies and the development of cross-disciplinary research have resulted in texts that challenge the master narratives of the Renaissance. Rona Goffen, a feminist art historian, introduces a radical interpretation of Titian's women, and she deals with gender in terms of iconography, biography and patronage.

Rona Goffen and Giles Robertson focus on Laura Bagarotto, the bride that the picture commemorates. Charles Hope proposes that the figure of Profane Love is a portrait of Laura herself. Robertson rejects this stating, “[i]f the clothed figure is indeed a portrait [of Laura] it would be the earliest surviving example of a full-length female portrait in Venetian if not in Italian art, and it would also seem ahead of its time as an allegorized portrait.”⁴⁰ Goffen also denies this possibility, writing that Titian made realistic, not idealised portraits of women. Furthermore, since the two figures are identical, a naked Laura would be unlikely in sixteenth-century Italy.⁴¹ Goffen then proposes that the image is about Laura as a bride, although her identity is subsumed by her nuptial status, and that the work concerns female sexuality in marriage.⁴² As Panofsky suggested earlier, the nude represents Celestial Love, and Goffen likens her to Sodoma’s painting, *Allegory of Celestial Love* (Fig. 4).⁴³ The similarities are significant; both representations share the flame of heavenly love. Goffen references Friedlaender as well, comparing the lamp to the antique metal vessel in the *Hypnertomachia*, which contained the flame of Love.⁴⁴ Celestial Love is described as superior, her sex is covered by white drapery, her legs locked together and her slender proportions idealize and dematerialize her. Her nudity, classical lamp and relationship to the sarcophagus allude to the past whereas those things associated with the bride are modern.⁴⁵ Goffen also recognises that the two female figures are identical, and she explains that Celestial Love represents one aspect of a woman’s identity. The relationship between Celestial Love and her clothed counterpart is complicated.

Goffen writes,

The repetition of red and white, and the juxtaposition of their attributes seem to confirm the single identity of the two women, figured as bride and as wife: As bride, crowned with myrtle, she holds Venus's roses and the gift presented by her husband at their marriage; and as wife, nude yet chaste, she turns to the bride as though to exhort her(self) to the Love symbolized by her lamp.

This interpretation is problematic, as chastity would be an attribute of a bride, who has yet to consummate the marriage. The wife, suggested to also be a representation of Celestial Love, should be understood as allegorical.

However, in a later publication, Goffen argues that Celestial Love is actually Venus representing love and sex which can be realised through the actual body of the bride. The church on the side of Venus is a symbol of protective love and emphasizes her purity. Through her presence, sexual love is sanctified by matrimony and procreation.⁴⁶ The rabbits behind the bride signify fertility, and the gated city is a metaphor reminding the viewer that the institution of marriage is dependent on the chastity of the bride. Cupid encourages the fountain which waters the rose, or male fertility nurturing Venus's flower.⁴⁷ Even the glove has a sexual connotation, as a Petrarchan motif that covers and uncovers the hand.⁴⁸ Goffen writes that in order to fulfill her role as *mater familias* she must be both pure and sexual.⁴⁹ Her sexuality is

integral to her identity as a woman, and this sexuality is legitimized through marriage, and visualized by Titian.

Although Goffen identifies symbols much like Panofsky, hers is a feminist reading as she places Laura at the forefront of her analysis. Similarly, Giles Robertson takes a biographical approach to the subject matter, as the peculiar history of the couple has the potential to explain the mysterious painting. Giles Robertson writes,

The marriage was certainly surprising. Aurelio was a rising and ambitious civil servant, already one of the secretaries of the Council of Ten and possibly with his sights set on the Grand Chancellorship which he later achieved, while the bride, though unobjectionable as a wealthy widow, was the daughter of Bertuccio Bagarotto, who had been executed for treason as recently as 1509.⁵⁰

The history of Laura's family becomes relevant because the violence with which Venetian officials reacted against the Bagarottos was later believed to be too severe. Historical references seem to suggest Bertuccio Bagarotto's innocence. Sanudo tells us that he went to the gallows protesting his innocence and Bembo records that the sentence was considered too severe and in 1519 his son was granted a pension without an official rehabilitation. Furthermore, Laura's ability to remarry a high profile Venetian politician suggests that her family's disgrace had been lessened.

Sanudo's records of Nicolo's life seem to give the impression that he knew his character well, and that the two men were friends. From Sanudo's accounts, Nicolo was an active, highly efficient and ambitious personality who relished in display, and Robertson suggests that an instance where he appeared dressed in scarlet, followed by ten friends and family members wearing the same brightly coloured dress to the occasion of his installation as Grand Chancellor is indication that such an unusual painting would be commissioned to commemorate his wedding.⁵¹

Roberston's interpretation is the most creative of those included in this paper, as she argues that the painting subtly expresses the unjust violence enacted upon the Bagarotto family. She writes, "[i]f we accept the clothed Venus as a portrait of Laura Bagarotto we could see the vessel under her left arm as containing her father's ashes, and such an interpretation would explain its contents not being displayed, while earlier suggestions - that it contains jewels or white roses - do not."⁵² If this is truly Laura then the nude Venus becomes an allegory of Truth, vindicating the family name. The vase which she holds aloft in her left hand is associated with the iconography of *Caritas*, symbolizing the warmth of God's Love, as it also does later in the hand of Ripa's *Felicta Eterna*, but the fact that she is Venus means that Titian is introducing new iconography. According to Roberston, it is the illumination of Truth, not the warmth of Celestial Love that is signified by the lamp. The subject matter of the relief is linked to a work by Giotto from the Arena chapel in Padua, the city where he

completed his first set of frescos. The violent scene is a classicized version of the rapine below Giotto's grisaille figure of *Injustitia*.⁵³

It is believable that *Sacred and Profane Love* depicts the bloody history of Laura's family and attempts to restore the honour of her father through a commissioned painting. Reconciliation for the deeds of her relatives might have been necessary for her marriage to a Venetian official. The marriage was to her advantage, and the circumstances through which she became a respectable woman once more may have relied on those who believed in her father's innocence. If Bembo had expressed his regret to the harshness to which Bertuccio was subjected, and Sanudo affirms that he claimed innocence until the very end, then sufficient doubt may have lingered in the minds of those responsible for Laura's fate.

Goffen's research reveals more about the biography of Laura which provides evidence for certain visual elements such the bridal gown. A record of a white satin gown appeared in a document outlining Laura's dowry. The fact that Laura may have worn the gown a second time signals "the beginning of her social and psychological rehabilitation."⁵⁴ She is literally reborn through her second marriage. The consideration of material culture revealed the presence of Laura's actual gown in the painting, and provoked a discussion concerning the single red sleeve which has been suggested as an indication that Laura was widowed. The silver casket held by the bride was discovered to be a commonplace gift for newly wedded women. A new methodology resulted in previously overlooked information to become part of our

understanding of the work. The inclusion of the gown which belonged to Laura, and the large dowry that may have paid for *Sacred and Profane Love*, implies that she may have been Titian's informal patron. Goffen concludes that "[t]he bride's involvement in the creation of Titian's picture of marriage, both as subject and possibly as client, may have determined his innovative characterization of a woman as a fully realised individual, the decisive protagonist of her own life."⁵⁵ Certainly her tragic story would suggest that Laura was a strong individual who was forced to become independent. If Laura did influence the subject matter, it would explain why a feminist methodology could make sense of the mysterious painting.

In conclusion, *Sacred and Profane Love* is a fascinating art work, attractive for its technical beauty and mysterious aura. Although no scholar has been able to completely decipher the meaning, methodology allows art historians to approach it from endless points of view. Although Titian's intention will never be known, art historians will continue to contribute to our understanding and appreciation of Titian, a process that will allow Renaissance art to remain relevant and valuable.

Notes

¹ Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966).

² Sacred and Profane Love. Titian. (1514 ca.) oil on canvas cm. 118x279. Borghese Gallery, Rome.

³ Howard Seymour, "On Iconology, Intention, Imagos, and Myths of Meaning," *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no. 34 (1996): 86.

⁴ Walter Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose (Sacred and Profane Love) by

Titian," *The Art Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (1938): 323.

⁵ Giles Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth, an alternative Reading of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love," *Renaissance Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 1988): 127.

⁵ Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 36.

⁶ Seymour, "On Iconology," 86.

⁷ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

⁸ Broude and Garrard, *Expanding Discourse*, 2.

⁹ Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly iconographic* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 113.

¹⁰ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 270.

¹¹ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 270.

¹² Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 270.

¹³ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

¹⁴ Rosemary Trippe, "The 'Hypnerotomachia Poliphili', Image, Text, and Vernacular Poetics," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2002): 1223.

¹⁵ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

¹⁶ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

¹⁷ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

¹⁸ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

¹⁹ Friedlaender, "La tintura della rose," 323.

²⁰ Rona Goffen, "Renaissance Dreams," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1987): 683.

²¹ Patricia Emison, "The Paysage Moralisé," *Artibus et Historiae* 16, no. 31 (1995): 128.

Meyer Schapiro, "'Muscipula Diaboli,' the Symbolism of the Mérod Altarpiece" in *Renaissance Art*, ed. C. Gilbert (New York, 1970), 34.

²² Emison, "Paysage Moralisé," 128.

Ed Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York, 1968), 150-51.

²³ Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, 324.

²⁴ David Jaffe et al., "Foundations," in *Titian* (Great Britain: National Gallery Company Limited, 2003), 92-94.

²⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

²⁶ Panofsky, "Studies in iconology."

²⁷ Panofsky, "Studies in iconology."

²⁸ Panofsky, "Studies in iconology."

²⁹ Panofsky, "Studies in iconology."

³⁰ Panofsky, "Studies in iconology."

³¹ Emison, "Paysage," 125.

³² Emison, "Paysage," 125.

- ³³ Emison, "Paysage," 127.
³⁴ Emison, "Paysage," 127.
³⁵ Emison, "Paysage," 127.
³⁶ Emison, "Paysage," 127.
³⁷ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 33.
³⁸ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 128.
³⁹ Howard Seymour, "On Iconology, Intention, Imagos, and Myths of Meaning," *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no. 34 (1996): 85.
⁴⁰ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 271.
⁴¹ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 36
⁴² Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 36
⁴³ Rona Goffen, "Titian's Sacred and Profane Love and Marriage," in *The Expanding Discourse* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 114. Sodoma's full name is Giovanni Antonio Bazzi and the painting is dated ca. 1504
⁴⁴ Goffen, "Titian's Sacred and Profane," 114.
⁴⁵ Goffen, "Titian's Sacred and Profane," 114.
⁴⁶ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 41.
⁴⁷ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 38.
⁴⁸ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 38.
⁴⁹ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 39.
⁵⁰ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 271.
⁵¹ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 274.
⁵² Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 274.
⁵³ Robertson, "Honour, Love and Truth," 279.
⁵⁴ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 33.
⁵⁵ Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 42.

Sublime (Re)Visions: The Public Function of the Industrial
Sublime in Contemporary Photography

Jocelyn Claire Burke

Each passing generation of artists has explored the concept of the sublime. The sublime has been an enticing and artistically fertile trope, both in its elusive definition and its intrinsically felt presence. Edmund Burke is credited with establishing the formal conceptualization of the sublime in his influential 1756 discourse, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Since then, the concept and the functions it serves have been reinterpreted to suit the needs and sensibilities of each era and its formative thinkers. Burke's theory, most notably revised by Immanuel Kant and Jean-Francois Lyotard, has been continually appropriated and re-negotiated by theorists of romanticism, modernism, and post-modernism. The incredible

social and ideological shifts perpetuated by widespread industrialization and urbanization subsequently created a fertile ground for the sublime to be reinterpreted in newly emerging social contexts.

When considering the ways and the extent to which technology and globalization have changed the world since the turning of the twenty-first century, it comes as no surprise that there has been a recent resurgence of artistic and academic interest in the desire to constitute the sublime.¹ This paper will explore the contemporary need for the sublime, and the educational functions it now performs in the realms of public art. I will evaluate the techniques, subject matter, and public presentation of photography by Andreas Gursky and Edward Burtynsky, positing that both artists engage with representations of the sublime in the post-industrial era.

In 1948, at the onset of the industrial and cultural commitment to planned obsolescence within the industrial and social world, Barnett Newman aptly noted that the sublime had replaced beauty as the fascination of our age.² The planet's bountiful natural resources were once a potent totem and archetype of our conception of the beautiful. As they continue descending toward depletion, anxiety around the implications of their disappearance is reflected back at society in public art. From this contemporary vantage point, the sublime has never been more relevant.

The nuances within existent theories of the sublime across the art-historical conversation have been influenced by numerous sources,

including wars, natural disasters, feminist movements, and developments in psychiatry. All of the aforementioned forces could potentially cast any contemporary notion of the sublime into a chaotic miasma of interpretations. For the purposes of cogently evaluating the manifestation of the sublime in art today, it is superfluous to retrace the widely documented historical evolution of the theory, how it functions within the psyche of the beholder, and all related ideological problems.³ I will just note that in each passing era the exponential progression of industrialization has inevitably propelled the notion of the sublime to the place it now occupies within a globalized public consciousness.

This timely revival of interest in the sublime has resurfaced as a way to address the mind-boggling scale of globalized industrial development in our era of planned obsolescence, global warming and peak oil.⁴ The concept of a ‘sublime wilderness,’ as established by American Romanticism, contains an inherent flaw for application to ecological theory due to its dependence on a separation between humans and nature.⁵ The coinciding forces of modernist theory and industrialization exaggerated the romantic notion that humans are separate and by their means superior to nature. Whereas the romantics viewed nature as an “emblem of permanence against the transience of human life,”⁶ modernist art proved inherently complicit in industrial development, promoting goals for mankind that would be achieved at the expense of the natural environment.⁷ Over the course of the nineteenth-century, mass urbanization spread across America and the number of

citizens living in cities jumped from a mere seven percent to over forty percent. Consequently, the 1890 census indicated that all of the vast tracts of frontier land, previously seen as characteristic of the ‘wild and free’ American identity, had been accounted for.⁸ The symbolic meaning of nature in the dominant public consciousness was inevitably altered, as nature became a resource to be plundered in order to meet the rising demands of ever-accelerating industrial progress. John Ruskin critiqued the depiction of nature in art as early as 1850. After establishing that nature in art was “part of a larger moral activity... meaningful only in its connection to...social, political and economic issues,” Ruskin then declared the “failure of nature” and, influenced by the Industrial Revolution, he predicted a future annihilation of human life (as coined by Burke).⁹ Ruskin’s projection has startling relevance today when we consider that resources are being exhausted at an unprecedented rate. The detrimental effects are supported by physical and spatial changes, which can be passively observed by the average person in periods less than a decade.¹⁰ Contemporary theorists now suggest that we are, in fact, annihilated.¹¹ This perceived state of annihilation is symptomatic of a public body largely disenfranchised and separated from a formerly intrinsic identity of place.¹² While writing about *Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime*, Alix Olin explains the larger cause of a present day Burkean annihilation:

These days, at least in the Western world, such fear and trembling in the face of God are no longer generalized. In

place of God, we have a sprawling network of technology, government, business, and communications. These forces of globalization have become our religion... These factors are like the Divine in that they are beyond the understanding of the vast majority of people whose lives they affect.¹³

In previous eras, the Divine was the only source of terror need to create a sensation of the sublime. In postmodern globalized cultures, the fact that forces controlling nearly every element of existence come from a mash of incomprehensible and unidentifiable sources makes the agency of the individual appear to be inconsequential.

The cultural confusion caused by instruments of globalized industrialization has permeated the public consciousness to such a degree that it can be defined as the ‘administrative sublime’.¹⁴ The administrative sublime is also exemplified, perhaps unintentionally, by the practices of the Center for Land Use Interpretation, which was founded in 1994 out of Los Angeles as a way to address land use concerns. The center hosts educational exhibitions on contemporary land use and conducts public bus tours to remote industrialized sites and guarded borders of military-industrial complexes. The Center claims complete objectivity regarding environmental and political implications of land use, stating that their various tours “do not aspire to the sublime, but rather operate as an agent for the mediation of the sublime.” Significantly, Michael Holte suggests that “the center’s

tours provide a frame, however ephemeral, for the experience of these sites, putting humans in contact with the inhuman scale of ambition and the folly of progress.”¹⁵ Although the administrative body does not claim to be affiliated with art, the practices they use are inextricably linked to conceptual art. In fact, The Center for Land Use Interpretation was included in the Whitney Biennial of American Art in 2006.¹⁶ The declared neutrality of the educational practices of the Centre are an interesting comment on the reality it documents, but when people are generally oblivious to the impacts of technology in a globalized industrial world approaching environmental crisis, the function of the sublime is less effective.¹⁷ The scale and urgency of the global environmental crisis requires the use of a widely accessible and effective modernist tool: photography.

Photography has long been credited for possessing the power to personalize the viewing experience of a subject, provide factual objectivity, and neutralize the subject matter of incomprehensible events that have become commonplace.¹⁸ German photographer Andreas Gursky’s large format photographic images of vast public spaces are compositionally equalized through digital manipulation, and present both as a conceptual and visual portrait of the postmodern world. Scenes of commonplace public environments expose their underlying realities of globalization through the work’s digital ‘enhancement’ and repetition of the visual elements that constitute their vast spaces. In one of his most famous works, appropriately titled *99 Cent*, the enormous 207 x 336 centimeter

visual plane is rammed solid with the colourful repetition of candy wrappers in a warehouse-sized dollar-store. The viewer is both entranced with a sense of option and overwhelmed with the cultural reality of vastly manufactured, inexpensive products that are ephemeral in their short-lived journey toward consumption. In *Greeley* of 2002, Gursky digitally manipulates a photograph of grazing beef cattle by repeating the paddock almost all the way to the horizon line, and cramming each paddock with more cattle than is realistically conceivable. At first glance the rural landscape registers as commonplace, but as the immense scale and equalizing treatment of the repetitive visual elements sink in, the image becomes fraught with the implications of industrial farming practices and the incredible amount of natural resources required to produce enough beef on a global scale. The feeling of unease created by large-scale images that are both awe-inspiring and disturbing comes from the simultaneously surreal and familiar realities, which present “our own ignorance magnified. It is our own situation we are looking at.”¹⁹ The digital manipulation techniques draw the viewer’s attention to the industrial implications of the subject matter, but do they successfully implicate the viewer as a participant in the globalization narrative? In the case of Gursky’s body of work, it is the digital enhancement that triggers the notion of the sublime. However, while the unreality of the photographs allegorize the conditions of globalization, the viewer can also dismiss the images for the same reason. As has been common to the history of photography, Marshall McLuhan’s famous cultural theory rings true: the

medium embeds itself in the message.

The advent of photography, in particular the Stereograph, allowed for detailed scenes with illusory depth, depicting the spectacular vastness of nature, to be commodified as a symbol of the leisure class, and its ability to escape the perils of industrialized urban life.²⁰ Of course, the proliferation of the photographic medium was perfectly suited to document both the industrialization of modernity and its counterpart- pristine wilderness. Similarly, following the deindustrialization of corporate wastelands during economic recessions in the twentieth-century, the evolution of our photographic culture naturally took interest in photographing abandoned factories in a neo-romantic nostalgia, not unlike the nineteenth-century preoccupation with ancient ruins.²¹ Nature photography has long served as a response to the social pressures of industrial growth, but as the work of Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky indicates, it is no longer relevant or effective to present an outdated sentimental view of untouched land. Rather than manipulating scenes of common public space to conjure the sublime, Burtynsky uses large-format analog prints to show rarely seen landscapes that evidence the incomprehensible scale of resource depletion invoked by globalized industrialization.

Drawing influence from nineteenth-century photographers like Carleton Watkins and August Sander, Burtynsky's large-format viewfinder film cameras capture astonishing detail with great clarity.²² Additionally the immense size, formal composition, and beautiful colouration provide the viewer with a visceral experience

of “a heightened sense of observation unattainable in the act of viewing the scene itself.”²³ That is, if the viewer ever had the opportunity to physically visit the site. The manufactured landscapes of mines, quarries, recycling plants, landfill dumps, oil fields, and factories are all settings spectacularly altered by human engineering. Burtynsky photographs them in such a way that they are also spectacularly beautiful and surreal. His series of *Nickel Tailings, Sudbury, Ontario* looks like volcanic lava is running across a marshy plain. The contrast of fiery orange veins against deep black earth is so striking and unusual that it demands a second look. The image is so dramatic that it seems as though it is digitally manipulated, but it is not. As revealed by the title of the series, the otherworldly colours are the result of oxidized iron left behind in the process of separating nickel from ore.²⁴ The image is visually stunning, but the fact that such beautiful colours are left behind in our natural environment by the processes of industry is the challenging element of the sublime at play in these works.

The same can be said for *Plate 7. Mines #22, Kennecott Copper Mine, Bingham Valley, Utah* and *Rock of Ages #15, Active Granite Section, E.L. Smith Quarry, Barre, Vermont*. The nearly countless layers of excavated rock resemble ancient ruins and minimalist painting respectively, and are beautiful in their symmetry, colouration, and rhythm. Yet, a closer look into the micro-details of the scene reveals large machinery, ladders and other indications of scale. Suddenly the enormity of decades of insatiable excavation that the mine and quarried pit represent incites awe and

horror. The viewer is faced with a literal representation of the human impact on the land that is both rarely considered, and in which all citizens of industrialized nations are implicated.²⁵ The seductive beauty and terrifying meaning implicit in the mechanism of the sublime become manifest as the viewer is made aware of the incomprehensible reality of the world outside her or her finite consciousness. The gargantuan incursions on the land in Burtynsky's photographs contradict the expansionist belief and culturally ingrained myth of the infinite renewability of the earth.²⁶

However, Burtynsky is careful not to define his work as a moral or political statement against industry. He makes conscious effort to present his work in a context of neutrality, allowing the viewers to draw their own conclusions.²⁷ Western civilization has consistently resisted recognizing human vulnerability in the face of nature,²⁸ but Burtynsky's photographs evade such resistance by providing multiple visual and conceptual ways of entering the work. Subject matter is delicately balanced with technical and artistic mastery, leading towards an end that is reflective and sublime.

Contemporary society needs the experience of the sublime in order to come to terms with the reality of industry and the state of the natural world. In his theory of the ecological sublime, Christopher Hitt presents the idea that "the sublime offers the unique opportunity for the realization of a new, more responsible perspective on our relationship with the natural environment."²⁹ The practices of artists like Andreas Gursky and Edward Burtynsky, whose works conjure the sublime, currently operate in

a unique cultural context with a public body primed by a state of mass annihilation, ready to welcome and hopefully benefit from the educational insights allowed by photography of the industrial sublime

Notes

¹ Jane Forsey, "Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 4 (2007): 381.

² Paul Beidler, "The Postmodern Sublime: Kant and Tony Smith's Anecdote of the Cube," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 2 (1995): 179.

³ Forsey, "Theory," 381.

⁴ Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 129.

⁵ Christopher Hitt, "Toward and Ecological Sublime," *New Literary History* 30, no. 3 (1999): 603.

⁶ Hitt, "Ecological Sublime," 618.

⁷ Charles Garoian, "Art Education and the Aesthetics of Land Use in the Age of Ecology," *Studies in Art Education* 39, no. 3 (1998): 254.

⁸ Deborah Bright, "The Machine in the Garden Revisited: American Environmentalism and Photographic Aesthetics," *Art Journal* 51, no. 2, (1992): 60.

⁹ Susan Platt, "Paradigms and Paradoxes: Nature, Morality and Art in America," *Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (1992): 84.

¹⁰ Lippard, *Lure of the Local*, 129.

¹¹ Alix Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky and the Contemporary Sublime," *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (2002): 24.

¹² Lippard, *Lure of the Local*, 9.

¹³ Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky," 23.

¹⁴ Michael Ned Holte, "The Administrative Sublime of The Center for Land Use Interpretation at the Circumference," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 13 (2006): 24.

¹⁵ Holte, "Administrative Sublime," 20.

¹⁶ Holte, "Administrative Sublime," 24.

¹⁷ Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky," 31.

¹⁸ Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 4.

¹⁹ Ohlin, "Andreas Gursky," 35.

²⁰ Bright, "Machine in the Garden," 61.

²¹ Steven High and David Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 49.

²² Lori Pauli, *Manufactured Landscapes: The Photographs of Edward Burtynsky* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2003), 23.

²³ Pauli, "Manufactured Landscapes," 13.

²⁴ Pauli, "Manufactured Landscapes," 21.

²⁵ Pauli, "Manufactured Landscapes," 11.

²⁶ Lippard, *Lure of the Local*, 126.

²⁷ Pauli, "Manufactured Landscapes," 22.

²⁸ Hitt, "Ecological Sublime," 611.

²⁹ Hitt, "Ecological Sublime," 608.

Postmodern Pastiche: the Internet and Dadaism

Angel Callander

In our current technological age, digital reproductions of artworks are readily available with a mere Internet search. Additionally, the Internet allows for users to acquire copies of any image editing software, which in turn enables the altering and amalgamating of virtually anything, by anyone. Apathetic, yet culturally mindful teenagers and politically motivated bloggers worldwide therefore have the means to create any sort of visual statement they choose. The results of this infinite availability that I wish to explore are the combinations of fine art pieces with elements of present-day popular culture. This blending can range from celebrities to figures of political interest.

I do not contend to analyze the psychological underpinnings of the creators of these works, but rather to place the works themselves within a context of the art historical practices and canons on which they may intrinsically rely. For this purpose, and despite the seeming triviality of these works, I will refer to the creators as “artists” and to the works as “art.” These puzzling works of art, I believe, can be categorized in three ways at once. In a large way, there is a comparison to be made to the anti-art sentiments of Dadaism in the First World War era. Considered by some as a precursor to the critical and theoretical perspectives of Postmodernism, Dadaist photomontage bears a resemblance to these digital works physically and philosophically. As I place these works in a Postmodern setting, they reject the traditional medium and technique of painting and perhaps even adopt societal critique and parody, while the physical principles bear resemblance to pastiche.

Essentially, with the Internet presenting the opportunity to discover so many things over its vast expanse, one may happen upon a pink leisure suit clad Heidi Montag, obviously made the central figure of *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (1626) by Peter Paul Rubens. Perhaps even a bald-headed Britney Spears may come along, preparing to forcefully strike the Three Graces with an umbrella, having replaced Venus as the subject of Botticelli’s *Primavera* (1482). In the spirit of this art, I would like to start by discussing the particular way in which these works play with the multiple temporalities of artworks. It has been argued that works of art are

the most profound tools for pluralizing time.¹ Nagel and Wood describe this phenomenon as a “bending”: while the work of art is physically produced in a particular moment, there is nonetheless a tendency for the work to direct attention away from this moment.² The work contemporaneously expresses time backwards and forwards, like a folded piece of paper meeting at its opposite ends. In the case of a Baroque painting, for example, this “bending” of time can perhaps be seen as something profound. In essence, its Baroque technique would be taken from a conflation of the previous works of the Renaissance style and a desire to stretch the movement to complex and eccentric limits. In stretching Renaissance ideals of clarity and linear organization the painting indicates a prior point of origin, while the embellishment of these qualities with innovative composition and emotions of ecstasy or anguish suggests an appeal to present and future observers to regard it as a truly meaningful step in the progression of art.³

In its own way, this edited art participates in simultaneous, multiple versions of time. The evident reference to backward time being the backdrop and narrative of a fine art reproduction, while the inclusion of recognizable figures seems to indicate not only a stream of cultural concern in a present time (celebrities, politics, etc.), but also a lasting, digital message to a future generation of these concerns. Additionally, there is an element of displacement. Whether it is intentional on the part of the artist or not, the juxtaposition of history with modern condition in this art is an act of anachronism. Nagel and Wood’s view of anachronism suggests

imitation, with the source being largely separated and removed from the modern imitation.⁴ With the art I am discussing, this gap exists because of the general difficulty in fastening images, especially with differences in context and materiality. For example, a digital photograph of Lady Gaga, performing in a green and glitter-covered unitard, complete with wing-like protrusions, is especially cumbersome when she is placed into a reproduction of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) painting as the farmer's unmarried daughter. Assumedly, the 'aggressiveness' of Lady Gaga's signature style can serve as a disparity for the stoic farmer, as well as for Wood's attempt to resist the 'aggressiveness' of contemporary abstract art in Europe.⁵ However, the intended significance can become lost in the seemingly clumsy contrast, if not meant just for comedic affect. The fixed context of images in their historical circumstance is not easily broken when analyzed, allowing for the confusion between sources and imitations, supporting the anachronism.⁶

Notoriously known in the art world as the movement of 'anti-art,' I believe the conscious principles of Dada are evident, perhaps unconsciously, in this art. Having manifested from the crisis period of World War I, Dada's modus operandi had been to criticize the popular culture of the time.⁷ For the first time in the canon of art history, mass media would make up a large part of a movement; artists would spend time 'recontextualising' cut-outs from newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc.⁸ Next to the general ideology of Dadaism, the birth of photomontage is what I consider

to be important in this investigation. Hans Richter, a participant in the Dada movement in Zürich, details photomontage as an important tool in “new art,” representing a visual perception of the artist’s experience in the world.⁹ In a way, these altered artworks I’m considering may exhibit the artist’s experience in mainstream culture, observing the professed disintegration of persistent religious and intellectual values and the transpiring of celebrity reverence. Like the Dadaists, these artists use their resources to provoke and “confront a crazy world with its own image.”¹⁰

A fundamental position of Dadaism is one of self-criticism.¹¹ I do not believe the artists of this Postmodern pastiche can create a work to confront society and simultaneously escape the denunciation themselves. Creating strong political commentary using figures from popular news stories is self-reflexive of a point of view, placing the artist directly into the social situation. Like Dada artists, it is not necessarily a commitment in the sense of complete dedication to the point of view; however, by producing the work, there is an intrinsic opinion that is sent out.¹² Dada artists are said to have had demands for “utter transformation of all social and political conditions of the working class,” the prominent ideal being to replace ‘bourgeois’ art and “cultural icons of a society once ruled by class domination.”¹³ By producing ‘anti-art,’ there had been an attack on these cultural icons and artworks. Similarly, my pastiche artists can be sought after as creating attacks on this ‘bourgeois’ art of the past by infiltrating it with images of political conflict and Hollywood’s quasi-estranged female idols of the last

ten years. Interestingly, these images contain figures that may be considered of high rank in society based on authority and net worth, such as police officers and celebrities. The result is a clash of 'powerful' figures and objects of high culture.

One thing to note with these digital parodies is the deliberate replacement of central religious figures. For artists of the early twentieth century, Dadaists included, the historical situation of art represented immorality, depravity and falsehood.¹⁴ By producing photomontages comprised of reconceptualized items of mass media, the message would be of rebellion against mainstream culture, political systems, and societal norms.¹⁵ Perhaps substituting the crucified Christ of Pietro Cavallini's *Crucifixion* (1308) for a smiling Heidi Montag, arms outstretched, is an artist's way of communicating his or her distaste for the upper-class decadence in commissioning religious work for the promise of salvation. The act of replacing Christ for Heidi Montag either equates her as a religious icon, or as a symbol of modern depravity; perhaps she is both, as a symbol of modern depravity, being considered by some as an icon. Regardless of the modern artist's intention, the inherent principles of the art reflect a critique of mainstream culture and art historical practices that parallels the ideology of Dada artists. As a whole, I consider many of the innate principles of this Postmodern pastiche to align nicely with those of historical Dadaism in thought and application.

The difficulty in truly defining Postmodernism enables this art to find its way into the canon, especially with the already proposed

quality of multi-temporality as well as the social criticism of Dada. Literary theorist, Ihab Hassan, tells of critic Leslie Fiedler's impulse to "challenge elitism of the high modernist tradition in the name of popular culture," coming from a view of Postmodernism as a term of bold and almost uninhibited acceptance for things.¹⁶ In this art, high culture (that of fine art) is directly infiltrated by popular culture. To illustrate this idea—and in the spirit of aforementioned politics—I draw upon the recent case of "Occupy" protestors at University of California Davis campus being pepper sprayed by police officers. Photos and videos of this incident would spread across the Internet like wildfire. It did not take long for outraged Internet users, having sided with the protests, to appropriate the media of the affair in their own ways; one way happening to be in the form of fine art alteration. A widespread photo of an officer nonchalantly pepper spraying a line of students would be adapted to numerous paintings, placing the officer and his can of pepper spray in various ways to be either comedic or simply commentary, or both. Many of these can be seen on a 'dedicatory' blog.¹⁷ This officer can be found spraying into the face of Andrew Wyeth's polio-ridden Christina in *Christina's World* (1948), Édouard Manet's nude female picnicker in *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1862-3), a seated woman in *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-6) by Georges Seurat, Gustav Klimt's lovers in *The Kiss* (1907-8), and even the American Declaration of Independence in John Trumbull's *Declaration of Independence* (1817).

For all imaginable political commentary, no fine art reproduction could be safe from the disreputable pepper spray officer. Hassan's problem of whether Postmodernism is simply made of artistic propensity or social circumstance as well is illustrated in these pieces of art, suggesting that the happenings within society can be expressed through art.¹⁸ While this is not exactly a new concept, the pervasive digitization of culture allows not only for the production of this art, but also—perhaps more importantly—for the almost immediate sharing of the work worldwide. Liberties taken in the appropriation of these reproductions through the 'artistic process' of digital image editing cuts through social circumstance in its use of a particular issue, creating an accessible version to everybody, both physically (digitally) and intellectually. Conceptual problems of Postmodernism as a term, according to Hassan, are mitigated by the abilities of imagination and natural desire to "apprehend our historical presence in noetic constructs that reveal our being to ourselves."¹⁹ Being presented with a version of culture as it is understood to a contemporary group of people, which in this case would be one of protest versus police intervention, and integrating it into a historical version of culture understood much differently—in this case fine art—one is forced to combine two separate, individual understandings in order to reveal this 'being.' The notion of these artistic constructs as intellectual is dependent on the recipient and his or her desire to understand. Independent of the artist's intentions, the art may be critically analyzed or written off as a good joke; this is an inherent value of virtually all art in the Modern period. This penetration

through something so highly regarded throughout history as a piece of art by something politically and culturally charged, with the intention of real meaning or not, is apt to Postmodern exploration.

In an artistic sense, Postmodern art is naturally the converse to art labeled as Modern. Postmodern art, then, seeks a rejection of the aesthetic, formal and painterly values emphasized by Modern artists, while deciphering the phrase “art for art’s sake” in “the narrowest and most materialistic sense.”²⁰ One could argue for the use of celebrities in place of fine art subjects as something of the utmost materialism. Celebrities embody those who are paid large amounts for their work in entertaining with music, television, film, etc. By including these entertainers with which our culture has become so fascinated, this materialism implies “the neglect of life’s spiritual and transcendent aspects,” that is, the accepted idea that society in general pays much less attention to religion.²¹ With this in mind, a reproduction of Raphael’s *Madonna and Child* (c. 1503) shows the Virgin Mary seated with the Christ child looking up at her adoringly. Alternatively, what can be found is this painting having been translated into a language of Postmodernism, replacing the Virgin with a crying Lindsay Lohan, dressed in a bathing suit and smoking a cigarette; the look of the Christ child just as loving as the original. A call to acknowledge the endemic ‘worshipping’ of celebrities in an almost religious way, or to recognize the artist as having a profound sense of humour? Embedded in this new work, intentionally in either case I believe,

is a likening of Lindsay Lohan to the Virgin Mary. The effects on those who may view it will differ; there may be shock, claimed understanding, deep thought, or laughter in response to this art.

In contrast to Romantic artists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these artists are not claiming alienation from mainstream culture, but rather showcasing their full immersion.²² Clement Greenberg had further developed the idea of the “rebel artist” in the twentieth century from Charles Baudelaire, who had originally outlined the modern artist as fundamentally estranged in a pursuit of beauty.²³ For Greenberg, the ideal artist was inspired by traditions of Modernism over aspects of nature, focusing on aesthetics; the artist had to be arrogant and introspective, however, Postmodern artists are said to be “predominantly outwardly focused and concerned to contribute to the social and political.”²⁴ I propose that this Postmodern artist has more potential to be rebellious than Greenberg’s ideal artist, simply because penetrating issues of the social and political, by virtue, has the capacity to incite volatile reactions.

David K. Holt describes the artist of Postmodernism as an “arranger of preexisting images or signs,” creating nothing of real originality in the art world.²⁵ On the other hand, this artist is reliant on the art world to reward his or her transgression of ‘bourgeois’ sensibilities.²⁶ For the artists I am discussing, it is not necessarily the art world that will provide the reward, but rather the massive Internet community. This community is accepted, as a large part of modern culture, to have become oblivious to more obscure

symbols of religion and mythology. This iconographic illiteracy allows for a message of political or moral standpoint to remain simply because the backdrop is visibly identifiable as a painting within the canon of art history. The reward, assumedly, is of the work digitally spreading over the Internet regardless of the reaction. Paris Hilton crawling on the table of Juan de Juanes' *Last Supper* (c. 1560) may be offensive to some and hilarious to others, being shared with the corresponding commentary to make others aware. The subject of the painting, while by a lesser-known Spanish Renaissance artist, bears strong resemblance to the earlier and more recognizable *Last Supper* (1495-8) by Leonardo da Vinci, allowing the narrative to be received by most. It is this supposed attention to transgression of 'high culture' using the existing catalogues of art history and popular culture that places these cut-and-paste artists in a category of Postmodernism.

I do not mean for the term 'cut-and-paste' to be unkind, but it is rather a specification for the pastiche-like nature of this art I am considering. Pastiche is a term derived from the Italian *pasticcio* indicating a combination of elements, originally used as a cooking term.²⁷ Today, it is used as a critical term to denote any of the following: insulting depictions, lesser versions of things, "second-rate imitations, empty historical recreation[s]," and parodies.²⁸ Richard Dyer describes works of pastiche as possessing three qualities, the basis of which is the combining of elements, followed by the "quotation/imitation of prior works," and finally the negative aspect of deceit in the imitation.²⁹ This principle of

combining existing elements is where I employ the term of ‘cut-and-paste.’ The use of image editing software is analogous to the physical cutting and pasting of photographs, newspapers, etc., and the same terms are used for the digital ‘tools.’ Placing Nicole Richie and Paris Hilton seated together in the small boat of John William Waterhouse’s *The Lady of Shalott* (1888), or an open-mouthed Heidi Montag over Edvard Munch’s agonized figure in *The Scream* (1893), while I am simplifying, is a matter of replacing figures via digital cutting and pasting.

This pastiche form of imitation is the main vehicle for the communication of the Postmodern artistic sensibilities already discussed. Dyer appoints pastiche works the intentions of portraying randomness, multiplicity, disbelief, chaos, and “feeling[s] of abandonment.”³⁰ All of these things, I believe, are realized—or have the potential to be realized—in this art being studied. Performance-dressed Britney Spears replacing Joseph in *The Canigiani Holy Family* (1507-8) by Raphael, watching over Elizabeth, Mary and the infants of Jesus and John the Baptist, can certainly present a sense of chaos, disbelief, multiplicity and ‘randomness.’ These mentioned feelings of abandonment may arise from the obvious relinquishing of the patriarch Joseph as part of the Holy Family, as well as the general loss of true religious intent. In this sense, the pastiche purposely demoralizes the original subject of a historically renowned artwork and leaves an awareness of the aforementioned deceit or hypocrisy in the new reproduction. It is, of course, the semiotic values behind the

original images that allow for multitudinous feelings about the pastiche. The mixing of the signs “allows for stimulating intellectual and affective play between the elements.”³¹

The mixing of semiotic values in imitation opens the door for parody, as well. While Dyer has equated parody with pastiche, there are those who believe the two remain separate. Linda Hutcheon cites pastiche as an operation of resemblance and comparability, while parody sets out to differ from a relationship with the model; she maintains, however, that both are formal imitations with requisite intent.³² I would reason that parody and pastiche are not opposed to each other in this case, as pastiche describes the physicality while parody can define the inner meaning within the physical representation. Heidi Montag posing in a bikini as Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) is made in the style of pastiche, as an imitation using pre-existing elements, while the subject itself parodies Manet’s prostitute confronting her voyeurs. Hutcheon and I do agree on one thing: “[t]he pragmatic function of irony, then, is one of signaling evaluation, most frequently of a pejorative nature.”³³ That is, the irony of juxtaposing modern society with fine art by applying the principles of parody and pastiche, especially using the sort of ‘fallen female icons’ of popular culture illustrated thus far, provides the viewers (members of the Internet community) with something of derogatory character to be judged.

Raoul Hausmann had written of the possibilities of photomontage to constantly change as often as the social structure changes

(presumably daily).³⁴ In digitally altering images into a sort of photomontage, this principle remains true, the social structure having evolved into an age of pervasive technology. Within the technological context of the Internet, I have proposed the virtually limitless possibilities for creating a new kind of art. This art bears strong resemblance to established principles of Postmodernism, creation of pastiche and parody, as well as to the historical movement of Dadaism. In splicing figures of contemporary culture with digital reproductions of art historical works, the commentary is dynamic, of course, given the inherent subjectivity of art and ‘taste.’

The immeasurable opportunities to offend, humour, encourage contemplation and perhaps even inspire are present given the vast audience that may receive the work. Whether the cast of “Desperate Housewives” has replaced Empress Eugénie and her maids of honour in a Franz Xaver Winterhalter painting (*The Empress Eugénie Surrounded by Her Maids of Honor*, 1855), or a police officer is assisting the firing squad of Francisco Goya’s *The Third of May 1808* (1814) with his can of pepper spray, obscure narratives are produced. Intent may play a part in this narrative, assuming the artist is previously aware of the original content of the painting chosen, or alternatively, assuming they are not and the point is to joke. In either case, the reaction will vary between viewers in the art gallery of the Internet. The space of the Internet makes possible a new form of time for infinite recirculation and recombination of aesthetic objects, and the Postmodern pastiche is

free to pass through cyberspace for an eternity.

Notes

¹ Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 9.

² Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 9.

³ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 9.

⁴ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 298.

⁵ "American Gothic," The Art Institute of Chicago, accessed January 15, 2012, <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/Modern/American-Gothic>

⁶ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 298.

⁷ Rudolf Kuenzli, *Dada* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2006), 14-15.

⁸ Kuenzli, *Dada*, 15.

⁹ Hans Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 112.

¹⁰ Richter, *Art and Anti-art*, 114.

¹¹ Stefan-Sebastian Maffei, "Between 'Critique' and Propaganda: The Critical Self-Understanding of Art in the Historical Avant-Garde. The Case of *Dada*," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9, no. 27 (2010): 236.

¹² Maffei, "Between 'Critique' and Propaganda," 233.

¹³ Maffei, "Between 'Critique' and Propaganda," 230.

¹⁴ Maffei, "Between 'Critique' and Propaganda," 220.

¹⁵ Maffei, "Between 'Critique' and Propaganda," 220.

¹⁶ Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," in *A Postmodern Reader*, eds. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 275.

¹⁷ *Fuck Yeah Pepper Spray Cop Blog*; "Archive," accessed December 2012, <http://fuckyeahpepperspraycop.tumblr.com/archive>

¹⁸ Hassan, "Concept of Postmodernism," 276.

¹⁹ Hassan, "Concept of Postmodernism," 277.

²⁰ David K. Holt, "Postmodernism: Anomaly in Art-Critical Theory," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29, no. 1 (1995): 85.

²¹ Holt, "Postmodernism," 85.

²² Holt, "Postmodernism," 87.

²³ Holt, "Postmodernism," 87.

²⁴ Holt, "Postmodernism," 87.

²⁵ Holt, "Postmodernism," 87.

²⁶ Holt, "Postmodernism," 88.

²⁷ Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.

²⁸ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: The Cromwell Press, 2007), 7.

²⁹ Dyer, *Pastiche*, 8.

³⁰ Dyer, *Pastiche*, 19.

³¹ Dyer, *Pastiche*, 20.

³² Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: the teachings of twentieth-century art forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 38.

³³ Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 53.

³⁴ Raoul Hausmann, "Definition der Foto-Montage," as quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada: art and anti-art*, 114.

Appearance Versus Reality in Jean Rhys' *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*: Ekphrastic Encounters and Postcolonial Discourse

Lucina Pinto

“The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life”

– Georg Simmel “The Metropolis and Mental Life”

Julia Martin, the protagonist of Jean Rhys' *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, grapples with the very pressures described by Simmel.¹ Julia is conflicted between her desire for autonomy, her dissatisfaction with her monotonous life, and her complete and unavoidable reliance on the charity of others in order to survive

within the strictures of her class, gender, and colonized identity. *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* is a Modernist text in that it offers its reader brief episodic chapters involving little to no detail, as well as fluid movement in and out of different subjectivities and perspectives. The ending is indefinite and ambiguous, leaving the reader, if not wholly frustrated, then at least somewhat disillusioned. This effect is linked to one of the central aims of the Modernist novel — to create a fleeting pictorial window into the behaviour of a desolate individual facing a seemingly unmanageable and disappointing future. Rhys' text contains strong undercurrents of postcolonial issues. A consideration of appearances and realities can be framed within several ekphrastic encounters in the novel, and constructed around readings of the representation of gendered relations, as well as the performativity of Julia's role within the context of her colonial 'otherness'.

In its simplest form, ekphrasis is the verbal representation of the visual. The original ekphrasis, according to Murray Krieger, is Homer's verbal representation of the visually fictive shield of Achilles, in Book 18 of the *Illiad*. This shield provides protection for Achilles, not only through its physical impenetrability, but through the symbolic imagery of past and future Greek history depicted on its plate. It protects Achilles "by means of the emblematic decoration as well as the invulnerable material."² Furthermore, ekphrasis can function as a synthesis of two opposing forms of representation (i.e. text and image) that simultaneously trigger an understanding of each other — this is what W.J.T.

Mitchell refers to as ekphrastic hope. According to Mitchell, ekphrastic hope functions as “the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor.”³ Ekphrasis can also be understood through the Saussurean concept that the linguistic sign is a two-sided entity, consisting of signified and signifier, and the acceptance that these parts are intimately linked — each activating a conceptual understanding of the other.⁴ Krieger’s theory of ekphrasis becomes clearer when read alongside Saussure’s ideas. Krieger argues that ekphrastic representation is both miracle and mirage. The miracle is the realization that language can provide a spatial fix — “to freeze itself into a spatial form” — giving the reader an exhilarated sense of *sight*.⁵ While, paradoxically, the mirage is merely the illusion masking such impossibility: “an awareness of the incapacity of words to come together at an instant.”⁶

Krieger speaks of the tension between the natural sign, “a sign that is to be taken as a visual substitute for its referent,”⁷ and the arbitrary sign. In semiotics, “the linguistic sign is arbitrary,”⁸ meaning that within the relationship between signal and signification “the signal is *unmotivated*: that is to say arbitrary in relation to its signification with which it has no natural connexion in reality.”⁹ However, Saussure concedes that the symbol is not quite so easily positioned, “for it is characteristic of symbols that they are never entirely arbitrary ... they show at least a vestige of natural connexion between the signal and its signification.”¹⁰ Thus *symbol* comes to mean *image* and it is here that one can begin to

see the effectiveness of ekphrasis. One of the many functions of ekphrasis in literature is that it relieves the tension between arbitrary and natural sign by sustaining the illusory relationship between the mirage of the representation of the visual object, and the miracle of accessing that object through language. When dealing directly with ekphrastic texts this simplistic understanding of the function of ekphrasis does not allow for much in the way of analysis. This is because while ekphrasis serves to represent the visual, it additionally *misrepresents* it. As Krieger argues,

...the claim of naïve imitation no longer applies... the genre is thus used to allow the *fiction* of an ekphrasis, a make-believe imitation of what does not exist outside the poem's verbal creation of it. Literal ekphrasis has moved, via the power of words, to an illusion of ekphrasis. The ekphrastic principle has learned to do without the simple ekphrasis in order to explore more freely the illusionary powers of language.¹¹

Krieger's argument can be applied to a reading of Rhys' text. Although her work contains ekphrasis in its purest sense, the ekphrastic encounters of the characters move far beyond the limiting structure of mimesis. The visual representations in the narratives, the seesaw relationship between signified and signifier, create subjectivity for otherwise empty words and voiceless images.

The central ekphrastic moment in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*

concerns an Amedeo Modigliani nude portrait. Modigliani was an Italian born painter who lived and worked in Paris at the height of the avant-garde movement. He was fascinated by philosophical literature, including the writings of Nietzsche and Lautreamont, which were both strong influences on his depictions of the seedier aspects of modern Parisian life. Almost solely attracted to portrait painting, Modigliani focused primarily on the nude female form. The women of these portraits suggest a hedonistic sensuality — stemming from Symbolist notions of the relationship between sin and the female form. The imagery itself is overtly sexual; the women are coded through their naked forms and sensual expressions. The reclining nude is presented to the viewer as a welcoming yet exotic Other. The women's faces, long and mask-like, with harshly defined features — long angular noses, wide-set eyes and shocking lips — rarely show any heightened level of emotion beyond the suggestion of the erotic. Although we may now view Modigliani's nudes as modern, liberated women expressing their sexuality, the reality is that the women who posed for Modigliani were most likely prostitutes or women of low economic status. They are much like Rhys' protagonist Julia, who confesses, "I felt as if the woman in the picture were laughing at me and saying: 'I am more real than you. But at the same time I *am* you. I'm all that matters of you."¹² Julia is not a prostitute in the general sense of the term, but she does sell her companionship and her body in exchange for money.

As readers we are never wholly sure of Julia Martin's intentions. A

self-pitying and destitute character, Julia lives in post-World War I Paris, and has been discarded by her former lover, Mr. Mackenzie. This abandonment disrupts Julia's ability to tolerate her previous lifestyle. As Mr. Mackenzie suspects, Julia "had a fixed idea that her affair with him ... had been the turning-point in her life. They had destroyed some necessary illusions about herself which had enabled her to live her curious existence with a certain amount of courage and audacity."¹³ To Mr. Mackenzie, Julia is a beaten and broken down woman, too involved in her own self-destructive and wasteful ways to overcome her circumstances.

Julia's identity is continuously constructed in relation to the men around her. Masculine identity is qualified in the novel by the possession of a woman or further, through the possession of her image. The juxtaposition between the self-assured masculine characters and the powerless female 'others' (Julia, her dying mother, and Modigliani's nude) creates a disturbingly imbalanced power structure. Before dealing directly with the central ekphrastic moment, it will be interesting to look at a less notable encounter in order to help frame the gender relations in this novel. In London Julia pays a visit to Neil James, a man she had an affair with when she was nineteen and with whom she has developed an enduring friendship. However, Julia is not naïve in her understanding of their relationship, observing that "[b]ecause he has money he's a kind of god. Because I have none I'm a kind of worm."¹⁴ This power structure codes all of her relationships with men. That they exist as god-like figures both infuriates her to the point of

sickening anger, and keeps her constantly seeking the masochistic feeling of proximity to them.

There is no direct ekphrastic description of Mr. James' paintings, only insight into his reactions towards them; "because he loved them he became in their presence modest, hesitating, unsure of his own opinion."¹⁵ It gives him a sense of pride to show them off to Julia, reassuring him of his own superiority, similar to how Mr. Horsfield feels when he presents Julia with fifteen hundred francs: "he felt powerful and dominant. Happy."¹⁶ The purchase of the paintings and the need for the validation of their quality is the same as Horsfield's 'purchase' of Julia. Horsfield possesses Julia in the same way that James possesses his paintings. Both feel awkward and unsure of their taste but both are still aware of the feelings of dominance and control afforded by them.

The true ekphrastic moment that occurs between Julia and Mr. James happens as Julia is leaving his apartment: "[t]here was a vase of flame-coloured tulips in the hall – surely the most graceful of flowers. Some thrust their heads forward like snakes, and some were very erect, stiff, virginal, rather prim. Some were dying with curved grace in their death."¹⁷ The vase of "flame-coloured" flowers is teeming with metaphorical references to Julia's sexual history. At nineteen Julia may have been a virgin when she engaged in the affair with Mr. James. The phallic nature of Rhys' description, "like snakes," "erect, stiff," certainly suggest that Julia's relationship with Mr. James is sexually charged. The description of the dying flowers as gracefully curved is in stark

contrast to the thrust of the other tulips, suggesting Julia's own descent from the former grandeur of her sexual allure: "[h]er career of ups and downs had rubbed most of the hall-marks off her."¹⁸ Rhys' male characters' identities are dependent therefore upon Krieger's verbal mirage, the illusion of masculinity provided by the narrated visual representation of their possessions.

In an almost metafictional approach, Rhys introduces the central ekphrastic moment as a story within a story. In the context of telling Mr. Horsfield about herself, Julia recounts the time she spent as an artist's model and how she told the same story to the female sculptor for whom she worked. This complex and multilayered account centers around Julia's reaction to the Modigliani print on the artist's studio wall. Before she comes to the picture Julia gives an account of her impression of the woman: "[a]bout thirty-five years old. And so she simply wouldn't believe that anything was true which was outside herself or anything but what she herself thought and felt."¹⁹ In describing the artist, Julia is describing herself. She is very much set in her ways and rather disinclined to see the good or helpful side of anyone. She is distrustful of all the men in her life, of her sister and mother, of sneering servants and dodgy relatives — but mostly she is distrustful of herself, of the consequences of her actions and the purpose of her thoughts. She feels attacked by the woman in Modigliani's portrait, stating, "[i]t was a beastly feeling I got — that I didn't quite believe myself, either. I thought: 'After all, is this true? Did I ever do this?' I felt as if the woman in the picture

were laughing at me.”²⁰

Who *is* this woman though? This is how Julia sees her:

This picture is of a woman lying on a couch, a woman with a lovely, lovely body. Oh, utterly lovely. Anyhow, I thought so. A sort of proud body, like an utterly lovely proud animal. And a face like a mask, a long, dark face, and very big eyes. The eyes were blank, like a mask, but when you had looked at it a bit it was as if you were looking at a real woman, a live woman.²¹

She is the pictorial representation of Julia’s life. Modigliani’s nude is Krieger’s miracle/mirage moment for Julia, where she is reminded of a previous ekphrastic encounter in the novel, namely her feelings of disgust towards the combination of the still-life oil painting and the red plush sofa in her tawdry hotel room. As Rhys explains, “the picture and the sofa were linked in her mind. The picture was the more alarming in its perversion and the sofa the more dismal. The picture stood for the idea, the spirit, and the sofa stood for the act.”²² They are the embodiment of Julia’s circumstances. The miracle is “the idea, the spirit,” the naturalization through the pictorial of her lifestyle. Through her interaction with the painting she gains momentary access to her own reality. However, though the mirage of the ekphrastic moment is suspended by the image, it is almost immediately destroyed: “[b]ut it had all gone, as if it had never been. And I was there, like a ghost.”²³ She becomes overwhelmed by her inability to grasp her

own reality.

Julia feels as if the woman in the portrait is speaking to her, or at the very least the exchange allows Julia to be self-critical. As Tobias Döring suggests, “the iconography perpetuated by the painter begins to function as a mirror of self recognition for the writer, offering him the desired mode to represent his life.”²⁴ Although Döring is speaking specifically of the autobiographical author-text relationship, his argument is useful when considering Julia’s reaction to the Modigliani portrait. In the portrait Julia sees a mirrored image of herself — she has described the woman as having “a face like a mask”²⁵ in the same way she describes her own ritual of putting on makeup as “partly a substitute for the mask she would have liked to wear.”²⁶ Julia’s own description of the painted woman is almost identical to how we see her: “[h]er eyebrows were thin, finely marked; her very thick dark hair was lit by too red lights ... her hands were slender.”²⁷ In turn, the description also reflects how we see Julia’s dying mother: “[d]ark skinned, with high cheek-bones and an aquiline nose.”²⁸ In this sense, Julia *is* one of Modigliani’s nudes. The women of his portraits are impossible to categorize — all we see of them is their pure physicality — their mask-like expressions give away no hint of a story. Just as it is with Julia, they are coded by their bodily acts and not their cultural identity. This vagueness of expression extends to all facets of Julia’s life, as “it was not easy to guess at her age, her nationality, or the social background to which she properly belonged.”²⁹ Rhys suggests that Julia is a colonized

woman in both physicality and mentality, insofar as “[he]r mind was a confusion of memory and imagination.”³⁰

Robert Young defines colonial desire as “immediate racist reactions of desire and aversion, of simultaneous attraction and repulsion ... a covert but insistent obsession with transgressive, inter-racial sex, hybridity and miscegenation.”³¹ This “colonial desire” is the undercurrent for the way the colonized women in Rhys’ text are presented. The men who ‘possess’ Julia are conflicted by feelings of both attraction and repulsion. As Mr. Mackenzie remarks, “[w]hen she had walked in silent and ghost-like, he had been really afraid of her. Now he only felt that he disliked her intensely.”³² Mr. Horsfield similarly wavers between desire and disgust, noting, “[s]uddenly he saw Julia not as a representative of the insulted and injured, but as a solid human being... He saw all of this with great clarity, and felt appalled.”³³ Julia, her mother, and Modigliani’s nude are all described in primitive, animalistic language, “she was still beautiful, as an animal would be in old age,”³⁴ suggesting the way in which the men of the novel have exoticised their relationships. The repeated use of words such as “vulgar,” “strange,” “bestly,” “instinctively” and others are within the discourse of postcolonial writing, and help to visually frame Julia and the other female characters as primitive Others.

The death of Julia’s mother serves as a final miracle/mirage moment for the protagonist. As in her encounter with Modigliani’s nude, Julia feels a heightened sense of self-reflectivity, as she

observes, “[t]hat was a dream too, but a painful dream, because she was obsessed with the feeling that she was so close to seeing the thing that was behind all this talking and posturing, and that the talking and the posturing were there to prevent her from seeing it.”³⁵ She has the same reaction after the painted woman ‘speaks to her,’ confessing, “it was a beastly feeling, a foul feeling, like looking over the edge of the world.”³⁶ This ‘miracle’ moment sends Julia to the absolute edge of self-awareness — but she is incapable of pushing beyond that point because as Krieger shows, ‘ekphrastic hope’ can only be suspended for an instant. Ekphrasis is only “our unattainable dream of a total verbal form, of a tangible verbal space.”³⁷ It is with the *appearance* of her existence that Julia is able to engage, while of the *reality*, she remains ignorant.

Returning to the quote given at the outset of this paper, Simmel spoke of the great overwhelming pressures of Modernity, pressures that Julia Martin feels intensely and is able to reconcile only through her ekphrastic encounters. In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, appearance, which here has come to mean illusion or Krieger’s ‘miracle,’ achieves its closest possible connection to reality, that reality being the fleeting and directly destroyed mirage. For Rhys, ekphrasis exposes gender constructs and allows Julia to explore the performative nature of her colonized identity. It functions to reveal the tensions between appearance and reality, which are so fluidly framed by powerful moments, such as Julia’s recognition of herself in the Modigliani nude, and the death of her exotic and distant mother. Though Julia is still shrouded in self-

doubt and uncertainty at the end of the novel, the reader is left at the very least with an appreciation for the “fiction of ekphrasis” as upholding the illusion that understanding is a possible and attainable dream.

Notes

¹ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe: Free Press, 1950).

² Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xv.

³ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Ekphrasis and the Other,” in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 152.

⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, “The Object of Study” and “Nature of the Linguistic Sign” in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (New York: Longman, 1991), 1-14.

⁵ Krieger, *Eksprasis*, 10.

⁶ Krieger, *Eksprasis*, 10.

⁷ Krieger, *Eksprasis*, 2.

⁸ Saussure, “Object of Study,” 12.

⁹ Saussure, “Object of Study,” 13.

¹⁰ Saussure, “Object of Study,” 12.

¹¹ Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 19.

¹² Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 141.

¹³ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 24.

¹⁴ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 81.

¹⁵ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 83.

¹⁶ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 36.

¹⁷ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 84.

¹⁸ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 11.

¹⁹ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 39.

²⁰ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 41.

²¹ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 40.

²² Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 8.

²³ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 41.

²⁴ Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2002), 139.

²⁵ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 40.

²⁶ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 11.

²⁷ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 10.

²⁸ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 70.

²⁹ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 11.

³⁰ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie* 9.

³¹ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), xi-xii.

³² Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 22.

³³ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 122.

³⁴ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 9.

³⁵ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 94.

³⁶ Rhys, *Mr. Mackenzie*, 41.

³⁷ Krieger, *Eksprasis*, xvii.

Courtesans in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Exploring Ambiguity in Titian's Female Portraits

Vanessa Tignanelli

Titian's unidentified female portraits have been idealized throughout history in an attempt to discover the mystery of the artist's intentions. This paper focuses less on the theoretical aspects of the portraits, and considers the external situations surrounding the portraits' formation: the society in which Titian worked, its cultural influences and traditional art methods. I do not discredit any theories concerning the paintings' meanings or uses, but focus on Titian's use of courtesans as models for the portraits, and the influence of these women, as the more important aspect. Rather than idealize these women's identifications, this paper

looks at the extensive courtesan culture in sixteenth-century Venice. The relationship between courtesans, writers, painters and patrons becomes fundamental to understanding the relationship between Aretino and Titian, the reasons why Titian used these beauties in his artwork. I will contemplate three possible reasons for Titian creating these portraits. My discussion will be rooted in what can be understood about courtesans and their role in society and art history.

The rhetoric of ideal beauty began with Petrarch in 1327 when he denounced his vocation as a priest, and fell in love with Laura de Noves. The sonnets he wrote about her played a large role in setting standards for beauty that continued into the Renaissance in written and painted form.¹ He wrote 365 sonnets, one per day dedicated to his true love. Considered the first modern poet because of his interest in individuality, Petrarch's sonnets make elaborate and extravagant comparisons to describe Laura's beauty, and his own despair at loving someone who could not return his love. His sonnet *Gli Occhi Di Ch'Io Parlai*, translated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, reads:

Those eyes, 'neath which my passionate rapture rose,
The arms, hands, feet, the beauty that erewhile
Could my own soul from its own self beguile,
And in a separate world of dreams enclose,
The hair's bright tresses, full of golden glows,

Courtesans in Sixteenth-Century Venice

And the soft lightning of the angelic smile
That changed this earth to some celestial isle,
Are now but dust, poor dust, that nothing knows.
And yet I live! Myself I grieve and scorn,
Left dark without the light I loved in vain,
Adrift in tempest on a bark forlorn;
Dead is the source of all my amorous strain,
Dry is the channel of my thoughts outworn,
And my sad harp can sound but notes of pain.²

He wrote of Laura's exquisite features, which he believed all women should possess. Petrarch's sonnet became the artist's manual on how to paint women in accordance with this ideal. Artists created portraits of women with Laura's features, proving they understood these standards of beauty. The portrait of Laura that Petrarch commissioned Simone Martini to paint was never found, leading art historians to come to the conclusion that Laura existed solely in Petrarch's imagination as an allegory of beauty.³ This contributed to the conception of unidentified female portraits as symbols and allegories rather than real women. In Titian's art the anonymous beauty becomes, as Elizabeth Cropper suggests, the very embodiment of beauty, the beautiful woman as the synecdoche of beautiful art, as in the aptly named *La Bella*.⁴ As a result, her historical identity is taken from her and her biography

becomes irrelevant.

Artists' definitions of features that render a woman most beautiful according to the Renaissance canon became the formulae for painting ideal beauty. Among many earlier writers, Pietro Testa illustrated in his 1650 folio "Particolari perfetioni che fanno la donna bellissima" specific requirements for female portraits: long, fine, blonde hair, knotted simply; dark eyebrows that curve in perfect arches that taper gently towards the ends; beautiful, large, prominent eyes, oval in shape and blue or dark chestnut in colour; soft and rosy ears; gleaming white and vermilion cheeks, softly curving; a small mouth, neither too angular nor too flat, revealing only five or six upper teeth when open; teeth that are even and gleaming white; a round chin, with a little depression in the middle; a round, slender, gleaming white neck with a small hollow underneath; and square shoulders.⁵ The model's features may have been idealized to suit canonical beauty, the artist having followed these formulae to make the portrait's beauty surpass reality.

Titian created many portraits of women who meet the standards of ideal beauty in sixteenth-century Venice. For example, *Mary Magdalene* (c. 1530-1535, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Florence) possesses each required feature noted by Testa. Yet these portraits are suspected to have a function beyond the presentation of a beautiful woman, provoking a reaction in the viewer. Looking specifically at *Mary Magdalene*, the figure serves a religious purpose. According to Bernard Aikema, a theory by art historian Jan Emmens suggests that there was an entire genre of painting in

the Renaissance dedicated to encouraging a state of penitence in the viewer.⁶ For female viewers, the Magdalene was a symbol of hope and redemption from sins, a repentant prostitute. Women of a similar lifestyle used this image as inspiration. However, the meaning changes in front of a male audience. As Jan Emmens states, a man who could overcome the temptations of the seductive female figure would gain eternal life.⁷ Both functions lead the viewer into a state of penance, thus fulfilling an ideological purpose.

There are numerous other art historians who choose to concentrate on theoretical meanings of female portraits. Parmigianino's *Antaea* (c. 1531-1534, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples) is often preferred to be seen not as a *who* but as a *what*, ignoring questions about Antaea's identity as a bride, serving girl, the artist's mistress or a celebrated courtesan.⁸ Durer's figures in *The Bathing Women* (1496, Kunsthalle Bremen Art Museum, Germany) are described as temptresses, rather than being celebrated as possibly the first nude depictions of witches.⁹ Cleansing the females of associations with their true identities deprive these figures of a further frame of reference.¹⁰ Any questions concerning the models that artists used to create these images are constantly ignored in favour of theorizing about Titian's intentions, iconography or literary sources.

Over time, with each generation inserting their own ideas, experiences, knowledge and priorities into historical paintings, the original meaning of the work becomes lost.¹¹ The women that

Titian painted are generally reduced to allegories, temptresses, and countless other symbolic representations. Titian understood that following the conventions of ideal beauty, as well as traditional methods used by both artists and writers, would help him be successful. Aretino used literary formulae in his letters to convince patrons of Titian's artistic genius.¹² For artists, the rhetoric for ideal beauty was based on formulae invented by Petrarch.¹³ These formulae were further developed by Leonardo da Vinci in the *Mona Lisa* (c. 1504-1514, Le Louvre, Paris) with the implementation of the golden ratio and using mathematical systems to create ideal beauty.

Titian's unidentified females adhere to the ideal beauty standards of sixteenth-century Venice. Some say he may instead have idealized his models to suit his own preconceptions of beauty.¹⁴ Both views explain why Titian's females exhibit many similar characteristics. However, the former theory rests on these women existing as pure imagination, and the latter verifies Titian's use of models. A third possibility, combining both views, must be considered. Venetian courtesan portraiture, closely tied to genre painting, frequently disguised itself under a thin mythological veil.¹⁵ Veiling an ordinary portrait under a mythological or religious guise was a trick used to make portraits acceptable for a specific function, group or patron. For example, it is possible that *Flora* (c. 1515, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) is a model transformed under a mythological veil.¹⁶ *Vanity* (c. 1515, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany) is a woman who becomes an

allegory with the addition of a mirror, and *Mary Magdalene* is transformed from a model into a saint with the inclusion of her emblem, the oil jar. Their origins are instantly misrepresented. With so many iconographic practices to deliberate, the woman behind the canvas becomes secondary.

There is some evidence to suggest that Titian worked from models. Giorgione used models to create his paintings.¹⁷ As a follower of Giorgione, Titian must have been introduced to this practice. It is interesting to note recurring faces in his works at different periods in his career. Critics have implied that a woman's reappearance in these works demonstrates her mortality.¹⁸ The anonymous woman's representation in *La Bella* and in other works of the mid-1530s, such as *Woman with a Fur* (now *Woman in a Fur Coat*, 1536-1538), is clearly unrelated to the meaning of these paintings. Many believe this is nothing more than testimony to her having been employed by Titian as a model during those years.¹⁹ He employed another anonymous beauty twenty years earlier to pose for the *Sacred and Profane Love* (c. 1514, Galleria Borghese, Rome), *Flora*, and the mother of the *Speaking Infant*. These may have been the most popular courtesans of the time, or perhaps his lover or second wife, although there is no record of his remarrying.

The actual identities of these models have been lost, yet they may well have been prostitutes given that some women combined modeling with prostitution. For all we know they may have been employed by Titian also in this second capacity.²⁰ Aretino wrote in a letter to Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, declaring that Titian

enjoyed the company of courtesans.²¹ Other letters confirm the fact that he had mistresses and would often dine with Angela del Moro, a courtesan who was involved in some of the most scandalous episodes of the century.²² For many historians, these facts have led to the assumption that Titian's personal proclivities can explain his art.²³ Perhaps the model's identity was unrelated to the final intentions of the portrait.

It is essential to note that educated viewers would have understood the traditional association of the beautiful woman with beautiful art.²⁴ A courtesan was a symbol of beauty to all who gazed at her, the inspiration of writers and painters, reflected in art and literature.²⁵ By representing the beautiful female figure, the artist represented his own genius. For these reasons, it is not unfathomable that Titian used courtesans as his muses, thus enhancing his own reputation as an artist.

Courtesan culture in sixteenth-century Venice was internationally recognized. Venetian courtesans were not regarded in the same social standing as prostitutes. They were talented, well-trained, literate women with well-respected and worldly clientele.²⁶ They were regarded much the same way as Geishas, Japanese women who showcased their beauty and performed traditional Japanese arts for the entertainment of powerful men.²⁷ Charles Hope believes that the Venetian Republic society created what it desired, and courtesans consciously encouraged this process.²⁸ These women lived respectable lives, yet their success was highly dependent on their wealthy male customers.²⁹ Important men from

all over the world sought courtesans for their intelligence, beauty and entertainment skills.

Many portraits have been interpreted as depicting courtesans. For example, Brian Steele gives reasons as to why Palma Vecchio's *Young Woman as Flora* (now titled *A Blonde Woman*, c.1520) is a representation of a courtesan, rather than commemorating ideal beauty without regard for the model's identity.³⁰ Steele believes that the portrait presents a specific woman and not an allegorical figure, made obvious through her body language and the plain background.³¹ Flora is historically known as a courtesan of ancient Rome who became a goddess, the patroness of springtime and prostitutes.³² The connection between courtesan models and the guise of Flora is a recurring theme. As courtesans were desirable creatures, their connection to the goddess is a positive association compared to the negative connotations that come with their association to Mary Magdalene, a prostitute in need of a transition in her lifestyle.

Under a mythological veil, Titian's portraits of courtesans become inventive portrayals of their reputation. According to William Farina, courtesan culture is perhaps the largest influence on Titian's departures from Ovid's tales. Titian would use characters from Ovid's stories to represent real people and events in Venice. Farina believes that *Venus and Adonis* (c. 1560, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) represents the young men of Venice, in the allegorical character of Adonis, being distracted by courtesans, in the allegorical character of Venus, instead of focusing on

fighting the Turks.³³ In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of the goddess Venus trying to restrain her lover, the mortal Adonis, from departing for the hunt. The playful sensuality of the scene conceals the tragic irony that Adonis is killed during the hunt by a wild boar. Titian painted two versions of the composition: one in 1554 for Philip II of Spain, and the other in 1570, now lost, for the Farnese family.³⁴ It is clear that the nude female figure has convinced the warrior to reconsider his departure mid-stride.

The widespread courtesan culture in Venice at this time was inescapable for Titian, as his personal life strayed so close to them. Considering their close friendship, one can reasonably assume that Aretino and Titian had similar interests. Aretino built himself a vulgar reputation, publishing pornographic poetry and the *Modi*, being banished from Arezzo, and being forced to flee Rome on account of his uncivilized work.³⁵ Aretino belonged to an industry that sold sex and seduction for male entertainment, thus bringing him close to courtesan culture. He named several well-known courtesans of the day in the verses of *I Modi*.³⁶ It is possible that Titian created the portraits to suit this industry and exploited courtesan popularity to augment his own career. It was the same prosperous men who traveled to Venice to seek the courtesans' company that commissioned works by Venetian artists such as Titian during their visit.

According to Charles Hope, the reality and the role of the female figure was meant to appeal to a male customer.³⁷ Visitors may have wanted souvenirs to remember their experiences with the

infamous courtesans. This is not an alien notion; nearly every teenage boy of the early 1970's had a poster of Olivia Newton-John or Farah Fawcett in his bedroom. During a time when magazines and photography did not exist, when artists were the sole manufacturers of portraits, it is conceivable that there existed a sixteenth-century pin-up girl industry. By definition, pin-up girls are models whose mass-produced pictures see wide appeal as popular culture.

The term "pin-up" refers to drawings, paintings and other illustrations of models or actresses. It is important to note that this term was coined after Titian's career, yet for the sake of this paper I am going to refer to the portraits in this manner. Pin-up girl posters reflect contemporary social standards of beauty and seduction. Courtesans were acknowledged as the most beautiful women in their society. *Woman with a Mirror* (1512-1515, Le Louvre, Paris) depicts a beautiful woman admiring herself in a mirror with a young man doting on her. Mirrors, while being symbols of vanity and self-reflection, also symbolize desire and possession.³⁸ In this sense, *Woman with a Mirror* falls into the same category as pin-up girl posters.

Courtesans played a large role in male sociability. Men could bond over their experiences with courtesans. Being in the presence of these women and having them entertain for his pleasure was something that gave a man a superior reputation. This was mainly due to courtesans' origins in Classical Antiquity. High-class pornography, literally referred to as "writing about courtesans" in

Greek history, entered into the humanist revival of antiquity.³⁹ Tessa Storey refers to courtesans as having played a large part in the complex social, sexual and emotional dynamics of late Italian Renaissance society, explaining: “association with elite courtesans was not an illicit aspect of male culture, nor a question of private immorality, but was closely tied to the constructions of elite manhood and man honour.”⁴⁰ By wooing courtesans according to codes known as the “arts of love,” men demonstrated virtue and the nobility of their souls, thereby setting themselves apart from ordinary vulgar spectators.⁴¹ Creating portraits of courtesans as keepsakes, objects of fantasy or memory, meant creating an object symbolic of manhood that could be brought into the home and continuously accessed. They would not have served an educational, religious or mythological function, but a social function. If the practice of painting courtesans as pin-up girl keepsakes did exist, then an entirely new genre of painting has been discovered.

Comparing Titian’s identified and unidentified female portraits helps in understanding the differences between commissioned works and possible courtesan pin-ups. *Portrait of Isabella d’Este* (1534-1536, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) illustrates a woman fully clothed, staring blankly with stiff body language. Contrastingly, *Woman in a Fur Coat* is much more seductive, with sultry eyes, a coy smirk and partial nudity. The differences in body language and eye contact are enough evidence to deduce that these portraits were painted for different audiences and social functions.

Portrait of a Young Woman (1530s, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg) compared to *Portrait of the Empress Isabella* (1548, Prado Museum, Spain) highlights differences between portraits made to showcase wealth and those designed to be sexually appealing. Jewels, luxuries and a backdrop of her kingdom surround the Empress. The young woman is seductive and partially nude, teasing the viewer, perhaps alluding to her career, yet is adorned with jewelry and a fancy hat.

Contrary to the stereotypes surrounding prostitution, courtesans were of a higher class than common prostitutes, and were economically independent. For this reason certain unidentified female portraits are more comparable to those of nobility. *Girl with a Platter of Fruit* (c.1555, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin) seems more concerned with showcasing wealth, with her refined clothing, pearl necklace and platter of exotic fruits and flowers. However, the woman retains seductive elements, such as a revealed back and the flirty over-the-shoulder pose, possibly insinuating that she earned her wealth as a courtesan.

Courtesans have been described as sensual, mannered, sophisticated, never to be degraded as whores or prostitutes by anyone.⁴² Renaissance documents confirm the fact that courtesans were economically enterprising, often formidable and powerful, and occasionally cultural beacons as well.⁴³ As their success began to flourish, courtesans found a new sense of control and independency. Even the prostitute Marcolina, known as the “daughter of Venice” and the heroine of a Venetian playlet titled

La Bulesca, exclaims joyfully to her cousin: “Dear Zuana, it’s so wonderful to be one’s own woman, to live in one’s own house, and not slave in this brothel. I always had to give Alvisè Verso three or four lira, but now I keep it all.”⁴⁴ Veronica Franco is one example of a thriving courtesan of this time. Not only was her name internationally recognized, but she also went on to become a published poet, a very uncommon tale for women in the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ Courtesans gained status as international icons and celebrities, and were able to afford the same luxuries as nobility. They wore items such as pearls, jewelry that normally was reserved for honourable women and symbolic of female respectability.⁴⁶ Laws were set in place in the early 1560s so that nobility could distinguish themselves from women of ill repute.⁴⁷ However, the laws failed and courtesans were possibly more fashionable than noblewomen. Titian’s *La Bella* is as seductive as other portraits discussed in this paper, with her sultry hand position and coy smirk, yet the artist depicts her wearing the finest garments to acknowledge this woman’s wealth.

Some observation has been made concerning courtesan property ownership. Julia Lombardo is the only courtesan to have kept inventories of her possessions, and although no money values were included, the list provides insight to her extremely comfortable lifestyle.⁴⁸ The inventories provide evidence that of the twenty-eight paintings in the collection, at least two could have been portraits of Julia and her sister Angelica. In the main bedroom hung “Un retrato de donna con soaze [de nogera] con la sua

coverta,” surely a portrait of Julia.⁴⁹ That Julia cared to keep the painting covered indicates it was of special importance to her. Unless created by a great master, a representation of a stranger would have been a strange purchase. Considering that a courtesan’s livelihood depended on allurements, it is unlikely that one would invite the competition of another woman’s portrait into her home.

It was not uncommon for a courtesan to possess a portrait of herself. In Thomas Coryat’s travelogue, written in 1608 during his voyage through Europe, he states that upon entering the palace of a Venetian courtesan one “may see the picture of the noble cortezan most exquisitely drawn.”⁵⁰ Another account indicates Veronica Franco’s ecstatic reaction to Tintoretto’s rendering of her beauty, and how she proclaimed that she was falling in love with her own image.⁵¹ Considering their economic stability, courtesans could have afforded to commission their own portraits. There are countless examples of commissioned portraits by upper-class women, such as the *Portrait of Isabella d’Este* or *The Portrait of Empress Isabella*. It is possible that Titian did not paint these unidentified female portraits as allegories or for male entertainment, but instead for the model herself. Assumptions surrounding Titian’s intentions are made without regard for female patronage. For example, theories surrounding *Mary Magdalene* were discussed earlier in this paper. However, Vittoria Colonna, who was neither a prostitute seeking forgiveness nor a man seeking eternal life, commissioned the painting in the early 1530s.⁵² She

was a woman seeking a different kind of redemption, as she went from being married nobility to a pious widow. This information changes the meaning of the work entirely.

The history of the identities of these females has been lost, yet there is much evidence as to their existence, participation and importance in sixteenth-century Venetian culture and society. Questions as to why Titian painted these portraits will forever remain unanswered, but it is certain that courtesans had a direct relationship to Titian. An artist of such social standing could not have ignored the impact courtesans had on sixteenth-century Venetian culture and the wealthy visitors they attracted. All three reasons considered in this paper for Titian creating these female portraits become intertwined through the study of courtesan livelihood. These women were simultaneously symbols of beauty, entertainment for men, and autonomous members of society.

Notes

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³ Baldasso, "Painting Laura," 4-6.

⁴ Rona Goffen, "Sex, Space, and Social History," in *Titian's "Venus of Urbino"* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72.

⁵ Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (1976): 2.

⁶ Bernard Aikema, "Titian's Mary Magdalen in the Palazzo Pitti: An Ambiguous Painting and Its Critics," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 53.

⁷ Aikema, "Titian's Mary Magdalen," 53.

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¹⁰ Lynne Lawner, "'Renaissance Beauties': An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, accessed November 24, 2011, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1987/sep/24/renaissance-beauties-an-exchange/>

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¹² Norman E Land, "Ekphrasis and Imagination: Some Observations on Pietro Aretino's Art Criticism," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (1986): 208.

¹³ Howard, "On Iconology," 88.

¹⁴ Goffen, *Titian's "Venus of Urbino,"* 6.

¹⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, "Titian, Ovid and Sixteenth-Century Codes for Erotic Illustration," in *Titian's "Venus of Urbino"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.

¹⁶ Julius Held, "Flora, Goddess and Courtesan," in *De Artibus Opuscula* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 201-218.

¹⁷ Bernstein, "The Female Model," 55.

¹⁸ Goffen, "Sex, Space, and Social History," 72.

¹⁹ Goffen, "Sex, Space, and Social History," 72.

²⁰ Goffen, "Sex, Space, and Social History," 72.

²¹ Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women*. (London: Yale University Press, 1997), footnote 13

²² Lawner, "Renaissance Beauties."

²³ Goffen, *Titian's "Venus of Urbino,"* 11-12.

²⁴ Goffen, *Titian's "Venus of Urbino,"* 13.

²⁵ Lawner, "Renaissance Beauties."

²⁶ Andrew Fleck, "The Custom of Courtesans and John Marston's The Dutch Courtesan," *Heldref Publications* 21, no. 3 (2008): 11.

²⁷ Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon, *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 223.

²⁸ Lawner, "Renaissance Beauties."

²⁹ Edwina Currie, "Good-time girls," *New Statesman* (11 March 2002), 53.

³⁰ Brian D. Steele, "In the Flower of Their Youth: 'Portraits' of Venetian Beauties ca. 1500," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 2 (1997): 491.

³¹ Steele, "In the Flower of Their Youth," 491.

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- ³⁷ Lawner, "Renaissance Beauties."
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- ⁴⁵ Margaret F Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-10.
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- ⁴⁷ Jutta Sperling, "The Paradox of Perfection: Reproducing the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 1 (1999): 24.
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- ⁴⁹ Santore, "Julia Lombardo," 54.
- ⁵⁰ Thomas Coryate and George Coryate, *Coryat's Crudities*. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1905), 403.
- ⁵¹ Santore, "Julia Lombardo," 55.
- ⁵² Aikema, "Titian's Mary Magdalen," 52.

A Life Seen of Obscenity: Robert Mapplethorpe and The Public Perception

Jennifer Graham

To this day, Robert Mapplethorpe is still remembered by the controversy that followed his works from the 1970s into the early 1990s. Depicting ‘obscenity’ through the camera lens, Mapplethorpe exhibited a life that was not agreeable with ‘normative’ social values, fueling both public and political efforts to censor his art. Although Robert Mapplethorpe’s artwork pushed the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ sexuality in the public eye, what made Robert Mapplethorpe’s works so obscene was the possibility that he was living the life he represented on camera. Mapplethorpe’s non-apologetic depiction of homoerotic images of male nudes and scenarios of sadomasochism scandalized

politicians and shocked audiences, who read them as a reflection of the artist's own lifestyle.

As an openly gay artist at a time of extreme homophobia and ignorance, Mapplethorpe's proud identification as a homosexual offended those who believed that being gay was an atrocity to normative society.

Mapplethorpe's images of male nudes were made shockingly desirable to audiences, as a strange dynamic of sensuality was embedded into his photographs. Quoted in the book *AIDS And The National Body* written by Thomas E. Yingling and Robyn Wiegman, Kobena Mercer posits that Mapplethorpe's nude images "[objectify] black men's bodies into an aesthetic ideal invested with what the *white male* subject wants-to-see."¹ As Mapplethorpe's male nudes were interpreted as homoerotic, and seemingly desirable, fear filled the heterosexual public's minds, as they became horrified at finding pleasure in Mapplethorpe's images. Allowing the public to categorize both Mapplethorpe and his work as 'homosexual' by representing homoerotic male nudes in his art, right wing leaders of homophobic causes and agendas, like Jesse Helms, had the opportunity to speak out against homosexuality, with Mapplethorpe as their target. Thomas E. Yingling and Robyn Wiegman explain that the censorship of Mapplethorpe's artworks was due to a homophobic plan, stating: "[t]he denial of the Mapplethorpe pieces is only the latest installment in a concerted effort to build a right-wing national consensus out of fears that play prominently on homophobia and

more or less explicitly equate male homosexuality with national security risk.”² The idea that homosexuality was an infectious disease that needed to be contained and censored fueled politicians to speak for the public, propelling their homophobic mandate into the media’s web of controversy. The article “Print Media and Public Reaction to the Controversy Over NEA Funding For Robert Mapplethorpe’s ‘The Perfect Moment’ Exhibit,” written by Douglas M. McLeod and Jill A. MacKenzie, explains:

As part of his largely successful effort to impose content restrictions on federally funded art during the summer of 1989, US Senator Jesse Helms exploited public fears and fantasies about male homosexuality. The name to which the Senator most frequently assigned these fears and fantasies was to ‘Mapplethorpe’. ‘This Mapplethorpe fellow’, Helms told the *New York Times* ‘was an acknowledged homosexual. He’s dead now, but the homosexual theme goes throughout his work.’ As he would throughout the ensuing controversy Helm’s places Mapplethorpe’s sexuality and AIDS related death in close proximity to each other and then projects both on the thematics of the photographer’s work.³

As Senator Helms spearheaded the revolt against Mapplethorpe’s artwork and lifestyle, he implanted alarm into audiences through the media, warning that Mapplethorpe’s life ended in (what was

thought) a gay-related disease, AIDS. Because Helms deemed homosexuality infectious, censoring Mapplethorpe and his lifestyle became a viable option for audiences to stow away their unwanted homoerotic desires, and the idea of art as a disease could simply be cured by censorship.

Since Mapplethorpe was a self-proclaimed pornographer, his lifestyle continued to scandalize his image within the public eye. The book *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures: a Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Book*, written by Martin Duberman, quotes Robert Mapplethorpe considering his work, stating: "I'd rather call it pornography than call it homoerotic."⁴ The identification of his works as 'pornographic' was problematic for audiences, as it unabashedly embraced a taboo element of society. Actively involved in creating his pornographic images, Mapplethorpe was inevitably linked to an obscene and pornographic lifestyle. Quoted in Edward De Grazia's *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and The Assault on Genius*, Mapplethorpe credits his divergence from societal norms to another art genius, Andy Warhol, explaining: "Warhol says that 'anything can be art,' and then I can make pornography art."⁵ Mapplethorpe's defiance of societal boundaries of 'acceptable' art angered politicians who felt it their responsibility to place laws in the way of Mapplethorpe's groundbreaking artworks. Actually charged with the criminal offense of 'pandering obscenity,' a Cincinnati museum was temporarily closed down on the grounds that it displayed Mapplethorpe's pornographic works in 1990.

Although the museum director was eventually acquitted of the crime, the uproar of politics that surrounded this event seriously challenged all artists' right to freedom of expression, and the ability for an artist to have a taboo lifestyle. Linda S. Kauffman argues that politicians like Helms were fundamentally upset with Mapplethorpe's images because of the lifestyle he led, positing that "[a]lthough this point is seldom mentioned, I think what most enraged prosecutors and politicians like Jesse Helms was that a gay man took the nude photos of children."⁶ Residual in Mapplethorpe's works, Mapplethorpe's way of life was a continual factor in the taboo controversy that surrounded his art. As Susan Owens discusses in "Disciplining 'Sextext': Queers, Fears, and Communication Studies," pornography has never been considered 'appropriate' for the public's gaze by politicians. Therefore, "any investigation of the academic and political debates on pornography is *also* a study of the constructed public and private realms of civic life, what is and is not 'fitting' for public view or talk."⁷ As such, any discussion of pornography in the public sphere was automatically deemed inappropriate, and as Mapplethorpe was so open about his work being pornographic, his ideologies were met with disgust. However, what discomfited both politicians and audiences most of all was the unpredicted pleasure that the public experienced in looking at Mapplethorpe's taboo works. Although Mapplethorpe's suggestive images allowed for a voyeuristic quality of enjoyment, these images were not 'appropriate' for audiences to enjoy by societal norms. Robert Asen describes in "Appreciation and Desire: The Male Nude in the Photography of

Robert Mapplethorpe,” that audiences were alarmed at their ability to enjoy Mapplethorpe’s shockingly taboo images. Discussing the erotic, Asen theorizes: “it nevertheless conveys a sensuous sexuality that is unsettling. It operates against social codes of modesty and self-denial. The erotic promises a satisfaction of repressed desires. But freeing oneself from repression runs the risk of scandal.”⁸ Audiences were disturbed by their ability to find pleasure in Mapplethorpe’s images, and were angry that Mapplethorpe could create such an unwanted desire, which made it once again, a political imperative to censor these images. Seemingly ‘dirty,’ Mapplethorpe’s works went against ‘pure’ and ‘clean’ images of society, and as Mapplethorpe’s lifestyle was disapproved of, politicians like Patrick Buchanan felt the need to “clean up” what he considered Mapplethorpe’s “pollution.”⁹ Using Mapplethorpe as a prime example of what was polluting pristine culture, politicians worked to demonize Robert Mapplethorpe, claiming he was not fit for, and should be hidden from the public’s view.

Mapplethorpe’s sadomasochist images, and the insertion of himself in these images, allowed audience to categorize him as a sadomasochist and a threat to society. Images such as “Self Portrait with Bull Whip” from 1978, which show Mapplethorpe as an active participant within the sadomasochist lifestyle, enabled audiences to envision Mapplethorpe as a taboo creature of society. Mapplethorpe’s sadomasochist artworks shocked audiences, as most viewers had never before been exposed to this type of

lifestyle. Mapplethorpe's images opened the public's eyes to a part of non-dominant culture that had been kept hidden. Kauffman suggests that by depicting male heterosexual submissives, which "constitute a substantial subculture, unacknowledged because their existence defies too many taboos," Mapplethorpe "exposes one of sadomasochism's best-kept secrets."¹⁰ By using himself to make visible a lifestyle that had been hidden, Mapplethorpe was identified as a sadomasochist whose vulgarity must be censored. Politicians who wished to censor Mapplethorpe's obscenity created a need for political intervention, claiming that democracy was at stake if Mapplethorpe's works were not put out of sight. William F. Buckley Jr. was quoted saying: "[i]f a democratic society cannot find a way to protect a taxpaying Christian heterosexual from finding that he is engaged in subsidizing blasphemous acts of homo-eroticism, then democracy isn't working."¹¹ Framing him as a *threat* to democracy, politicians used Mapplethorpe's identity as a sadomasochist to further their campaign against the censoring of his works. As Mapplethorpe's sadomasochist images blurred the lines of innocence and corruption, which in turn disrupted concrete ideas of public morality, politicians felt obligated to 'protect' the public from Mapplethorpe. Susan Weily states that Mapplethorpe's work was never meant to make our viewing experience simple, and that he wanted audiences to be conflicted in their observation of his work. Wiley explains that Mapplethorpe "installs his exhibitions so that the sexual images are interspersed with other subjects. We view a sadistic tableau side by side with a celebrity portrait or a lyrical still life portrait of baby's breath. The

distinction between corruption and innocence is blurred. He insists that it's all the same."¹² This confusion between good and evil, moral and immoral, defined Mapplethorpe's own lifestyle. However, politicians preyed on the intangibility of morals found within Mapplethorpe's work. Although politicians claimed Mapplethorpe should be blamed for his obscenities, Elizabeth Armstrong and Martin Weinberg argue that the immorality is in the eye of the beholder, claiming that the "stark disagreement about the artistic value of these sex-related photographs is consistent with one of the most robust findings in cultural sociology- meaning cannot be 'read off' objects themselves but depends on what readers bring to the work."¹³ As the meaning of the image can only be found within the interpretation made by the viewer, in essence, each viewer is responsible for the obscenity he or she finds within Mapplethorpe's work. Audiences saw Mapplethorpe as a sadomasochist, which allowed politicians to seek moral sanitizing of Mapplethorpe's works, when in reality audiences should have looked within themselves to explore the inner potential for moral corruption.

As the public was made uncomfortable by Mapplethorpe's lifestyle, and as traditional societal norms were challenged by Mapplethorpe's artwork, the public opted to categorize his work as 'obscene' and censor some of the artist's groundbreaking, controversial work. Mapplethorpe's unabashed and proud identification as a taboo member of society frightened audiences, for enjoying Mapplethorpe's images would mean to embrace his

lifestyle as part of their own. Mapplethorpe's artwork endured beyond the initial calls for censorship, and in doing so, highlighted the necessity of defending both uninhibited artistic expression, and the personal freedom to pursue subversive lifestyles.

Notes

¹ Thomas Yingling and Robyn Wiegman, "How the Eye Is Caste: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Limits of Controversy" in *AIDS and the National Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 67.

² Yingling and Wiegman, "How the Eye is Caste," 60.

³ Douglas M. McLeod and Jill A. Mackenzie, "Print Media and Public Reaction to the Controversy over NEA Funding for Robert Mapplethorpe's 'The Perfect Moment' Exhibit," *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (1998): 292.

⁴ Martin B. Duberman, *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures: a Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Book* (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 66.

⁵ Edward De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and The Assault on Genius* (New York: Random House, 1992), 780.

⁶ Linda Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 237.

⁷ Susan Owen, "Disciplining 'Sextext': Queers, Fears, and Communication Studies," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2 (2003): 301.

⁸ Robert Asen, "Appreciation and Desire: The Male Nude in the Photography of Robert Mapplethorpe," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1998): 59.

⁹ De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 784.

¹⁰ Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys*, 21.

¹¹ De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 783.

¹² De Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere*, 782.

¹³ Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Martin S. Weinberg, "Identity and Competence: The Use of Culture in The Interpretation of Sexual Images," *Sociological Perspectives* 49, no. 3 (2006): 411.

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Derek Fincham

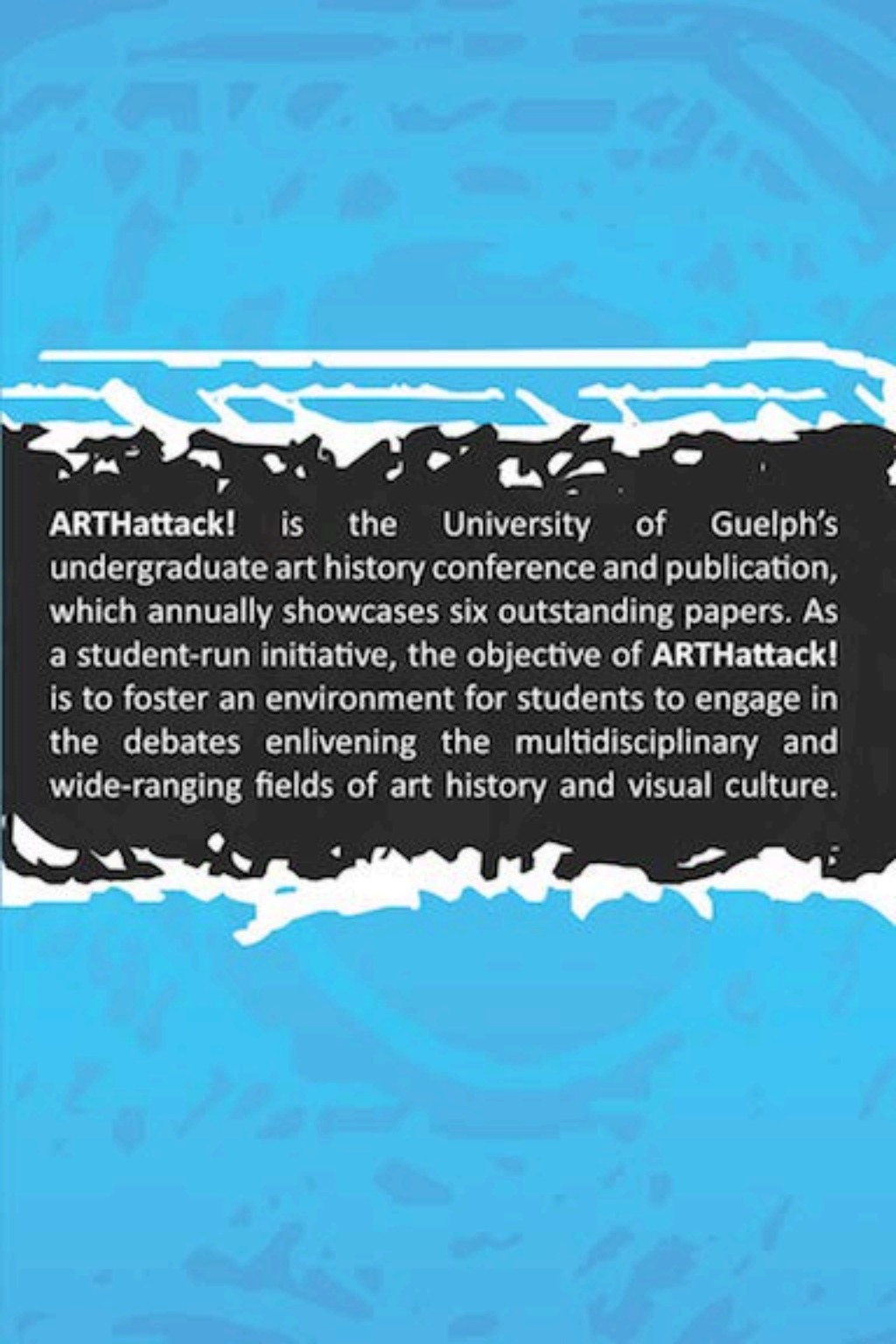
Biography

Derek Fincham is an Assistant Professor at South Texas College of Law in Houston. He earned a Ph.D. in Cultural Heritage Law from the University of Aberdeen, and has researched the laws relating to art theft and antiquities looting. During the summer he serves as the Academic Director for the Association for Research into Crimes Against Art (ARCA) which runs a post-graduate certificate program in Art Crime and Cultural Heritage Protection in Amelia, Italy.

Keynote Speech Abstract

“An Overview of Cultural Crime”

Illicit cultural heritage is a broad category that includes pieces of art, and objects of antiquity which have been stolen, looted, or forged. This includes the theft of works of art from museums, the looting of archaeological sites, the destruction of heritage during armed conflict, and even fraudulent sales of stolen or forged artworks. Dr. Fincham will introduce these concepts by discussing recent high-profile instances of theft and looting. A brief overview of the laws and regulations which apply to these classes of objects will then illustrate why cultural heritage crime is such an enduring problem, and think about what steps members of the public, art lovers, and art professionals can do to prevent and repair the damage done to our collective cultural heritage.



ARTHattack! is the University of Guelph's undergraduate art history conference and publication, which annually showcases six outstanding papers. As a student-run initiative, the objective of **ARTHattack!** is to foster an environment for students to engage in the debates enlivening the multidisciplinary and wide-ranging fields of art history and visual culture.