

**MAKING THINGS PERFECTLY QUEER:
ART'S USE OF CRAFT TO SIGNIFY LGBT IDENTITIES**

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Abstract

This research explores how queer culture and theory can be communicated through crafted objects and curated exhibitions. It interrogates whether it is possible to identify queer characteristics, aesthetics and themes in crafted objects and develops the idea of *visual polari* – based on Polari, the slang language used by gay men in England predominantly in the mid twentieth century – as a methodology.

The research then examines how art related to queer lives has been curated in art organisations and how different curators have approached creating queer taxonomies. It also examines the use of craft techniques by artists addressing queer topics and argues that the marginalised positions of craft – the decorative and the domestic – have been adopted by queer practitioners.

Marginalised groups can often be excluded from representation in cultural organisations, and museums and galleries have traditionally shied away from the emerging discipline of queer theory. Although Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Month acts as a focus for queer recognition in museums and galleries, many organisations are unsure how to explore or tackle the subject. The core of this research examines practical case studies that explore how this can be achieved.

The research was informed by four exhibitions where I was both the artist and curator. The first – *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery – drew on artist intervention methodologies that had been used to address race within museums, but had not been applied to marginalised sexualities.

The second was *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds and used oral histories from gay men and women to reposition objects in the art gallery collection.

The last two installations were at National Trust properties – Nymans House and Gardens and The Vyne – and examined the queer lives of their former occupants. The exhibitions used artist interventions to disrupt any single

interpretive narrative and move away from the centring of the houses' histories on heteronormative family trees.

Queer is a contested term and LGBT encompasses a wide variety of experiences. Although the research strives for inclusion, not all experiences that come under the banner term LGBT are explored equally. Rather, this research aims to move the ideas about how cultural organisations can represent queer lives and to generate debate in the fields of museums, galleries and historic houses.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Date: 10th August 2015

Introduction

This research interrogates the intersection between conceptual practice and queer theory. The terms ‘art’, ‘craft’ and ‘queer’ are all contested, their definitions have repeatedly changed over time and are geographically specific.

Chapter 1 outlines the use of the term queer in the research. Queer is used with a double definition: it is a noun to discuss individuals who identify as LGBT¹ and it can also be used as a way of describing a deviation from the norm. Queer can therefore be used as a verb (queering) to question normative views.

Specifically, in this research, it is used to address heteronormativity² within cultural organisations. Queer is therefore used as an identity and also as a strategy and so explores the tension between essentialist ideas of identity and social constructionist ideas of identity in process.

Chapter 1 then explores the intersection between queer and craft practice, a relationship which is constantly in process. What were once seen as fixed binaries – craft/fine art, heterosexual/queer – are now much more nuanced and open to debate.

The artworks created and examined within this research sit within an overlap area. Produced using craft techniques and materials, they operate within a conceptual fine art framework. Conceptual craft has repeatedly been linked with artists’ movements that have used craft’s associations with the handmade, the personal and the domestic. Craft’s diverse nature and its secondary status to fine art within the art world has been used to explore marginalised identities to such an extent that craft’s status as old-fashioned and traditional is being replaced with ‘crafting as a strategy to examine and challenge contemporary issues’.³

Like queer, craft in an umbrella term. Craft groups together a number of material practices, two of which will be used in the research: clay and textiles.

¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans.

² Heteronormativity is defined as ‘the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged’ in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry*, 24:2, 547–66.

³ Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, “Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts,” *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010) 610.

Both have been linked with queer craft practice but for very different reasons. Clay, when fired, moves from a state of endless transformative possibility into a fixed form. It has been described as the ‘ultimate archival material, contributing primary archaeological information about past cultures’.⁴ This stabilising of form can be seen as a mirroring of queer, which has moved from an activity people engaged in into an identity.

In contrast to ceramics, textiles are more open to being worked and reworked. Their strongly gendered link with the feminine makes them ripe for queer work, especially by men. Chapter 1 concludes with an outline of the queer craft methodology that will be used in the rest of the research.

Chapter 2 – Queer Objects – begins with an examination of how queer lives and objects overlap. Sarah Ahmed has argued that ‘[t]o be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way.’⁵ It considers the objects one might turn to for queer orientation. The chapter then considers two artistic strategies for queer craft practice that are used to create new work.

Firstly, it explores the idea of queer readings, which examine existing objects and artworks through a queer filter to interrogate them for queerness. Queer readings have suggested reversing the foreground and background as a strategy to interrogate marginalised spaces for queerness. Adopting this reversal, *The Problems with History* is a series of textile pieces that visually adopt this technique.

Secondly, queer appropriation and its links to postmodernism is explored with *BlueBoy* and *Pillar of Masculinity*. The works draw on Polari, the queer slang used in London in the mid-twentieth century, as a starting point to develop re-appropriation and adaption as a queer visual technique – a visual polari.

Queer art has largely relied on photography and figurative painting and the literal depiction of queer individuals. In Chapter 3 – Queer Curating – the manner in which different curators have approached curating queer art

⁴ Paul Mathieu, *The Memory of Humankind: Digital Ceramics and the Archive*, research proposal, three-year research project funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, (2007) 13, qtd in Paul Scott, *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection: A Theory of Surface*, PhD Thesis (Manchester: Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, 2010) 22.

⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke, 2006) 1.

exhibitions, and particularly exhibitions that do not solely rely on figurative representations of queer individuals, draws out potential methodologies for identifying queer sensibilities in art objects.

It has been argued that there are few objects that uniquely link to individuals who identify as LGBT,⁶ so the representation of LGBT lives in museums – which rely on material culture to represent groups of people – can be problematic.⁷ Often, the ability of objects to signify queer lives relies on the association between queer individuals and a particular object rather than the notion of a queer group or type of object(s).

The reliance on the association between objects and lives lived in order for objects to have queer relevance creates a fragile interrelationship that is easily broken. Without explicit interpretation, heteronormativity erodes queer ties with objects. The main body of practice explores how heteronormativity operates in museums, art galleries and historic houses. Through a combination of artist intervention, curatorial practice and creation of new work, four organisations have been doubly queered: the organisations' curatorial methods have been examined and deconstructed and LGBT histories have been placed at the core of their displays.

Three very different strategies were adopted for the different venues. Chapter 4 – Queering Museums and Art Galleries – describes two solo shows that intervene into museum and art gallery collections. The first, *Queering the Museum*, took place at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2010/2011, the second, *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection*, was at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery at the University of Leeds in 2012.

Queering the Museum drew on artist intervention techniques that have traditionally been used to explore the representation of race in museums and, in particular, the work of the artist Fred Wilson. Through a reframing of the museum's collections and exhibitions using a queer lens, the heteronormative exhibition practices that often erase queer lives are unpicked. Consisting of 19

⁶ Robert Mills, "Queer is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture," *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 86.

⁷ Angela Vanegas, "Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums," *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin, (London: Routledge, 2010) 164.

queer craft interventions throughout the museum, the exhibition critiqued the basis for museum displays and interrogated museum acquisition and collecting policies. To some extent this method of intervention relies on grand narratives of the past and attempts to create universalising truths which, like heteronormativity, privilege some individuals over others.

To move away from grand narratives, the intervention at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery used an oral history archive as the basis for a repositioning of the gallery's twentieth century art collection. Queer oral histories were embedded in contemporaneous objects and the resulting artworks were placed alongside objects in the collection in order that the collection be re-viewed, queerly, through the association. The oral histories were used to alter the contemporaneous objects, which in turn changed the perception of the objects in the art gallery collection.

Historic houses operate very differently from museums and art galleries. Chapter 5 – Queering the Historic House – describes two historic house interventions, at Nymans House and Gardens in 2012 and The Vyne in 2013, both National Trust properties. Within historic houses, the lives of former residents are often at the heart of the curatorial interpretation and family trees usually form the starting point for understanding their histories. While marriage is not always an indicator of sexual intimacy, its centrality within the interpretations of historic houses puts relationships and intimacies centre stage in a way that seldom happens in museums.

Historic houses also present an accumulation of objects and allow us to view the associations between those objects and their use by historic house owners. Collecting theories have explored how the collection and display of material culture can reflect identity, often with respect to gender. Whitney Davis⁸ has explored how queer men have subverted Freud's idea of family romance and used object collection and collation to create substitute queer family romances using objects.

The two historic house interventions discussed in this research were part of a larger project where, as one of the directors of Unravelled Arts, I commissioned

⁸ Whitney Davis, "Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 17, No 2–3 (2011) 309–329.

33 new pieces of crafted artwork in response to three separate National Trust properties. This multi-voiced response to each house ensured that different narratives of the past came to life. This allowed the interpretation of the properties to move away from the 'pale, stale and male'⁹ dominated view of history and allowed queer, female, postcolonial and working class histories to be heard. The interventions discussed in this research address queer lives and they in turn queer the interpretation of those properties.

Chapter 6 concludes with a reflection on the partial and temporary nature of queer associations and the issues that have arisen through the practice.

⁹ Jenny Sealey qtd in "Arts Council and the Creative Case for Diversity," speech by Sir Peter Bazalgette 8 Dec 2014, 10 April 2015. http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Sir-Peter-Bazalgette_Creative-Case-speech_8-Dec-2014.pdf.

1. Queer, Queer Craft, Queer Craft Methodology

In order to set the terms for the practical work in this research, this chapter starts with a discussion of the term 'queer', which is a fluid, contested and historically specific term. For the purpose of this research, it is being used in two ways: as an inclusive term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT), which will be discussed in this chapter; and to refer to 'differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange'.¹⁰

This double definition opens the term out and enables queer to become a strategy (to queer), which can be used to explore queerness (LGBT identity).

Drawing on queer studies, the discussion explains how shared queer experiences led to the development of queer sensibilities, which allow us to link queer identities and lives lived with material culture.

Following on from the definition and discussion of queer, the chapter then explores queer craft. A relatively unexplored area, this section discusses key moments when craft has links with identity. It will also unpick some of the intersections between craft and queer theory and suggest reasons why the two overlap. Since both terms are contested, any discussion of either – let alone their intersection – will be by necessity both partial and subjective. However, to support the discussion, a number of key craft exhibitions that focus on queer identity are brought into the discussion.

Finally, the chapter outlines the methodology used in the remainder of the research, and in particular the practice-based interventions which form the core of the original research.

¹⁰ *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (Collins: London, 1982).

1.1 Queer

Queer has been much discussed and debated in academia. The aim of this section is not to summarise that debate, but rather provide the essential underpinnings required to explore why the understanding of queer objects and queer sensibility is a contested and relatively new field.

Queer itself is a contested term. It refers and relates to many things in many ways and eludes simple definition. As Michael Warner says, 'the appeal of "queer theory" has outstripped anyone's sense of what exactly it means.'¹¹ Originating from an examination of the lives of gay men and lesbians (often called queer studies), it has taken on their marginalised position and developed into a tool with which to examine and deconstruct, often around the areas of gender and sexuality, and is referred to as queer theory. The practical work in this research links identity (queer studies) with the destabilising process of queer theory. For work exploring the binaries of art/craft and heterosexuality/queer, it seemed important to avoid 'either/or' and concentrate on the overlap area of 'and', linking both identity politics and deconstructive techniques. It can therefore be useful to think of queer in two ways: as a noun (related to a group) and as a verb (used in order to deconstruct and interrogate). Whereas gay and lesbian relied on binaries – gay/straight – queer explores transgressions of gender.

The adoption of the word queer works in two main ways: it re-appropriates a negative term of derision, and also uses its agency as a term of difference. Since its emergence in the English language in the sixteenth century (related to the German *quer*, meaning "across, at right angle, diagonally or transverse"), queer has generally meant "strange", "unusual" or "out of alignment".

The move in academia from identity (queer studies) to process (queer theory) is possibly best summarised by David Halperin, who argues:

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a

¹¹ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 0.

positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men.¹²

This provides rich pickings for academic discourse and give queer the ‘potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions’.¹³ However, it runs the risk of making queer a subject without essence and therefore removed from LGBT lives lived.

Queer and LGBT are not necessarily synonymous and, according to Sedgwick,¹⁴ queer theory is not restricted to homosexual men and women, but to anyone who feels their position (sexual, intellectual or cultural) to be marginalised. Similarly, ‘[i]n 1992, San Francisco Queer Nation activist Karl Knapper opined that “queerness is about acknowledging and celebrating difference, embracing what sets you apart. A straight person can’t be gay, but a straight person can be queer.”’¹⁵ According to queer theory, the queer position then is no longer a marginal one considered deviant or pathological, but rather multiple positions, all equally valid. However, in practice, queer academic courses and books closely map what was formerly referred to as gay and lesbian studies and is now often called queer studies, so in reality queer in academia straddles both identity and process.

For the purposes of this research, these two aspects of queer – the study of LGBT identities and the deconstruction of identity privilege – are considered together. Queer lives are made visible through newly-created objects and those newly-created objects are used to destabilise heteronormativity in museums, art galleries and historic houses.

LGBT identities are not historically stable and the representation of historical queer lives is not straightforward. Terminology is both geographically and temporarily specific and the linking of sexual inclination with identity is a relatively recent social construct.

¹² David M. Halperin, *Saint=Foucault: Towards a Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 62.

¹³ Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 2.

¹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol1, No1 (1993): 13.

¹⁵ Calvin Thomas, “On Being Post-Normal: Heterosexuality after Queer Theory,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, eds. Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 21.

It is argued that, historically, in Western Europe, queerness was an act that someone engaged in rather than an essential part of their character or make-up. Bray argues that modern homosexual identity originated 'at the close of the 17th century, with the emergence of an urban homosexual subculture that sprang up around [molly houses]... north of the Thames'.¹⁶

Foucault, by contrast, argued that it was around 1870,¹⁷ when 'in various medical discourses, the notion of the homosexual as an identifiable type of person begins to emerge'.¹⁸ 'The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history... Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality',¹⁹ while the 'sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species'.²⁰

This change from act to identity complicates the retrospective use of contemporary LGBT identity terms on historical figures. However, it is needed for the deconstructive strategy of queer theory which 'aims to decentralise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them'²¹ to take place, since it relies on identity politics and the 'assumption that sexual inclinations, practices, and desires are the expression of a person's core identity'.²²

Regardless of when this identity creation happened, the move from 'temporary aberration' into 'species' meant that:

Homosexuality came to be understood as the grounds for community; on this basis, a recognisable – though small and discreet – culture began to develop, which had its own "ways of dressing, of talking, distinctive gestures and distinctive acts with an understood meaning, its own jargon" [and created] a cultural context for homosexual identity and community... which "existed independently of the individuals who might

¹⁶ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982) 84, qtd in Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 11–12.

¹⁷ Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 11.

¹⁸ Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 11–12.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 43.

²⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

²¹ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 81.

²² Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 81.

compose it at any time”, and was distinguishable from the surrounding culture.²³

These shared ways of dressing, talking and jargon formed the basis of a queer sensibility and with it the possibility of a shared, queer subculture and material culture. This queer sensibility has mutated and will continue to change over time and often works by disrupting normative gender patterns. This sensibility is not shared by all LGBT individuals, and indeed may be discounted by some. I am not arguing here that LGBT should be seen as an ethnicity, but rather that there are shared collective experiences which can be expressed visually and, likewise, that there are visual sensibilities that are associated with queer identities.

According to Alexander Doty ‘queer readings and positions can (and do) become modified or change over time as people, cultures, and politics change.’²⁴ Therefore the visual communication between viewer and object may not necessarily need to rely on any intrinsic queerness in the object itself, but on the relationship between the viewer, the object and their context. Or as Nicky Sullivan puts it: ‘[r]ather than functioning as a noun, queer can be used as a verb, that is, to describe the process, a movement between viewer, text, and world, that re-inscribes (or queers) each and the relations between them.’²⁵ This idea of queer readings will be discussed further in Chapter 2, which looks at the queer object and also forms a core part of the methodology used in the *Queering the Museum* case study.

Queer is but one possible aspect of a person’s identity, an identity which is potentially made up of many characteristics. However, queer is a minority identity and this has implications for visibility. Whether queer is something that should be drawn out or discussed in relationship to artworks, objects and artists is debated.²⁶ However, owing to its status as a minority position in an overwhelmingly heterosexual world, unless queer is specifically mentioned when curating all but the most blatant depictions of queer lives and affections,

²³ Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, qtd in Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 12.

²⁴ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 8.

²⁵ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 192.

²⁶ Alpesh Kantilal Patel, “Open Secrets in ‘Post-Identity’ Era Art Criticism/History: Raqib Shaw’s Queer Garden of Earthly Delights,” *Post-Racial Imaginaries* 9.2 (November 2012).

the effect of heteronormativity effectively erases queer difference and thereby silences it.

Queer theory is less a matter of explaining the repression or expression of a homosexual minority, than an analysis of the Hetero/Homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations – in a word, the constitution of the self and society.²⁷

It is therefore natural that a discussion of queer material culture should investigate how these power relations play out in the cultural organisations that collect and display objects. The research will investigate how artists can reposition the hetero/homo binary and reflect on the ubiquity of heteronormativity which ensures ‘heterosexuality as an institution is so embedded in our culture, that it has become almost invisible.’²⁸

The practical case studies in this research explore the heteronormativity of cultural organisations. They comprised interventions in museums, galleries and historic houses and, not only did they seek to increase queer representation, but they also make evident the ideas of:

[p]oststructuralist theorists such as Foucault [who] argue that there are no objective universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become “naturalised”, in culturally and historically specific ways. For example, Judith Butler, and Monique Wittig argue (in slightly different ways) that heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourses, institutions, and so on, that has become normalised in our culture, thus making particular relationships, lifestyles, and identities, seem natural, ahistorical, and universal. In short, heterosexuality, as it is currently understood and experienced, is a (historically and culturally specific) truth-effect of systems of power/knowledge.²⁹

²⁷ Steven Seidman, “Deconstructing Queer Theory or the Under-theorization of the Social and the Ethical,” *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 128, qtd in Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 51.

²⁸ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 121.

²⁹ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 39.

These queer interventions seek to question this 'natural' and 'historical' view of heterosexuality and examine and question the systems of knowledge that have normalised it. As Sarah Ahmed points out, '[t]o make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things.'³⁰

Queer can therefore be seen as a way 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them'.³¹ This queering, according to Jonathan Weinberg, is more than pointing out potentially gay and lesbian identities, but rather 'it involves revealing the signs of what Adrienne Rich called "compulsory heterosexuality"'.³²

³⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161–2.

³¹ Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, p vi

³² Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986) qtd in Jonathan Weinberg, "Things are Queer," *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (1996) 12.

1.2 Queer Craft

My mother made me a homosexual.

If I got her the wool would she make me one too?

Gay joke, traditional

Neither craft nor queer are essentialist terms. 'Part of queer's semantic clout, part of its political efficacy, depends on its resistance to definition, and the way in which it refuses to stake its claim.'³³ Likewise, craft 'has always had an unstable and complex identity and status'.³⁴ Therefore what these two words mean is constantly under debate and contested and any overview of either, let alone their overlap, will be subjective, partial and open to debate.

Both queer and craft act as subjective groupings and both are terms which occupy a subordinate position in binaries where each dominant term relies in part on the subaltern for their meanings. As marginalised groups re-appropriate mainstream culture, so mainstream culture sublates³⁵ marginalised cultural production so there will never be a clear boundary between queer and non-queer or craft and art. The aim of this writing is not to attempt to police those boundaries or to produce absolute categories.

Craft materials and techniques are increasingly being used in the art world, often linked to conceptual approaches to identity politics. In 2014, the curator John Chaich declared that '[c]raft has been long considered the queer stepchild of fine art.'³⁶ The aim of this section is to consider why this may be.

A number of potential reasons will be addressed, namely: using craft's marginalised status in the art world to address the identity politics of a marginalised group, can be seen as an double disruption of the craft/art hetero/homo binaries; the adoption of craft by queer has been a natural

³³ Halperin, *Saint=Foucault*, 113.

³⁴ Tanya Harrod, "Disorder in the World of Work: The Crafts in Britain in the Twentieth Century," *The 1998 Peter Dormer Lecture*, (London: Royal College of Art, 1998) 4, qtd in Jorunn Veitberg, *Craft in Transition* (Bergen: Kunsthogskolen, 2005) 22.

³⁵ Sublation is defined as 'the process by which disruptive cultural elements are absorbed by hegemonic culture' in Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 91.

³⁶ John Chaich, *Queer Threads: Crafting Identity and Community* (New York: Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, exhibition catalogue, 2014) 5, 31 March 2015. http://www.leslielohman.org/exhibitions/2013/queer-threads/QueerThreadsCatalogue_FINAL.pdf

progression for craft, an art form which has been linked to the personal and political since the late nineteenth century; the field of conceptual craft allows the physical permanence of objects³⁷ to stand in for a relatively new, and rapidly changing, (queer) identity group; and craft's links to the personal and the heterogeneously handmade allow for individual difference to be made visible.

This section will begin by exploring how craft and identity have linked historically and how craft, like queer, has embraced and used its subordinate position within its binary. It will then explore how craft began to be adopted as a strategy within the art world to explore marginal identities – first by feminist artists and later, via postmodernism, by queer artists. It concludes by discussing how craftivism has sidestepped the hierarchies of the art world by using the internet and social media to provide unmediated platforms for identity through craft to be shared.

1.2.1 **Craft and Identity**

Art and craft split during the sixteenth century, with art 'accorded the status of an intellectual activity while the craft trades were regarded as manual labour and consequently were ranked lower down the scale'.³⁸ This set up a binary that would later be echoed in the writing of Kant whose influence, according to the curator and writer Marcia Tucker, is still being felt. Kant separated 'the formal from the informal, the sublime from the decorative, thinking from feeling, the intellectual from the corporeal, high art from kitsch'.³⁹ These binary divisions have been repeatedly assaulted, not least by conceptual makers. Working with craft, using haptic⁴⁰ skills to address intellectual concerns, conceptual makers question these seemingly polarised binaries and undermine (or queer) these divisions.

³⁷ Andrew Livingstone, "Decentered Meaning: Ceramics Materiality – Relocating Process and Technique," *Proceedings of the Crafticulation & Education Conference*, ed. Leena K. Kaukinen, (Helsinki: Nordic Forum for Research and Development in Craft and Design, 2009) 101, 26 March 2015.

https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10224/4810/Kaukinen_verkko.pdf?sequence=2

³⁸ Veitberg, *Craft in Transition*. 38.

³⁹ Marcia Tucker, "A Labour of Love," *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, eds. M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen, (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2005) 110.

⁴⁰ Haptic is defined as 'relating to or based on the sense of touch' in *Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 667.

The contemporary use of the word craft – relating it to makers and making of objects – only started gaining currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century⁴¹ at the same time that Foucault argues that modern gay identity was being established.⁴² Direct links between craft and queer were yet to be developed, but this period saw the linking, through the aestheticism of Wilde, of interior decoration and the decorative with homosexual men.

At roughly the same time, the Arts and Crafts movement, which would form the basis for much craft thinking in the twentieth century,⁴³ linked craft with personal identity and politics. Railing against industrialisation – which could be linked with uniformity of product and invisibility of maker – William Morris centrally placed the individual in the movement which sought to promote a ‘glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user’⁴⁴ thereby linking the personal with the handmade. Craft was therefore assigned two distinctly different characteristics that are still linked to it today: the handmade and political opposition to mainstream culture, both of which resonate when discussing ideas of queer craft.

At the start of the twentieth century, the decorative arts enjoyed a substantial critical literature⁴⁵ with writers including Christopher Dresser, John Ruskin, William Morris and Walter Crane arguing that they were ‘arts worthy of consideration alongside all others’.⁴⁶ However, craft began to be devalued with the advent of modernism. From around 1945, the visual avant-garde made work primarily for museum and gallery settings and turned their backs on the idea of art for domestic settings.⁴⁷ Robert Morris recalls that ‘the great anxiety’ for artists of the 1960s and 1970s was for one’s work to ‘fall into the decorative, the feminine, the beautiful, in short, the minor’.⁴⁸ According to Elissa Auther, the pejorative associations with the decorative also included “‘craft”, a category of

⁴¹ Peter Dormer, “The Salon de Refuse?” *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 6.

⁴² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43, qtd in Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 11–12.

⁴³ Paul Greenhalgh, “The History of Craft,” in Dormer, *The Culture of Craft*, 25.

⁴⁴ William Morris, “The Art of the People, (1879)” *The Collected Works of William Morris: 1910-15*, vol xxii (repr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966) 50.

⁴⁵ Greenhalgh, “The History of Craft,” in Dormer, *The Culture of Craft*, 30.

⁴⁶ Greenhalgh, “The History of Craft,” in Dormer, *The Culture of Craft*, 30.

⁴⁷ Carol McNicoll qtd in Veitberg, *Craft in Transition*, 65.

⁴⁸ Robert Morris, “Size Matters,” *Critical Inquiry* Vol 26, No 3 (2000) 478 qtd in Elissa Auther, “Wallpaper, the Decorative, and Contemporary Installation Art,” *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 116.

form often conflated with the decorative'.⁴⁹ This left strategies in the art world related to domesticity and the decorative wide open for artists – and especially feminist artists – combining craft with identity politics.

One of the most notable examples feminist craft practice was *Womanhouse*, the installation and performance space organised by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro in 1972. According to Chicago, its strategy was 'to appropriate an amateur activity, and to intensify or multiply it until it transcended the normal boundaries of domesticity',⁵⁰ or in the words of Lucy Lippard, rather than 'untying the apron strings', the artists involved were 'keeping the apron on, flaunting it, and turning it into art'.⁵¹ That Chicago felt the need to transcend the boundaries of the domestic gives an indication of the inability of the art world to address the domestic while Lippard's transformation of the apron from a symbol of oppression to one of emancipation links with the idea of kitsch, taking a cliché, emptying it of meaning and then filling it with ever-more loaded meaning to provide 'a productive confusion within the normal hierarchy of cultural prestige'.⁵²

Craft was adopted as part of feminist art practice not only due to its rejection by the art world establishment, but also for its gendered associations. In *The Subversive Stitch*, Rosika Parker argues that the construction of femininity, which also began in the Renaissance, coincided with the separation of fine art and craft, a gendering of arts and crafts that continued into the eighteenth century academies, with 'each consigned to the "appropriate" gender'.⁵³ The gendered nature of craft education continued at least into the 1980s in English schools, with boys learning woodwork and metalwork while girls learned home economics and sewing, a gendering that was replicated in other countries.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Elissa Auther, "Wallpaper, the Decorative, and Contemporary Installation Art," *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 116.

⁵⁰ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007) 155.

⁵¹ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 155.

⁵² Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 33.

⁵³ Rosika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, (New York: Routledge, 1984) 39, qtd in Marcia Tucker, *A Labor of Love*, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) 20-22.

⁵⁴ Tami Katz-Freiman, "Craftsmen in the Factory of Images," *BoysCraft*, (Haifa: Haifa Museum of Art, 2008) 180.

The second-wave feminist movement exploited this linking of craft and gender, addressing both craft's advantages and disadvantages. Exploring the long history of domestic arts including textile arts, paper works and decorative painting on furniture and ceramics, feminist artists argued 'that these amateur activities should be recuperated as a lost art history'.⁵⁵ While this opened up a ready-made alternative art history and a 'vast realm of women's experiences',⁵⁶ it also confronted them with 'the questionable notion that craft was inherently female, and [with] the negative aspects of that gendering'.⁵⁷ The connection between craft and gender is most marked in textile work made by men, where '[t]he association of homosexuality with textiles is so deeply ingrained in Western culture that it is nearly archetypal'.⁵⁸ These associations between queer male sexuality and textiles have been addressed in exhibitions such as *BoysCraft* (Haifa Museum of Art, 2008), *Boys with Needles* (Museum London in London, Ontario and Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto, 2003) and studiously ignored in other such as *Boys Who Sew* (Crafts Council London, 2004). More recently, *Queer Threads, Crafting Identity and Community* at the Leslie Lohman Museum in New York (2014) suggested that the association between fibre art and queer identity is due to the fact that '[i]t is only natural that artists seeking to explore a queer sensibility would look to something so ubiquitous to explore a perspective that may seem so foreign'.⁵⁹

Feminism did more than simply open up a parallel art history using craft, it also undermined the absolute status of modernism and enabled a space for multiple, conflicting and contradictory art practices. As Tami Katz-Freiberg puts it:

Artists such as Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro and others turned to manual crafts as a political act that

⁵⁵ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 150.

⁵⁶ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 151.

⁵⁷ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 151.

⁵⁸ Anna-Marie Larsen, "Boys with Needles," *Boys with Needles*, eds. Brian Meehan and Nataley Nagy (Canada: Museum London and the Textile Museum of Canada, 2003) 4.

⁵⁹ Hunter O'Hanian, "Greetings," *Queer Threads, Crafting Identity and Community*, (New York: Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, exhibition catalogue, 2014) 3, 31 March 2015. http://www.leslielohman.org/exhibitions/2013/queer-threads/QueerThreadsCatalogue_FINAL.pdf

challenged the modernist hierarchy. This feminist contribution was essential to the launching of a wide-ranging postmodernist strategy.⁶⁰

Katz-Freiberg here links feminist craft with the postmodernist movement that was to come. Postmodernism, like feminism, opened out the art world and allowed voices which spoke in ways other than the 'straight, male, Eurocentric artistic elite'⁶¹ promoted by critics including Clement Greenberg. Maria Elena Buszek concurs, stating that 'early postmodern artists placed great faith in the value of folk and popular arts that had traditionally been viewed as the realm of women's, queer, and non-Western cultures as a means of communicating beyond an elite community and letting the "real" world back into the art world.'⁶² However, postmodernism did not just take from queer culture. According to Nayland Blake, postmodernism was a product of queer culture since:

many of the theoreticians of the postmodern – the generation of critics and philosophers that came of age in the late '60s – were gay and lesbian... the discourse of the postmodern is the queer experience rewritten to describe the experience of the whole world.⁶³

The new focus on appropriation in the art world that came to the fore with postmodernism can be argued to be a queer visual strategy, since, according to Horne and Lewis 'one could say that lesbians and gays have always had to be post-modern in the sense of having to form identities out of appropriations and adaptations of existing codes, not least in order to resist designation and co-option by medical and legal discourse.'⁶⁴ While appropriation is now a widespread technique adopted by many in the art world, it is interesting to note how many queer artists working with craft techniques use it as a strategy, including the textiles of Nick Cave, Kent Henricksen and Nicolas Moufarrege as well as the ceramics of Léopold L. Foulem.

⁶⁰ Tami Katz-Freiberg, "'Craftsmen in the Factory of Images', *from BoysCraft*," *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010) 599-600.

⁶¹ Buszek, "Introduction," 5.

⁶² Buszek, "Introduction," 5.

⁶³ Nayland Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," *In a Different Light, Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, eds. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995) 12.

⁶⁴ Peter Horne and Reina Lewis, "Introduction, Reframed – Inscribing Lesbian, Gay and Queer Presences in Visual Culture," *Outlooks, Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture*, eds. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996) 3.

As postmodernism's re-appropriation of object and codes allowed objects to be read from alternative viewpoints, feminist theory – which queer theory draws on – allowed for a 'deconstruction of masculinity, [which has] permitted us to see that the viewpoint that has been accepted as objective is profoundly marked by interest of gender, race, and sexuality'.⁶⁵ Therefore, re-appropriation, feminism and queer theory can all be seen as ways of questioning patriarchal privilege and (re)viewing 'objective' points of view.

The use of craft became an increasingly legitimate part of the artistic canon from the 1980s onwards.⁶⁶ However, rather than working with craft for craft's sake, for many contemporary artists the selection of craft media is 'generally chosen with regard to the sociohistorical underpinning of a medium rather than any essential regard for or desire to plumb its unique material properties'.⁶⁷ The work therefore becomes meta-craft: craft about craft. Craft's link to feminism started to loosen and:

During the 1990s, male artists such as Mike Kelley, Lucas Samaras and Jim Hodges... began using craft techniques in order to destabilize the modernist canon.

This trend may also be related to the development of queer theories – which followed in the wake of the feminist discourse that undermined preexisting gender categories and offered alternative, flexible and liberating ways of thinking about gender.⁶⁸

This use of craft to interrogate identity within the art world is continuing with artists including Tracey Emin and Grayson Perry, with Perry in particular revelling in craft's 'domestic and feminist histories'⁶⁹ replacing 'the obsessive prudery of the country potter with a provocative, explicit sexual, corporeal zest'⁷⁰.

⁶⁵ Flacia Rando, "Reflections on a Name," *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (1996) 8-10.

⁶⁶ Katz-Frieberg, "Craftsmen in the Factory of Images," 599.

⁶⁷ Buszek, "Introduction," 5.

⁶⁸ Katz-Frieberg, "Craftsmen in the Factory of Images," 599–600.

⁶⁹ Janis Jefferies, "Loving Attention – An Outburst of Craft in Contemporary Art," *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 224.

⁷⁰ Jefferies, "Loving Attention," 224.

Nayland Blake mapped these new associations between gender, sexuality and technique in his 1995 exhibition essay:

Much of this work looks back to the '70s. Many of the male artists are recreating working methods that originated in the women's art movement. They are employing centralized imagery, using "craft" materials, sewing and employing a pre-modern rhetoric of sentiment. Many of the women are using '70s gay male culture as a template for expressions of sexual exploration and community. They are exploring drag, s/m technologies, and flauerism as a way of moving lesbian identification beyond the feel-good homilies of essentialism. As such, there is an interesting crossover in this work.⁷¹

This deliberate blurring of 'gay male' and 'lesbian' art and interest is maybe unsurprising since 'ideas of gender between the binaries of masculine and feminine are central to postmodern "queer" sensibilities.'⁷²

Although craft had been allowed back into the art world, it was not a uniformly positive position and the power relationship between craft and fine art remained complicated. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Glenn Adamson argues that the most widespread strategy towards craft was by artists who saw it as 'a site of cultural failure, a field of activity that is resigned to inferiority and debasement',⁷³ with 'Robert Arneson, Judy Chicago, Gijs Bakker, Mike Kelley, Gord Peteran, Miriam Schapiro, Richard Slee, Emma Woffenden, and Yagi Kazuo, each in his or her way, tak[ing] their strength as artists from some aspect of craft's intrinsic weakness.'⁷⁴

The most obvious exception to the association between craft and weakness came as a result of the AIDS crisis which created the impetus for one of the most notable things to happen in craft in the 1980s, and particularly in the intersection between queer and craft. However, it took place outside of the art world completely. During the 1980s and 1990s, the art world saw queer lives come centre stage, when 'the effects of AIDS became, arguably, *the* dominant

⁷¹ Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," 26.

⁷² Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 20.

⁷³ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 159.

⁷⁴ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 168.

issue in avant-garde art.⁷⁵ Politics and art were joined together. 'Not only did the AIDS crisis challenge the supposed neutrality and objectivity of the art world in a similar, but more pervasive way than feminism did in the 1970s, but it also revitalized a public art tradition stretching back to the civil rights and anti-war movements.'⁷⁶

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, which was conceived by Cleve Jones in 1985 and formally organised in June 1987, enabled a lost generation to be made visible. Adopting a strategy used by war memorials, the names of the dead were used to signify and memorialise loss. The quilt acted as both personal memorial and public metaphor. Hawkins argued that quilts represented America itself: as America's 'quintessential folk art, the patchwork quilt is linked to nineteenth-century sewing bees and a nostalgia for a past sense of community'.⁷⁷ Growing as the number of dead grew, the quilt was laid out on the Mall in Washington DC both as a protest to:

the country's indifference to the AIDS epidemic and to rally for greater attention to research and support⁷⁸ and also as 'a way to suffer intimate losses in the most public space in America, to leave behind ghetto and closet, to bring mourning from the margin to the centre.'⁷⁹

Unlike most war memorials, the quilt did not seek uniformity. While each panel adopts the same 3 foot by 6 foot dimensions, craft and handmaking allowed individuals to create their own personal memorial. This resulted in juxtapositions of styles and emotional responses, refusing hierarchy or the ranking of the individual components. Christopher Reed has argued that the quilt fused 'anger and power (conventionally masculine) with sentiment and sewing (conventionally feminine)',⁸⁰ drawing on both 'camp culture and feminist activism'.⁸¹ Unlike memorials carved in stone, the fabric of the quilt is sewn in

⁷⁵ Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 208.

⁷⁶ Cherry Smyth, *Damn Fine Art: By New Lesbian Artists* (London: Cassell, 1996) 84.

⁷⁷ Peter Hawkins, "Naming Names," *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, (London: Routledge, 1996) 136.

⁷⁸ Hawkins, "Naming Names," 137.

⁷⁹ Hawkins, "Naming Names," 137.

⁸⁰ Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 216.

⁸¹ Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 216.

homes, by loved ones and will fade and fray, 'its fragility, its constant need for mending, tell[ing] the real truth about "material" life.'⁸²

The AIDS crisis 'led to a substantial change in social attitudes towards homosexuality, which paradoxically enhanced the visibility of this form of otherness',⁸³ changing not only societal attitudes, but also what was seen as acceptable in the art world. 'The culture of drag and camp, and its relation to queer and alternative practices, gradually filtered into art. The transmutation of kitsch into high art, and the charging to mass imagery with subversive and critical meanings... allowed it to penetrate into an elitist discourse.'⁸⁴ This adoption of previously 'alternative' practices included the reintegration of the decorative into the art world by artists such as Robert Gober and Virgil Marti and a 'more open use of media traditionally associated with craft... particularly by artists aggressively pursuing queer and feminist counterpoints to a contemporary art world in which heterosexual masculinity is still a privileged position'.⁸⁵

Although gender and sexuality prejudice is a concern for many artists, more recently, artists working with queer craft have begun to open up the politics they are interested in critiquing. The current craftivist movement 'unifies the seemingly oppositional issues of identity politics and global politics, difference and connection'.⁸⁶ Neatly sidestepping the discussions about hierarchies in the artworld, craftivism and DIY craft uses the media and open access platforms such as Etsy to avoid 'craft's hierarchies, power structures, or institutional methods for confirming status.'⁸⁷ By avoiding 'curated' galleries and publications, Craftivist makers are using recent changes in media and communication to allow personal viewpoints to be heard. Rather than working on undermining the power structures in the art world, to a large extent, as some feminist artists chose to do in the 1960s and 1970s, craftivism simply avoids them. The internet:

⁸² Hawkins, "Naming Names," 141.

⁸³ Katz-Frieberg, "Craftsmen in the Factory of Images," 600.

⁸⁴ Katz-Frieberg, "Craftsmen in the Factory of Images," 600.

⁸⁵ Buszek, "Introduction," 15.

⁸⁶ Buszek, "Introduction," 15–17.

⁸⁷ Dennis Stevens, "Validity is in the Eye of the Beholder – Mapping Craft Communities of Practice," *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 53.

has, in effect, created new communities of practice which are quite different from the more traditional form of craft practice... It seems that youthful artists working in craft media are focused on carrying out their own version of truth relative to their own epistemological perspectives and generational experiences.⁸⁸

This democratisation of craft means that 'craft is at a generational crossroads and is presently expanding to embrace aspects of cultural hybridization that have not previously been recognized or articulated with the status-quo craft community'.⁸⁹ Julia Bryan-Wilson suggests that it is these areas of hybridisation which can most benefit from craft, since craft:

allows us to see those overlaps, to make connections between such different subject: globalized labor, war, digital culture, feminism, collaboration, queer identity. Maybe precisely because it is so slippery and unfixed, it can encompass a broad spectrum of issues.⁹⁰

For queer artists, who belong to a social group which has traditionally been marginalised, it is possibly unsurprising that there has been a desire to adopt the similarly marginalised art form of craft. Queer identity has had a short and wildly changing history formation, and craft, with its 'primary links to the physical object [which]...cannot be dematerialised'⁹¹ provides a relatively permanent counterpoint with which to mark queer lives. Craft therefore democratically centres the individual, or as Bruce Metcalf puts it, '[c]raft continues to be a social movement, often intuitive and without leadership. I see craft as a collective attempt to relocate personal meaning to a largely indifferent world.'⁹² Craft has been repeatedly linked to the personal, the political and the heterogeneously handmade, which makes it an ideal agent for queer, or as Katherine Brooks argues that '[j]ust as traditional quilts can help art historians understand the role of feminism in art-making, so can contemporary craft help

⁸⁸ Stevens, "Validity is in the Eye of the Beholder," 48.

⁸⁹ Stevens, "Validity is in the Eye of the Beholder," 43.

⁹⁰ Julia Bryan-Wilson, Liz Collins, Sabrina Gschwandtner, Cat Mazza and Allison Smith, "The Politics of Craft: A Roundtable," *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010) 628.

⁹¹ Livingstone, "Decentered Meaning," 101

⁹² Bruce Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview," *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory and Critical Writing*, (Toronto: Coach House Books with the Craft Studio at Harbourfront Centre, 2002) 17.

us to reflect on the ever-changing landscape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer issues.⁹³

As we have seen, the linking of the personal and craft has changed over time, and we can only expect it to further change in the future. Both craft and queer, when both used as nouns, operate as collective identities. The shared influence they can generate by uniting disparate groups can be powerful but also runs that risk of disguising differences and competing needs and priorities. Gloria Anzaldúa warns that queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which ‘queers of all races, ethnicities and classes are shored under... even when we seek shelter under it, we must not forget that it homogenises, erases our differences’.⁹⁴ Similarly, Veitberg⁹⁵ has argued that craft as a collective identity may have lost its meaning, and ‘may well fade in the coming decades’.⁹⁶ Whether the unifying power of queer and craft will continue to outweigh their potential to erase difference will be key to whether these two collective terms will continue to be used and useful. Either way, the potential to derive power from marginalised status has huge productive potential. As Mazzanti succinctly puts it ‘craft has engaged with the leftovers of visual art and design. However, in this seemingly resigned position there is a potential that has not yet been fully realized.’⁹⁷

⁹³ Katherine Brooks, “Using Craft to Explore Contemporary LGBTQ Culture,” *Huffington Post*, 1 July 2014, 26/3/15. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/07/queer-threads_n_4551235.html

⁹⁴ E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Leaned from My Grandmother,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, eds. Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 453.

⁹⁵ Veiteberg, *Craft in Transition*, 2005, 86.

⁹⁶ Paul Greenhalgh, “Introduction: Craft in a Changing World,” *The Persistence of Craft*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: A&C Black, 2002) 16.

⁹⁷ Louise Mazzanti, “Super-objects – Craft as an Aesthetic Position,” *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 72.

1.3 Queer Craft Methodology

I was looking around, and I realized that Ruskey's was a gay restaurant. The waiters were all gay, as were half of the customers. The mirror-topped tables were gay, and so was the ubiquitous smell of the Windex used to wipe them. The old-fashioned tile floors, the dramatic lighting, the whoops of laughter almost instantly suppressed into terribly amused hissing – it all seemed extremely gay, down to the men in formfitting T-shirts despite the cold outside, and I hoped none of my clients would see me.

Edmund White, *Jack Holmes and His Friend*, 2012

This project examines queer (theory and studies) and its relationship to contemporary art and craft practice in order to explore whether, and how, objects can be visually identified as queer or be used to queer spaces or collections of objects. As White's protagonist asserts that mirror-topped tables could be identified as gay, this research considers both how objects can represent queer identities and also be seen to display queer signifiers. Both craft and queer are large and contested areas, and this thesis explores the areas of overlap between the two in order to identify ways in which they can inform each other theoretically and practically.

I consciously decided to use multiple research methods in the project and that the research should explore their intersection from a number of different theoretical viewpoints to generate a broad understanding of the area. This strategy of using a variety of methods is something identified by Carole Gray and Ian Pirie:

most researchers in Art & Design have displayed characteristic eclecticism, adopting a 'multi-method' approach to information gathering,

selection, structuring, analysis, evaluation, presentation and communication.⁹⁸

A number of key theoretical texts have been used that relate either to queer theory – Nikki Sullivan’s *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003), Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory, An Introduction* (1996) – or craft practice – Jorunn Veitberg’s *Craft in Transition* (2005), Glenn Adamson’s *The Craft Reader* (2010) – and occasionally to both. The texts that explore the overlap between craft and queer theory include Maria Elena Buszek’s *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (2011) and M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen’s *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft* (2005).

When considering queer, it is important to reiterate that queer can refer and relate to many things in many ways, but eludes simple definition. While this provides rich pickings for academic discourse and opens up potential ways of utilising queer as an artist, at the same time it runs the risk of divorcing queer from LGBT identity politics completely. However, as I hope to outline, queer does not refer to nothing,⁹⁹ but rather its investigation will necessarily involve doubt, a lack of clearly defined categories and some contradictions.

While theorists may argue that queer works only as a tool and relates to nothing in particular, in practice, academic courses and books include some topics and texts and exclude others. What is included tends to closely map what was formerly referred to as gay and lesbian studies and is now often called queer studies.

In practice, queer is used in two very different, but related ways: as a shorthand for gay and lesbian (and often referred to as queer studies) and as a tool to examine and deconstruct, usually around gender and sexuality (queer theory). There is an irony in that queer studies is a study of identity and queer theory a deconstruction of identity. This research project requires both of these: *identity* through the exploration of how LGBT identities can be incorporated into

⁹⁸ Katie MacLeod, *The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-based PhD Submissions: Working Papers in Art and Design 1* (2002), 15 January 2013.
http://www.herts.ac.uk/research/files/art-and-design/WPIAAD_vol1_macleod.pdf

⁹⁹ Halperin, *Saint=Foucault*, 62.

museum and historic house exhibitions and made visible through objects; and *deconstruction of identity*, and in particular a deconstruction of heteronormativity through the contestation of power structures in museums, art galleries and historic houses. Heteronormativity, which can be defined as the way in which institutions and structures of understanding ensure that heterosexuality is privileged¹⁰⁰ is ubiquitous in many museums and historic houses, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The research develops this enquiry in five main ways, namely: by defining queer and a historic mapping of how craft and identity, and specifically, queer have intersected; addressing what might we mean by a queer object and how this might develop into a visual polari;¹⁰¹ exploring key curatorial strategies for addressing queer; discussing how craft objects can queer museums and galleries and their collections; and identifying how craft objects can queer domestic spaces and in particular historic houses open to the public.

Chapter 2, *Queer Objects*, explores which objects - to draw from Sarah Ahmed's writing¹⁰² - might enable people who identify as LGBT, orientate themselves, or help them find their way. The discussion of historical associations between non-figurative objects and LGBT individuals moves onto discussion of three bodies of studio work: *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*, *The Problems With History* and *BlueBoy and Pillar of Masculinity*. These collections were created as part of the research practice that interrogates LGBT associations with objects. They also examine the use of appropriation in queer craft practice to create objects that resonate with a visual polari, which can provide an object with a queer resonance, regardless of its context or setting. In the opening quote, Edmund White's protagonist identifies mirror-topped tables and Windex as gay. In a similar vein, what is being attempted in the research is to identify what, if anything, would signify queerness in a crafted object, exploring what a queer visual language might look like, or what coded signifiers it might be based upon, and how it could be used by artists. The development of visual polari drew strongly on the work of a number of artists

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, "On Being Post-Normal," 21.

¹⁰¹ Polari: a slang language used by British gay subculture particularly in the middle of the twentieth century

¹⁰² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.

who identify with minority identity status – race, gender or sexuality – and included Kara Walker, Glenn Ligon, Virgil Marti and Robert Gober.

Exploring ideas through craft techniques moves craft and its discourse away from its traditional emphasis on skill towards using craft practice to answer core questions. Craft's links with the handmade and the personal and its marginal position within the art world allow artists working with craft to intimately explore heterogeneous positions and power relations. Zandra Ahl has described the linking of ideas and making within her own practice as an '...investigation of taste, power, hierarchy, class and gender. I call it craft.'¹⁰³ The linking of ideas and craft techniques has led to the adoption of the term conceptual craft, a term which Jo Dahn suggests should be used to describe objects 'whose fullest interpretation depends on a conceptual context and a knowing audience, willing to "unpack" them.'¹⁰⁴

Within the research, I have relied on two main craft media: ceramics and textiles. Ceramic brings with it resonance with archaeological digs and the role of found ceramic objects in building a picture of historical societies. By casting objects in the making process, clones are produced which can be modified and resituated to explore alternative narratives. The casting process involves a reduction in scale whereby the new cast will always be slightly less than the original object and brings with it an intrinsic sense of inferiority. During the research, I moved away from concepts of permanence and legacy and became interested in the idea of identity in process, in a continual stage of change. I therefore moved the making away from the permanence of fired clay and began working with textiles which could be unpicked and re-stitched multiple times. These tapestries were sourced already stitched by amateur sewers and parts of them were unpicked and re-stitched with alternative patterns, moving them away from amateur hobby activity into a more conceptual arena.

Relatively little has been written about queer sensibilities and strategies in art and most of the writing is by exhibition curators. These include Daniel J.

¹⁰³ Zandra Ahl, "And what is your title?," *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford: Berg, 2010) 608.

¹⁰⁴ Jo Dahn, "Elastic/Expanding: Contemporary Conceptual Ceramics," *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Elena Buszek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 158.

Cameron, curator of *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* at the New Museum, New York (1982); Nayland Blake, co-curator of *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice* at the Berkeley Art Museum (1995); Marcia Tucker, curator of *A Labor of Love* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1996); and Tami Katz-Freiman, curator of *Boyscraft* at the Haifa Museum of Art (2007).

Chapter 3, Queer Curating, examines a number of these exhibition strategies to compare queer curatorial methods. These can be grouped into three main, non-exclusive areas. These are curating work by artists who self-identify as queer; curating work that queers exhibition spaces; and curating work that is deemed to have a queer sensibility.

Since queer is subjective, any sense of queerness is fluid. However, a number of queer visual strategies are identified by drawing on curatorial methods of grouping works and using intertextual readings of theoretical writers and visual readings of queer environments. This section of the project also examines how a space can be queered in addition to how objects destined for that space can be given a queer significance.

Chapters 4 and 5 of the research describe the making of new queer craft works that respond to existing spaces and collections. Gillian Rose argues that '[t]he seeing of an image [*object*] ... always takes place in a particular social context that mediates its impact.'¹⁰⁵ Therefore, I felt it was key that the context within which those objects were situated also needed to be considered in order to explore queer craft. Within the research in this dissertation into museums, art galleries and historic houses, queer is used predominantly as an identifier of sexual minorities and identity politics. However, as Del LaGrace Volcano puts it, 'queer is a verb in drag, passing as an adjective'.¹⁰⁶ Its use within these three cultural organisations not only indicates identity difference, but also the undermining and challenging of the power structures and norms that take place

¹⁰⁵ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Second Edition, (London: Sage, 2007) 11.

¹⁰⁶ Del LaGrace Volcano, *Charming for the Revolution: A Congress for Gender Talents and Wildness*, Conference, Tate Modern, 2 February 2013, np.

within them. There is a double queering taking place: a queering (disruption) of the environment, which allows for queer identity (LGBT) representation to take place.

The exploration of queer craft in museums and galleries comprises two case studies: *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds. Representation of queer identity in museums is relatively unusual and the unpacking of the normative structures that privilege heterosexuality even more so. In the first case study, *Queering the Museum*, I drew on the conceptual framework developed by another minority group (African American), and in particular the work of Fred Wilson, to explore and critique the representation of difference by museum curators within museum collections.

Theoretically, this project draws on the writings of Patrick Steorn, who argues for the development an “alternative archive” that consists of interpretations of artworks or other objects that have been queered and appropriated by a LGBT audience, and which holds narratives about affective knowledge and queer desires.¹⁰⁷ Here, Steorn is addressing the lack of material culture related specifically to LGBT lives and shares the views of Halberstam who talks of the need to collect ‘ephemeral affects, memories and cultural values generated by other types of objects than the documents and objects that can be found in a conventional archive or museum’.¹⁰⁸ This lack of objects meant that in addition to the juxtaposition of existing objects within the collections, I created the objects that previously could not be made, for example, queer counterparts to the heterosexual figurine groups that I inserted into the exhibition displays to fill historic gaps in the collection. To assess the impact of *Queering the Museum*, a programme of audience evaluation was undertaken to gather feedback.

Queering the Museum adopted museum norms of using individual objects to stand in for group identities. This left it potentially open to charges of

¹⁰⁷ Patrik Steorn, “Queer in the Museum, Methodological reflections on doing queer in museum collections,” *Lambda Nordica: Queer Methodology*, No. 3–4, Vol. 15 (2010) 130.

¹⁰⁸ Steorn, “Queer in the Museum,” 129–130.

generalisation and stereotyping, which brings difficulties when trying to represent such a diverse group. Therefore I decided with the subsequent project, *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection*, to move away from 'grand narratives'¹⁰⁹ and examine individual oral histories drawn from the Brighton Ourstory oral history archive. Selected texts from individual oral histories were incorporated into objects chosen for their relationship to those narratives. These objects were then placed adjacent to existing artworks in the collection at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds in order to reposition the existing collection from their heteronormative framework into a queer (re)framing of the past.

This use of the quotidian practically implements Halberstam's suggestion that in order to represent LGBT lives, it is memories rather than objects that should be archived. Cvetkovich argues that lesbian and gay history relies an archive of emotion in 'order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive',¹¹⁰ and for archive, we can also read museum collection. *Queering the Museum* and *Other Stories* required making and curating objects and working as a hybrid artist/curator/art historian, a queering of roles.

The work within domestic environments was undertaken in conjunction with the National Trust. The project, *Unravelling the National Trust*, involved curating three large exhibitions of artist interventions in Nymans House and Gardens, The Vyne and Uppark. The exhibitions involved commissioning artworks specific to each house from between 10 and 12 artists working with craft techniques. This curatorial methodology allowed multiple, divergent views about the houses to be explored, moving away from any sense of master narrative, absolute truth or historical progression. In these terms, the curation of the projects could be seen as a *queering* of the authorised history of the site and any reference to LGBT relationships a *queer queering*.

¹⁰⁹ Amy Tooth Murphy, *Demystifying Public Engagement: Gender & Sexuality Studies Beyond the Academy Conference*, Newcastle University, 14–15 May 2011, np.

¹¹⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings, Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 241.

I chose to work with houses since they allow access to intimacy in a way that museums seldom do. These sites are built upon individual whimsy and allow their owners to shape the environment and its contents in a way that can reflect their identity. The family tree, which is central to the interpretation of most historic houses, places a documentation of relationships at the core of the narrative of the house and provides a useful starting point for exploring historic sexualities, both normative and non-normative. All three of the houses have long, well-documented histories of the houses and their occupants. They are open to the public and so have moved from being semi-private spaces to public spaces; what was a home is now a public spectacle.

Two of the houses and their exhibitions – *Unravelling Nymans* and *Unravelling The Vyne* – have particular relevance to this research project. Oliver Messel at Nymans and John Chute at The Vyne both present us with queer histories. The interventions that I made for these two houses will be explored in depth to examine what they can tell us about the historic presentation of non-normative sexualities in historic houses. In addition to the commissioning of works by artists for the exhibitions, a number of writers were also commissioned to write about subjects related to the exhibition. The results of these commissions are shown in the *Unravelling* catalogues in the appendices and helped guide my thinking in the writing of this chapter of the research as well as in the development of the work.

1.3.1 Approach to Practice

My artistic practice broadly uses materials that are associated with craft practice using conceptual thinking to inform the making and its presentation.

Paul Scott¹¹¹ identified three main categories of ceramic PhD research:

1. Research of a purely historical or theoretical nature such as Julian Stair's 2002 thesis *Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910–1940*.
2. Research to explore and develop new materials, techniques or ways of working, such as Kevin Petrie's 1999 thesis *Water-based Ceramic Transfer Printing: The Development and Creative Use of a New On-glaze Printing System*.
3. Research that analyses the creative process, proposing it as a research tool to create new understandings of issues of events, which Scott illustrates using Neil Brownsword's 2006 thesis *Action – A Creative Response to Transition and Change in British Ceramic Manufacture*.

Scott describes this third category:

the creative process itself is posited as the primary research methodology, the artist researcher as reflective practitioner; the process of making art documented through notebooks, sketchbooks and video, and critical peer review used as a common methodological evaluation tool.¹¹²

Of the three categories, this project most closely aligns with the third, but it is by no means a perfect fit. Historical and theoretical research directly informed the creation of new work, which in turned became the catalyst for new theoretical writing. This interrelated process continued throughout the research project, firmly linking the two research methods. Rather than using the creative process as an end in itself, the project aims to create social and curatorial change through the work, question curatorial practice and inform subsequent curatorial

¹¹¹ Paul Scott, *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection: A Theory of Surface*, doctoral Thesis (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2010) 32–33.

¹¹² Scott, *Ceramics and Landscape*, 33.

projects. Therefore, in addition to the making of the work, writing and talking about the practice formed a large part of the research. Presentations about the work have taken place at numerous industry events including: The Museums Association Conference; *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* at Tate Modern; *My Queer Museum* at the V&A; the University of Leicester's AHRC Museum Ethics Research Network; and *Curating Craft* at the Bergen Academy of Art and Design. Throughout the project, peer review has comprised both a form of verification and also brought new and at times unexpected thoughts and possible working methods.

A key part of the methodology involved in the project, and one that is seldom discussed in PhD research, was the haptic aspect of the making. The physical process of making and the time taken to create the work allowed periods of reflection and thought around the subject, which formed a core part of the research process and fed into both the interpretation of the work and the direction of new work. Running against the idea of Cartesian dualism that suggests 'mind and matter existed in separate spheres'¹¹³, I argue that the two were linked during the research and informed each other. In a research project that explores binaries and hierarchies, this is maybe unsurprising. As queer theory presents a more fluid approach to identity than the former fixed binaries of gay and straight, I would suggest that flattening, blurring and uniting of binaries enable a more insightful exploration of the subject. This uniting and blurring is also a core part of the practice-based nature of the research, where the thinking is 'the result of ideas worked through matter'¹¹⁴ and 'demonstrative of the intellectuality of making, which is not the same as the intellectuality of writing',¹¹⁵ a physical knowledge which is in turn worked through words.

¹¹³ M. Anna Fariello, "Regarding the History of Objects," *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, eds. M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen, (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2005) 10.

¹¹⁴ MacLeod, "The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-based PhD Submissions," np.

¹¹⁵ MacLeod, "The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-based PhD Submissions," np.

2 Queer Objects

Chapter 1 discussed how queer is being used in two separate, but linked ways: as a signifier of LGBT identities and as a strategy to oppose the norm. This chapter discusses how objects and artworks might be read as queer without relying on the representation of same-sex couples or individuals who display non-normative gender roles. It also explores strategies that artists might employ to imbue objects with queer significance.

To start the discussion, a chair owned by Robert Mapplethorpe is used to illustrate the fragile nature of queer associations with objects within a larger discussion of historic associations between queer lives and objects. The chapter then explores how the identification of queer identities and the use of queer visual strategies can be brought together in visual art to create 'meaning' in three main ways and each will be illustrated by a body of new work made as part of the research project. Firstly, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection* examines the overlap between queer lives and the objects associated with them and the need to consider partial and unsubstantiated histories when dealing with queer pasts as well as relying on emotional truths in queer archives, secondly, *The Problems with History* explores the visual representation of identity repression and the notion of queer readings and deconstructive reversal and how these may be used as an artistic strategy and finally, *BlueBoy* and *Pillar of Masculinity* adopt appropriation as a queer visual strategy to illustrate visual polari.

Any exploration of queer visual techniques will be geographically, culturally, temporarily, racially and gender partial. This discussion will therefore never succeed in universally answering the question of what makes an object queer. Reassuringly, according to Judith Halberstam, resignation to failure can be viewed as a queer aesthetic position, one that she claims as 'possibly a lesbian style rather than a gay style (since very often gay style is style writ large)'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 110.

However, Halberstam then goes on to suggest that failure is a strategy that has been used by male artists such as Andy Warhol as ‘an opportunity rather than a dead end; in true camp fashion, the queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic,’¹¹⁷ or, as Quentin Crisp succinctly put it, ‘[i]f at first you don’t succeed, failure may be your style.’¹¹⁸ Richard Dyer has similarly tried to define the difference between lesbian and gay male culture, this time, as ‘a polarisation of sensibilities: the emphasis on self-reflexivity and artifice in camp, the stress on authenticity (the hallmark of the confessional novel) and naturalness (the folk song ethos) in feminist culture’.¹¹⁹ If queer is in opposition to the norm, and we accept that societal norms are in constant flux, then any opposition will also be in a constant state of transition.

Having laid the groundwork that this chapter will never meet a universal view and is set to fail, we can move on. Any discussion on what constitutes a queer aesthetic will not be universally shared by all individuals who identify as queer, or indeed be restricted to queer individuals since the lines of demarcation are extremely blurred. As has previously been stated, Sara Ahmed suggests that ‘[t]o be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way,’¹²⁰ and this chapter discusses objects which (may) help (some) individuals with queer sexual orientations or sensibilities find their way.

When discussing queer objects, we are not exploring the notional idea of same-sex desire between two objects, but rather how some objects resonate with queerness. Just as the study of gendered objects does not reflect the absolute sexing of material culture, but rather how those objects reflect societal expectations of gender norms and behaviours, so queer objects reflect contemporaneous associations with queer culture(s). Likewise, just as there are many ways of being queer, there are numerous ways of defining queer objects. Many of the methods for defining a queer object rely on contextual information about their use or ownership. These links between objects and their queer associations are tenuous and easily lost or missed. For some, queer objects are

¹¹⁷ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 96.

¹¹⁸ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 109–110.

¹¹⁹ Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002) 26.

¹²⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.

those objects which have been owned by queer people, which raises questions about the potentially fluid queerness of objects whose ownership has passed between individuals – some queer, some heterosexual. For other people, queer objects are those objects whose adoption is synonymous with queer subcultures.¹²¹ As will be discussed later, the assimilation or sublation of queer culture and the overlaps between queer lives and straight lives makes this a grey area and potentially limits the uniquely queer objects to a very small pool.

A more promising approach to defining queer objects may be looking at those objects which have been brought together to form queer collections by individuals^{122,123} where the queerness of these objects relies on their interrelationships to each other and the individuals who collected them. Similarly, the selection and grouping of objects by curators presenting queer exhibitions (see Chapter 3) enables an interrogation which starts to develop a taxonomy of queer objects.

Finally, there are some objects which read as queer. They may rely on queer strategies such as camp and appropriation or feature queer imagery. The queerness may be the intention of the maker, part of the intrinsic nature of the object or arise through a reading of the view of the object by an individual with a queer viewpoint or affinity. The goal is not to police whether something is queer, but rather open up the discussion to allow queerness to be acknowledged.

This chapter will start with a case study exploring the fragile nature of links between objects and queer lives before it concentrates on those sensibilities and strategies which can be used to create artworks which somehow embody queerness. Burston and Richardson suggest that ‘belonging to a sexual minority lends one an outsider’s viewpoint which, though not entirely predictable in its

¹²¹ Angela Vanegas, “Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums,” 163–171.

¹²² Whitney Davis, “Homoerotic Art Collections from 1750 to 1920,” *Other Objects of Desire, Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, ed. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 85–115.

¹²³ Richard Meyer, “Mapplethorpe’s Living Room: Photography and the Furnishing of Desire,” *Other Objects of Desire, Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, ed. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 130–149.

consequences does make for different ways of seeing'.¹²⁴ This chapter seeks to understand how we might read this different way of seeing as the 'preferred reading'¹²⁵ of objects and how some objects "encourage" queer viewing... the product of a queer cultural moment in which images [or objects] have been subject to so much renegotiation (including subcultural renegotiation) that the preferred heterosexual reading has been destabilised.¹²⁶ In case this seems like a theoretical conceit, it is worth considering Michele Barrett's argument that '[c]ultural politics are crucially important... because they involve struggles over *meaning*,¹²⁷ which will always be a loaded struggle since '[h]istorians have argued with force that we demand standards of proof of homosexuality that we would not require of heterosexuality. In effect we assume heterosexuality'¹²⁸ and therefore any assertion that a certain sensibility should be assigned anything other than a heterosexual status (as we will see later with the intersection of camp and postmodernism) will always be subject to debate.

The chapter will explore how the identification of queer identities and the use of queer visual strategies can be brought together in visual art of create meaning in three main ways. Firstly it will consider the overlap between queer lives and the objects associated with them, then it will consider the notion of queer readings and deconstructive reversal and how these may be used as an artistic strategy and finally, drawing on polari, it will debate the use of appropriation as queer visual strategy.

These three ideas come together in Nayland Blake's *In a Different Light*.

Queer people are the only minority whose culture is not transmitted within the family. Indeed the assertion of one's queer identity is often made as a form of contradiction to familial identity. Thus, for queer

¹²⁴ Paul Burston and Colin Richardson, "Introduction," *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995) 5.

¹²⁵ Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995) 45.

¹²⁶ Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," 46.

¹²⁷ Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," 45.

¹²⁸ Laura Gowing, "History," *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally R Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 55.

people, all of the words that serve as touchstones for cultural identification – family, home, people, neighbourhood, heritage – must be recognized as constructions for and by the individual members of that community. The extremely provisional nature of queer culture is the thing that makes its transmission so fragile. However, this very fragility has encouraged people to seek retroactively its contours to a degree not often found in other groups. Queer people must literally construct the houses they will be born into, and adopt their own parents. The idea that identity and culture are nonorganic constructs is also one of the most important characteristics of postmodernism.¹²⁹

While I would dispute Blake's argument that queer people are the *only* group who rely on horizontal rather than the vertical transmission of group identity,¹³⁰ he does manage to bring together the three main arguments of this chapter, namely the provisional nature of queer culture, the desire for queer revisionist readings and how the need to construct cultural identification outside of the grand narratives of history chimes with the postmodern technique of re-appropriation.

Finally, it is worth remembering that in a practice-based PhD concerned with craft practice, the potential for using both haptic and intellectual knowledge. Sally Munt has argued for joining of the head and body – uniting both theory and lived experience.¹³¹ The world of queer theory has the potential to erase real life experience in the desire to create an academic genre, privileging the intellectual over the bodily. The haptic nature of craft production brings the bodily back into this discussion. Rather than simply back up an academic debate, it is hoped that this fusing of haptic and conceptual has resulted in objects that communicate visually about the subject in a more nuanced, open and less didactic manner than text alone can allow.

¹²⁹ Nayland Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," *In a Different Light*, Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights, 1995) 12.

¹³⁰ For more examples, see Andrew Solomon, *Far From the Tree: A Dozen Kinds of Love* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2013).

¹³¹ Sally R. Munt and Andy Medhurst, "Introduction," p xxii.

2.1 Queer Lives and Objects

One of the most literal ways of associating objects with queerness is to look at those objects which have strong association with queer lives. This leads to some arbitrary and time-specific connections. When considering queer aesthetics, it is hard to avoid discussing Oscar Wilde's fusing of aestheticism with homosexuality. Wilde's assertion: '[h]ow often I feel how hard it is to live up to my blue china,'¹³² which, according to Aaron Betsky, 'made it clear that the objects of everyday use could be aesthetic as well, so that a tea service could be the equal of a painting'¹³³ and played a double hand of developing both aestheticism and 'what Susan Sontag has retroactively called camp, one of whose criteria is that it finds beauty in the elevation of the everyday to the extraordinary.'¹³⁴ The argument is not that Wilde has made blue and white china queer, but rather that blue and white china has queer associations owing to its link with Wilde.

While this study of blue and white and camp may be seen as a retrospective reading of historical queer aesthetics, there have been other attempts to identify a queer aesthetic. The sexuality researcher Magnus Hirschfeld suggested 'that one way to determine a person's sexual orientation is to study the objects that decorate her or his home'.¹³⁵ This explicit linking of material culture with queer identity suggested statuettes of half-dressed working-class men by Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier and works by Michelangelo and Rodin had queer resonance. Patrik Steorn describes how Hirschfeld created an alternative canon, 'based mainly on homoerotic and aesthetic appreciation',¹³⁶ a canon which is 'not necessarily about completely different objects, but about different emotional and political attachments to objects'.¹³⁷ This is not to say that the work of Rodin is queer, or that Rodin was queer, but that the work chimed in a way that appealed to queer men.

¹³² Oscar Wilde qtd in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, (London: Penguin, 1988) 43.

¹³³ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997), 81.

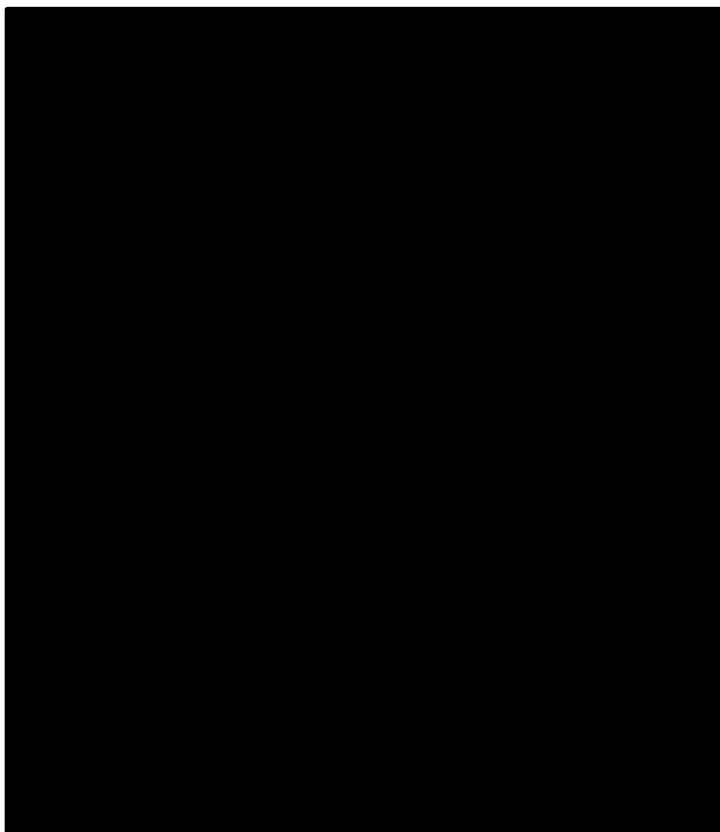
¹³⁴ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 81.

¹³⁵ Steorn, "Queer in the Museum," 130–131.

¹³⁶ Steorn, "Queer in the Museum," 130–131.

¹³⁷ Steorn, "Queer in the Museum," 131.

Some of these queer associations are still present today, others less so. The paintings of Thomas Gainsborough – not something previously read as queer by this author – were thought, by Hirschfeld, to appeal particularly to homosexual men. Whether it is this connection or a simple linguistic play that led to a gay pornographic magazine being called *Blue Boy*,¹³⁸ we may never know. What is possibly of more interest is, with the lack of vertical, familial, knowledge transfer between queers, how quickly cultural knowledge can be lost. While the possibility of linking queer identities and associations with objects will be discussed later in Chapter 4, the overwhelmingly heteronormative filter that exists in the world can possibly best be illustrated by the image in Figure 2.1. Taken from a Christie's catalogue from 1989, lot 242 is listed as *An Oak Reclining Armchair, by the firm of L. & J.G. Stickley, circa 1920, Five slats beneath the straight arm, with drop-in black leather cushion seat, model no 498–33in. (84cm.) wide, 38 in. (97cm.) deep, estimate \$2,500 – 3,500.*¹³⁹



¹³⁸ Paul Bourassa, "A Different History," *Leopold Foulem: Singularities* (Québec: Musée National Des Beaux-Arts du Québec, 2013) 96.

¹³⁹ *The Collection of Robert Mapplethorpe* auction catalogue (New York: Christie's, 1989) 99.

Figure 2.1 L. & J.G. Stickley, *Oak Reclining Armchair*. c.1920, 84cm wide x 97cm deep, The Robert Mapplethorpe Collection. Image removed owing to copyright restrictions.

Sold as part of the Robert Mapplethorpe Collection, the chair is one of a large number of objects that furnished Mapplethorpe's home and was also used in his photography. According to Dimitri Levas, Mapplethorpe's interest in his collection was 'not scholarly but visual and aesthetic; arranging... the objects was the highest priority for him',¹⁴⁰ which Meyer goes on to describe as an interest in how the objects related to each other, as a collection, rather than the 'art-historical value, provenance, or prestige of any one piece'.¹⁴¹

In Mapplethorpe's 1978 photograph *Helmut and Brooks, N.Y.C.*, if you look past the image of a man being fisted, you see this same Stickley chair (albeit with the original leather back pad). This object, once at the core of queer aesthetics, both as part of a queer collection and also the (part) subject of queer artwork, illustrates the heteronormalisation that can happen when queered objects are disassociated from their queer context and become just another oak armchair again. This is mentioned for two reasons: firstly to argue for the need for queer associations to be documented by archives as will be discussed in Chapter 4, but also to demonstrate the ephemeral and temporal nature of queer aesthetic associations.

¹⁴⁰ Dimitri Levas, untitled one page statement, *The Collection of Robert Mapplethorpe* auction catalogue (New York: Christie's, 1989) n.p.

¹⁴¹ Richard Meyer, "Mapplethorpe's Living Room: Photography and the Furnishing of Desire," *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, ed. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 141.

2.2 *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*

The collection of another man – Charles Lang Freer – formed the basis for a series of ceramics panels, created as part of the research, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*. Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919) was a railroad car manufacturer from Detroit whose art collection (including Whistler’s *Peacock Room* with its blue and white porcelain) and funding formed the basis for the Freer Gallery of Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

As Mapplethorpe’s chair has shown, maintaining queer associations with objects is problematic when the sexuality of the owner/collector is known. It is even more difficult when their queerness is in question. Freer was a lifelong bachelor and his sexuality is debated.¹⁴² Keeping Oscar Wilde’s camp associations with blue and white in mind, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection* considers Freer’s gender atypicality through a series of ceramic plaques that combine prints of drawings of Chinese ceramics from the Freer collection catalogue¹⁴³ with images of naked men from gay pin-up and pornographic magazines.

The plaques create a discourse between a documented fact (Freer’s collection) and a disputed one (his possible queerness). This casual disregard of the usual reliance on documented and collaborated evidence adopts an appropriately gossipy approach to history – the poet John Giorno, as referenced by Gavin Butt, explored ‘gossip’s central importance for understanding art history, which resides, he suggests, in its capability for revealing the art community’s sexual secrets.’¹⁴⁴ These plaques form a visual representation of the conflation of two aesthetic responses: Freer’s public collecting and (disputed) private queer desire.

¹⁴² Joshua G. Adair, “House Museums or Walk-in Closets?” *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 268.

¹⁴³ Freer Gallery of Art (compiler), *The Freer Gallery of Art I China*, (Tokyo: Kodansha Ltd, 1981) 181.

¹⁴⁴ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005) 1.

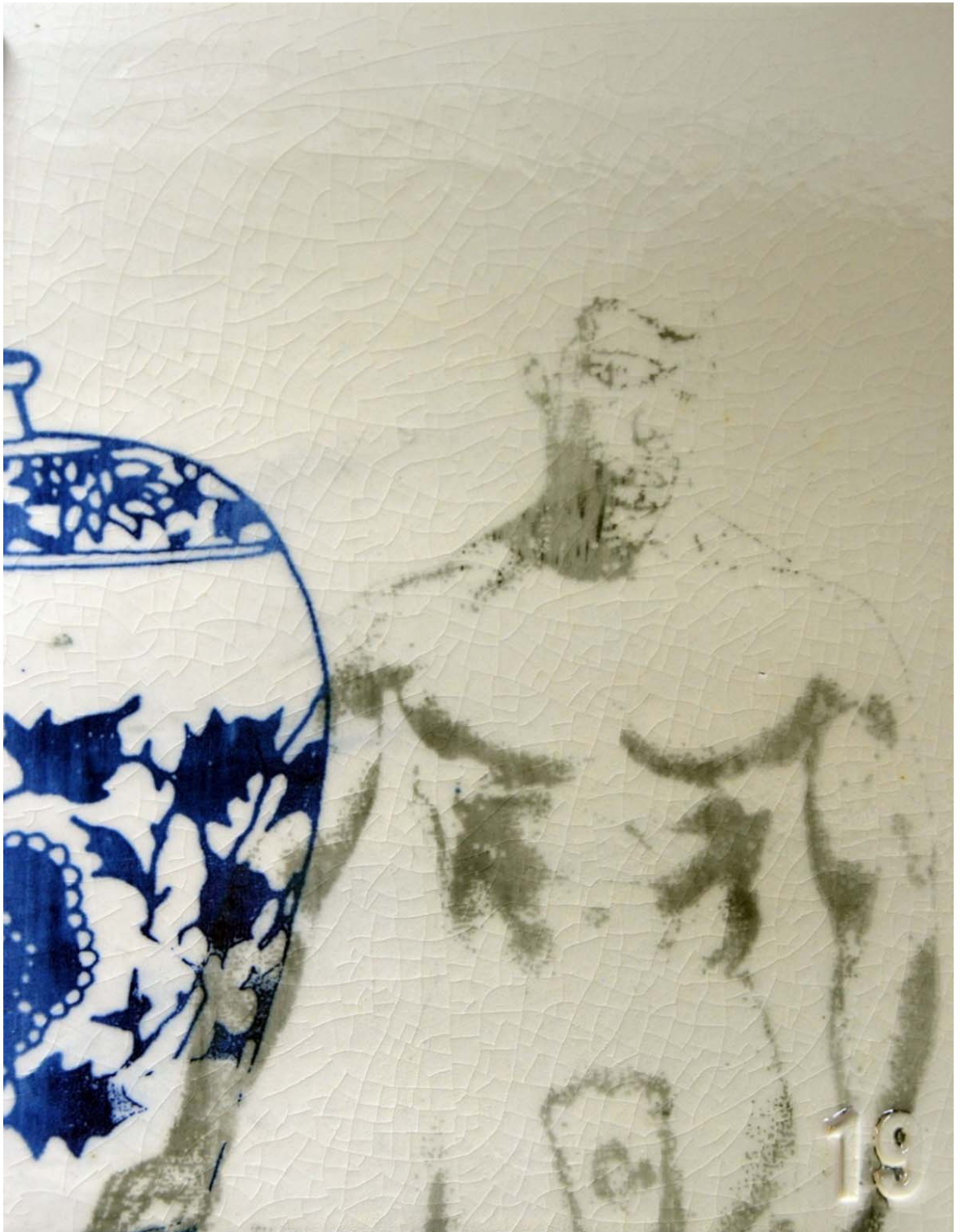


Figure 2.2 Matt Smith, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection, no. 19*, 2012, white earthenware with screen-printed cobalt and underglaze, 24cm x 20cm.

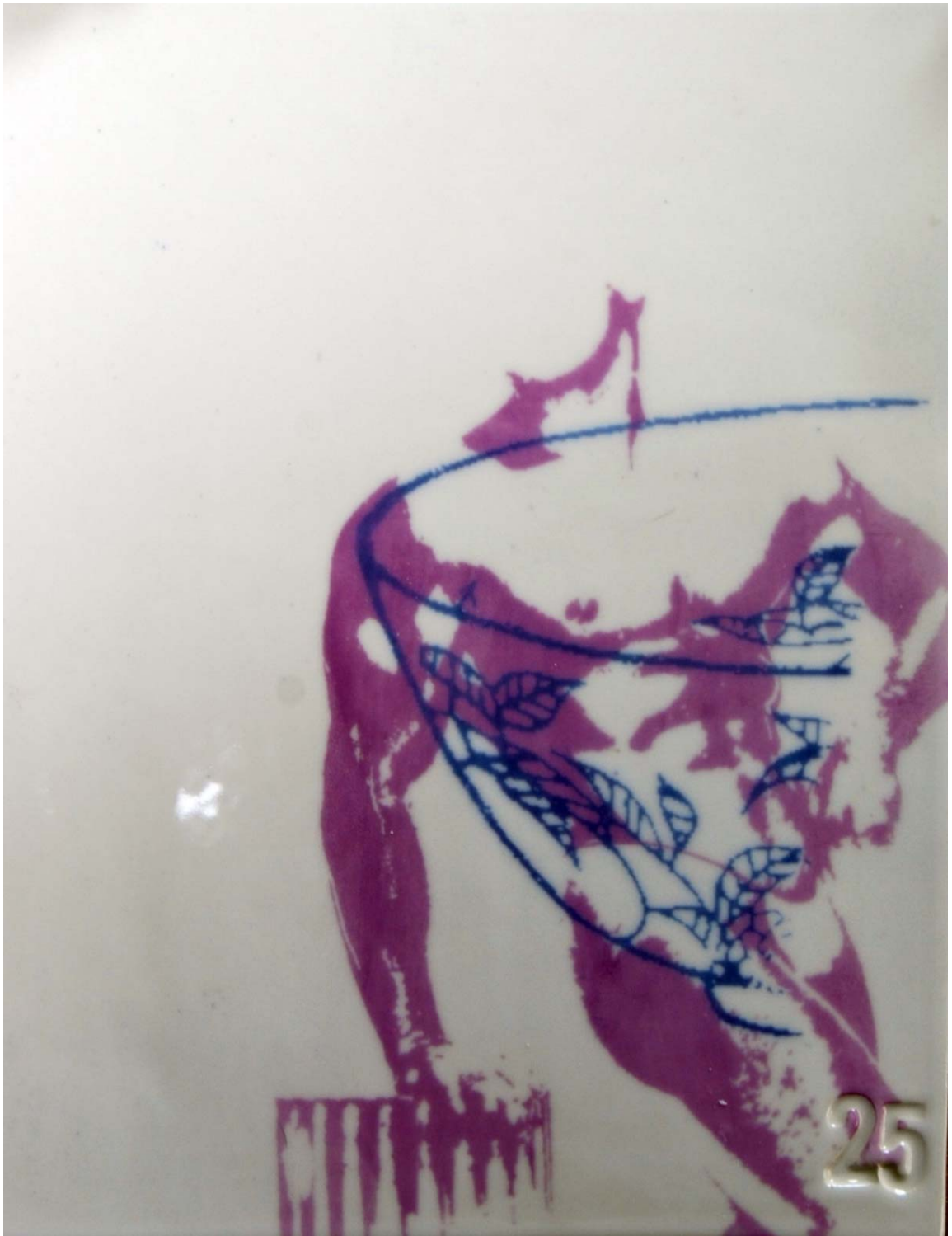


Figure 2.3 Matt Smith, *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection, no. 25*, 2012, white earthenware with screen-printed cobalt and underglaze, 24cm x 20cm.

The plaques in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 incorporate a numbering technique, referencing museum and archive collections. This alternative Freer archive to some extent draws on what Halberstam describes as ‘gay and lesbian history as a repressed archive and the historian as an intrepid archaeologist digging through homophobic erasure to find the truth’.¹⁴⁵ This sifting through material, according to Robert Mills, means that queer history exhibitions will necessarily adopt a:

style of presentation partly modelled on scrapbooks and collage; in place of the representative “object”, they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths... with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions [and which recognise] that interpretations change and that our encounters with archives are saturated with desire.¹⁴⁶

This queer desire, which, drawing on Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*,¹⁴⁷ Mathias Danbolt describes as so ‘hard to document, let alone archive in traditional ways’¹⁴⁸ is made visible through appropriated fragments and irreverent half-truths in *From the Recesses of the Freer Collection*.

¹⁴⁵ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 147–148.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Mills, “Queer is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture,” *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums* ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 86.

¹⁴⁷ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

¹⁴⁸ Mathias Danbolt, “We’re here! We’re queer? Archivist Archives and Archival Activism,” *Lambda Nordica, Queer Methodology*, 3–4, vol 15 (2010) 96.

2.3 *The Problems with History : Queer Readings*

‘...there is no one “right” way of looking at the world.’

Claire Bishop¹⁴⁹

This interrogation of material culture for queerness can be seen as a queer method. Mair Rigby suggests that in literature, to ‘discover queer experiences and lives, it is often fruitful to look at the marginal characters and places’.¹⁵⁰ Taking this idea forwards, Hilde Hein argues that reversing the ‘foreground and background... draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and, having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected’,¹⁵¹ thereby resituating the dominant position into a subordinate one: ‘[r]eclaiming the background can... be a cognitive breakthrough: it can also be a warranted act of rebellion.’¹⁵² This method of reversing the foreground and background, and reading against the grain, has been adopted in the second body of work to be discussed in this chapter, a series of textile pieces called *The Problems with History*.

The Problems with History series started with the reworking of mass-produced tapestries in which the central figures were stitched over with the aim of prioritising the marginal characters and scenery (Figure 2.4). This attempted silencing of the central characters did not remove them from the work, but rather changed their status. This inability to remove the figures completely echoes Michel Foucault’s assertion that silence is ‘an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.’¹⁵³ Meanwhile, Jonathan Katz¹⁵⁴ has linked queerness and silence, suggesting that silence was used as a resistance strategy in the work of Warhol, Johns and Rauschenberg – one that I would suggest mirrored the effects of the closet and what Anna-Marie Larsen describes as the ‘repression and the institutionalization of silence and discrimination’¹⁵⁵ that they

¹⁴⁹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 13.

¹⁵⁰ Mair Rigby, “‘A Strange Perversity’: Bringing Out Desire between Women in *Frankenstein*,” *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 480.

¹⁵¹ Hilde Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 57.

¹⁵² Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 57.

¹⁵³ Rigby, *A Strange Perversity*, 477.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Katz, “Performative Silence and the Politics of Passivity,” *Making a Scene*, ed. Henry Rogers and David Burrow (Birmingham: Article Press, 2000) 100.

¹⁵⁵ Larsen, “Boys with Needles,” 5.

experienced. Backing up Foucault's assertion, John Cage demonstrated with 4'33" that even when silencing was attempted, absence (of sound in this case) was never achieved.



Figure 2.4 Matt Smith, *Hide and Seek*, from *The Problems with History*, 2012, found textile and silk, 45cm x 45cm.

According to Martha Gever, coming out – or leaving the closet – is not only an individual declaration, but also a social process that ‘defies social disapprobation and infuses conventional representations of sexual deviance... embodied by lesbians and gay men with new meanings – what Michel Foucault

called “reverse discourse”,¹⁵⁶ a reversion echoed in the methodology used to produce these textiles.

As *The Problems with History* developed, I began working increasingly with amateur tapestries. Mass-produced canvases, originally stitched by hobby sewers at home, were unpicked and reworked. These textiles, sewn by unknown crafters, of artworks by named artists which often depicted known sitters were reworked into objects by a named artist depicting an anonymised sitter. In doing so they move from the world of handicraft to fine art, while adopting and using amateur craft skills. This use of tapestry canvases has to acknowledge their kitsch associations, which Thomas Crow suggests provides another ‘productive confusion within the normal hierarchy of cultural prestige’¹⁵⁷ while at the same times harnessing, what Philip Derbyshire terms, queer’s ‘violent rejection and despoliation of the norm’.¹⁵⁸

Stuart Hall suggests that we think of identity not as an unproblematic fact, but ‘as a “production”, which is never complete, always in process.’¹⁵⁹ While this disturbs the authority of ideas of cultural identity, Hall uses this idea to study the implications of identity as displacement. His argument suggests that one is only aware of identity when inhabiting a position where your identity is unaligned with those of the people around you. *The Problems with History* mirrors this idea of flux. The intervention onto the original sewing can be reversed at any time, or indeed replaced with another intervention. The works mirror Judith Butler’s argument that queer must be seen as a category in constant formation, ‘that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and

¹⁵⁶ Martha Gever, “The Names We Give Ourselves,” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Fergusson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 194.

¹⁵⁷ Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft*, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Philip Derbyshire, “A Measure of Queer,” *Critical Quarterly*, Vol 36:1, March (1994) 39–45, qtd in Emmanuel Cooper, “Queer spectacles,” *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996) 13.

¹⁵⁹ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) 222.

expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favour of terms that do that political work more effectively'.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 19 qtd in Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 129.

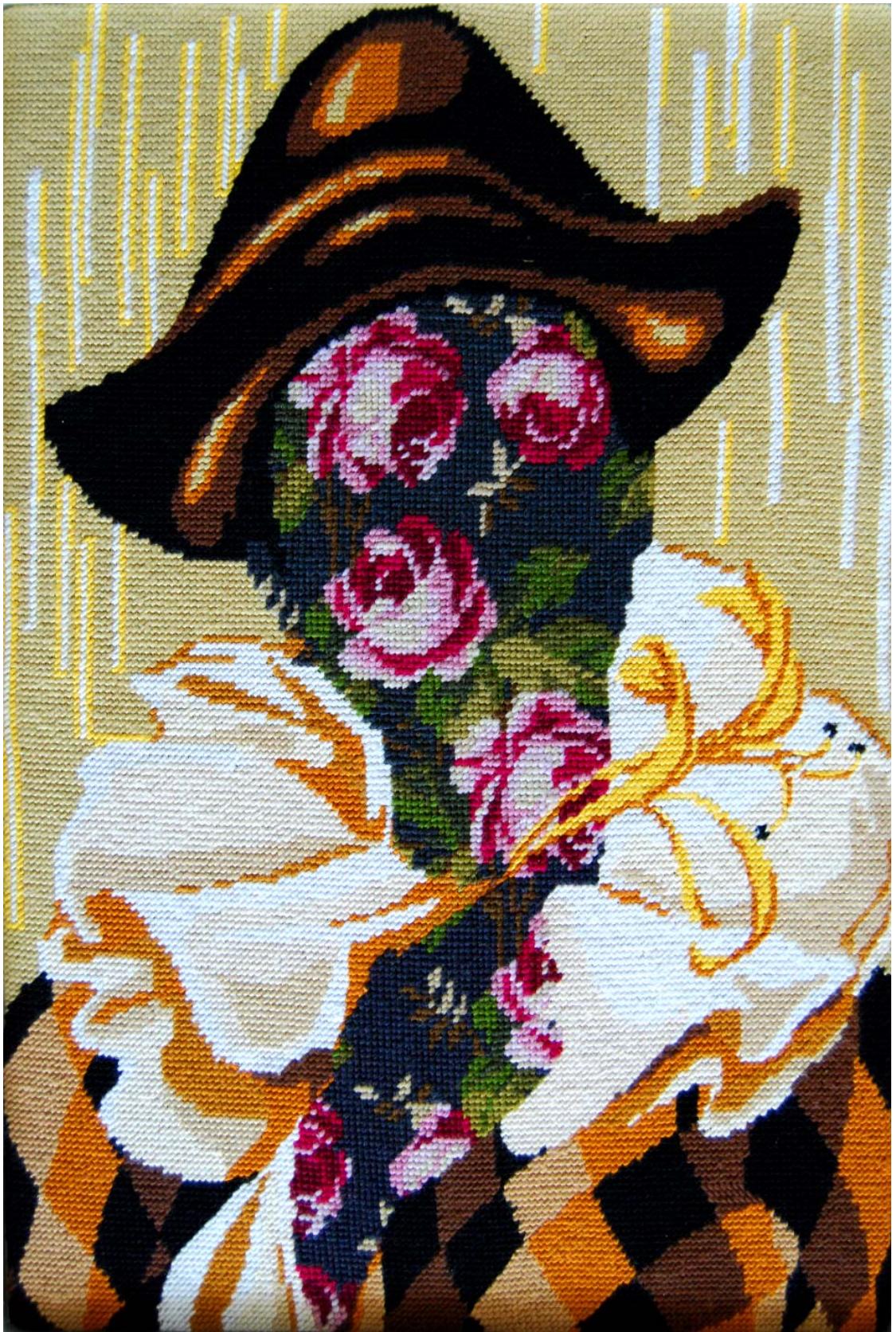


Figure 2.5 Matt Smith, *1870/1970*, from *The Problems with History*, 2014, found textile and wool, 55cm x 38cm.

I will now focus on one particular piece (Figure 2.5) from *The Problems with History* series, 1870/1970 which works on a number of levels. It subverts a tapestry which is believed to date from the late 1970s or early 1980s of a clown and reworks the space formerly taken by the face and hands with a late-Victorian, decorative, Berlin wool work upholstery pattern. It fuses these two different times (1870 and 1970) with the changing status of homosexuality in England. Foucault, slightly provocatively, named 1870 as the year that homosexuality was invented¹⁶¹ within medical discourse. He argued that before this medicalisation, homosexuality was an act rather than an identity. The use of the Berlin wool work pattern references both this date and the years preceding it, when, according to Foucault, homosexuals were as yet to be foregrounded. By 1970, homosexuality had been medicalised and criminalised, and then decriminalised in 1967 (in England and Wales). Associations between homosexuality and dandyism that gained currency with Oscar Wilde were still prevalent. Whether it was innate mannerism, defence mechanism or coping strategy, gay men in popular entertainment of the 1970s were usually figures of fun and amusement to be laughed at or pitied.

The use of ornament as the masking technique in this work is deliberate. Describing the work of textile artist Neil MacInnis, Anna-Marie Larsen argues that through a pastiche of images, MacInnis claims ‘a history of repression, violence and silence. He then re-inserts contemporary queer consciousness back into the very fabric of textile history.’¹⁶² MacInnis thereby claims the aesthetic of ornament as a queer visual language. The associations between textiles and the domestic, the feminine, the decorative and a queer aesthetic is also explored by Tom Folland, who argues that their use in Robert Rauschenberg’s *Combines* blurred the ‘boundaries between public/private, male/female and high/low’¹⁶³ at a time when modernism was ‘underwritten by a fear of the ornamental [which could contaminate it with a] domestic aesthetic of craft and frivolity.’¹⁶⁴ Folland continues, ‘the decorative fabrics Rauschenberg

¹⁶¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 10–11.

¹⁶² Larsen, *Boys with Needles*, 6.

¹⁶³ Tom Folland, “Robert Rauschenberg’s Queer Modernism: the Early Combines and Decoration,” *The Art Bulletin*, 92.4 (Dec 2010) 350.

¹⁶⁴ Folland, “Robert Rauschenberg’s Queer Modernism,” 350.

employed brought to light the flip side of modernism, its debased other: the feminine, the commodity, the decorative, the queer.¹⁶⁵

This undermining of modernism is unsurprising since, according to Emmanuel Cooper, many gay and lesbian artists were in turn alienated 'from late modernism because the forms and conventions of mainstream art did not offer the range and meanings required'.¹⁶⁶ Textile's challenge to 'dominant cultural sensibility through a strategic use of the decorative, decadent, feminine'¹⁶⁷ helped anchor it as a medium in the fine art world to be mined by feminist and queer artists, a medium that when adopted by men, immediately puts the work 'outside social convention'.¹⁶⁸

By not simply reversing the marginal and the core in the textile, but introducing a new visual vocabulary of decoration, it could be argued that *1870/1970* employs 'a radical exteriority'¹⁶⁹, moving outside of structures of power and authority. It has been suggested that the poststructuralist logic of Foucault and Deleuze run the risk, through assaulting the binary hierarchies, of 'reaffirm[ing] the very structures of authority they seek of overthrow'.¹⁷⁰ In contrast to this, Saul Newman argues that Derrida's idea of deconstruction provides 'a series of moves which include the dismantling of conceptual oppositions and hierarchical systems of thought'.¹⁷¹ Newman goes on to suggest that Derrida does not want to simply 'invert the terms of these binaries so that the subordinate term becomes the privileged term [inversion]'¹⁷² but transform the hierarchical structure itself.¹⁷³ Therefore, rather than reversing the binary opposition, 'one should perhaps question, and try to make problematic, its very structure'.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁵ Folland, "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism," 355.

¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Cooper, "Queer Spectacles," *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996) 18.

¹⁶⁷ Folland, "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism," 356.

¹⁶⁸ Peter Hobbs, "The Sewing Desire Machine," *Reinventing Textiles Vol 2: Gender and Identity*, ed. Janis Jefferies (Winchester: Telos, 2001) 50.

¹⁶⁹ Saul Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol 27, No 3 (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 1–20, 2.

¹⁷⁰ Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 2.

¹⁷¹ Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 2.

¹⁷² Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 4.

¹⁷³ Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 5.

¹⁷⁴ Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 6.

This movement away from binaries and hierarchies chimes with queer theory. The questioning of the structure is seen in *1870/1970* where rather than simply inverting the foreground and background, the foreground is removed and replaced with another background, thereby deconstructing the original binary hierarchy between foreground and background. In his dismantling of hierarchies in which one term is subordinate to another, Derrida's critique 'throws into doubt the question of essential identity'.¹⁷⁵ This would concur with the socially constructed ideas of queer theory and may be what led John Caputo to argue that 'deconstruction is a strategy of *responsibility* to the excluded other.'¹⁷⁶

Once this deconstruction has taken place, we are left with the structure of a portrait with no way of identifying or orientating towards the sitter. Ahmed has argued that queer refers to both sexual and also political orientation and disorientation,¹⁷⁷ orientations that are oblique to the majority position. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the face as orientated.¹⁷⁸ He states: '[m]y gaze which moves over the face, and in doing so faces certain directions, does not recognise the face unless it comes up against its details in a certain irreversible order...[t]o invert an object is to deprive it of its significance.'¹⁷⁹

Whilst Merleau-Ponty seems to be suggesting there is only one significance and orientation to be found, Ahmed suggests, that to move from a position of disorientation to orientation, we need to get our bearings and "'what" we are orientated toward'¹⁸⁰ will differ for different people and an altered portrait with queer affect may well provide queer orientation. As Rictor Norton explains, while:

¹⁷⁵ Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," 4.

¹⁷⁶ John Caputo, "Beyond Aestheticism: Derrida's Responsible Anarchy," *Research in Phenomenology* 19 (1988) 59–73 qtd in Saul Newman, "Derrida's Deconstruction of Authority," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol 27, No 3 (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 13.

¹⁷⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161–162.

¹⁷⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 171.

¹⁷⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith and Kegan Paul, (London: Routledge, 2002) 294, qtd in Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke, 2006) 171.

¹⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.

the term “orientation” is now common in legal and psychiatric discourses, we think of it as a scientific word. But of course it is merely a directional metaphor drawn from magnetism and navigation, which has gradually superseded the directional metaphors used prior to the 1970s: inclination, deviant, pervert, invert, taste, tendency, bent, drive. Sexual love is often expressed in terms of directional metaphors.¹⁸¹

The final point to make about *1870/1970* returns to the fusing of two years, 100 years apart. Elizabeth Freeman proposes that time and class are the ‘hidden referents of the postmodern, ironic re-enactment that we call camp’¹⁸² and has coined the term ‘temporal drag’ to describe their effects. Rather than limiting drag to gender parody, temporal drag in *1870/1970* operates with a ‘queer historical impulse... making connections across time’¹⁸³ and uses what Blake calls drag as ‘an artistic method’.¹⁸⁴ This impulse to make historical connections, according to Mathias Danbolt,¹⁸⁵ predates the gay and lesbian liberation movements of the 1970s, using history as an ‘orientating device in the negotiation of sexual identity’.¹⁸⁶ This ‘co-existence of multiple temporalities’¹⁸⁷ was a core feature of *Wunderkammer*, but was discarded in favour of ‘straight time’¹⁸⁸ with ‘the establishment of public art museums in Europe in the late eighteenth century... which were structured around chronological order and periodical sequences, in line with a scientific understanding of historical progression’.¹⁸⁹ It may be a leap too far to suggest that the opposition of *straight time* is *queer time*, but it is something to be considered as we move onto another form of queer multiplicity: assemblage and re-appropriation.

¹⁸¹ Rictor Norton, *A Critique of Social Constructionism and Queer Theory*, online at <http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/socia102.htm>, quoted in Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke, 2006) 69.

¹⁸² Elizabeth Freeman, “Normal Work: Temporal Drag and the Question of Class,” *Temporal Drag*, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011) 1979.

¹⁸³ Carolyn Dinshaw *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, 1999) 1, qtd in Mathias Danbolt, “Disruptive Anachronisms: Feeling Historical with N.O. Body,” *Temporal Drag*, ed. Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (Hatje Cantz, 2011) 1984.

¹⁸⁴ Blake, “Curating in a Different Light,” 32.

¹⁸⁵ Mathias Danbolt “Disruptive Anachronisms: Feeling Historical with N.O. Body,” *Temporal Drag*, ed. Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011) 1984.

¹⁸⁶ Danbolt, “Disruptive Anachronisms,” 1984.

¹⁸⁷ Danbolt, “Disruptive Anachronisms,” 1986.

¹⁸⁸ Danbolt, “Disruptive Anachronisms,” 1986.

¹⁸⁹ Danbolt, “Disruptive Anachronisms,” 1986.

2.4 **BlueBoy and Pillar of Masculinity: Queer Appropriation**

Polari, a combination of 'pig' Latin, word inversions and Romany, had developed as a distinctive queer patois in the nineteenth century, and by the 1920s, it was common in theatrical circles and around the docks, fostering a sense of connection between queens, prostitutes, immigrants and other 'outcasts'.¹⁹⁰

This section of the research will adopt the idea of polari and mutate it into a visual method to infer queerness. Using polari's techniques of re-appropriation, amalgamation, subversion and coding, the methodology has been used to create the works *BlueBoy* and *Pillar of Masculinity*. The reasons for adopting visual polari as a means of considering queer are many. Like queer, it is slippery and constantly mutating, travelling and adapting over time and in different physical locations. It was used predominantly by LGBT individuals, but also adopted and adapted by other groups. Polari takes from many sources, adapting source material and repurposing it for its own ends. It takes from other languages and by mutating them, encodes messages, allowing them to occupy a place 'under the radar'. Visual polari covers subject matter, visual styles, ways of making, ways of displaying and arenas for display. This identification will by its very nature be partial, selective and open to debate. Since queer is a contested term, any attempt to define it visually will also, necessarily, be a subjective one. Relating to the idea of 'reading against the grain' in order to find queer interpretations, visual polari shares ground with collage and appropriation, taking fragments and reinterpreting dominant cultural norms and repurposing them into queer associations. As Noreen Giffney describes it, 'appropriation and pastiche, irony as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind... these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they're full of pleasure. They're here, they're queer, get hip with it.'¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Matt Cook, "Queer Conflicts: Love, Sex and War, 1914–1967," in *A Gay History of Britain, Love and Sex between Men since the Middle Ages*, ed. Matt Cook (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007) 157.

¹⁹¹ Noreen Giffney "The New Queer Cartoon," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 366.

It would be easy to equate this visual polari with postmodernism, and the two overlap to a degree. However, visual polari's use of camp means that rather than simply assimilate from heterosexual (mainstream) society, truly queer work doesn't merely collect and reflect, but provides an 'aggressive, queer critique of heteronormativity'.¹⁹² As Andy Medhurst, rather defiantly and slightly defensively, puts it, '[i]t's ours, all ours, just ours, and the time has come to bring it back home.'¹⁹³

Suzanne Moore has said that she has begun 'to see postmodernism as camp for straight, middle-class people'¹⁹⁴ and that camp 'which is meant to be a way to survive, [has been] commodified, becom[ing] just another signifier of knowingness, no longer a radical aesthetic at all'.¹⁹⁵ This interplay between camp's queer adaptation of heterosexuality into camp and heterosexuality's re-adoption of camp into straight postmodernism shows the difficulty of isolating and identifying a uniquely queer aesthetic. Moe Meyer, in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, argues that this sublation, or "'appropriation" by the hegemonic, heteronormative culture... removes the critical and subversive sting of Camp as a Queer practice'.¹⁹⁶

Moore's conflation of camp with postmodernism fails to take into account 'the degree to which [for LGBT individuals] the erasure of the gap between construction and experience is less naturalised than with many other human categories (notably race, gender and, supremely, heterosexuality) and thus [their] high degree of awareness of that gap'.¹⁹⁷ It could be argued as drag parodies gender (appropriation as mask), camp parodies the performance of difference traditionally expected of queers by heterosexuality, making it a differentiating device that could never be quite integrated into a majority position. As David Macy observes, 'Gays had to do more than assert an

¹⁹² Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012) 309.

¹⁹³ Andy Medhurst, "Camp," *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 291.

¹⁹⁴ Suzanne Moore, "No Better Than They Ought To Be," *The Vanity of Small Differences*, Grayson Perry (London: Hayward Publishing 2013) 21.

¹⁹⁵ Moore, "No Better Than They Ought To Be," 22.

¹⁹⁶ Robin Metcalf, *Camp Fires* (Toronto: Gardiner Museum, 2014) 9.

¹⁹⁷ Steve Drukman, "The Gay Gaze, or Why I Want My MTV," *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995) 87.

identity; they had to *create* it,' (Rogers' emphasis).¹⁹⁸ The aspect of camp which is lost on Moore, is that while 'postmodern aesthetics can easily be confused with camp... camp grows from a specific cultural identity, [whereas] postmodern discourses peddle the arrogant fiction that specific cultural identities have ceased to exist.'¹⁹⁹ Camp is at heart both a political and aesthetic strategy.²⁰⁰

The dividing line between postmodernism and camp is indeed a fine one. Instead of pretending to an authoritative originality, both camp and postmodernism 'concentrated on the way images and symbols ('signifiers') shift or lose their meaning when put in different contexts ('appropriated'), revealing ('deconstructing') the processes by which meaning is constructed'.²⁰¹ Two ceramic works that use camp and visual polari in order to signify queer cultural identity will now be considered.

The intersection between queer and contemporary ceramics is less discussed than that between queer and textiles. This may be partly because using ceramics is currently seen as less gendered than working with textiles. Paul Mathieu, discussing artists' adoption of clay, has written:

social exclusion due to sexual orientation might have played a role in their choice of the medium of ceramics too. The position of ceramics as a marginalised practice certainly influenced my choice as an artist. This marginalisation created a parallel with my own burgeoning sexuality and how it was perceived socially. I identified with the marginalisation of ceramics because I felt socially excluded in other ways. This might have been the case for many others as well, and might partly explain the large number of gay and lesbian artists working with clay...²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Henry Rogers, "Introduction," *Making a Scene*, ed. Henry Rogers and David Burrow (Birmingham: Article Press, 2000) 11.

¹⁹⁹ Medhurst, "Camp," 290.

²⁰⁰ Medhurst, "Camp," 280.

²⁰¹ Christopher Reed, "Postmodernism and the Art of Identity," *Concepts of Modern Art, From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, Third Edition, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981) 272.

²⁰² Paul Mathieu, *Sexpots: Eroticism in Ceramics* (London: A&C Black, 2003) 93.

What interests me more than clay's marginal position is its ubiquity in archaeological digs, which are then, in turn, used as ways of understanding historical societies. Unlike the textiles in *The Problems with History*, which can be endlessly altered, clay, once fired, becomes ceramic and is permanently changed, producing an identity that cannot alter. For this reason, Mathieu has called it 'an archival material, [a] witness to and evidence of our time'.²⁰³

BlueBoy can be seen as precious, both intrinsically as a breakable ceramic object and also in the main figure's 'performative gestures'.²⁰⁴ It thereby activates both the negative and positive associations of the word. The work adopts what Jim Mooney, drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, describes as a rhizomatic model involving connections between semiotic chains of signification in which 'the work of art is a gathering and ordering, (a re-articulation) of the gatherings, producing new matrices, new bodies, new conjunctions of semiotic chains'.²⁰⁵ This appropriation technique provides queer artists with 'challenging, even confrontational, ways of subverting mainstream culture and inserting their own odd, even perverse perspectives on a largely unsuspecting and often unsuspecting public'.²⁰⁶ According to Mathieu, this appropriation technique also has the ability to queer the object:

this "queerness" is not only based on content (gay iconography, sexual innuendoes, phallic forms, etc.) although at times it is one of the strategies employed. But it also, and more importantly, makes use of queer concepts, such as humour and camp, inversion, and reversal, excess and extremes, in an irreverent attitude to conventions and social prescriptions, a subversive approach to systems. Furthermore, the use of juxtaposition queerly challenges and contests both accepted codes and a

²⁰³ Paul Mathieu, "How to Write Critically About Ceramics?" *Ceramics Monthly*, Vol 58, Issue 7 (September 2010) 80.

²⁰⁴ Metcalf, *Camp Fires*, 7.

²⁰⁵ Jim Mooney, "Research in Fine Art by Project: General Remarks toward Definition and Legitimization of Methodologies," *Queertextualities*, ed. Henry Rogers (Birmingham: Article Press, 2013) 23.

²⁰⁶ Cooper, *Queer Spectacles*, 14.

system of clues that implies oppression and silencing, not only within sexuality but also within cultural institutions.²⁰⁷



Figure 2.6 Matt Smith, *BlueBoy*, 2013, cast white earthenware with cobalt carbonate and glaze, 35cm high.

²⁰⁷ Mathieu, *Sexpots*, 132.

This juxtaposition of casts of ready-mades, 'of appropriation and collage as means of generating startling new meanings'²⁰⁸ cannot quite live up to its source material. Jorunn Veitberg has suggested that making a mould instead of using objects directly, produces 'a distancing, stylistic effect. It can also be seen as a way of venerating the objects.'²⁰⁹ On drying, clay shrinks and therefore each part of this camp composite is marginally reduced from its original, a pathos that would not be lost on camp. Camp, says Sontag (in Note 45), is 'Dandyism in the age of mass culture.'²¹⁰ In *BlueBoy*, the replica of a mass-manufactured figurine of a dandy demonstrates:

the cruising style that has come to be known as "stand-and-pose" – a decidedly self-contained form of cruising that telegraphs something like: "I am indicating that I want you only to the extent that I am showing how desirable I am by demonstrating that I am capable of complete indifference to you".²¹¹

This swishy pose ensures that the work demonstrates what Dyer calls, the 'two different interpretations'²¹² of camp 'which connect at certain points: camping about, mincing and screaming; and a certain taste in art and entertainment, a certain sensibility'.²¹³

The associations between queer and both Gainsborough and blue and white ceramics have been discussed earlier. In *BlueBoy*, a ceramic, slipcast replica of Gainsborough's subject is joined when wet with two other heads to form a phallic trio which is decorated with casts of ormolu decoration and mounted onto a horn of plenty. The fusing of high and low cultural references mirrors what Sontag described as camp's 'unsettling of hierarchies [which] enabled new appreciations of underrated popular forms and advocated an arch scepticism towards established cultural canons'.²¹⁴ In addition to the hierarchies of

²⁰⁸ Metcalf, *Camp Fires*, 7.

²⁰⁹ Veitberg, *Craft in Transition*, 68.

²¹⁰ Metcalf, *Camp Fires*, 12.

²¹¹ Douglas Crimp, "Coming Together to Stay Apart," *The Art of Queering in Art*, ed. Henry Rogers (Birmingham: Article Press, 2007) 52.

²¹² Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 49.

²¹³ Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, 49.

²¹⁴ Andy Medhurst, "Camp," 279.

sculpture and decorative art, the work also addresses the hierarchy between fine art (the subject matter) and craft (the material). *BlueBoy* uses visual polari's amalgamation of queer-coded references, re-appropriation from other sources and subversion of hierarchies, bringing them together in a phallic visual form.

Pillar of Masculinity adopts a similar strategy to *BlueBoy*. Overfired, the base has collapsed in on itself and the central column bends forwards. Creating a slightly pathetic parody of a sporting trophy, it addresses 'camp's adoption of the feminine as a way of being free of the masculine'.²¹⁵ The small dandy on the top of the work stands in contrast to the usual figures of sporting winners, and brings us back to the notion of failure as a queer methodology. Both these pieces adopt and subvert existing material, and by creating new associations, start to erase their original 'legitimizing metanarratives'²¹⁶ and for legitimating, read "heteronormative".

²¹⁵ Andy Medhurst, "Camp," 283.

²¹⁶ Judith Roof, "Postmodernism," *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 176.



Figure 2.7 Matt Smith, *Pillar of Masculinity*, 2013, cast white earthenware with cobalt carbonate and glaze, 51cm high.

2.5 Conclusion

While there can be no unifying definition of either queer sexuality or queer aesthetic sensibility and content, since these discourses are ‘active, multi-faceted and evolving’,²¹⁷ this does not mean that queer objects do not exist. Although any investigations of queer objects, as already mentioned, can only be partial, temporal and specific to the investigator, ‘culture plays an active role in constructing identities’²¹⁸ and material culture has a part to play. For Foucault, ‘power lies at the root of the gaze’²¹⁹ and so to question hierarchies and normalise power structures, we need to be clear whose gaze is privileged and exactly what they are seeing. The fleeting and tenuous links between objects and their queer owners has been demonstrated by the oak chair, formerly owned by Robert Mapplethorpe. In Chapter 5, on historic houses, we will explore how collections can be brought together to form queer environments. However, to address the overwhelming force of heteronormativity, queer associations with individual objects need to be identified and recorded.

Notions of camp can feel dated, possibly since the need for coding, hiding and connotation has decreased in some Western societies as tolerance towards queer individuals has increased. It will be interesting to see whether this will, in time, negate the need for ‘euphemisms... mimicry: innuendo and inversion [as] ...a distinctive [queer] aesthetic’²²⁰ and whether alternative visual strategies will take their place. That queer aesthetics should be subject to change is unsurprising, since, according to Stuart Hall, identity is a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.’²²¹

While it is beyond the scope of this research, [s]exuality is just one of the marginalising aspects of someone’s life – so is gender, class ethnicity, and

²¹⁷ Larsen, “Boys with Needles,” 8.

²¹⁸ Peter Horne and Reina Lewis, “Visual Culture,” *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 99.

²¹⁹ Evans and Gamman, *The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing*, 21.

²²⁰ Lisabeth During and Terri Fealy, “Philosophy,” *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 127-8.

²²¹ Stuart Hall qtd in Jones, Amelia, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012) 233.

race. So to solely look under the prism of queerness negates other difference.²²² It may be argued that techniques identified here as queer (verb) to consider queer (noun) could potentially be adopted to consider other marginalising differences. In doing so, queer problematises memory, or what Foucault called the “ritual of power” [which] selects what is important (the histories of triumph) [and] reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures and contradictions’.²²³ Queering, in contrast, celebrates these very ruptures and contradictions: ‘Almost intrinsic to queer culture is that it is fleeting and unpredictable, it... must exist in the cracks and the rips.’²²⁴ This concept is explored by Butler²²⁵ in “Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject” where she discusses the use of *style* by those liminal groups sacrificed to maintain coherence within ‘the category of the human’²²⁶ as both a sign of their exclusion and a mode of survival.

‘The political significance of an artist’s work is never given once and for all; it does not have a fixed ontological status but is reaffirmed, fought over, ascribed new meaning in new contexts, encounters and exhibitions.’²²⁷ It is therefore relevant that in the next chapter we explore how different curators have used the idea of queer in exhibition development. While this is unlikely to drill down into the specifics of any one object and its queer associations, it holds the potential to start exploring queer visual methodologies and groupings which operate in a manner other than through written or spoken language.

²²² Evans and Gamman, *The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing*, 39.

²²³ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 15

²²⁴ Cooper, “Queer Spectacles,” 26.

²²⁵ Judith Butler, “Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject,” *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie (London and New York: Verso, 2000) 30–37.

²²⁶ Butler, “Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject,” 30–37.

²²⁷ Francis Francina, “Scream and Scream Again,” *Art Monthly*, No 372 (Dec–Jan 2013–2014) 13.

3 Queer Curating

The linking of two words – queer and curating – opens up many possibilities and so it is unsurprising that different curators have explored their intersection in various ways. In 2012, I helped Lara Perry programme and deliver a conference at Tate Modern called *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating*. The different approaches to curating taken by the speakers started to explore the breadth of possibilities that queer curatorial strategies could engage.

This chapter can only be a partial exploration of the area that can be broadly split into three main, non-exclusive areas, namely curating work by artists who self-identify as queer; curating work that queers exhibition spaces; and curating work that is deemed to have a queer sensibility.

This chapter surveys how each of these strategies have been manifested using key case studies. Owing to the paucity of queer exhibitions in general, and queer craft exhibitions in particular, the research in this chapter has been opened out to look at queer art exhibitions. Since the exhibitions have happened over the last 30 years, the ways in which they talk about identity varies and, wherever possible, their choice of terminology will be used.

All of the exhibitions are described based on extant documentation, usually the exhibition catalogues produced by the venues. While these provide a very different experience from seeing the exhibitions in person, time and geography mean that there is no other way of tackling the subject.

3.1 Curating work by artists who self-identify or are identified as queer

Possibly the most obvious starting point when discussing queer curating would be to use the identity of the artist as the starting point, to curate an exhibition of works by makers who identify as queer or more usually referred to as gay artists and lesbian artists. Since queer is a contested term, deciding who to include or exclude will be open to debate and it is interesting to see how different curators have negotiated this terrain. The three exhibitions selected to discuss these issues are *Hidden Histories* (New Art Gallery, Walsall, 2004), *Das achte Feld/The Eight Square: Gender, Life, and Desire in the Arts since 1960* (Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2006) and *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* (National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, 2010).

In 2004, Michael Petry curated *Hidden Histories* at the New Art Gallery in Walsall. The catalogue that accompanied this survey exhibition of work by men who had male lovers starts with the pertinent questions:

Do artists who are same sex lovers have anything in common besides their sexual desire? How does gender preference impact the way work is made? Is art by same sex lovers as diverse as that of the heterosexual majority? What is the importance of documenting same sex history?²²⁸

Petry does not try and link the works through any other overarching themes, arguing that the works are as 'diverse as the men who made them'²²⁹. He also argues that in no way is he trying to 'out' any of the artists, since the information about their sex lives is already in the public domain. However, he adds that '[r]eaders may be surprised at the inclusion of so many prominent and pivotal artists.'²³⁰ So while he is not breaking new news, he does acknowledge that this will be news for many readers. Here he shares similar territory with Jonathan D. Katz – whose exhibition *Hide/Seek* is discussed later. Petry has provided revisionist histories of key artists including Jasper Johns and Robert

²²⁸ Michael Petry, *Hidden Histories: 20th Century Male Same Sex Lovers in the Visual Arts* (London: Artmedia Press, 2004) 7.

²²⁹ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 13.

²³⁰ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 7.

Rauschenburg, highlighting their relationship which is often discounted by exhibition venues that privilege information about Rauschenburg's marriage.²³¹

Petry suggests that, unlike sex or race, other traits that have/are on occasions treated prejudicially by the dominant, same-sex desire can often be hidden. While the idea that sex and race can never be hidden is arguable in some situations, there is a core truth here. An artist's name, will often give information about their sex and sometimes their race, but not their sexuality. So unless curators actively include that information or the artists specifically address same-sex desire visually in their work, a heteronormative filter is placed over the art. Therefore avoiding the mention of minority sexuality effectively erases it. Flipping this from a negative to a positive, the reading of many works of art becomes much richer when the (in this case queer) context is known. For example, Petry reinterprets Jasper John's *Target* works in light of the entrapment stings at the time by police in America on men seeking sex with other men in public toilets.²³²

Petry unpicks the many ways in which 'institutional homophobia'²³³ and academic and curatorial bias²³⁴ often privilege information about heterosexuality and hide details of same-sex activity, especially when dealing with nationally important artists. He also explores the different levels of historical evidence required to assume heterosexuality or homosexuality.²³⁵

Petry argues, 'It is not this text's contention that there is a gay aesthetic.'²³⁶ He talks about his desire to write a historical narrative and so move 'homosexual history' from an oral, horizontal history to a written, vertical one and 'in doing so, previously hidden codes and meanings in social and artistic practice can be made decipherable to the general viewer.'²³⁷ I would argue that these codes and meanings could be seen as the basis for a queer sensibility. However, Petry takes his argument against any overarching queer aesthetic further, stating that:

²³¹ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 23.

²³² Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 17.

²³³ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 35.

²³⁴ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 36.

²³⁵ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 41.

²³⁶ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 7.

²³⁷ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 49.

The twentieth century will not be seen to have engendered a queer aesthetic or a gay style. Everything from figurative to performance art exists within the work of same sex lovers. No school ties them together... Just as there is no overriding theme to/of heterosexuality, so there is no homosexual one. What has been missing is their hidden history.²³⁸

If we were searching for a queer aesthetic methodology from this exhibition, it might focus around the themes of visibility, invisibility and coding. It is interesting to compare this statement with the way in which Museum Ludwig in Cologne structured its beautifully titled 2006 exhibition, *The Eight Square: Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960*. Under the rules of chess, when a pawn reaches the eight square it can transform into a queen:

This not only means a change of gender, but also grants him greater freedom of movement, more influence, and more power. The normal situation is turned on its head, so that the weak male becomes a powerful female, the loser becomes the winner. But it is no secret that when seasoned chess players face one another, the pawn almost never reaches the other side of the board. Sadly, reality rarely permits such miraculous changes.²³⁹

The exhibition is introduced in the catalogue as:

a comprehensive exhibition of artistic approaches since 1960 to highlight the various aspects of sexual desire and sexual liberation. The initial catalyst for this was an issue of the art journal *Kunstforum International* edited by Heinz-Norbert Jocks, and dedicated to the 'homo-erotic eye' in contemporary art. The issue inspired the curators to take a closer look at artistic inquiries into the complications of gender and the varieties of sexual transformation and divergence, and to bring together a broad range of approaches.²⁴⁰

While the curators are not arguing for a singular queer aesthetic, they are implying that works can be grouped into queer aesthetic approaches. The

²³⁸ Petry, *Hidden Histories*, 66.

²³⁹ Kasper König, "Foreword," *Das achte Feld: Geschlechter, Leben und Begehren in der Kunst seit 1960* or *The Eight Square: Gender, Life, and Desire in the Arts since 1960*, ed. Frank Wagner, Kasper König and Julia Friedrich (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006) 13.

²⁴⁰ König, "Foreword," 11.

poetic sensibility of the exhibition title is taken through into the exhibition structure. From the entrance hall 'two different routes take the visitor in two opposite directions: to either the world of gender relations, or to the manifold forms of desire'.²⁴¹ These two routes split the works up into nine separate sections.

Establishing identity through signs, 'with works that operate with sigils, typographies, pictograms, diagrams, repeating patterns, schemata and scribble that focus on sexual desire by emblematic means'.²⁴² *Female to Male to Female* features art in which the artists have explored 'the pleasures of masquerade and slipped under the skin of the other sex'.²⁴³ *Sexy Machismo* explores work by artists who take a critical stance towards patriarchal conventions. *Accursed Worlds* features hybrid creatures, mutations between human and beast. *Transsexuality* features mainly photographic portraits of individuals who confuse the sex binaries with work by Del LaGrace Volcano, Catherine Opie and Annette Frick, with writing by Judith Butler. *Identity and Portrait*, which, in addition to work by Nan Golding, David Hockney and Robert Mapplethorpe, features *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1996) by Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye. This presents a fictional photo archive of a black, lesbian movie actress and nightclub singer. I will compare this with Fred Wilson's *An Invisible Life*, a collection that looks at another queer person of colour, later in this chapter. *Outsiders, Discrimination, AIDS* contrasts the role of the artist as an outsider with their assertion that when 'gay artists produced gay art... that reduced them in the eyes of many to mere artisans producing for shunned minorities'.²⁴⁴

The exhibition has two potential end points, described in the catalogue as *No finale, but instead two ends*. They are *Places of Desire – Cruising*, which explores spaces where people pick each other up and *Friendship Gallery*, which explores artist collaborations and is also where "[t]he eighth square is

²⁴¹ Frank Wagner, "The Eight Square: Observations on an Exhibition Experiment," *Das achte Feld: Geschlechter, Leben und Begehren in der Kunst seit 1960*, ed. Frank Wagner, Kasper König and Julia Friedrich (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006) 23.

²⁴² Wagner, "The Eight Square," 23.

²⁴³ Wagner, "The Eight Square," 25.

²⁴⁴ Wagner, "The Eight Square," 33.

visualised”²⁴⁵ using Wolfgang Tillmans’ photographs to produce a ‘*Garden of Earthly Delights*’.²⁴⁶

While on one level, the exhibition performs as a survey show (albeit for a wider group of identities and a shorter timespan than *Hidden Histories*), the non-linear progression of the exhibition and the overlapping, non-exclusive exhibition area titles allow for the multiplicities and contradictions inherent in such a wide-ranging subject area to come to the fore. Taking a broader, less essential approach to sexual identity, the exhibition places work by mainly queer makers, with ‘queer work’ by makers who would not necessarily self-identify as queer (including Matthew Barney and Louise Bourgeois). The exhibition catalogue also features essays by writers including Judith Butler (“Transgender and the Spirit of Revolt”) that places queer visual art in its broader cultural context (queer cinema, queer performance and queer appropriation in music) as well as exploring more methodological ideas in essays such as Julia Friedrich’s “Everything Doubled: Self-styling and Gender in Modern Art” and Eva Meyer’s “Orlando or the Idiosyncrasy of Sex.”

If we attempt to draw out non-figurative queer aesthetic strategies from *The Eight Square*, we would again find the use of coded signs, but also masquerade and drag, the undermining of patriarchy, hybridity and boundary transgression and the creation and re-appropriation of archive material to create missing queer histories.

The final exhibition that will be considered in this section is *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*. Curated by Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward, the exhibition opened at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution in 2010 before touring to the Brooklyn Museum and the Tacoma Art Museum in 2012.

The catalogue features works dating from 1891 until 2005 incorporating a wide definition of portraiture including Warhol’s image *Truman Capote’s Shoe* and Robert Rauschenberg’s *Canto XIV (from XXXIV Drawings from Dante’s Inferno, including KAR)* and featuring ‘straight artists representing gay figures, gay artists representing straight figures, gay artists representing gay figures, and

²⁴⁵ Wagner, “The Eight Square,” 39.

²⁴⁶ Wagner, “The Eight Square,” 39.

even straight artists representing straight figures (when of interest of gay people/culture).²⁴⁷ In his foreword in the catalogue, Martin E. Sullivan, the director of the gallery, bills the exhibition as ‘the first major museum exhibition to chart the influence of gay and lesbian artists on modern American portraiture. Not just a chronicle of a prominent subculture, *Hide/Seek* reconsiders neglected dimensions of American art.’²⁴⁸

Katz, in his catalogue essay, uses the images to map a social and political narrative of same-sex desire from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The exhibition title plays with the visibility and invisibility of queer lives, and Katz has developed a back catalogue of interrogating key artworks from the canon for queer signifiers which he backs up with biographical information about the artists, particularly relating to the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Katz writes:

While we have tried to represent a diverse group of artists, our emphasis on canonical figures has worked against our desire for inclusivity. Even today, the art world is too often closed to women and ethnic and racial minorities; in the past, that tendency was amplified. While we could have chosen to focus on a more diverse group of artists, our goal has been to address the role of sexual difference within the American mainstream, both as a means of underscoring the hypocrisy of the current post-Mapplethorpe anxiety about referencing same-sex desire in the museum world and toward scrutinizing the widely held but utterly unsupportable assumption that same-sex desire is at best tangential to the history of American art.²⁴⁹

This raises a difficult issue that Maura Reilly brought up at the *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference at Tate Modern in 2012. While Katz provides a ‘revisionist approach to queer representation... only 25%

²⁴⁷ Jonathan Katz, “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” *Hide /Seek, Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, ed. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010) 15.

²⁴⁸ Martin E. Sullivan, “Foreword,” *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, ed. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010) 9.

²⁴⁹ Katz, “Hide/Seek,” 15.

of the artists are women'.²⁵⁰ In fact Maura was being generous, a survey of the plates in the catalogue shows that 22% of works by a single artist are by women (78% by male artists) and of the works showing solely male or female subjects, only 21.6% are of female subjects (with 78.4% depicting men). While no exhibition can be everything to everyone, and it is certainly not my intention to undermine the curators of these shows or to argue that all exhibitions should exactly represent the demographics of society. However, basing the exhibition so strongly on the canon that a patriarchal art world has decided should represent America could be seen to reinforce gender, race and class disparities.

Gender imparity aside, both the exhibition title and Katz's catalogue essay underscore the play of the visible and invisible by gay men and lesbians, presenting:

a dynamic familiar to a subculture long used to employing protective camouflage, while at the same time searching for tiny signs, clues, or signals that might reveal the presence of other queer people. From a glance held a little too long, to the cut of hair or dress, to manners and tastes undetectable to the uninitiated, queer people have long used a superficial conformity to camouflage instrumental differences legible only to those who know where and how to look. And there is often no better form of social camouflage than the refusal of camouflage... This book seeks to turn such seeing into noticing.²⁵¹

This public/private dichotomy threads through both Katz's essay and also the chronological chapters written by David C. Ward ("Before Difference, 1870–1918", "New Geographies/New Identities", "Abstraction", "Postwar America: Accommodation and Resistance", "Stonewall and More Modern Identities" and "Postmodernism").

Tracing the theme of coding starts with Marsden Hartley's *Painting No. 47, Berlin* (1914–15), which uses abstracted and symbolic visual references to produce a portrait of Hartley's dead lover. Katz argues that this painting provides 'a landmark instance of what would become a leitmotif in the

²⁵⁰ Maura Reilly, *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference video recordings, Tate Modern. Web. 19 February 2015. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/civil-partnerships-queer-and-feminist-curating-video-recordings#open265737>, 41 minutes.

²⁵¹ Katz, "Hide/Seek," 14.

development of queer American portraiture: the self-conscious creation of a bifurcated pictorial language, at once public and private'.²⁵² The catalogue follows onto the post-abstract artists Rauschenberg and Johns who 'cultivated a self-portraiture that was all mediation, its imagery appropriated from mass culture'²⁵³ and during:

the extraordinary persecutions of the Lavender Scare era, wherein queers were psychoanalyzed, ostracized, incarcerated, and repeatedly blamed for a host of social ills that were very far from anything to do with same-sex desire, it was patently clear that gay people did not have the privilege of defining themselves. In short order, the inauthentic trumped the authentic as the defining mode of portraiture, and the postmodernist portrait was born.²⁵⁴

This use of the inauthentic led to appropriation, whether it be Mapplethorpe's 'aggressive appropriation of traditional photography, the domestic interior, the patriarchal posing – for other purposes... [which enabled his work] to look both conservative and defiant at the same time, making it, at the very least, harder to dismiss as "merely" political'²⁵⁵ or for 'lesbian artists whose chief constraint was often not the political ramifications of making a statement, but an art world that proved uninterested in a female, and especially lesbian, presence itself, the appropriation and subversion of dominant masculine narratives offered a tempting target.'²⁵⁶

Postmodernism is therefore linked to work by gay men and lesbians seeking the inauthentic and to subvert masculinity respectively. David Ward defines postmodernism as 'a peculiarly elusive category whose very slipperiness reflects our groping attempts at defining the society in which we live now'.²⁵⁷ He goes on to describe postmodernism as 'an exasperating term [which] does not define the thing itself but is indeterminate... But the fact that it cannot be defined precisely captures its essence: it means and has meant different things

²⁵² Katz, "Hide/Seek," 26.

²⁵³ Katz, "Hide/Seek," 38.

²⁵⁴ Katz, "Hide/Seek," 38.

²⁵⁵ Katz, "Hide/Seek," 52.

²⁵⁶ Katz, "Hide/Seek," 55.

²⁵⁷ David C. Ward, "Postmodernism," *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, ed. Jonathan D. Katz and David C. Ward (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010) 231.

to different people at different conceptual levels.²⁵⁸ This slippery elusive nature has much in common with queer theory. Coming after, and rejecting modernism, '[p]ostmodernism entails a self-conscious rejection of modernism itself; a severing of the presumed equivalency between artist and artwork, so that the artwork became, in Barthes' words, a "tissue of quotations"'.²⁵⁹ Ward argues that this severing between the maker and the artwork is a strategy that has appeal particularly to:

artists on the margin – women artists; artists of color; gay artists – in short, artists who have something to lose rather than gain by presenting their art and the heroic extension of their identity. This is particularly true for queer artists, who *literally* had something to lose by disclosing too much. Queer artists had a vested interest in creating cryptic and detached artworks that were able to address multiple audiences at the same time.²⁶⁰

This neatly conflates marginal status, appropriation, postmodernism and subversion of patriarchal norms. I will now look at this subversion of norms.

²⁵⁸ Ward, "Postmodernism," 231.

²⁵⁹ Ward, "Postmodernism," 232.

²⁶⁰ Ward, "Postmodernism," 232.

3.2 Curating work that 'queers' an exhibition space

In her article, *The Curatorial Paradigm*, Dorothea von Hantelmann asserts that:

the exhibition's most important cultural accomplishment was the constitution of a site in which basic categories of modern societies are enacted and exercised. Museums and exhibitions introduced a ritual that fulfils precise functions in modern Western societies: it addresses the individual citizen (where theatre, as another cultural format, addressed a collective); it placed the individual in relation to a material object (in an increasingly industrialized society that derives its wealth and identity from a manufactured object-world); and it immerses both the individual and the object into a narration of linear time, progress and development.²⁶¹

The work of Fred Wilson, Glenn Ligon and Jo Darbyshire explore what happens when that narrative of linear time, progress and development excludes an artist's history and how by adopting different methodologies on the intersection between artistic and curatorial practice, artists can help the museum or gallery begin to redress those omissions.

The role of the curator as an auteur has increased in significance in Western society in recent years and over the last few decades has come to be seen as a creative activity. Von Hantelmann²⁶² argues that this change has come about as the art historical canon's authority and objectivity has become increasingly questioned. Until this happened, 'the exhibition did not play itself into the foreground'²⁶³ and it was only when the curator emerged as a figure who 'selects exemplarily, who is constituted in choosing (particular works of art, discursive positions, aesthetic acts, et cetera), and above all in whom consumption is manifested not only as a receptive capacity, but as a productive and generative force'²⁶⁴ that curating as an art practice began to be recognised.

In 2003, Jo Darbyshire conflated lesbian and gay lives with a queering of the Western Australian Museum in Perth in the exhibition called *The Gay Museum*. In the e-catalogue to the exhibition, Darbyshire writes that the exhibition aimed

²⁶¹ Dorothea von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," *The Exhibitionist: La Critique* No. 4 (2011) 7.

²⁶² Von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," 8.

²⁶³ Von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," 8.

²⁶⁴ Von Hantelmann, "The Curatorial Paradigm," 11.

not only to redress the lack of representation but to also overcome the lack of objects in the collection that represented lesbian and gay lives, as she succinctly puts it: 'On the face of it lesbian and gay people had no history.'²⁶⁵

Darbyshire linked oral histories that she had gathered with quotes from the media and objects from the collections to set up resonances between them. For example, an interview about the destruction of records from an LGBT organisation is juxtaposed with a shame-faced crab, while a statement about lesbianism at the start of the 20th century is shown with a contemporaneous silver locket containing two female portraits.

Darbyshire advocated the need for this breaking of the museum conventions to open up 'new meanings and ideas... exploring other ways objects can be interpreted when displayed'²⁶⁶ and suggested that artists with their 'training in lateral thinking and the skill of "looking"'²⁶⁷ have the potential to see alternative content and meaning in objects, which is required if gaps in collections are to be (temporarily) filled. Rather than focusing responsibility on the institution or curator to explain this lack of objects, Darbyshire looks at the reasons lesbian and gay men did not keep a record of their lives:

the gaps in the knowledge, the collusion to keep quiet, the eradication of knowledge or memory, self-censorship and the fear of exposure in the lesbian and gay community were heartbreakingly apparent. For many people, safety lay in the eradication of all evidence of difference. Many things... that signal significant moments in our history were just too dangerous to keep. Researcher Reece Plunkett suggests that these actions are evidence that gay and lesbian people have had a fundamentally different experience of history.²⁶⁸

A fundamentally different experience of history is not something that is only experienced by lesbians and gay men. Much work has been done by artists of colour to bring these revisionist histories to light. In the UK, notable work has

²⁶⁵ Jo Darbyshire, *The Gay Museum: An Exhibition Exploring the History of Lesbian and Gay Presence in Western Australia* e-catalogue. Web. 19 February 2015. http://www.jodarbyshire.com/uploads/text-files/gay_museum_catalogue.pdf, 2.

²⁶⁶ Darbyshire, *The Gay Museum*, 2.

²⁶⁷ Darbyshire, *The Gay Museum*, 3.

²⁶⁸ Reece Plunkett, "History, Sexuality, Western Australia," conference paper, *Homosexual Histories Conference*, (Melbourne, 1988) qtd in Darbyshire, *The Gay Museum*, 3.

been done with collections by Keith Piper; while in the States, Fred Wilson has continually reinterpreted collections, most notably those at the Maryland Historical Society in the *Mining the Museum* exhibition in 1992. In 1993, a year after *Mining the Museum*, Wilson worked with Capp Street Project in San Francisco on an exhibition *An Invisible Life: A View into the World of a 120 Year Old Man*. Unlike *Mining the Museum*, which had seen Wilson take existing objects from a collection and reframe, juxtapose and edit them to tell a previously neglected history (of African and Native Americans), the Capp Street Project explored the eradication of knowledge in another way. It juxtaposed found objects to materially represent a fictional life. The intervention took place in Haas-Lilienthal House, a historic house that had been restored to its Victorian style. The intervention recreated the life of its fictional former inhabitant, Baldwin Antinous Stein. Baldwin was born in the Caribbean before travelling the world, becoming friends with Eadweard Muybridge and acquainted with Marcel Proust in Paris. In addition to sound recordings, and a silent video piece placed inside the bedroom closet, objects belonging to Stein were placed around the house:

On the second floor of the house, in the library and bedrooms, hundreds of photographs – portraits of men of different ethnicities – cluttered the shelves and table tops. There were pictures from the turn of the century of sailors, athletes, gentlemen in business suits, and other men lounging outdoors. The house was also filled with memorabilia, statuettes of men wrestling, and other art objects from around the world. Books sitting on table tops, such as *Love in Ancient Greece* (1962), *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *Nijinsky* (1993) and *Proust and the Art of Love* (1980).²⁶⁹

The intervention worked on a number of levels. At the end of a tour of the house, most visitors were surprised to find out that Stein was not a real person²⁷⁰ even though Wilson had encouraged the docents to alert visitors to ‘faux finishes’ and ‘hidden’ architectural details in the house. This shows how visitors ‘invest museums and their docents with an unquestioned authority’.²⁷¹ The intervention also showed how collections of objects allow observant visitors

²⁶⁹ Jennifer A. González, “Against the Grain: The Artist as Conceptual Materialist,” *Fred Wilson: A Critical Reader*, ed. Doro Globus (London: Ridinghouse, 2011) 146.

²⁷⁰ *Fred Wilson: Art in Context* exhibition brochure, (New York: Metro Pictures, 1995) qtd in González, “Against the Grain,” 147.

²⁷¹ González, “Against the Grain,” 147.

to piece together the 'evidence of Stein's gay desire'.²⁷² While Stein's sexuality was never explicitly referred to, the process of sifting through material culture and amassing evidence of shared minority cultural references is called into play as these objects allow a silenced, queer identity to become evident. In this way, *An Invisible Life* allowed Wilson to illustrate 'the degree to which life histories of men like Stein – educated, cosmopolitan, gay men of the last century – have generally been rendered invisible'.²⁷³ Material culture here makes visible a difference that is bodily invisible.

A similar process happens at the Geffrye Museum of the Home in London, where the *Loft-style Apartment, 1998* features a Balzac chair from Heal's and a copy of *Wallpaper**. The Judy Garland biography on the bookshelf tips the balance of probability for the observant visitor that this is probably the apartment of a gay man.²⁷⁴

This strategy of creating fictional lives, standing in for actual lives that were not permitted entry to the archives, was also used by Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Dunye in *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1996), which documents the life of a (fictional) black movie actress and nightclub singer using 82 photographs showing her in film roles and in private shots with female friends and with her partner. The work, which Dunye developed into a film of Richards' life – *The Watermelon Woman* – provides a record of a life that would exclude the archive on two counts, as a lesbian and also as a black actress living at a time when '[b]lack actors were not even mentioned in the credits of American films... because their white colleagues would never have tolerated it.'²⁷⁵

Even when marginalised identities become part of the art canon, there are still questions to be answered about whose voice is being heard, a question tackled head-on by Glenn Ligon in *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1991–1993). Robert Mapplethorpe's *Black Book* (1986) features 91 photographs of mainly nude black men in fetishistic poses. The work had been controversial: both black and white writers had been critical of the photographs as objectifying

²⁷² González, "Against the Grain," 147.

²⁷³ González, "Against the Grain," 147.

²⁷⁴ The many links between Judy Garland and gay male culture, led to Barry Walters describing her as the Elvis of homosexuals. Barry Walters, "An Icon for the Ages," *The Advocate* (13 October 1998) 87.

²⁷⁵ Wagner, "The Eight Square," 31.

black male bodies,²⁷⁶ and more generally, when right-wing attacks on Mapplethorpe's 1988 survey exhibition, *The Perfect Moment* and its public funding by the National Endowment for the Arts, led to the show being cancelled at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC.

Ligon, who is black and gay, describes his first encounter with the images in the *Black Book* as 'very disturbing'²⁷⁷ and started asking himself 'if those photographs were racist'.²⁷⁸ Realising that the question was too limiting and that the subject was more complicated, and also wanting to remove the personal from the enquiry, Ligon sourced newspaper articles about the scandal and books both praising and critiquing the work. The final piece comprises a row of the 91 Mapplethorpe images, double hung, with 78 texts (also double hung) between them. These texts, adopting the visual language of museum object labels, contain comments about the work ranging from art historians, Mapplethorpe himself, pro- and anti-gay campaigners to a personal ad reading 'Me: black, 5'8", 32 years old, huge, huge dick, long and thick, seeks bottoms who can't get enough of my funky stuff'. In addition to using secondary information, Ligon took the book to a bar, Sound Factory, and collected responses to the work between dancing.

The small physical size of the texts ensures that viewers have to come up close to the texts to read them and thereby become intimately involved with the work. The plurality of the responses and their sheer diversity opens out the questions raised by the *Black Book* and moves its interpretation away the usual didactic, anonymous institutional labelling into a world of contradiction, conflicting contexts and plurality. With issues this personal about identity and representation, Ligon provides a methodology and a space to allow a rounded discourse to take place, and queers the traditional curatorial interpretation techniques.

²⁷⁶ Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation," *Image Scavengers* exhibition catalogue, ed. Janet Kardon (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1982) 27–34, qtd in Scott Rothkopf, "Glenn Ligon: AMERICA," *Glenn Ligon: AMERICA*, Scott Rothkopf (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011) 34.

²⁷⁷ Scott Rothkopf, "Glenn Ligon: AMERICA," *Glenn Ligon: AMERICA*, Scott Rothkopf (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011) 34.

²⁷⁸ Rothkopf, "Glenn Ligon," 34.

3.3 Curating work deemed to have a queer sensibility

As was previously mentioned, unlike race or sex which may be indicated via the artist's name, or visually in images of the artist, sexuality seldom is. This would indicate that we are reliant on three things if we wanted to know whether a work might contribute to a 'queer canon': existing knowledge about the artist; curator-provided information about the artist or the work explaining its relevance to queer; or portrayal of queer lives in the work.

Photography by artists including Del LaGrace Volcano, Nan Goldin and Wolfgang Tillmans have ensured the visibility of queer lives in contemporary art. However, this section explores works that identify queer art in a fourth way: through a queer sensibility. This is a slippery area that is open to disagreement and contest. Reading a queer sensibility requires cultural knowledge and intertextual readings. In this way, it could be argued that queer sensibility works as a visual polari, a coded message of kinship, allowing others to read a queer resonance in a work. Any reading of sensibility will be culturally, geographically and temporally specific. The boundaries between any given subject or visual methodology being queer or not queer will be permeable and open to debate.

Over the last 30 years there have been a number of attempts to curate shows around queer sensibility. This section will explore how the curators have tried to categorise these shows and illustrate how, as identity politics have altered, so too have the curatorial strategies.

The first case study is *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art*, which was guest curated by Daniel J. Cameron at the New Museum in New York in 1982 and featured work by 19 artists. Table 3.1 lists the artists, their genders and the type of work displayed.

Charley Brown	Male	Collage
Scott Burton	Male	Performance with furniture
Craig Carver	Male	Acrylic on canvas
Arch Connelly	Male	Paste jewels and mixed media
Janet Cooling	Female	Acrylic on canvas
Betsy Damon	Female	Drawing on paper, documentation of performance

Nancy Fried	Female	Clay and acrylic
Jedd Garet	Male	Acrylic on canvas
Gilbert and George	Male	Photosculture and documentation of performance
Lee Gordon	Male	Oil on canvas
Harmony Hammond	Female	Textile sculpture
John Henninger	Male	Soft sculpture
Jerry Janosco	Male	Ceramic
Lili Lakich	Female	Neon
Les Petites Bonbons	Male	Documentation of performance
Ross Paxton	Male	Acrylic on canvas
Jody Pinto	Female	Mixed media 2D and 3D
Carla Tardi	Female	Oil on wood
Fran Winant	Female	Acrylic on canvas

Table 3.1 Artists, gender and material, in *Extended Sensibilities*

Cameron splits 'Homosexual Content'²⁷⁹ into three main categories: 'Homosexual Subject Matter'²⁸⁰ comprised cultural material about homosexuals aimed mainly at a straight audience; 'Ghetto Content ... as the name suggests, the artist and audience are both gay'²⁸¹; and 'Sensibility Content [which] has occurred as a cultural synthesis of the first two. Neither intended for a limited audience of gays, nor an attempt to market a destigmatized version of homosexuality to a larger group, Sensibility Content is work which is created from personal experience of homosexuality which need not have anything to do with sexuality or even lifestyle.'²⁸²

Extended Sensibilities moved away from fixed essential ideas of identity towards visual languages and interests. Unsurprisingly, the exhibition was very

²⁷⁹ Daniel J. Cameron, "Sensibility as Content," *Extended Sensibilities: Homosexual Presence in Contemporary Art* exhibition catalogue, ed. Daniel J. Cameron (New York: The New Museum, 1982) 7.

²⁸⁰ Cameron, "Sensibility as Content," 7.

²⁸¹ Cameron, "Sensibility as Content," 7.

²⁸² Cameron, "Sensibility as Content," 7–8.

mixed and trying to put an overarching summary on it is near impossible. However, a number of things are worth noting. In addition to a large amount of figurative imagery, works which could be associated with craft formed a relatively large amount of the show. These ranged from Harmony Hammond's soft sculptures, Jerry Janosco's composite and re-appropriated ceramics, John Henninger's satin cruising figures, Nancy Fried's elaborate acrylic and clay sculptures and Arch Connelly's papier mâché and paste jewel sculptures, with the latter four sharing an unabashed camp aesthetic.

The curator, Cameron, recalled that 'nearly every out or closeted gay art world professional... assured me that it would be difficult, verging on impossible, to get a serious art world gig after doing this project'.²⁸³ However these views were unfounded, since Cameron went on to become Senior Curator at the New Museum and then Chief Curator at the Orange County Museum of Art.

The exhibition's premise was criticised by the self-identified gay artist Nicholas Mouffarrege in *Arts* magazine who wrote, '[w]e are faced with artists who happen to be homosexual rather than a particular homosexual aesthetic... it would be frightening to see the work of these artists, and others, stereotyped as homosexual, for they are artists "before" they are homosexual'.²⁸⁴ In hindsight, what was a ground-breaking exhibition premise does to some extent fall down in the face of Mouffarrege's attack. While there was a tradition of lesbian art shows, there was a reluctance by gay male artists to show in the exhibition (Gilbert and George pulled out after the catalogue went to print, but a private collector lent work). Cameron's arguments in the catalogue are not particularly backed up by the works in the exhibition and a lack of clear curatorial structure leaves the show looking like a group of works by 'artists who happen to be homosexual'²⁸⁵ rather than a visual representation of personal experience of homosexuality.

Gay sensibility would not be addressed in an exhibition again until 1995 when Lawrence Rinder and Nayland Blake curated *In a Different Light* at the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Rinder

²⁸³ Daniel J. Cameron qtd in Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 200.

²⁸⁴ Nicolas Mouffarrege, "Lavender: On Homosexuality and Art," *Arts* 57 (October 1982) 78–87.

²⁸⁵ Mouffarrege, "Lavender," 78–87.

was interested in works that conveyed ‘gay and lesbian views of the world... [views that were] outward-looking, gregarious and socially concerned’.²⁸⁶ Blake shared ground with Petry and Katz, and was interested in ‘a cross-generational exhibition’,²⁸⁷ arguing that the art world is prone to cultural amnesia and that gay men and lesbians ‘have been especially susceptible to such forgetfulness because art with homosexual content – literal, metaphorical, or symbolic – has typically remained unidentified as such or has simply been excised from the histories’.²⁸⁸ Featuring a much wider pool of artists than *Extended Sensibilities*, and coming after the Whitney Biennale of 1993 which saw a strong focus on identity and multiculturalism, *In a Different Light*, created nine groups within the exhibition: Void, Self, Drag, Other, Couple, Family, Orgy, World and Utopia.

The use of the word ‘sensitivity’ is very specific within the exhibition as Rinder explains:

The notion of “sensitivity” that we have employed...is somewhat idiosyncratic. The groups are not based on aesthetic sensitivity, but rather came together and are identified by social sensitivity... The exhibition is thus structured in a fundamentally sociological rather than art historical manner. While aesthetic sensitivities as such are not a point of departure or structuring principle, such sensitivities certainly emerge in interesting ways throughout the exhibition.²⁸⁹

Rinder quotes Harmony Hammond’s experience of curating the 1978 *A Lesbian Show* when she found ‘not a distinctly lesbian aesthetic sensitivity, but rather the revelation of a broad variety of shared thematic concerns including ‘issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole’.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Lawrence Rinder, “An Introduction to *In a Different Light*,” *In a Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder and Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995) 2.

²⁸⁷ Rinder, “An Introduction to *In a Different Light*,” 2.

²⁸⁸ Rinder, “An Introduction to *In a Different Light*,” 2.

²⁸⁹ Rinder, “An Introduction to *In a Different Light*,” 4.

²⁹⁰ Rinder, “An Introduction to *In a Different Light*,” 4–5.

Rinder argues that if 'identifiable gay or lesbian aesthetic styles or sensibility exist, they exist in multiplicity, and in complex intersection with mainstream art practice. They are emanations of complex, fluid sociological constructs, never simply gay or lesbian'²⁹¹ and goes on to state that 'gay or lesbian sensibilities – aesthetic or otherwise... are highly amorphous phenomena... and are not attached exclusively to people who have sex with people of the same sex'.²⁹² Rinder therefore gets around some of the issues Cameron faced in attracting artists to take part in a homosexual exhibition: by removing the terms gay and lesbian from identity politics and sexual acts, the show had the potential to include work by non-gay artists whose practices met with the curator's definitions of gay and lesbian sensibility.

Atkins, in his 1996 review of queer curating, states that 'In *In a Different Light*, homosex was out of favour; indirectness and irony, metaphor and perverse gesture, the dandyish and the coquettish, were in. (Blake dubbed overtly gay or lesbian imagery "essentialist" and "retrograde.")'²⁹³ Queer art and craft had relied on same sex imagery (and still does to a large extent) to mark its identity, and it is understandable why Blake wanted to get away from the act of sex and onto the cultural norms and shared experiences of queer individuals in the West.

There is a language change in the catalogue, from Rinder's gay and lesbian to Blake's queer. Blake (who like Ligon and Wilson identifies as both gay and black) defines the show as 'a map of queer practice in the visual arts over the past thirty years. It is... incomplete and personal'.²⁹⁴ What is interesting about Blake's catalogue essay is that in addition to the main categories in the exhibition, he identifies visual and narrative themes that run through the entire show, which form an underpinning of what queer visual sensibility might comprise (at least on the west coast of America in the mid-1990s). These themes included: postmodernism and the re-appropriation and manipulation of material by queer artists, the use of semiotic means to express queer tribal affiliations, the twin heritage of the fluxus and the punk movements, the

²⁹¹ Rinder, "An Introduction to *In a Different Light*," 5–6.

²⁹² Rinder, "An Introduction to *In a Different Light*," 6.

²⁹³ Robert Atkins "Goodbye Lesbian/Gay History, Hello Queer Sensibility: Mediating on Curatorial Practice," *Art Journal*, Vol 55, No 4: We're Here: Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter 1996) 80–85.

²⁹⁴ Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," 11.

adoption, by queer artists, of the roles of curator, critic and historian, the use of craft materials and pre-modern rhetoric of sentiment, drag and the ability to 'pass', the flipping of serious issues into parody, self-mockery, black humour and failure.

Amy Scholder, in her catalogue essay for the exhibition, *Writing in a Different Light*, adds to Blake's list, including irony and camp, reading cultural works with a subversive gaze and the adoption of revisionary history. This provides queer with a two-pronged strategy: coupling artistic strategies with revisionist methods where 'gay plundering of the past is not just nostalgia, but marks an active reincorporation that is self-knowing'²⁹⁵:

[queer] is driven by the dynamic of a double movement: it addresses lesbian and gay visual cultures in a way which foregrounds art produced by lesbian and gay, or queer, artists but also goes beyond that to attend to the potentially queer reception of visual material from the past and the present, regardless of its sexual point of origin...[creating] a space to consider the production of queer meanings, since in a heterosexist society the queer reader has often to be ever resourceful and imaginative in the production of alternative sexual pleasures.²⁹⁶

These two themes – the production of art by and about queer people and the queer reading of historic visual materials will form the basis of the two next chapters. They will respectively examine how craft and queer sensibility can be used to destabilise (queer) museums, art galleries and historic houses and allow a space for queer (LGBT) lives to be represented.

²⁹⁵ Horne and Lewis, "Introduction," 7.

²⁹⁶ Horne and Lewis, "Introduction," 2.

3.4 Conclusion

The breadth and divergence of curatorial methods for examining queer make clear that this is a subject area very much open to debate. Rather than aim to find an essentialist method for queer curating, this plurality of approaches allows for flexibility and tailored approaches to take place. However, certain themes recur: visibility, invisibility and coding recur, and link in with artworks that are open to both public and private readings. These private queer readings, as discussed previously, need not be restricted to queer art, but can be adopted as filters to view any material. The themes of masquerade, drag and re-appropriation which can all be linked with notions of camp and kitsch also recur.

Nayland Blake suggests that overtly gay or lesbian imagery is retrograde. However, this leaves us with the difficulty of trying to unpick a queer sensibility. Lawrence Rinder argued that if an identifiable gay or lesbian sensibility exists, it exists 'in multiplicity, and in complex intersection with mainstream art practice.'²⁹⁷ Therefore it would stand to reason that as art practices continually mutate, so will queer sensibilities.

Whether these sensibilities speak of any essentialist notion of lesbian or gay identity is questionable. It is more likely that they have developed in response to a variety of shared concerns which Rinder lists as 'issues of anger, guilt, hiding, secrecy, coming out, personal violence and political trust, self-empowerment, and the struggle to make oneself whole'.²⁹⁸

Two queer methodologies that are of particular relevance to the next two chapters are hybridity and the re-appropriation of archive material to create missing queer histories. The hybrid role of artist/curator/historian will be adopted in both a museum and an art gallery and in two historic houses to unpick how these organisations can be queered through craft interventions.

²⁹⁷ Rinder, "An Introduction to In a Different Light," 5–6.

²⁹⁸ Rinder, "An Introduction to In a Different Light," 4–5.

4 Queering Museums and Galleries

This chapter describes two intervention projects and explores what they can tell us about queer representation in museums and galleries. The first project is *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2010–11 and the second is *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery at the University of Leeds in 2012.

In October 2007 Jack Gilbert argued in the *Museums Journal* that most museums and galleries were failing to ‘collect, frame and interpret the lives and experience of LGBT people... not necessarily because individual staff are homophobic but because of institutional failure’.²⁹⁹

Using two different exhibitions – *Queering the Museum* and *Other Stories* – I sought to unpick the interrelationships between queer theory (and LGBT experiences) and museum and gallery exhibitions, exploring how queer could be brought into and interpreted within museums and art galleries that hold collections of material culture. I also sought to investigate why LGBT experiences are so seldom included in museum and gallery displays.

This chapter considers the two exhibitions in turn, since the curatorial and artistic strategy used in *Other Stories* was informed by lessons learnt from *Queering the Museum*. In both exhibitions, I worked as both artist and curator, placing new works alongside the existing collections and also rearranging objects from the permanent collection in order to recontextualise them. This hybrid role of artist/curator/historian and its coupling with craft materials and re-appropriation has a large overlap with Nayland Blake’s suggestions of what might comprise a queer sensibility, as was outlined in the previous chapter.

As has previously been discussed, there is a distinction between queer and LGBT. This is a key point for both the exhibitions and the thesis, for the two are distinct, yet related. Within *Queering the Museum*, the main emphasis was on issues and histories related to people who identify as LGBT, with one object – *Donkey Boy* – exploring queer in a broader sense. Queer can be defined as

²⁹⁹ Jack Gilbert, “The Proud Nation Survey has Revealed a Shocking Reluctance of the Museums Sector to Integrate LGBT Material into their Exhibitions,” *Museums Journal*, Issue 107 (October 2007) 19.

‘differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange’³⁰⁰ and ‘to put in a difficult or dangerous position’.³⁰¹ This opens it out and provides numerous potential strategies to be adopted by the artist.

If queer means ‘differing from the normal’, then museums are intrinsically queer: they act as a counterpoint to everyday life, they provide an arena for stopping, staring, thinking and – on occasion – accessing the liminal. Why then, according to Gilbert, do they so seldom explore LGBT lives? Through working with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery, and looking at their collections through a queer lens, I aimed to explore what heteronormative assumptions underpinned the working of the organisations, the development of their collections and the interpretation of those collections.

Both *Queering the Museum* and *Other Stories* could fit under the umbrella of what is often termed institutional critique:

As I see it, artists doing institutional critiques of museums tend to fall into two different camps. There are those who see the museum as an irredeemable reservoir of class ideology – the very notion of the museum is corrupt to them. Then there are those who are critical of the museum not because they want to blow it up but because they want to make it a more interesting and effective cultural institution.³⁰²

With both these projects, the aim was to work with the organisations and their collections to explore how queer could be more effectively represented. The projects owed much to the work of Fred Wilson, whose works ‘challenge assumptions about the dynamics of race, ethnicity, class and gender in

³⁰⁰ Collins English Dictionary (London: Collins, 1982).

³⁰¹ Collins English Dictionary.

³⁰² Corrin, Lisa G., Kwon, Miwon and Bryson, Norman. *Mark Dion* (London: Phaidon, 1997) 16.

museums and in hegemonic culture³⁰³ and his ideas concerning socially just organisations and the ability that museums have to change society.^{304,305}

³⁰³ Janet Marstine, "Fred Wilson, Good Work and the Phenomenon of Freud's Mystic Writing Pad," *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* ed. Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (London: Routledge, 2012) 84.

³⁰⁴ Janet Marstine, "Museologically Speaking, An Interview with Fred Wilson," *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* ed. Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale (London: Routledge, 2012) 38-44.

³⁰⁵ David Fleming defined social justice as an idea 'based upon the premise that **all** people should be able to derive benefit from museums, that they have an **entitlement** to access to museums, and to see themselves **represented** in museums. Furthermore, museums have a responsibility to **fight** for social justice, not simply through ensuring access for all, but even in some instances through acting as forums for debate about basic human rights.' *Museums Campaigning for Social Justice*, 5th Stephen Weil Memorial Lecture, Shanghai, 8 November, 2010. 5 Feb. 2013.

<http://www.intercom.museum/documents/5thWeilLectureShanghaiNov2010.pdf>

4.1 Queering Museums

Since Gilbert's 2007 article, there have been a number of exhibitions that explored LGBT identity in British museums, the most prominent being *Gay Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery (July–October 2009). However, even in 2011 Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation at the British Museum, argued that the 'question of whether museums are doing enough [to reflect LGBT history and experience] remains pertinent'.³⁰⁶

There are numerous reasons why museums have struggled with LGBT visibility and to argue that it is solely down to institutional homophobia or apathy misses some key points. One of the first issues to address when talking about queer and museums is material culture. Since museums and galleries and their exhibitions are usually centred around object collections, those groups in society that own, use and consume objects tend to be privileged in museum displays. In addition, since museums and art galleries predominantly use material culture to form exhibitions and tell stories, they rely on objects standing in for identity groups.

It can be assumed that the only difference between gay and straight men and women is that they have sex with people of the same gender. This logic would therefore focus any queer material culture search around objects related to queer sex:

The underlying message seemed to be that, because lesbians and gay men are defined by their sexuality, they can only be represented by objects relating to sex, an approach that denies other aspects of gay and lesbian culture. Whilst lesbians and gay men have much in common with everyone else – most gay men are more likely to use a steam iron than a cock ring – there are, nevertheless, often distinct dress codes and meeting places, tastes in music and so on. In summary, many museum staff appear

³⁰⁶ Stuart Frost "Exhibition Review: Queering the Museum," *Social History in Museums*, Vol. 35 (2011) 65.

confused about who should collect gay and lesbian material, how to record it and, indeed, what it might be.³⁰⁷

In reality, associations between LGBT identities and material culture are much wider and more nuanced than might initially be assumed. As with any minority group, the experience of being in that group is made of many more experiences than those linked directly to the differencing characteristic. However, to draw out LGBT links to objects in collections, there either needs to be a high degree of knowledge on the part of the curator, or else those links need to be identified within cataloguing systems and in the exhibition labels, something that is seldom done, as we will see later.

Museums generally label objects with information about their date, material and maker. It is less common for objects to be associated with their owners and coupled with a lack of visibility among LGBT people – whether that be via their appearance or name – it makes the process of identifying LGBT-related objects next to impossible for museum visitors, unless those links are specifically drawn out in object labelling. While tagging objects with key words related to their LGBT associations would help, Patrik Steorn suggests that to:

attribute tags like ‘homosexual’ or ‘queer’ or ‘heterosexual’ to objects in museum and archival collections...[will] not be able to account for the juicy stuff – the kinds of emotional attachment, desire, knowledge and narratives that may queer any certain object.³⁰⁸

The association of objects with queer identities is still in its infancy for most organisations. An online catalogue search of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery’s collection using the keywords “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, “transgender”, “LGBT” and “queer” brought up only one search result. Using the keyword “queer” finds object number 1900P102, a photogravure of Dorothy Drew from a work by Edward Burne-Jones. Its connection to queer is found in a

³⁰⁷ Vanegas, “Representing Lesbians and Gay Men in British Social History Museums,” 164.

³⁰⁸ Steorn, Patrik, “Queer in the Museum,” Notes presented at Connecting the Dots: Virtuality, Technology and Feminism in the Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 23rd September 2011, <http://feminismandcurating.pbworks.com/w/page/44328295/Patrik%20Steorn>, accessed 01/05/2015

contemporaneous commentary about the object highlighting that it ‘has a queer kind of elfin charm’.³⁰⁹

The reality of the collection, which includes many images by the openly homosexual Simeon Solomon, for example, is vastly different to what this search would suggest. This raises some disturbing questions. Aside from researchers needing to bring with them a large amount of pre-existing knowledge to identify any queer relevance in the collection, there is an argument that what is not identified or collected is deemed of no importance, and this lack of documentation could be read as an – albeit potentially unwitting – aggressive act of cultural silencing:

Omission from the museum does not simple mean marginalization; it formally classifies certain lives, histories, and practices as insignificant, renders them invisible, marks them as unintelligible, and, thereby casts them in the realm of the unreal.³¹⁰

Exhibition labels are usually written with an institutional voice and backed up with documented evidence. Normative thinking assumes people are part of the majority unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Names and portraits will often indicate gender and race, but less often sexuality. With some notable exceptions, written information about historical queer lives is unusual and, before the decriminalisation homosexuality in 1967, was often confined to criminal or medical records. This reliance by museums on documented ‘fact’ means that LGBT histories are often silenced or negative and that heterosexuality is assumed and privileged, encouraging heteronormativity. Joe Heimlich and Judy Koke concur, arguing that within museums there is still tremendous homophobic prejudice often enacted through the silence, omission and assumptions that are socially dominant.³¹¹

It was out of a desire to interrogate some of these issues that the rationale for *Queering the Museum* developed. Drawing on previous identity-based museum

³⁰⁹ <http://www.bmagic.org.uk/objects/1900P102>, accessed 22 January 2013

³¹⁰ Anna Conlan, “Representing Possibility: Mourning, Memorial and Queer Museology,” *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin, (London: Routledge, 2010) 257.

³¹¹ Joe E. Heimlich and Judy Koke, “Gay and Lesbian Visitors and Cultural Institutions. Do They Come? Do They Care? A Pilot Study,” *Where is Queer? Museums & Social Issues A Journal of Reflective Discourse*, ed. John Fraser & Joe E. Heimlich, Vol 3, No.1 (Spring 2008) 94.

work, notably Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore 1992–1993) and Jo Derbyshire's *The Gay Museum* (Western Australia Museum, Perth, January–May 2003), the exhibition utilised numerous intervention techniques rather than rely on the “discovered” identities and “hidden” histories³¹² of makers or owners of objects in the collection.

Queering the Museum aimed to negate the ‘heterosexual filter’³¹³ that is placed over museum displays, a filter that prioritises the position of the mainstream and negates LGBT experiences unless they are specifically mentioned. The exhibition comprised 19 interventions placed throughout Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, exploring LGBT themes by drawing on and interrogating the museum's collections. The museum is one of Britain's largest local authority museums and houses a broad range of objects, from fine and applied art to natural and social history and archaeology.

4.2 Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Museums present themselves as neutral, democratic spaces that deal in facts and the truth. However, they are nothing of the sort. Curators make active decisions about what to collect, thereby shaping what society deems valuable and worth preserving. They also make active decisions about what to keep in store and what to display, and which narratives to tell with those objects that are displayed. *Queering the Museum* repeatedly questioned and critiqued these decisions by re-appropriating objects to tell revised stories, removing objects from the stores and placing them centre stage and placing newly created ‘historic’ objects within the collection to fill LGBT gaps. *Queering the Museum* therefore worked within – and outside of – the museological norms and there are many of these, since:

Above all, a museum is not the neutral and transparent sheltering space that it is often claimed to be. More like the traditional ceremonial monuments that museum buildings frequently emulate – classical temples, medieval cathedrals, Renaissance palaces – the museum is a complex experience involving architecture, programmed displays of art

³¹² Oliver Winchester, “Of Chaotic Desire and the Subversive Potential of Things,” *Queering the Museum* exhibition catalogue (Brighton, 2010) np.

³¹³ Petry, “Hidden Histories.” 7.

objects, and highly rationalized installation practices... it also carries out broad, sometimes less obvious political and ideological tasks.³¹⁴

With this in mind, *Queering the Museum* aimed to unpick the workings of the museum and explore why LGBT identities are so seldom seen in museums.

The interventions in the exhibition were placed within four main settings and respond to the norms of those particular environments, namely: cathedral-like atriums, dense traditional museum displays, classical fine art galleries and social history exhibitions. Figure 4.1 shows the exhibition layout.



Figure 4.1 *Queering the Museum* gallery plan, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

4.2.1 The Atrium: Lucifer and the Round Room

The first main gallery space in the museum is the Round Room, which was designed in order to impress the visitor. It is a large, circular, top-lit space, tiled with encaustic tiles and hung – academy style – with a range of oil paintings from the fine art collection. The Round Room employs the ‘very architecture of museums [that] suggests their character as secular rituals... [with] monumental classical forms... corridors scaled for processions and interior sanctuaries

³¹⁴ Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994) 280.

designed for awesome and potent effigies'.³¹⁵ In the centre of the space, raised on a plinth, is Epstein's bronze, *Lucifer* (1944–45), inspired by Milton's poem *Paradise Lost*. The first intervention in the exhibition involved draping the sculpture with a cape of artificial green carnations (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.2 Matt Smith, *Carnation Cape*, 2010, organza and silk carnations, size variable, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

The use of Lucifer can be read in a numerous ways, particularly through a queer filter. In *Paradise Lost*, Lucifer is banished to hell after a failed rebellion to wrestle control of heaven from God, an attempt borne out of his belief that the angels were equal to God. This struggle for equality is mirrored in feminism and gay rights activism, placing Lucifer in a queer role, challenging the received orthodoxy. The desire to challenge an overarching power structure that controls society can be read either as a fight between good and evil or the democratisation of society, depending on one's position. It raises interesting arguments for a largely secular society within which equality is being shared between increasingly diverse groups. Does the inclusion of an LGBT exhibition within the authoritative and faux sacred setting of a museum signal the end of a

³¹⁵ Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," 281.

period of demonisation of these minorities or a temporary 'satanic' undermining of that which society deems good and holy?

The journey of Lucifer from a heavenly creation of God to an exiled 'other' could be read as the 'coming out' transition through which LGBT individuals can become distanced from heterosexual family units, thereby becoming 'other' and challenging the status quo. Furthermore, it could be argued that the demonisation of Lucifer for a single act of defiance has parallels in homophobia.

Lucifer's assigned role as the negative counterpoint to good also chimes within queer theory, as Thomas Dawson explains:

the binary distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality... resulted from a homophobic desire to devalue one of those oppositions. Consequently, homosexuality is not symmetrically related to heterosexuality – it is subordinate and marginal, but necessary to construct meaning and value in heterosexuality.³¹⁶

This has links to the use of ethnographic materials in museums, as will be discussed later.

The transgressive nature of the sculpture is also seen in its form: the head was modelled from a female model and placed on a male body. Epstein was obviously comfortable being linked to identifiably gay men – by 1905 he had produced 'emotionally charged drawings of male nudes intended to illustrate [the homosexual] Walt Whitman's poem *Calamus*'³¹⁷ and in 1908 was commissioned to design the tomb of Oscar Wilde. Therefore, it is maybe unsurprising that *Lucifer* resonates with queer in so many ways.

There are many reasons why the figure of Lucifer, which has been awarded the most dominant, monumental position in this temple to culture, makes a great starting point for an exhibition exploring the 'other'. It is interesting that such a twisted and deviant object can be read as normative by virtue of its status in an

³¹⁶ Thomas A. Dowson, "Queer Theory Meets Archaeology: Disrupting Epistemological Privilege and Heteronormativity in Constructing the Past," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 280-281.

³¹⁷ Evelyn Silber, "The Tomb of Oscar Wilde," *Jacob Epstein Sculpture and Drawings* exhibition catalogue (Leeds: WS Maney and Sons, 1987) 124.

authoritative establishment, and this is where the intervention came into play. Layered on top of the figure was a cape made of 2,000 artificial green carnations, sewn together on organza fabric. The cape acts as a signifier, letting the visitor know that something is changed, all is not as it has been, making them relook at the familiar and see it in a new light, reading the stories that were already there but forgotten or overlooked. The contrast between the sculpture and the intervention jars the viewer: cheap, fake flowers juxtaposed with a fine art bronze; garish lime green contrasting with the mellow patina of the metal and the hundreds of tiny flowers, joined together to subsume the mighty figure. Issues relating to artificiality and camp and men taking part in the “female” art of sewing are not far away.

I would argue that, counter to the “male” approach of installing iconic objects on plinths in white cube spaces – objects made to impress, inspire awe and dominate a space – interventions embody a more “female” way of working. They take a situation and modify it, they adapt, they subvert. Interventions show us the foolishness of what we take for granted, they challenge authority and, when done well, they remind us that there are many ways of seeing the world: they are perfect agents for queer. They also bring questions of hierarchies to the fore: do the carnations adorn the sculpture or does the sculpture simply become a display plinth for the new object?

The green carnation, with its unnatural status, was popularised by Oscar Wilde as a means of self-identifying as homosexual in Victorian England. ‘The playwright notoriously attended the premiere of *Lady Windermere’s Fan* at the St James’ with a group of young men, all wearing green carnations, supposedly the symbol of homosexual desire in Paris.’³¹⁸

Visual signifiers have long been important to gay men as a means to recognise each other. As Matt Cook explains, ‘the play of visibility and invisibility, and recognition and misrecognition, were important to the homosexual dynamic in London during the [Victorian] period.’³¹⁹ It is therefore apt that the carnation was taken as a visual key to link the interventions within Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Figure 4.4). The carnation was used within the exhibition to visually

³¹⁸ Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality: 1885–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 29.

³¹⁹ Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 132.

signify queerness in a mirroring of the ways that museums use words – “husband”, “wife”, “child” – to reinforce heteronormative values and family ties. Within the exhibition, the role of the carnation mirrors the performance of cruising: the visitor walks through an ostensibly heterosexual environment looking for queer signifiers that they can then choose to either engage or ignore with.

Matt Smith (1971 -)
Carnation Cape, 2010
Green silk carnations, organza



Sexual acts between men were illegal in the United Kingdom until 1967. Therefore gay men had to communicate with each other in covert ways to avoid persecution and prosecution.

Green carnations were worn on the lapels of gay men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to signify their homosexuality. They were often worn by Oscar Wilde.

In 1894, Robert Hichens anonymously published the novel 'The Green Carnation'. Based closely on the lives of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, it was used in the prosecution of Wilde during his trial for Gross Indecency.

The cape is placed on Epstein's sculpture, 'Lucifer'. 'Lucifer' was sculpted with the body of a man and the face of a woman. This merging of genders provides a starting point for 'Queering the Museum'.

Queering the Museum is a series of displays which explore Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender themes using the museum's collections. It is funded by Arts Council England and is part of the ShOUT! Festival, Birmingham's celebration of Queer Culture. To comment on the exhibition, tweet using the hashtag #queering.

Figure 4.3 Matt Smith, Label for *Carnation Cape* showing green carnation, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

This play between invisibility and visibility, recognition and misrecognition, is key to the strategy for the second set of works in *Queering the Museum*, the ones placed within the museum collection. By adding new works within the existing collection, a playful air of hide and seek is engaged. It could be argued that this could lead to interventions being missed. However, this was the approach of the exhibition: armed with basic signifiers and coded signals, the visitor had the opportunity to see – or ignore – LGBT histories within the collections.

4.2.2 Traditional Museum Display: Upstairs in the Industrial Gallery

The upstairs floor of the Industrial Gallery was last redisplayed in the 1970s. It employs the traditional museum norms of collecting, cataloguing and displaying to provide curated, ‘representative’ histories of a subject – in this case, ceramics. Collecting theory would label this type of collection – and display – as male. It argues that ‘women’s collections tend to be personal and ahistorical, men’s impersonal and historical, just as, traditionally, women have tended to have a relatively greater emotional investment in people than in ideas and men to some extent the reverse’.³²⁰

By inserting personal, people-centred objects into the cases, the display has been queered, not only through a disruption to the cataloguing systems used by the museum, but also through a gendered assault on the impersonal, male display. Disorder is created within the systematic display, and ‘the collector’s need for order... satisfied by the task of arranging and cataloguing the objects he owns’,³²¹ is disrupted and contaminated.

The interventions in this gallery are direct responses to the extant collections. The new, queer objects play with the existing cataloguing rules and re-appropriate them with queer narratives to produce new groupings that both sit within the categories, but also outside of them. In this way, they echo the LGBT community’s ability to visually ‘pass’ – to go under the radar when necessary and fit in – albeit sometimes only when subjected to a cursory glance. These new works undermine the museum’s position of authority and place the shared

³²⁰ Frederick Baekeland, “Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting,” *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994) 207.

³²¹ Baekeland, “Psychological Aspects,” 209.

experiences of LGBT-identified individuals in the centre of cultural power. The interventions play with the rules of insider and outsider, adopting queer theory's positions of 'emic and etic'³²² – who is in, who is out. There is a permeability to the distinction as objects alternate between being inside and outside the museum's collections, just as individuals can potentially adopt and discard queer positions. In this act of securing space within the cases, the objects both illustrate that these marginalised stories can be found within the existing 'truths' of the collection and also deserve an (albeit, in this case, temporary) telling.

Naturally, this challenging of authority is nothing new – various artists upset the applecart and question perceived hierarchies within the art and cultural world. Jeff Koons' use of kitsch and Rebecca Warren's use of the amateur are obvious examples. However, the linking of a marginalised group to the museum narrative raises social and ethical issues of inclusion, stereotyping and equal voice.

One of the interventions in the Industrial Gallery is *Double-spouted Teapot* (Figures 4.4 and 4.5). Sited within a collection of earthenware tea and chocolate pots, the piece is a wordplay on the American slang "tea-rooming", describing anonymous male–male sexual encounters in public toilets.



Figure 4.4 Matt Smith, *Tea-rooming* (left) intervention in the cases in the Industrial Gallery, 2010, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

³²² Tom Boellstorff, "Queer Techne: Two Theses on Methodology and Queer Studies," *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* ed Kath Browne & Catherine J.Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) 218.

Figure 4.5 Matt Smith, *Double-spouted Teapot* (right), 2010, white earthenware, 25cm tall, collection of Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

The piece is cast from a Wedgwood teapot, with a secondary spout added to the front. On the lid, the finial has been replaced by two bearded heads, cast from an Action Man figure – the idealised ‘boy toy’. Referring to both ‘cottaging’ and the social niceties of afternoon tea, the piece mashes two very discordant subjects and alludes to the British habit of boiling the kettle when shocking events occur. By taking a norm and subverting it, the piece acts to both tell a LGBT narrative and also act as an agent to queer the exhibition case.

Having two male heads facing forwards with two erect spouts, plays with the viewer’s eyes. It is not too large a jump to replace the teapot body with the writhing figures of men. A functional object has been remade unable to fulfil its traditional function, but achieving a new and different role.

4.2.3 Civil Partnership Figure Group

Another intervention in the ceramics gallery was the *Civil Partnership Figure Group* (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). In direct response to the eighteenth century ceramic *Figure Group* in the collection, the new piece repurposed the pose and figuration in a same-sex parody of the original piece.



Figure 4.6 Matt Smith, *Civil Partnership Figure Group*, 2010, white earthenware with enamels and lustres, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

Instead of trying to find or “out” queer objects in the collection, in this intervention I chose to make the pieces that did not exist historically, but could exist now, representing the lives that were lived but not recorded through

material culture. In this intervention, I moved away from the *Mining the Museum* work of Fred Wilson that used existing objects in the collection and reframed them with an African American focus, and drew more on the practice of artists such as Kara Walker and Glenn Ligon who adopt and subvert historical techniques and styles and insert minority identities.



Figure 4.7 Matt Smith, *Civil Partnership Figure Group*, 2010, white earthenware, enamels and lustres, 18cm tall. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

4.2.4 Social History and Gallery 33

Gallery 33 at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery came out of a desire for a more inclusive approach to displaying the museum's ethnographic collections. The gallery caused quite a stir when it first opened in the early 1990s for the then-innovative ways in which it approached multiculturalism, gender and social difference. Writing about Gallery 33 in 1995, Jane Peirson Jones said:

Cultural identity is a very personal and emotive issue for everyone because it involves the consideration of gender, sexuality, religion, nationality and economic group as well as race and ethnicity. There is evidence to suggest that, in Gallery 33... it is "the shock of non-recognition" which provokes an emotive response which is sometimes expressed in terms of cultural self-assertion.³²³

The gallery contains no reference to LGBT lives. Attraction to people of the same gender is the sole overarching unifier of gay men and women, and sex is something that museums have traditionally had an uneasy relationship with (using fig leaves to cover genitals and forming secret collections). Prior to civil partnerships, we were left with a relative void in material culture, a troubling vacuum, from which museums could draw. The troubled relationship between museums and sex is perplexing. Spaces with so much naked flesh on show, where one is prohibited from touching, lends them a voyeuristic atmosphere.

We take the dichotomy for granted: the 'improvement' gained while looking at classical nudes in harsh contradiction to puritanical attitudes towards real life nudity. Museums may be quiet, but they are not solitary. Visitors interact with each other. The behaviour appropriate when viewing an object can be redirected towards other visitors, and in one sleight of hand, the site of societal improvement becomes a base and charged cruising ground, the loitering of visitors slipping into cruising ground behaviour. It is little surprise that EM Forster includes the museum – along with commuter trains and bachelor flats – as an arena for homoerotic encounters in his 1914 novel *Maurice* and Isaac Julien explores S/M activities within the museum in his 1993 film *The Attendant*.

³²³ Jane Peirson Jones, "Communicating and Learning in Gallery 33: Evidence from a Visitor Study," *Museum, Media, Message*, ed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) 271.

While lack of material culture can be used as an excuse for not representing LGBT lives in museums, I think it avoids the insidious reality that most museums did not want to, or were afraid to, represent them.

The main museum and gallery exhibitions in the UK that have explored LGBT lives are *Pride and Prejudice* at the Museum of London (1999), *Celebrate!* Croydon Clocktower (2000 and 2001), *Hidden Histories*, Walsall New Museum and Art Gallery (2004), *Queer is Here*, Museum of London (2006), *Hello Sailor!* Merseyside Maritime (2007), *Warren Cup*, British Museum (2006),³²⁴ *Outside Edge: A Journey Through Black British Lesbian and Gay Life*, Museum in Docklands, London (2008) and *Gay Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery (2009).

They were all temporary, and with the exception of *Hidden Histories* and *Gay Icons*, relatively small scale. Due to their relative scarcity, when LGBT-related exhibitions are put on, they receive a disproportionate amount of attention. This is unsurprising, since museums deem what is important enough for society to care for and society relies on museum collections to provide communal memories. Museums are about objects: they collect them, preserve them, display them and occasionally, de-accession them.

By simply placing a civil partnership card within the displays of Gallery 33 (Figure 4.8), a number of issues are raised. In a gallery devoted to cross-cultural difference, why was there no mention of LGBT individuals? Was it due to a paucity of LGBT material, curatorial apathy, or the political climate in the early 1990s and Clause 28?³²⁵

³²⁴ Stuart Frost, "Secret Museums, Hidden Histories of Sex and Sexuality,"

Where is Queer? Museums & Social Issues A Journal of Reflective Discourse, ed. John Fraser and Joe E. Heimlich, Vol 3, No.1 (Spring 2008) 33.

³²⁵ Clause 28/Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 stated that a [local authority](#) 'shall not intentionally promote [homosexuality](#) or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any [maintained school](#) of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the United Kingdom in 2003.



Figure 4.8 Matt Smith, *Civil Partnership Card* intervention in Gallery 33, 2010, card, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

It may be that LGBT individuals have not argued strongly enough for representation or helped museums to reflect their lives. The Equality Act, 2010, provides the stick (to accompany the carrot) that had been missing to date. However, the practical application of the Equality Act on museums is as yet untested. The LGBT community should be campaigning for better inclusion in museums, since:

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest most authoritative truths... What we see and do not see in our most prestigious art museums – and on what terms and whose authority we do or don't see it – involves the much larger questions of who constitutes the community and who shall exercise the power to define its authority.³²⁶

While Peirson Jones includes sexuality as one of the many cultural identities to take into consideration,³²⁷ museums have a tradition of biased representation of difference and the role of ethnographic 'other' is not necessarily something that

³²⁶ Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," 286.

³²⁷ Peirson Jones, "Multiculturalism Incarnate," 158.

the LGBT community would want to embrace. However, it can learn from postcolonial studies and theorists of cultural representation. Art galleries and museums unwilling to discuss LGBT lives are often happy to show works by artists such as Francis Bacon, Caravaggio, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo or Georgia O'Keefe. While an artist's sexuality may or may not have an impact on how their works are read, if the stories of the LGBT community are consistently silenced, there are worrying parallels between these artworks and colonial ethnographic displays: objects removed from the context in which they were made, depersonalised and re-appropriated for the dominant culture's pleasure.

Joshua Adair draws further parallels between race and LGBT representation in museums. 'In a number of museums, both (*African American and gay*) experiences are summarily dismissed in favour of a narrative addressing whites and heterosexuals respectively'.³²⁸ Advocates of LGBT representation in museums could well adopt the argument that Eichstedt makes about race representation: '[I]ack of accurate information is a form of abuse... Continuing the telling of untruths, distorting experiences, and so on constitutes victimization'.³²⁹

If the paucity of LGBT exhibitions is in part due to a lack of material culture, then civil partnerships and same-sex marriages provide a fascinating opportunity for museums. Although far from adopted by all gay men and women, these are the first positive state recording of same-sex relationships. As increasing numbers of civil partnerships and same-sex marriages take place, customs and norms are being created. Clothing, wedding albums, invitations and wedding cards are all celebratory material, which can be collected and displayed by museums to tell positive, queer stories.

However, even without uniquely LGBT-related material culture, the interventionist strategies used in *Queering the Museum* enable museums to represent LGBT experiences. As Stuart Frost points out, by taking a tangential approach to museum display, *Queering the Museum* 'underlines the potential that exists for museums to reinterpret their existing collections in thought-

³²⁸ Joshua G. Adair, "House Museums or Walk-in Closets?" *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 274.

³²⁹ Jennifer Eichstedt, "Museums and (In)Justice," *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Hugh H. Genoways (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006) 133.

provoking ways, and how to integrate LGBT experience and history into permanent galleries'.³³⁰

4.2.5 Classical Art Gallery: Simeon Solomon

For *Queering the Museum*, a number of exhibition cases were taken out of store and placed within the main art gallery spaces. In each of these, objects from the museum stores were selected for their ability to act as vehicles to tell LGBT narratives. This method of working provides a useful methodology for exploring subjects where little material culture exists and draws on Jo Darbyshire's creative use of objects in the exhibition *The Gay Museum* in Perth (2003), discussed in the Chapter 3.

Unusually, access was given to all the collections, which allowed for some surprising unions – not least a taxidermy otter and three salt-glazed ceramic bears; in gay male culture, a bear is a large hairy man and an otter his slimmer counterpart – by placing these four objects together, a visual connection was created that moved the objects from their normal taxonomies. For the most part, these queer narratives were overlaid on objects which had no intrinsic connection to LGBT lives. However, the drawing of *Night and Sleep* by Simeon Solomon was an exception. In the early 1990s, when Clause 28 was still in place, museums shied away from mentioning homosexuality even more than they currently do. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery had one label that dealt with the subject (Figure 4.9).

³³⁰ Frost, "Are museums doing enough to address LGBT history?" 19.

SIMEON SOLOMON (1840-1905)

Bacchus 1867

oil on panel

Solomon was a close friend of Burne-Jones and the poet Swinburne. This is one of Solomon's most celebrated works. **Bacchus** represents the god of wine in classical mythology and was inspired by a portrait by the fifteenth-century Siennese Renaissance artist Sodoma in the Uffizi, Florence. The art critic, Walter Pater described this picture as an embodiment, not of the joyous Dionysus of the Renaissance, but a melancholy and sorrowing Dionysus-'the god of the bitterness of wine, "of things too sweet".

Solomon's sensual but androgynous images can be linked with his own homosexuality. His career collapsed in 1873 when he was convicted of homosexual offences and spent the last twenty years of his life living mainly in a London workhouse.

Bequeathed by Miss K E Lewis, 1961 (P52'61)

Figure 4.9 Wall label for *Bacchus*, c. 1991, card, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

I wanted to re-examine this label and try to reposition the narrative about Simeon Solomon in a less depressing way. I spent a lot of time researching Solomon, trying to piece together information about his relationships – who he had met, where he had met them and what their histories were. It became clear that the only documentation about Solomon's sex life was in police records and newspaper reports. The working class men he was caught with were named, but very little else was known about them. I began to sympathise with museum curators – how to tell stories without hard facts? I decided to work *with* the lack of evidence, rather than against it.

Lord Frederic Leighton (1830–96) was working at the same time as Solomon (1840–1905). They were both painters with links to the Pre-Raphaelites and both were seen as great talents at the start of their careers. Solomon's arrests and the subsequent scandals limited his career, while Leighton became a pillar of the Victorian art establishment: knighted in 1878, made a baronet in 1886 and raised to the peerage in 1896. There are numerous indications that, were they alive today, both men would identify themselves as gay. Solomon had numerous same-sex encounters, two of which led to his arrest, in London and then Paris. Leighton was much more discreet about any sexual relations he may have had, whether in England or North Africa.³³¹ He left no diaries and his correspondence was 'telling' in its 'lack of reference to his personal circumstances'.³³² This has led to his possible homosexuality being an ongoing matter of debate.

Within the case (Figure 4.10), two objects from the collection – a bronze by Leighton and a drawing by Solomon – were placed facing away from each other. Each was accompanied by contemporaneous quotes about the men, charting their lives. A small trophy of a bear, pierced with arrows was placed by the Solomon drawing, in some small way rewarding his openness and honesty. As previously mentioned, civil partnership documentation provides one of the first positive state-approved recordings of same sex activity, making it easier for curators and archivists in the future to tell definitively when people were in same-sex relationships, reducing the need for speculation, side-stepping and reliance on criminal charges.

³³¹ For more about the perceived links between North Africa and homosexuality in nineteenth-century London, see Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* pp. 14, 92–3.

³³² *Who was Frederic Leighton?* Leighton House Museum, London, 8 April 2015. <http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/museums/leightonhousemuseum/aboutthehouse/aboutleightonhouse/whowasleighton.aspx>.



Figure 4.10 Matt Smith, *Simeon Solomon* intervention, 2010, consisting of (left to right): Lord Frederic Leighton *Athlete Strangling a Python*, 1877, bronze, 550mm high, Simeon Solomon, *Night and Sleep*, 1888, chalk drawing, 359mm x 296 mm, Matt Smith, *A Tribute to Simeon*, 2010, white earthenware bear with underglaze, lustre and copper nails, 240mm high, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

Leighton and Solomon raise issues about how museums can incorporate historic LGBT narratives into exhibitions without resorting to the ‘married to his art’³³³ and ‘bachelor uncle’³³⁴ euphemisms. Joshua Adair³³⁵ argues that we need to rethink the use of the word gay. He advocates Fellows’ logic:

One of the most harmful aspects of homophobia is its equating of *gay* with sex alone: that is *gay* tends to be understood quite narrowly as a synonym for *homosexual*. For this reason, it’s not an ideal term to use when looking at a person’s nature beyond the scope of his sexual orientation per se. But what’s the alternative? Resisting the urge to coin a new term for my kind across time and cultures I’ve decided to make do with the familiar word *gay* and explain what it means to me: a male who

³³³ Vanegas, “Representing Lesbians and Gay Men,” 105.

³³⁴ Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture*, (Madison Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 18.

³³⁵ Adair, “House Museums or Walk-in Closets?” 264–278.

is gender atypical (psychologically and perhaps physically androgynous or effeminate) and decidedly homosexual in orientation if not in practice. Thus, my use of the term *gay* encompasses both gender identity and sexual orientation. It is not synonymous with *homosexual*.³³⁶ [Italics in original]

This shift of focus from physical act to gender and sexual difference, may be a means of moving the exploration of historic LGBT narratives in museums forwards. Similarly, queer becomes a useful tool to start discussing difference that cannot be solely categorised around sexual orientation.

4.2.6 Untold Stories – Cardinal Newman

Not all the proposals for interventions were accepted by the museum. One that wasn't was a kneeler exploring the beatification of Cardinal Newman, intended to be placed with a display of ecclesiastical silver.

Intervention Proposal: Bring me the Body of Cardinal Newman

An oversized needlepoint kneeler embroidered with mid c. 19th Berlin Woolwork designs and *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* ('Out of shadows and phantasms into the truth'), the inscription on the memorial stone of Cardinal Newman (1801–90) at Birmingham Oratory.

Newman specifically requested to be buried next to Ambrose St John with whom he shared a house for over 30 years. Regardless of the specifics of their relationship, the strong bond between the two men – which Newman likened to a marriage – places them outside the norm, as 'other'.

In the run-up to his beatification, the Vatican chose to exhume this body and move it from beside Father Ambrose. When digging up the corpse, it was found that the body had already disintegrated to such an extent that it was unable to be disinterred.

The exhibition dates for *Queering the Museum* overlapped with an exhibition in the museum about Cardinal Newman that was scheduled to coincide with the Pope's visit to Birmingham and in large part this was the reason for the proposal

³³⁶ Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 13.

being rejected. The conflict between church, museums and LGBT representation is not unique to this project and the links between museums and site of devotion are many, as previously discussed.

This association of museums as semi-religious spaces may account for the fury that queer representation in them can cause. At the same time as *Queering the Museum* opened, the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery decided, controversially, to remove David Wojnarowicz's work *A Fire In My Belly* from its *Hide and Seek* exhibition of LGBT portraits following complaints from the Catholic League.

The role of censorship in museums was tackled eloquently and successfully in '*The Play of the Unmentionable*' – an installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum (1992). In response to attacks on the National Endowment for the arts from the 'radical Right',³³⁷ Kosuth displayed objects, drawn from the museum's collections that were at one point or another deemed controversial – including a Rodin bronze and a Bauhaus armchair – illustrating the temporal nature of taste, 'comprehension and judgment of artworks and cultural artifacts'.³³⁸

While the kneeler was not included in the *Queering the Museum* exhibition, I produced the work after the exhibition had finished (Figure 4.11).

³³⁷ Joseph Kosuth, qtd in Charlotta Kotik, "Introduction," *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press, 1992) xiii.

³³⁸ Charlotta Kotik, "Introduction," *The Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum* (New York: The New Press, 1992) xii.



Figure 4.11 Matt Smith, *Bring Me the Body of Cardinal Newman*, 2012, canvas, wool, velvet, pleather, metal D ring, 60cm x 45cm x 15cm, collection of the artist.

It could be assumed that exhibitions exploring LGBT lives are mainly of interest to the LGBT community and this may, in part, account for their infrequency. However, the same arguments are not made about, say ethnographic galleries or galleries of Egyptology. In the evaluation of the exhibition, of the people interviewed who had come specifically for the exhibition, some 43% identified as heterosexual. Ivan Karp suggests that:

Cross-cultural exhibitions present such stark contrasts between what we know and what we need to know that the challenge of reorganising our knowledge becomes an aspect of the exhibition experience... Almost by definition, audiences do not bring to exhibitions the full range of cultural resources necessary for comprehending them; otherwise there would be no point in exhibiting. Audience are left with two choices: either they define their experience of the exhibition to fit with their existing categories of knowledge, or they reorganise their categories to fit better with their experience. Ideally, it is the shock of non-recognition that enables the audience to choose the latter alternatives. The challenge to exhibition

makers is to provide within exhibitions the contexts and resources that enable audiences to choose to reorganise their knowledge.³³⁹

In reality, there is no one 'LGBT community', but rather many different individuals who may, or may not, choose to associate under a uniting group. Therefore any attempts to unite individuals who identify as LGB or T into an overarching group will be fragmented, contradictory and multivoiced. There are few, if any, unifying activities, events or traditions. It is a group where the shared characteristic is seldom passed down through family lines, so in effect, members of the group are devoid of 'elders' to pass on the shared histories. I would argue that because of this, the representation of LGBT histories in museums is even more important for this group than those groups where traditions are passed from parent to children and allows all of us to 'reorganise our knowledge'.

³³⁹ Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) 22.

4.3 Other Stories

Following on from *Queering the Museum*, the next project, *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection*, was initiated by Layla Bloom, Curator of the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery at the University of Leeds. It was part of the university's marking of the centennial of the vice-chancellor Sir Michael Sadler's administration (1911–23). Sadler had donated many of the works in the gallery's collection and, following inquiries from the university's LGBT group, the gallery had decided to work with the Edward Carpenter papers held in the University Library archive.

Bloom was having difficulty relating the Edward Carpenter material to the permanent collection of paintings and sculpture and contacted me to see if I could help.

Edward Carpenter was born in 1844 in Hove. A true renaissance man, Carpenter was known for advancing adult education, vegetarianism, naturism, pacifism and gay rights. In 1891 he met George Merrill and the two men lived together and had an openly homosexual relationship until Merrill's death in 1928. I was interested in how the visibility of their relationship ran in contradiction to the perceived historical 'truth' that late Victorian homosexuality involved covert and persecuted lifestyles, with Oscar Wilde being the notable example.

At about the same time as Bloom contacted me about the project, I heard Amy Tooth Murphy, from LGBT History Month Scotland, talk about her work with LGBT oral histories and how many of the interviewees painted a picture that differed from the 'grand narratives' of the past. I had been concerned that with *Queering the Museum*, some of the interventions had relied on stereotyping, attempting to develop overarching narratives to describe a diverse, complex and contradictory group. Tooth Murphy's use of oral histories as a counterpoint to this rhymed with my thinking and tied in with Carpenter's biography that ran counter to prevailing queer histories.

As mentioned before, unlike most other minority groups – those linked by religion, ethnicity and race – the LGBT community produces a paucity of unique

material culture. There are few 'gay objects'. It is also a group that seldom passes knowledge down through familial, intergenerational lines.

In light of this, the role of the oral history archive becomes a key mechanism by which members of the fragmented, diverse 'LGBT community' can place themselves within a wider historical setting. Traditional museum and gallery classification – which records object date, medium and maker – provides a basis for categorisation and order, but often ignores the role those objects played in daily life – the reasons they were made bought, used and retained. The emotive memories that become embedded in loved objects are too often lost since these emotional attachments fall outside the normal means of classification. For all these reasons, I was interested in working with the material in an oral history archive to find out what people thought and felt in the past and to discover what discrepancies it might contain and what links and connections it might make with the fine art collection at the university. Therefore, I contacted the Ourstory oral history archive in Brighton.

The Ourstory archive's remit is to document lives of people who have same-sex desire.³⁴⁰ Like any collection, the archive is obviously further selected – by whose stories are told and collected, who is asked to speak and, who is willing to be recorded. Layered on top of that, was my further sifting and selecting. Going through the archive, I was looking for those voices that interested me – that made me stop and want to consider what was being said. I was interested in voices that either ran counter to my assumptions, shed light on those assumptions or with whom I felt an emotional attachment.

Working with these first-person narratives, I embedded them permanently, into contemporaneous objects. As a counterpoint to the argument that LGBT stories become hidden histories, I wanted to make these memories visible, tangible and permanent by indelibly etching them into objects that these interviewees could have owned, held or viewed. Throughout this process, I kept coming back to the third equal player in this exhibition – the university art collection – since this series of interventions formed a three-way connection between the oral

³⁴⁰ While this doesn't necessarily exclude trans people, I couldn't find appropriate reminiscences and trans voices were not heard in the exhibition, unfortunately.

histories, the contemporaneous everyday objects and the art collection at Leeds.

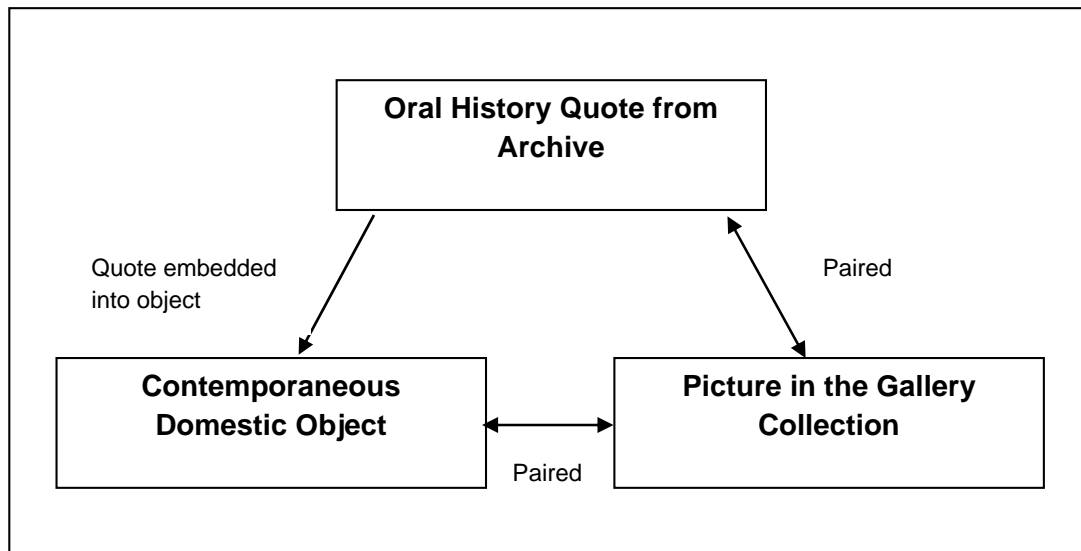


Figure 4.12 *Other Stories* exhibition methodology

I had a great sense of relief when the law changed. I was terrified of the law. When you grow up and you find that you're against the law – it worries you. Just the very fact that your existence is threatened all the time and you have to behave in certain ways. And you're vulnerable. In bars, for example, you never discussed where you worked, you never gave you name, never gave your real name anyway. You'd be Bill or Harry. I have friends who didn't even know my real name... I lived in terror, I'll never get over that as long as I live. It's born into us, it's bred to feel ashamed of

Quote laser cut
into Babycham
glasses

Paired with *Iaca*
by Vasarely



Paired



Figure 4.13 *Other Stories*, worked example of exhibition methodology

By taking a moment of absolute truth from the interviewees within the oral history archive and pairing it with objects in the museum collection, I aimed to open up the interpretation of the museum objects in a more democratic way: removing the pictures in the collection from their place in the development of art history and relating them to lives lived and contemporaneous queer social histories, histories:

... of the many people whose lives are not arranged through straightforward heterosexuality. This is a history that is almost always omitted from museums and galleries, even when it is integral to the lives of the artists and artworks that are exhibited there.³⁴¹

The use of domestic objects was a conscious one. It attempted to break the divide between museum objects and lived experience, bringing the domestic into a public setting and using it as a vehicle to talk about intimacy. As Lara Perry describes the domestic objects: '[t]hey belong to the realm of the familiar because our own homes are populated with similar kinds of things, and give us a direct mode of access to the "foreign country" that is the past'.³⁴² Their use was also a counterpoint to queer as 'other', the domestic objects describing the 'ordinary qualities of queer history and desires, and of their seamless integration'.³⁴³ This overwriting of the artistic canon with personal messages is not a new strategy. As part of the V&A exhibition *Give and Take* (2000), Ken Aptekar held a number of focus groups with different audience groups where they were encouraged to discuss paintings in the collections. Aptekar painted selected parts from those pictures, over which he placed glass panels which were sandblasted with quotes about the paintings taken from the focus groups.

³⁴¹ Lara Perry, "Ordinary Queerness," *Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection* exhibition catalogue (Leeds: The Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, 2012) 6.

³⁴² Perry, "Ordinary Queerness," 7.

³⁴³ Perry, "Ordinary Queerness," 7.

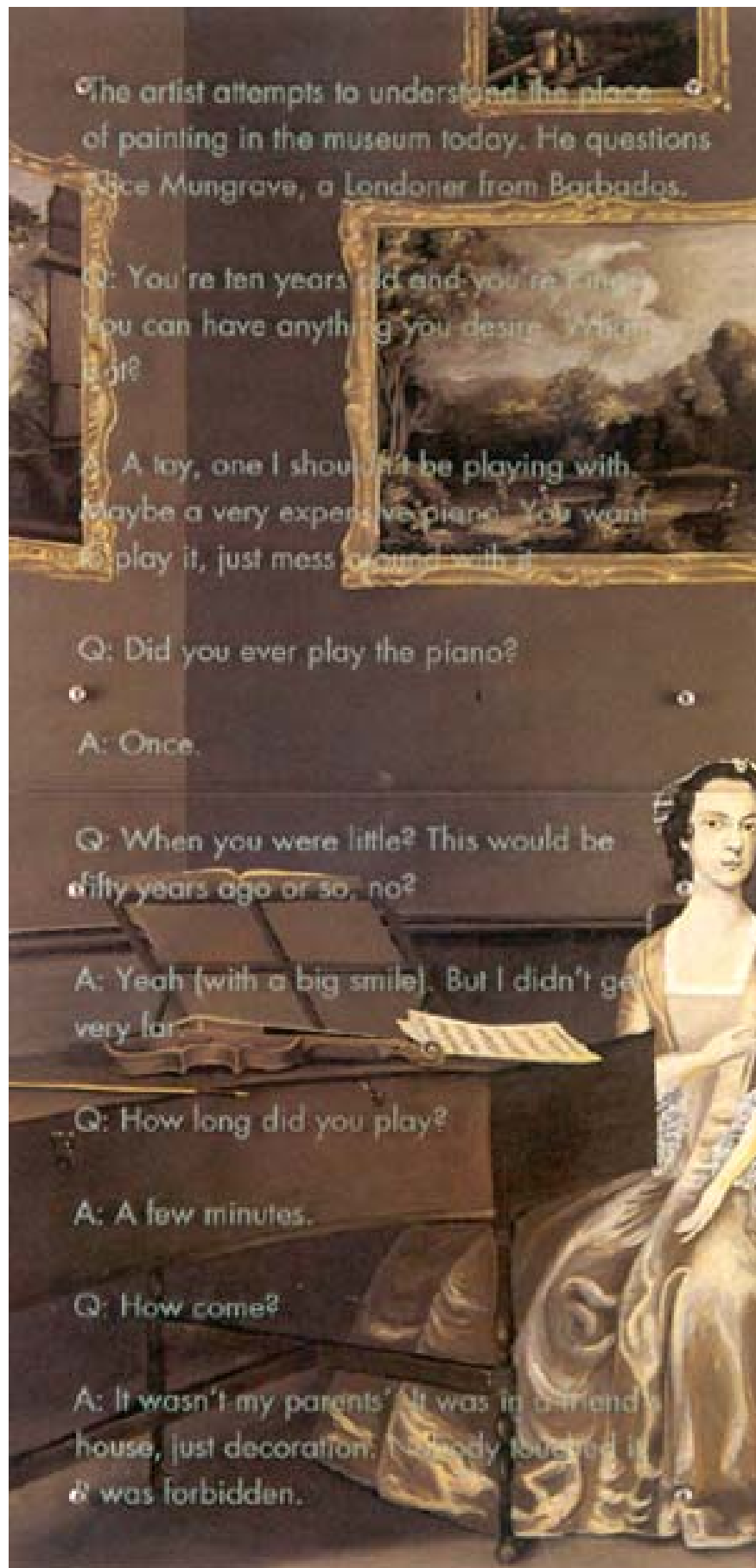


Figure 4.14 Ken Aptekar, *The Artist Attempts to Understand*, 2000, oil on wood, with bolts and sandblasted glass, 152.4 x 76.2 cm (two panels). Image © Ken Aptekar

Aptekar's work continually pulls the interpretation of objects away from the authority of the museum and opens it out to more personal musings, whether from focus group members or his own words and text. Dana Self, the curator of Aptekar's exhibition *Writing Voices* sees these paintings as:

anecdotal analyst to the contested interpretations of identity, masculinity, personal authority, Jewishness, and the slippery history of art. By appropriating paintings from Western art history and combining them with witty and poignant autobiography, Aptekar knits together art history and biography's parallel dialogue.³⁴⁴

The triple connection that occurred in *Other Stories* led to some interesting results and connections being made. The intervention that most closely tied in with the history of the objects in the collection was the pairing of a coffee set with two pictures – Duncan Grant's *Still Life, Asheham House* and Vanessa Bell's *Still Life (Triple Alliance)*. The intervention (Figure 4.15) was a coffee set that was fired with lettering transfers describing Val's experience of leaving her husband for another woman (who also left her husband) and the different ways their partners saw and reacted to this change.

³⁴⁴ Dana Self, "Ken Aptekar: Writing Voices," *Ken Aptekar: Painting Between the Lines, 1990–2000* exhibition catalogue (Kansas City, Missouri: Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001) 1.

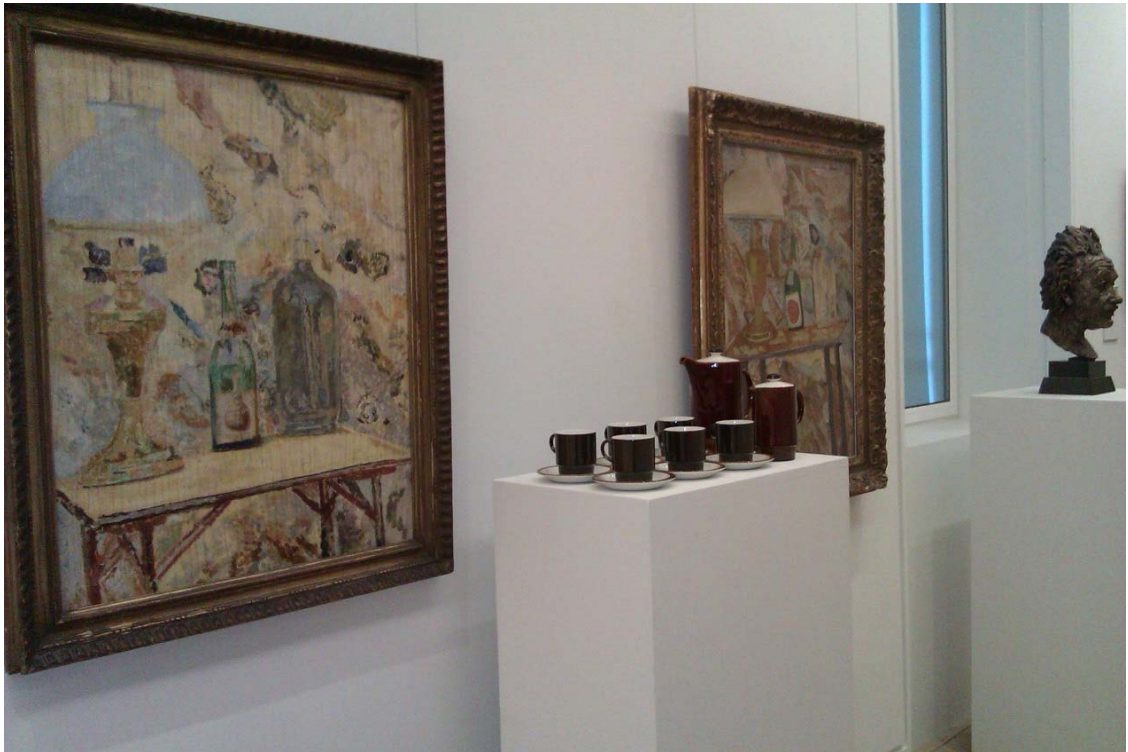


Figure 4.15 Matt Smith, *Untitled V*, 2012, ceramic coffee set with custom decals, 30cm high, shown with Duncan Grant, *Still Life, Asheham House*, 1914, oil and collage on board and Vanessa Bell, *Still Life (Triple Alliance)*, 1914, collage, newsprint, oil and pastel, Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery.

Bell's *Still Life (Triple Alliance)* was identified near the start of the project as a good partner for this text, both for its title and the biography of the artist. During the development of the project, Leeds acquired the Grant painting at auction and we were able to display the two paintings together, showing the different visual perceptions of the same still life by the two married artists whose non-monogamous relationship in some ways mirrored Val's oral history. The use of the coffee set also brought the domesticity of the situation to life and the paintings out of the gallery setting and back into the domestic.

The material in the Ourstory archive questioned some of the myths about gay men and women. Dennis (interview c. 1960) talked about his choice to have anonymous one-night stands rather than a relationship out of fear of being reported to the police and arrested as a homosexual. Dennis believed it was safer not to let people know his real name or his address. He explained how the police would go through the address books of homosexuals and arrest people in them for homosexuality.

The intervention (Figure 4.16) involved printing Dennis's quote onto a Stratton Fonopad address book. In 2012, I was able to undertake an activity that Dennis felt incapable of in the 1960s. The piece was paired with Frank Lisle's *Birdcage*, referring to both police entrapment and the 1973 play *La Cage aux Folles*.



Figure 4.16 Matt Smith, *Untitled III*, 2012, Stratton Fonopad address book, ink, 24cm high, shown with Frank Lisle, *Bird Cage*, 1955, oil on canvas, Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery.

The connection between Trevor Bell's *Image of Blues* and the oral history of Graham who would die of an AIDS-related disease less than a year after his interview was based on the visual appeal of Bell's image and its potential for

intertextual readings (Figure 4.17). *Blue* was also the title of Derek Jarman's last film, which explored the artist's experience with HIV and AIDS using a soundscape and a solid blue screen. At a similar time, Robert Gober started making his sink pieces and k.d. lang shot her 1990 video *So in Love* for the *Red Hot and Blue* AIDS fundraiser, which featured her repetitively washing bedsheets. For these reasons, I decided to work with soap for the intervention.



Figure 4.17 Matt Smith, *Untitled VI*, 2012, soap, titanium dioxide, 32cm x 32cm x 6cm, Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery.

When the soap piece was completed, its visual connection with marble and the tombstones of the *Don't Die of Ignorance* public health adverts of 1987 featuring cleaving icebergs became obvious. The intervention acted both as memorial to Graham and also placed his quotes within a contemporaneous cultural context.

There were objects in the collection by gay artists, including work by John Singer Sargent, which were not included in the exhibition. What I was interested in was trying to allow visual connections rather than curatorial connections to happen wherever possible – to let visual juxtapositions do the communication. Moving on from the stereotypes and generalities of *Queering the Museum*, the use of oral histories in *Other Stories* lent the exhibition a much more intimate and personal quality. The oral history archive – while certainly not unedited or

unselected – provided a more rounded, representative portrayal of lives and loves than can often be found through objects alone. By using these contradictory histories, and using them to reinterpret the pictures from the collection, I hoped to reposition the pictures away from their curatorial norms and certainties and into the worlds of emotion, subjectivity and identity. This is a strategy endorsed by Barbara Clark Smith who ‘contest[s] the claim that the material of which an object is made – metal, plastic, wood, fabric, paper – is more basic to its nature than the social and cultural meaning that men and women have given that object’.³⁴⁵

When trying to represent the LGBT community in museums and galleries, due to the lack of visual identifiers and the paucity of queer objects, the emotive links between objects and individuals become important. *Other Stories* tried to allow the pictures to be curated and considered in a new way:

Each of the quotations and objects that Matt has used in his own works articulates moment of crystalline clarity about the speaker’s situation, and the way that an individual’s life is shaped by its encounters with the sexual habits of a society.³⁴⁶

Robert Mills has identified that this fragmented narrative may well be a new, queer, curatorial paradigm:

Queer history exhibitions will adopt a style of presentation partly modelled on scrap books and collage; in place of the representative ‘object’, they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths. Museum goers will be invited to consume their histories queerly – interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions.³⁴⁷

There are often many histories to an object and to try and reduce history to a single, unified narrative will often erase the lives of those who lived outside of that mainstream and ignores that the past has always been a collection of complex, fragmented and contradictory stories.

³⁴⁵ Barbara Clark Smith, “A Woman’s Audience: A Case of Applied Feminist Theories,” *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 68.

³⁴⁶ Perry, “Ordinary Queerness,” 7.

³⁴⁷ Mills, “Queer is Here?” 86.

4.4 Conclusions from *Queering the Museum and Other Stories*

Queering the Museum interrogated and drew out LGBT narratives from within the collections at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. By developing subjective and tangential links and developing new artworks to explore queer narratives, the exhibition highlights that LGBT stories are all around, but often only appear when you look for them. But was it queer?

As has been previously discussed, queer can be used in many ways. As a noun, it encompasses the LGBT 'community', and in this reading the subject matter explored by the interventions are queer. However, this limited reading of queer doesn't address queer's use to describe 'differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange'.³⁴⁸ The *Donkey Man* intervention at Birmingham touches on this use of the word. The piece explores the sense of being not in the mainstream that most people experience at some time. This broadening, more encompassing use of the word may be a challenge to some theorists, but it's a potentially powerful tool with which to promote empathy.



Figure 4.18 Matt Smith, *Donkey Man*, 2010, white earthenware ceramic, underglaze colour and decals, 24cm high, shown in situ, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Image © Birmingham Museums Trust

³⁴⁸ Collins Dictionary of the English Language (Collins: London, 1982)

Queer as a verb brings exciting opportunities for artists, allowing them to alter spaces, work in non-normative ways and challenge hierarchies. Unsettling categorisations, disrupting sculptures and displays in the museum and questioning the messages curators tell us have all in some way resulted in the museum being 'put in a difficult or dangerous position'. Queer – the verb – provides limitless scope for working with museums. Chiming with institutional critique and museum interventions, it can work with or without reference to LGBT narratives. It is concerned with change: re-examining the norm, repositioning the marginalised, subverting the status quo and thereby resonating with outsider status.

One of the outcomes of the exhibition has been the acquisition of two pieces from the exhibition by the museum. This takes the work from the everyday and places it within the museum collection, a place where there is a duty to preserve and care for the object. The objects have left their outsider status and been deemed important enough to represent society. In doing so, the museum curators have moved the objects 'from the secular, profane, undifferentiated realm of the commodity, and ritually transform[ed] it into a personally and socially significant object'.³⁴⁹ It could be argued that through being acquired into the collection, the objects have lost their queer status and become mainstream.

However, this acceptance is provisional as the label that now accompanies *Donkey Man* makes clear: 'Matt Smith is an activist and campaigner over the issues of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender identity. His work is highly political and can be challenging, explicit, thought-provoking and funny'.³⁵⁰ I question whether terms such as activist and campaigner would be used if I had been working with mainstream identities in the project. I worked on the project as an artist, attempting to explore the museum's systems and taxonomies to understand why queer lives were so scarce in the displays. The labelling goes on to say: 'Smith also engages with society's inability to accept difference'.³⁵¹ What I was engaging with was an organisation's inability to portray difference.

³⁴⁹ Russell W. Belk, "Collectors and Collecting," *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994) 320.

³⁵⁰ Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *Object Label* (2011).

³⁵¹ Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *Object Label*.

Society's (in)ability to accept difference was engaged with through the evaluation of the exhibition. Part of the project included an evaluation study of the exhibition conducted by Maria-Anna Tseliou, a PhD student from the Museum Studies Department at the University of Leicester. While the sample size was relatively small (31) it raised some interesting results. 45.2% of the interviewees came specifically to the museum for the exhibition and 57% self-identified as LGBT and 43% as heterosexual; when asked by the interviewer whether they had found the exhibition provocative, interviewees replied that they had found it 'thought-provoking, but not at all provocative';³⁵² and 74.2% of the interviewees said they thought it appropriate to have gay and lesbian culture represented in museums and the other 25.8% agreeing, but with some specifications. This data challenges the museum sector's reluctance to address LGBT lives.

The evaluation also brought the use of the term queer outside the academy into sharp relief. Only 22% of interviewees were aware of the reclamation and re-appropriation of the word, with over half of interviewees having negative associations with the word. This raises concerns for its use in projects that are trying to increase and widen social engagement.

Queering the Museum provoked much positive comment and generated comparatively little protest and that could be attributed to a number of reasons. Craft, with its association with the homely, the comforting and the feminine is an ideal Trojan horse for the politically-minded. Working with museum rules and bending and distorting them, rather than attempting to overtake or dominate them in an agit prop manner has allowed for much greater pushing of boundaries.

Placing a 'homonormative' filter on the work of one museum highlighted a number of issues. Firstly, any object contains many stories and histories, and curatorial decision-making decides not only which objects are collected and displayed, but also which stories relating to an object are told. Secondly, the freedom that museums allow to artists undertaking institutional critique and artist interventions could be exploited more by curators, and if museums and galleries are serious about LGBT inclusion, the collecting patterns and

³⁵² Maria-Anna Tseliou, *Queering the Museum Evaluation Report* (2011) 5.

especially the cataloguing terms used, need to change. Finally, and possibly most controversially for museums, if the objects needed to tell a history and represent society do not exist, then get an artist to make them.

Michael Petry talks about the idea of horizontal history. Rather than the dominant culture's vertical transmission of history (through family ties and education) 'queer people have had to devise alternative means of keeping their excluded history viable',³⁵³ often passing information between friends or from one same-sex lover to another. Or as Nayland Blake explains, '[q]ueer people are the only minority whose culture is not transmitted within the family... The extremely provisional nature of queer culture is the thing that makes its transmission so fragile'.³⁵⁴ Whether mainstream museums will ever seriously preserve these histories, or continue to address them sporadically and temporarily remains to be seen.

Museums are one of the few organisations placed to preserve and communicate these histories vertically, and if they can't, maybe they should be more explicit about their selected approach to history. As Hans Haacke puts it:

What museums should perhaps do is make visitors aware that this is not the only way of seeing things. That the museum – the installation, the arrangement, the collection – has a history, and that it also has an ideological baggage.³⁵⁵

Other Stories provided a good counterpoint to *Queering the Museum* through its use of the quotidian. Museums have traditionally shied away from the personal, the questioning and the intimate in favour of the authoritative and overarching. Gail Levin argues that museums 'remain burdened by a centuries-old commitment to maintain a master narrative that privileges white men',³⁵⁶ and I would add that this master narrative particularly privileges straight white men.

³⁵³ Michael Petry, "Hidden Histories: The Experience of Curating a Male Same-sex Exhibitions and the Problems Encountered," *Gender, Sexuality and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 153–154.

³⁵⁴ Nayland Blake, "Curating in a Different Light," *In A Different Light: Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, Queer Practice*, ed. Nayland Blake, Lawrence Rinder, Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995) 12.

³⁵⁵ Hans Haacke, qtd in Michael Glover, "Stop Making Sense," *Independent*, 20 January 2001, 11.

³⁵⁶ Gail Levin, "Art World Power and Women's Incognito Work: The Case of Edward and Jo Hopper," *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 102.

The success of exhibitions such as Grayson Perry's *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum,³⁵⁷ which saw Perry reinterpret the collections through his own 'personal themes and obsessions'³⁵⁸ indicates a strong desire among museum visitors for a more personal and intimate approach to museum display. The role of the museum as a didactic place to learn is changing, slowly and slightly, into a place to feel. This change in museum focus, 'the reversal of foreground and background, which draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected'³⁵⁹ chimes with feminist thinking, which has also tried to erode the opposition between intellect and emotion.³⁶⁰

Chapter 5 will further explore curatorial engagement with emotion. It focuses on historic houses that often place lived lives and family trees at the core of their interpretive strategies. In doing so, their links between objects, lives and intimacies are much more to the fore than would be usual in museum and gallery displays.

³⁵⁷ Patrick Steel "British Museum Most Visited UK attraction in 2012," *Museums Association* [12 March, 2013], 20 July 2015. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/11032013-british-museum-was-uks-most-popular-visitor-attraction-in-2012?csort=like>

³⁵⁸ Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (London: The British Museum Press, 2011) 27.

³⁵⁹ Hein, "Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective," 57.

³⁶⁰ Hein, *Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective*, 57.

5 Queering the Historic House

Unravelling the National Trust was a three-year project that I co-curated with Polly Harknett and Caitlin Heffernan. Funded by Arts Council England, the National Trust and the Headley Trust, it involved three curatorial interventions in historic properties owned by the National Trust (Nymans House and Gardens in 2012, The Vyne in 2013 and Uppark in 2014). At each house, between ten and 12 contemporary artists (including myself) were commissioned to respond to the house and its histories. These commissions resulted in new site-specific work that examined some of the multiple stories contained in the properties. Rather than impose an exhibition theme or idea, we were keen that the site itself was the core of each exhibition. We asked artists to propose interventions based on their responses to the sites and the stories related to them, revealing the multitude of histories inherent in the houses and the compression of time, allowing the properties their place as 'sites of contradiction'.³⁶¹ The artists took on a curatorial role, retelling and reinterpreting the site to reflect their interests, through visual art.

Two main things arose from this approach: the sense of a unified homogenous narrative was disrupted into multiple stories and the reliance on documented evidence was reduced. The whole *Unravelling* project could be seen as a queering of the National Trust, moving from overarching narratives and allowing diverse and discordant histories. It therefore works against the authorised heritage discourse that Smith argues 'as a source of political power has the ability to facilitate the marginalisation of groups who cannot make successful appeals to or control the expression of master cultural or social narratives'.³⁶² Mathieu argues that '[t]he dominant culture presents us with only two alternatives, co-optation (do as I do, fit in, follow the rules, conform to the strategies and conventions of dominant discourses within art or elsewhere) or marginalisation (silence and invisibility)'.³⁶³ Interventions allow this to be reversed, with the dominant culture marginalised and subaltern narratives given centre stage, at least for a limited period of time.

³⁶¹ Affrica Taylor, "A Queer Geography," *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Andy Medhurst and Sally Munt (London: Cassell, 1997) 8.

³⁶² Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) 192.

³⁶³ Mathieu, *Sexpots*, 93.

When selecting the artists, we are interested in honesty over fact and were willing to select work based on hunches, feelings and intuition as well as documented evidence. The exhibitions therefore occupy a place somewhere between historical accuracy and storytelling. This was an active decision, since if we rely solely on ‘documented accuracy’, we are confined to a narrow and selected view of history.³⁶⁴

Two of the three National Trust properties provided the opportunity to work with gay male histories and provide practical case studies for queering historic houses. The interventions I produced for Nymans and The Vyne queered those sites in the double method previously described: both disrupting the normative curatorial methods and also exploring LGBT histories. These interventions: *Piccadilly 1830* at Nymans and *The Gift/Dandy* at The Vyne, allowed me to interrogate how historic houses deal with queer histories and the complexities that this might entail.

Historic houses that are open to the public occupy an odd position. Sites that have usually been used by successive generations over many years are preserved at a specific moment in time – what were (mostly) private spaces have become open to public gaze. The multiplicity and complexity of the many lives lived in historic houses means that they hold traces of innumerable, different individual experiences. These include class and economic difference, gender difference (often mapped by gendered rooms such as the parlour and the dining room), the effects of colonialism and international trade and collecting. These multiple stories are somehow condensed into a ‘visitor experience’ of the house as it is presented today.

Alison Oram argues, that the ‘presentation of historic houses in Britain generally reflects dominant ideas about the national past, and mobilises family narratives about aristocracy, class, lineage and family in order to forge a sense of stability and national identity’.³⁶⁵ This presentation is undertaken by the house custodians who choose what is and is not suitable for public consumption. With a few notable exceptions, non-normative sexuality is seldom included in that mix. This creates an interesting dichotomy, since at the heart of most visitor

³⁶⁴ See Chapter 4, Queering Museums and Galleries.

³⁶⁵ Alison Oram, “Sexuality in Heterotopias: Time, Space and Love Between Women in the Historic House,” *Women’s History Review*, Vol 21, No. 4, (Sept. 2012) 533.

guides is the family tree that records the sexual relationships and procreation of members of the family, tracing the inheritance of the house through the generations and thereby making reproduction and heteronormativity a core part of the curatorial narrative. The family tree also presents a very fixed and clean history of heterosexuality, recording marriages and divorces. Not only do they provide a sanitised history of heterosexual intimacies, they also usually silence all same-sex relationships, which until recently could not be recorded through marriage or civil partnerships and so are not included in the family tree.

Oram argues that in order to unpack historic house sites, 'it is useful to engage Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia", which can be broadly defined as a space of otherness and differences'.³⁶⁶ Foucault suggests, '[h]eterotopias are most often linked to slices of time'³⁶⁷ and are 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces... that are in themselves incompatible'.³⁶⁸

The reality of historic houses as sites of constant change and the expectation that they can be historically 'fixed' creates a tension at the heart of these sites. These heterotopias or 'other spaces' are sites that also 'contain alternative and contrary narratives of the past'³⁶⁹ and we are at an interesting time in their interpretation. The transition of Britain from its repression of LGBT histories under Clause 28 to its recent introduction of same-sex marriage has seen a vast shift in the rights and visibility of sexual minorities. This shift is also registering in historic houses, which is unsurprising since 'a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion'.³⁷⁰ However, this shift is not without complexity. Both Nymans and The Vyne have historic links to individuals who we would now define as queer. Each house involved men who lived lives that ran in contradiction to social norms, and did so openly in society. I found with both houses that the custodians, for many reasons, placed a heteronormative filter over these lives.

³⁶⁶ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 535.

³⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," reprinted in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London: Routledge, 1998) 239.

³⁶⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces, 241.

³⁶⁹ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 537.

³⁷⁰ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 241.

However, this is not surprising. Oram³⁷¹ makes a convincing point about Shibden Hall, the former home of Anne Lister in West Yorkshire. In the car park where visitors enter the site are information boards proclaiming: 'Welcome to Shibden – a family home from 1420 to 1933 and still a place for the whole family to enjoy today'.³⁷² This can be read as a linking of a word (family) being used in two different ways (contemporary nuclear family group with historical hereditary property) but is more likely to be read as a description of a property that was a site of nuclear 'family' norms. The reality of the Lister family who owned the property was that they rarely married and had few children, '[t]aking the two hundred year period until 1933 when the last John Lister died and the property passed into public ownership...(there were) a mere thirty-two years out of two hundred... when children under the age of eighteen lived in the house'.³⁷³ Oram goes on to argue that what 'family' meant to the Listers was 'sibling-based households rather than marital partnerships, celibacy and same-sex relationships rather than heterosexuality and a dearth of children rather than a secure succession'.³⁷⁴ Rather than discussing the changing role of family and relationships over time, the (false) impression given by the information boards is of stable, nuclear, heterosexual families.

Shibden does talk about Anne Lister's lesbianism and refusal to comply with expected gender codes. However, even here, Oram argues that '[s]he is cast as an interesting (and now acceptable) anomaly, rather than as a critique of the meanings of family and sexuality in public history'.³⁷⁵

Affrica Taylor argues that heterotopias are '[a]lways sites of contradiction, they can reflect an image of a perfect world, but at the same time they also reconfigure it'.³⁷⁶ It would appear, from Shibden Hall, and as we will see, Nymans, that this reconfiguration collapses a multitude of family and sexual relationships into conservative contemporary notions of what 'family life' is expected to be.

³⁷¹ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 541–542.

³⁷² Information boards currently extant (2009–10) at both entrances to the estate, qtd in Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias." 540.

³⁷³ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 540.

³⁷⁴ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 541.

³⁷⁵ Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopias," 542.

³⁷⁶ Taylor, "A Queer Geography," 8.

5.1 Nymans House and Gardens

Nymans is in the High Weald in Sussex and benefits from a particular microclimate, making it ideal for horticulture. It was with this in mind that Ludwig Messel bought the country estate in 1890 and began developing one of the foremost English gardens. Ludwig was born in Germany and moved to England in 1868, swiftly moving up from being a clerk to setting up his own stockbroking firm. Purchasing Nymans was seen as a way of sealing his position in English society, a trajectory that would see his great-grandson become the Queen's brother-in-law when he married Princess Margaret.

The house that Ludwig Messel bought was an early Victorian villa which he added to and modified. However, this wasn't to the taste of his daughter-in-law, Maud, who, on inheriting the house, rebuilt it as a "medieval" manor house 'begun in the 14th century and added to intermittently till Tudor times'.³⁷⁷ Maud made her way around the Cotswolds picking up historic architectural fragments and incorporating them into her new vision, one she shared with husband Leonard and their three children: Linley, Anne and Oliver.

In 1947, as a result of warming a frozen pipe with a blow lamp, a plumber managed to set fire to the house, leaving most of it in ruins and providing the 'ruined house with an even greater air of romantic antiquity'.³⁷⁸ This has left the property with a haunting quality: a small, habitable core of a building within much larger ruins.

Going around the house, there is an uneasy mix of elderly isolation and camp theatricality. The house was last lived in by Anne Messel who moved there when she was widowed and the house is preserved as it was during her final days. Traces of the solitary existence of this elderly woman still pervade the house. In contrast, there is a television set that was customised by her brother, the stage designer Oliver Messel, into a theatre with red curtains and tasseling.

³⁷⁷ Christopher Hussey, architectural writer for *Country Life*, qtd in *Nymans*, Visitor Guide, (Swindon: The National Trust, 2006) 10.

³⁷⁸ *Nymans*, 10.



Figure 5.1 Oliver Messel, customised television, c. 1950, Nymans House and Gardens.
Image courtesy of Anthony Armstong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon.

I was interested in somehow collapsing time between Anne's solitary final days and the period when Nymans was a site for make-believe, dressing-up, socialising and play, a time alluded to by her brother's customised television.

Anne and Oliver and their brother, Linley are discussed in the 2007 guidebook, *The Nymans Story*. Anne and Linley were both married twice. Both Linley's marriages and his divorce are written about in a paragraph in the guidebook.³⁷⁹ Anne's first marriage is covered in a paragraph and her divorce and second marriage gets its own section and two paragraphs. Their brother Oliver gets three paragraphs devoted to him. All three paragraphs talk about Oliver's professional career as a theatre and interior designer and his connections with other members of the family. The wider reality is that Oliver had a very public relationship with another man, Vagn Riis-Hansen, who was also his business partner, for nearly 30 years. Anne and Linley's (heterosexual) relationships are therefore treated very differently in the Nymans guidebook compared to Oliver and Vagn's (gay) relationship, which is not mentioned.

Oliver's personal life and relationship with Vagn has been dealt with in different ways by different authors. The catalogue to accompany the Oliver Messel retrospective exhibition at the V&A's Theatre Museum in 1983 states: 'so it is natural that Messel, with his flair for handiwork, his ability to turn things into other more exotic things, should have turned to making masks. This was probably at much the same time he found that he was a homosexual'.³⁸⁰ Whether there is an implied link between mask making and being a homosexual is unclear, but the central importance of Vagn in Oliver's life is noted in the biographical outline in the same catalogue.³⁸¹ Of 29 entries, 22 relate to his career and seven to his personal life, these being:

- 1904 born the second son of Lt.-Col. Leonard Messel, OBE, TD., Eton.
- 1922 Lives at Lancaster Gate.
- 1946 Moves to Pelham Place, SW7, and meets Vagn Riis-Hansen who becomes his manager and friend.
- 1956 Makes first visit to Barbados.
- 1966 Moves to Barbados...

³⁷⁹ Dr Katy Brown, *The Nymans Story: The Messel Family* (The National Trust, 2007) 19.

³⁸⁰ Cecil Beaton, Christopher Fry, Peter Glenville, Stanley Hall, R. Myerscough-Walker, Roger Pinkham (ed.), Sybil Rosenfeld, Carl Toms and Rosemary Vercoe, "Oliver Messel and the Theatre," *Oliver Messel, An Exhibition Held at the Theatre Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum 22 June–30 October 1983*, ed. Roger Pinkham (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983) 18.

³⁸¹ Roger Pinkham, "Biographical Outline," *Oliver Messel*, 15.

1977 Vagn Riis-Hansen dies.

1978 Messel dies of a heart attack.

Although two out of the seven personal biographical details concern Vagn, and that we have been told that Oliver was gay, Vagn is still presented as a 'manager and friend'.³⁸²

Three years later, in his biography of Oliver, Charles Castle refers to Vagn as 'the man who was to become his [Oliver's] life-long companion and administrator'³⁸³ and just to add confusion over what this might mean, promptly adds that Vagn has previously 'married a young Scottish actress, Zöe Gordon... [who] died tragically of a brain tumour, and he settled down with Oliver, sharing a relationship that endured for thirty years, until his death.'³⁸⁴

Castle includes a quote from Emlyn William, a friend of the two men, about Oliver and Vagn's domestic arrangements: 'Oliver would gently slip to the floor and lie on his back; nothing was interrupted. Then Vagn would say gruffly, "Oliver you silly bugger." He was a Dane who did not mince his English. "I'm fine Vagnie dear, just relaxing"'.³⁸⁵

More recently, Oliver's nephew, Linley's son Thomas Messel, published a book called *Oliver Messel: In the Theatre of Design*.³⁸⁶ He describes the relationship between Oliver and Vagn as: 'a devoted friendship, lasting twenty-seven years until Vagn's death. As Oliver's companion, Vagn, affectionately known as "The Great Dane," acted as his manager and organized his life both in their London home, 17 Pelham Place, and later in Barbados, where they moved in 1966'.³⁸⁷ During the course of the book, Vagn's status moves from 'companion' to 'partner'.³⁸⁸

³⁸² Pinkham, "Biographical Outline," 15.

³⁸³ Charles Castle, *Oliver Messel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) 124.

³⁸⁴ Castle, *Oliver Messel*, 124.

³⁸⁵ Castle, *Oliver Messel*, 125.

³⁸⁶ Thomas Messel, *Oliver Messel: In the Theatre of Design*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2011) 25.

³⁸⁷ Messel, *Oliver Messel*, 25.

³⁸⁸ Messel, *Oliver Messel*, 146.

Evelyn, the cook at their house in Barbados, is quoted in the Castle book discussing the two men's separate bedrooms, describing Oliver's as 'a terrible mess'³⁸⁹ whereas Vagn's was 'beautifully neat and tidy'.³⁹⁰ Again, this leaves us in question as to the relationship, but since homosexuality in Barbados is still illegal today, punishable with a life sentence, it would seem prudent to keep some semblance of celibacy or asexuality intact.

The importance of Vagn, and also Nymans, in Oliver's affections is demonstrated in his wish that '[f]ollowing his [Oliver's] meticulous instructions, his and Vagn's ashes were buried together at Nymans, in the walled garden which he had loved so much from childhood'.³⁹¹ As in the case of Cardinal Newman and Father Ambrose (discussed in Chapter 4) it is through their final wishes that, in a period before legal acknowledgement through civil partnerships and same-sex marriage, the emotional bonds between two men were often documented. As in the case of Newman, this leaves us in a difficult position. Does labelling the two men as lovers implicate us in a retrospective outing of them, or is it a reasonable assumption based on the information we have? Certainly, terms like 'partner' have enough ambiguity to ensure no one is clear. This lack of clarity raises interesting and difficult questions for curators and visitors alike, and it is possibly unsurprising that the interpretation provided in the *Nymans* guidebook bypassed their relationship completely, excluding and erasing the relationship between these two men. However, this is not a neutral act.

Unravelling Nymans was being planned at the same time as a temporary exhibition on the work of Oliver Messel was held at the house. In conversation, one of the house team mentioned that there had been a complaint from a visitor that Oliver's sexuality had been ignored and this was a concern for them. At the same time, I was told by another member of staff that we were not allowed to say that Oliver was gay. When asked why, I was told that it might cause offence to the family who are still actively involved with the property. There is something particularly challenging and poignant about omitting or erasing these

³⁸⁹ Castle, *Oliver Messel*, 251.

³⁹⁰ Castle, *Oliver Messel*, 251

³⁹¹ Messel, *Oliver Messel*, 26.

relationships from domestic spaces – one of the few spaces where same-sex desire could be acted out safely before it was decriminalised in Britain in 1967. I was therefore interested in how an intervention in the house could speak of this relationship while negotiating the politics of the house. As previously mentioned, we were interested in the house because of the theatricality of Oliver's designs, so it seemed sensible to start looking at the Messel archive held at the V&A. I was particularly interested in the costume that Oliver designed for the Russian dancer Serge Lifar to wear in Charles B. Cochran's *1930 Revue* that was performed at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, on 4 March and the London Pavilion on 27 March 1930 (Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2 Serge Lifar dressed in Oliver Messel's costume of a highlander in *Piccadilly 1830, The Stage*.

There were numerous reasons why this costume for a Highlander interested me. It had been worn on stage in 1930 by the dancer Serge Lifar, Diaghilev's one-time lover.³⁹² Oliver obviously had an affinity for it since he had it either 'remade or adapted'³⁹³ so that he could wear it to a party given by Daisy Fellowes, the editor-in-chief of French *Harper's Bazaar*. I was also drawn to its camp theatricality, a pastiche of masculinity: it takes military dress and exaggerates it to the point of parody, the feather headpiece owing more to cabaret and show girls than the military.

Messel's original costume for *Piccadilly 1830* has already set up a visual confusion of the dancer's masculinity (Figures 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5). By replacing a bearskin with ostrich feathers, the norms of military dress were questioned. Likewise, the compressing of two dates in one location – the Piccadilly of 1830 as a haunt for upper-class men was 'a distant cry from what [it] had become by 1930... [a]longside the bespoke Savile Row tailoring trade... it was also known as a cruising ground for the working-class Dilly Boys'.³⁹⁴ It is unlikely that Messel would not have been aware of Piccadilly's reputation in 1930 and that this could have acted as an in-joke for those in the know, fusing the dandy's adoption of military dress with a site known for casual sex.

The original costume is still extant in the V&A's store at Blythe House and I booked in to visit it. As with much theatrical costume, materials were chosen to create a visual impression from a distance rather than slavishly follow an original.

³⁹² Luke Jennings, "Sergei Diaghilev: First Lord of the Dance," *Observer*, 12 Sept. 2010. 24 May 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/sep/12/sergei-diaghilev-and-the-ballets-russes>

³⁹³ *Victoria and Albert Museum Collections Database*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 24 May 2013. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O133534/theatre-costume-messel-oliver-hilary/>

³⁹⁴ Paul Jobling, 'A Twitch on the Thread: Oliver Messel between Past and Present,' *Unravelling Nymans* (Hove: Unravelling Arts, 2012) 52.



Figure 5.3 Oliver Messel, *Highlander Jacket*, 1930, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Number S.500: 1/12-2006.



Figure 5.4 Oliver Messel, *Highlander Jacket (detail)*, 1930, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Number S.500: 1/12-2006.



Figure 5.5 Oliver Messel, *Highlander Hat*, 1930, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Number S.500: 1/12-2006.

I was interested in how this costume could be used as a jumping-off point to discuss Oliver’s sexuality and relationship with Vagn, how it could speak to the silence that currently existed at the property.

Beth Lord argues that heterotopias are spaces of difference ‘in which ordinary cultural emplacements are brought together and represented, contested, and reversed’³⁹⁵ and that ‘in presenting an illusory version of human life or nature they question and contest the “real” order of things’.³⁹⁶ It is this reframing of the ‘real’, a reframing that selects the narratives to tell that enables curators to provide reductionist interpretations of the complex histories of a historic house. Unlike the museum, whose heterotopic status in part relies on representing ‘objects *in their difference* from the conceptual orders in which those objects would normally be understood’,³⁹⁷ the historic house will often present objects in the context developed by their original owners. The historic house as a heterotopia relies more on a dynamic lived environment being presented as a

³⁹⁵ Beth Lord, “Foucault’s Museum: Difference, Representation, and Genealogy,” *Museum and Society*, Vol 4 No 1 (Mar. 2006) 3.

³⁹⁶ Lord, “Foucault’s Museum,” 3.

³⁹⁷ Lord, ‘Foucault’s Museum,’ 5.

static space and the compression and juxtaposition of multiple times to be experienced in a single visit. It was this temporal aspect of Foucault's definition of a heterotopia that interested me: the bringing 'together of disparate objects from different times in a single space that attempts to enclose the totality of time'.³⁹⁸ Using one installation, I was aiming to link three separate times: Anne Messel's time as a widow at the house, Oliver Messel in his 1930s heyday, and Piccadilly of 1830.

Jack Halberstam argues that there is a different, 'a queer and fluid form of knowing, that operates independently of coherence or linear narrative or progression... [which in]... the absence of memory or the absence of wisdom – leads to a new form of knowing'.³⁹⁹ The suppression of information allows for gaps in histories and opens up 'an alternative mode of knowing, one that resists the positivism of memory projects and refuses a straight and Oedipal logic for understanding the transmission of ideas'.⁴⁰⁰ This queer form of knowing might, in part, account for my desire to link these three separate historical times.

It could be argued that this merging of three separate times into an event that never happened is a queering of history. Foucault stated that '[d]iscontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove it from history'.⁴⁰¹ Building on this, John Potvin suggests that:

Modernist linear and chronological narratives which systematically occlude the possibility of that which threatens to make a mess of it all, or that which emerges as foreign and from outside its rigorous parameters, distinguish the very real and material experiences of otherness. The narratives of difference are always and by default must be differed, revealed only partially and gradually over time. Modernist history and historiography has made locating difference purposefully opaque, but not completely invisible or unintelligible.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Lord, 'Foucault's Museum,' 3.

³⁹⁹ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 54.

⁴⁰⁰ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 69.

⁴⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 119.

⁴⁰² John Potvin, "The Velvet Masquerade: Fashion, Interior Design and the Furnished Body," *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*, eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 11.

It therefore seems appropriate that to unpick queer histories, chronological narratives should be confused, made unintelligible and a space given centre-stage to the narratives of difference.

I hand-cut and sewed the jacket in *Piccadilly 1830*. I then embellished it with thousands of mirror backed glass beads, each one individually sewn on. This labour-intensive process involved repetition over a long period of time, and during the making process, I entered into polychronic time. Marcia Tucker argues that unlike the 'evolutionary, progressive, monochronic sense of time that informs the high art tradition',⁴⁰³ polychronic time, which is 'experienced in the long and complex processes of embroidery, lace-making, knitting and quilting... weaves the past and present together'⁴⁰⁴ and through these objects 'communal values and practices are brought forward into the present'.⁴⁰⁵

The process of beading not only allowed for the connection of disassociated points in time, but also allowed for reflection on the lives of both men. Tami Katz-Freiman has suggested that '[l]ike other labour-intensive processes, the process of beading inevitably marks the passage of time it has thus been employed by numerous artists, who create rituals of mourning culminating in beauty-infused products'.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Tucker, *A Labor of Love*, 68.

⁴⁰⁴ Tucker, *A Labor of Love*, 68.

⁴⁰⁵ Tucker, *A Labor of Love*, 68.

⁴⁰⁶ Katz-Freiman, *BoysCraft*, 153.

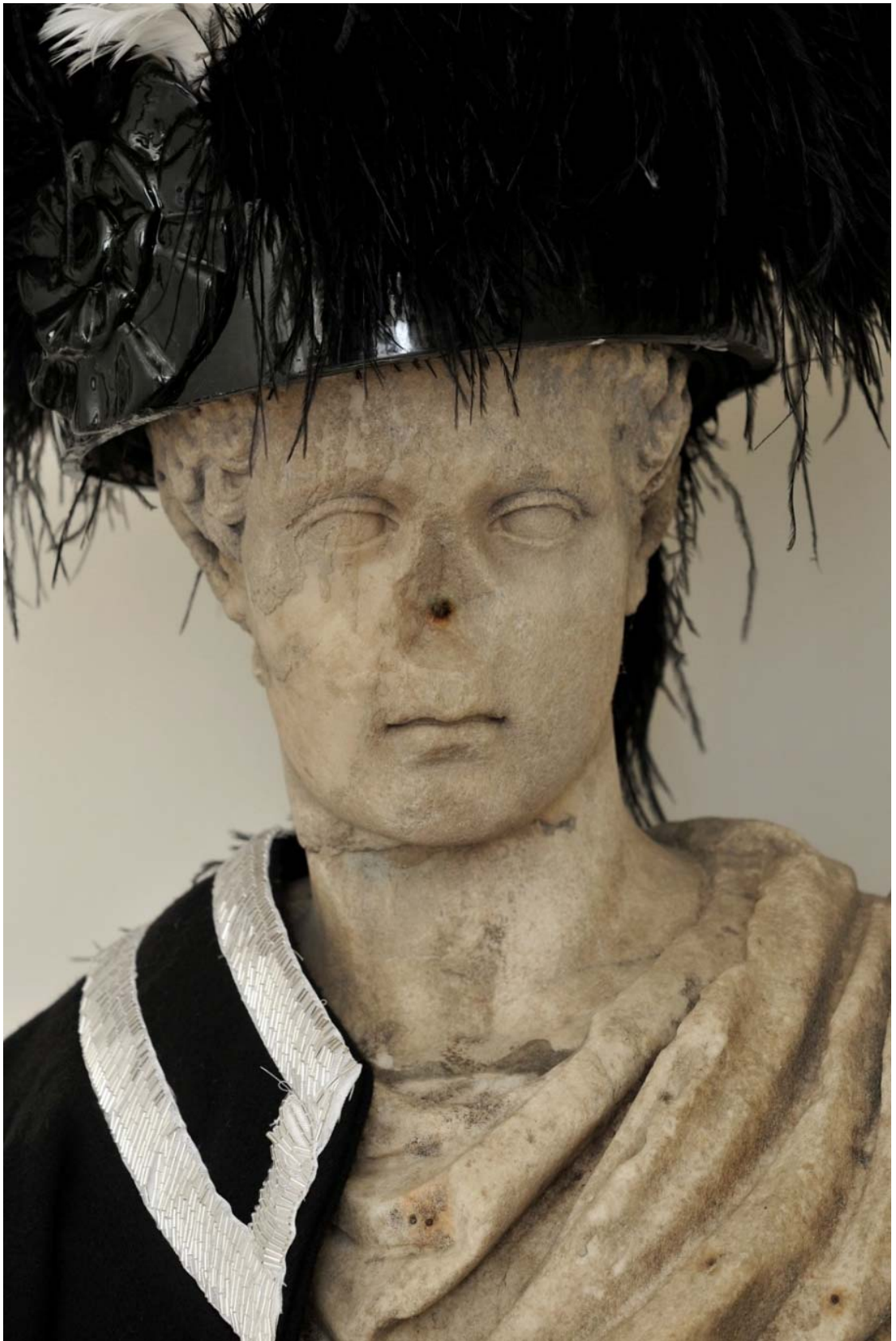


Figure 5.6 Matt Smith, *Piccadilly 1830*, 2012, turkey and ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads, dimensions variable, Nymans House and Gardens.

In my installation, the jacket was paired with an oversized feather bearskin. The cage and feathers were commissioned from a feather wholesaler who undertakes work for the Ministry of Defence. Partly to match the location of the finished work, but also to exaggerate the 'campy' stage aspect of the finished installation, I decided to enlarge the height of the hat which involved commissioning a custom-made cage.

The bearskin band and rosette were made out of ceramic. The feathers and wool of the intervention are relatively fragile materials, prone to decay. In contrast, the ceramic band and rosette, unless smashed, provided an almost permanent element to the intervention. I was drawn to the idea of a future curator trying to include a ceramic band sewn onto a metal cage into the normative, and heteronormative, interpretation of the house.

As Messel has replaced bearskin with ostrich feathers, I replaced the cotton braiding with mirrored beads. Both these substitutions 'betray many of the characteristics and tropes of the Camp sensibility that Susan Sontag enumerated in her seminal essay of 1964, namely: exaggeration, artifice, aestheticism.'⁴⁰⁷

The use of camp is fitting. Sontag suggests that, 'Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgement. Camp doesn't reverse things. It doesn't argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards'.⁴⁰⁸ Sontag is suggesting that camp allows a space for difference to exist. Here, the overlap between camp as a means of opening up debate and questioning norms acts in a similar manner to artist interventions. To reduce the intervention down to a simple 'outing' of Oliver Messel is to miss the point. The intervention plays with those subtle sleight of hands that shine light on how fragile performances of masculinity are: a feather too high turns military butch into showgirl effeminacy.

I first saw a photograph of Oliver Messel at an exhibition at Nymans a few years before the exhibition. It was a similar sleight of hand, a smile, a wink in that

⁴⁰⁷ Jobling, "A Twitch on the Thread," 54.

⁴⁰⁸ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," (1964) *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 108–111 and 117.

image that signalled to me that Oliver was other, was possibly gay. As Aaron Betsky posits, 'queer men put on a show. It was show that presented them first of all to themselves, validating their existence in a real place, and then to others who shared their tastes, so that they might recognize each other, and, finally and defiantly, to the world'.⁴⁰⁹ Curatorial silence does not always erase queer histories. In a similar way in which objects can be read as queer, attuned visitors can sometimes intuitively read that something queer may be going on within historic houses. If these queer histories are not being discussed by the institution, it suggests to the visually aware visitor that queer lives (and possibly visitors) are unwelcome, or at least should be silent or silenced.



Figure 5.8 Anthony Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon, *Photograph of Oliver Messel*, date unknown. Image courtesy of Anthony Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon.

⁴⁰⁹ Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1997) 6–7.



Figure 5.7 Matt Smith, *Piccadilly 1830*, 2012, Turkey and ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads, dimensions variable, Nymans House and Gardens.

The jacket and bearskin were placed on an existing Roman sculpture *The Antique Youth* – popularly known as the herm – at the property. The interaction between the new intervention and the existing object was a key consideration, since ‘juxtaposition queerly challenges and contests both accepted codes and a system of values that implies oppression and silencing, not only within sexuality but also within cultural institutions’.⁴¹⁰ This juxtaposition directly responded to the institutional silencing that was in place at Nymans.

The intervention thereby allowed previously silenced histories to be spoken of. Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), argues for the need to take affect into account when exploring gay and lesbian history which ‘demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism – all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive’.⁴¹¹ She goes on to suggest that both artistic representations and oral histories have value as affective transmitters.

As previously mentioned, *Piccadilly 1830* aimed to compress the time between when Oliver first wore the jacket and when his sister lived at the house, merging a high point for Oliver and a low point for Anne. By the time Anne moved to Nymans, both Oliver’s relationship with Vagn and Anne’s with the Earl of Rosse had ended, since they had both been widowed. Artwork and site came together when the piece was placed in location on the *The Antique Youth*. The sculpture, which has lost its nose and its genitals, lends the intervention a sense of the cadaverous as well as commenting on the de-sexing of the original designer: signposting both something queer and a memento mori. Adair argues that:

Many historic sites and house museums carry on the tradition of concealing and denying the gayness of the men who have had so much to do with the preservation of those places – promulgating what a gay preservationist with the National Trust calls the “bachelor uncle” description of those men.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Mathieu, *Sexpots*, 132.

⁴¹¹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 241.

⁴¹² Adair, “House Museums or Walk-in Closets?” 265.

It is to the credit of the house team at Nymans that, following the *Unravelling Nymans* exhibition, Vagn was put on the Messel family tree and linked to Oliver Messel, unravelling his status as a “bachelor uncle”.

6.2 The Vyne

The second intervention in a historic house took place at The Vyne, a large, adapted Tudor property near Basingstoke. Unlike Nymans, which has a relatively short history and whose interpretation is specifically focused on the period when the last resident lived there, The Vyne presents the visitor with numerous histories ranging from the 1500s to the 1950s. The slicing of time⁴¹³ at The Vyne therefore becomes that much more complex to navigate.

The history I chose to work with was that of John Chute (1701–76), who was the owner of The Vyne between 1754 and 1776. According to the guidebook:

John Chute as the youngest of Edward Chute's ten children and, as he was unlikely to inherit the family estates, spent many years travelling in Italy... He was never to marry, but surrounded himself with younger men, including his handsome, wealthy and deaf cousin, Francis Whithead... In Italy the two inseparable cousins were called the "Chutheads".⁴¹⁴

This is an odd paragraph and it is unclear what we are meant to make of it. It is hard to think that linking his unmarried status with handsome younger men and can anything but a thinly veiled indication that something queer is going on. Raymond Bentman is more explicit, arguing that 'John Chute and Francis Whithead made no secret of their intimacy. They were inseparable, they referred to themselves as "the Chutes" or "the Whitheads" and their friends called them "the Chuteheads." Chute referred to Whithead as "my other half"'.⁴¹⁵ The unpicking here becomes difficult. Bentman seems sure that Chute and Whithead were a couple but goes on to state:

We may debate what to call these men and we will never know what they did in bed. But when we survey all the information, the explanation that makes the most sense of the material is that these men were strongly

⁴¹³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 239.

⁴¹⁴ Maurice Howard, *The Vyne* (Swindon: The National Trust, 2010) 53.

⁴¹⁵ Raymond Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997) 277.

interested in other males for sexual and emotional gratification and that they formed some kind of group around this common interest.⁴¹⁶

Francis Whithead died in his early thirties, about ten years after he and John Chute met Horace Walpole in Florence on the Grand Tour and it is the relationship between Chute and Walpole that I was interested in exploring. We are fortunate that Horace Walpole was one of the most prodigious letter writers of the eighteenth century, and that provides us with insight into the specific intimacies between these two men.



Figure 5.9 Johann Heinrich Müntz, *John Chute (detail)*, The Vyne, National Trust Picture Library. ©National Trust Images/John Hammond

⁴¹⁶ Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," 278.



Figure 5.10 George Perfect Harding, *Horace Walpole* (detail), after *Portrait of Horace Walpole in his Library*, Johann Heinrich Müntz, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. G. Haggerty, *Walpole's Letters, Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2001) 5. Print. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

The use of the term 'other half' was also used by Walpole, many years after Chute used it to describe Whithead. This time, it was used when Walpole wrote following the death of John Chute: 'I am lamenting myself, not him! – no I am lamenting my other self. Half is gone; the other remains solitary'.⁴¹⁷ While I am not arguing that this term is being used to signify a queer sexual relationship, it does suggest a strong homosocial intimacy. Walpole's letters have been used

⁴¹⁷ Horace Walpole, "Letter dated 27 May 1776," qtd in George E. Haggerty, *Horace Walpole's Letters: Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2011) 14.

to argue on one hand that Walpole was a homosexual⁴¹⁸ and on the other that he was celibate and confined himself to epistolary relationships with both men and women.⁴¹⁹ John Iddon, on the subject of Horace Walpole in the guidebook for Strawberry Hill, writes: '[r]eal wives, however, were not his [Walpole's] orientation. As Wilmarth Lewis put it "the feminine part of his nature was strong" and he had a number of close urbane and effeminate bachelor friends such as Chute and Gray'.⁴²⁰

John Chute certainly displays mannerisms that would today be linked to gay culture, particularly gender reversal, as this excerpt from a letter to Walpole about a Raphael painting in Rome makes clear: '[s]uch a Christ, as beautiful, as graceful, and we may suppose, if his petticoats were off, as well made as his elder brother of the Belvidere'.⁴²¹ Similar effeminacy in Walpole did not go unnoticed. A contemporary, George Hardinge referred to Walpole's 'effeminacy of manner'⁴²² and added 'some of his friends were as effeminate in appearance and in manner as himself and were as witty. Of these I remember two, Mr. Chute and Mr. George Montagu. But others had effeminacy alone to recommend them'.⁴²³ That this effeminacy was not socially acceptable becomes clear in William Guthrie's attack on Walpole in 1764. Although in the writing, Guthrie pretends to not know the recipient of the attack, Bentman asserts that he did. Guthrie writes:

This *abuse* it would be more unpardonable to reply to, or retort, since there is a weakness and an effeminacy in it... The feeble tone of the expression, and the passionate fondness with which the *personal* qualities of the officer in question are continually dwelt on would almost tempt one to imagine, that his arrow came forth from a female quiver, but as it wants both the true delivery and lively imagination which characterized a lady's pen, the attack must have been from a neutral quarter, from a being between both, neither totally male or female... by

⁴¹⁸ Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," 278.

⁴¹⁹ George E. Haggerty, *Horace Walpole's Letters, Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2001) 111.

⁴²⁰ John Iddon, *Strawberry Hill & Horace Walpole: Essential Guide* (London: Scala, 2011) 29.

⁴²¹ Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," 277.

⁴²² George Hardinge qtd in Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," 277.

⁴²³ George Hardinge qtd in Bentman, "Horace Walpole's Forbidden Passion," 277.

nature maleish, by disposition female... that it would very much puzzle a common observer to assign to him to his true sex...⁴²⁴

This gives us an insight into the social expectations of male and female gender norms and the policing of their transgression. George Haggerty suggests that we concentrate less of what might be happening sexually and instead think ‘about the bachelorism, amicability, intimacy, and wit, then we will start to understand this man [Walpole] and his circle’.⁴²⁵ While I agree with Haggerty, I think there is enough evidence of non-conformity to create tentative, historical links between Chute and Walpole and what we would now call queer behaviour.

Walpole’s letters therefore give us a key insight into the early days of queer subculture (Walpole and Chute met in 1740), since it has been argued by Alan Bray, here quoted by Annamarie Jagose, that:

the origins of modern homosexuality can be discerned... at the close of the 17th century, with the emergence of an urban homosexual subculture that sprang up around ... “molly houses” ...[where] men with sexual interests in other men gathered, but not necessarily for sex. For although “sex was the root of the matter... it was as likely to be expressed in drinking together, in flirting and gossip and in a circle of friends as in actual liaisons”⁴²⁶

Bray therefore contradicts Foucault’s assertion that the move from homosexuality being an act ‘to which anyone might succumb’⁴²⁷ into ‘a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself’⁴²⁸ happened around 1870. Bray, and the letters of Horace Walpole indicate that this non-normative, or queer, way of being and shared sensibility was happening from the later 1600s onwards. This would open up the potential to use contemporary identity terms to describe historical intimacies from at least the eighteenth century.

What I was particularly interested in at The Vyne, though, was how this homosexual subculture responded to and adapted their houses. During their 36-

⁴²⁴ William Guthrie, qtd in Bentman, “Horace Walpole’s Forbidden Passion,” 282.

⁴²⁵ Heggarty, “Horace Walpole’s Letters,” 13.

⁴²⁶ Alan Bray, qtd in Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 12.

⁴²⁷ Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 11.

⁴²⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

year friendship/relationship Walpole and Chute continually sought to influence and adapt their own and each other's properties and the contents of those properties. Peter McNeil has argued that 'most contemporary evidence [of historical same-sex activity] is based on investigations of tavern-like brothels such as the infamous "Mother Clap's Molly House" and parks, latrines and servant's quarters, the sites described in court transcripts constitute a form of spatial "low life"'.⁴²⁹ However, Walpole and Chute, along with some other notable exceptions including William Beckford, provide us with a unique insight into how queer lives were being lived in a domestic setting, largely owing to the occupiers' financial independence, which allowed them greater freedom in society.

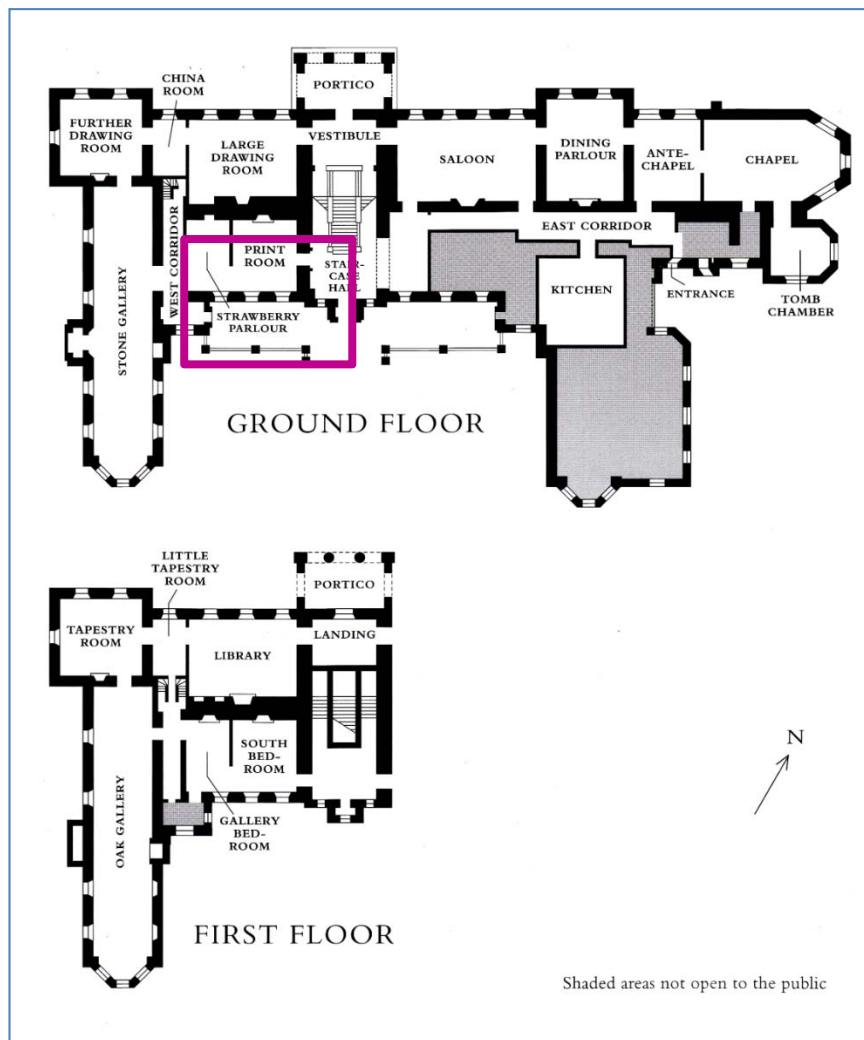


Figure 5.11 Amended plan of The Vyne highlighting Walpole's allocated rooms. Original plan M. Howard, *The Vyne* (Swindon: The National Trust, 2010) np. Print.

⁴²⁹ Peter McNeil, 'Crafting Queer Spaces: Privacy and Posturing,' *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity* eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 22-23.

On the ground floor of The Vyne is a room now called the Print Room, which was named the 'Strawberry Parlour' by John Chute in honour of the 'Committee of Taste'. According to *The Vyne* guidebook, '[i]t is possible Walpole used this and the neighbouring room when he was John's guest here.' As can be seen from the plan of the house (Figure 5.11), this places Walpole at the very heart of the house. It is difficult to know what to make of this – Walpole is placed centrally in the house, but with his sleeping accommodation on the ground floor, away from the other bedrooms on the first floor.

Alongside Richard Bentley, Walpole and Chute had formed the 'Committee of Taste', which supervised the enlargement and decoration of Walpole's villa, Strawberry Hill. Taste occupies a very specific place here; according to Haggarty 'taste became a code for a certain mode of shared sensibility that was often understood to suggest something about sexual predilection, or at least qualified masculinity'.⁴³⁰ Heggarty suggested that:

Walpole and his closest friends... understood taste as a definitive arbiter, something that they shared and that defined them. Like the later concept of identity, taste, for Walpole and his friends, is a shared predilection for the artistically sophisticated, for the idiosyncratic, for the one item or series of items that can help to make Strawberry Hill a retreat worthy of its creator.⁴³¹

Heggarty is here linking a domestic visual sensibility with identity politics. Therefore, I would argue that to understand how these men self-identified, we need to look at how they used, decorated and filled their homes as the two are intrinsically linked. To continue the conflation started by Heggarty, these are queer men and they designed queer houses. I was interested in using two more contemporary queer visual strategies: camp and kitsch within the interventions at The Vyne.

There are visual overlaps between The Vyne and Strawberry Hill, and the influence of the two men on each other is clear when you compare the painted

⁴³⁰ Heggarty, "Horace Walpole's Letters," 15.

⁴³¹ Heggarty, "Horace Walpole's Letters," 73.

vaulting in the Chapel at The Vyne (Figure 5.12) with the moulded ceiling in the Gallery at Strawberry Hill (Figure 5.13).



Figure 5.12 (left)

The Chapel at The Vyne. M. Howard, *The Vyne* (Swindon: The National Trust, 2010) np. Print. ©NT/Richard Holttum



Figure 5.13 (right)

The Gallery at Strawberry Hill. J. Iddon, *Strawberry Hill & Horace Walpole: Essential Guide* (London: Scala, 2011) Print.

This visual use of the gothic was a core element of Walpole's developments at Strawberry Hill, but his love of gothic was not solely visual. In 1764, Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto*, which is credited as being the first gothic novel which 'almost single-handedly made fashionable the taste for the bizarre, for love of doom and gloom. It also helped establish the Gothic as a site of sexual paranoia, especially the conflict between homosexuality and homophobia'⁴³² and was used as 'a stylistic innovation to describe the "unthinkable" and the "unspeakable"'.⁴³³ McNeil situates *The Castle of Otranto* by reference to:

The queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick [who] in her *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) famously argued for the gothic novel, invented by Walpole, Beckford and Monk Lewis, as a type of paranoid writing that embodied "homosexual panic". Similarly,

⁴³² Claude J. Summers (ed.) *The Queer Encyclopaedia of the Visual Arts* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004) 122.

⁴³³ McNeil, "Crafting Queer Spaces," 27.

Walpole's invention of the gothic novel has been interpreted by Raymond Bentman as a stylistic innovation to describe the 'unthinkable' and the 'unspeakable'.⁴³⁴

Gothic does not link solely to the homes of queer men – it was also exploited by the lesbian Anne Lister (1791–1840) when remodelling her house, Shibden Hall, 'to combine display with concealment'.⁴³⁵ It has been argued that this architectural choice was for psychosexual as well as aesthetic reasons. Rowenchild argues that 'disguise and hiding'⁴³⁶ accounts for her use of the gothic as well as the code in her diaries, with the gothic façade at Shibden Hall being an attempt to create increased importance and status, and provide a façade behind which to hide her (female) lover.

It is argued that the gothic architecture, as well as her diary, provided a safe social, physical and textual environment where her central and lesbian identities could coexist. It is interesting that the (public) molly house juxtaposition of a neutral exterior with an opulent interior is being replaced with a highly decorative, but visually intimidating (private) exterior. The use of gothic exteriors is interesting: it is a very visible display (of identity) which also provides a fortress-like defence from the outside world.

Charles Saumarez Smith describes Strawberry Hill as 'a presage of the way interiors would be used in the future, as a conscious instrument of personal expression: the house was to become a private castle. An escape from time, a place of retreat',⁴³⁷ again conflating domestic visual sensibilities with identity. While it is not hard to work out reasons why a gay man in the 1700s may want to escape from time, if we are to believe Saumarez Smith that the house is an instrument of personal expression, then we need to identify the visual characteristics of the house to determine the aesthetic chosen by this queer man. In addition to the use of gothic detailing, Walpole was renowned for his collections:

⁴³⁴ McNeil, "Crafting Queer Spaces," 27.

⁴³⁵ Anira Rowanchild, 'Everything Done For Effect: Georgic, Gothic and Picturesque in Anne Lister's Self-Production,' *Women's Writing*, Vol 7, No 1 (2000) 89.

⁴³⁶ Rowanchild, 'Everything Done For Effect,' 89–104.

⁴³⁷ Charles Saumarez Smith qtd Peter McNeil, "Crafting Queer Spaces: Privacy and Posturing," *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity* eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 23.

the collections at Strawberry Hill also fuelled an interest in fantastical and incongruous juxtaposition, further popularised through Walpole's published *Description* (1784) and the famous auction dispersal of 1842. Betsky notes that in the early nineteenth century, 'queers turned palaces into quasi-museums', with designs by Hope, Percier and Fontaine, looking 'as if you had peeked behind the heavy curtains of daily life to find a space of fantasy... the inhabitant could mirror himself or herself in idealized human forms and luxurious stage sets of a royal life'.⁴³⁸

Both Walpole and Chute were avid collectors, both during and after the Grand Tour. Mieke Bal argues that collecting can form a narrative, and that the collector acts as an agent in this narrative.⁴³⁹ I would suggest that Walpole and Chute's collections were used by the two men as a way of visually presenting themselves, and also a way of socialising and bonding, since:

Walpole's interest in art is genuine, and he reserves a kind of abject devotion to those things that most delight him: a head of Caligula, miniature portraits, scandalous memoirs: all these begin to suggest an eroticism in things that for Walpole, at least, may be the only eroticism there is. There is no word for an eroticism of this kind: a group of men sharing enthusiasm for a particular miniature or a particular bronze... Objects for Walpole are what bring him in to closer touch with the men he loves.⁴⁴⁰

Michael Camille⁴⁴¹ has argued that 'collecting is a performance'⁴⁴² and that collecting has a specific role in queer identity formation: '[i]t is not just that the unmentionable nature of same-sex desire has often meant that the subject had to communicate the 'secret' in a coded language, but the fact that this language was a system of objects. What could not be said could be spoken through

⁴³⁸ McNeil, "Crafting Queer Spaces," 27–28.

⁴³⁹ Mieke Bal, "Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting," *The Cultures of Collecting* eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994) 97–115.

⁴⁴⁰ Heggarty, "Horace Walpole's Letters," 85.

⁴⁴¹ Michael Camille, "Editor's Introduction," *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*, eds. Michael Camille and Adrian Rifkin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 1.

⁴⁴² Camille, "Editor's Introduction," 1.

things'.⁴⁴³ I therefore decided to use this love of collecting as the starting point for the first intervention at The Vyne: *The Gift* (Figure 5.14). While Walpole and Chute obviously influenced each other, there seems to have been some inequality, to the point that Walpole, writing to George Montagu comments: 'I don't guess what sight I have to come in Hampshire, unless it is Abbotstone. I am pretty sure I have none to come at the Vine, where I have done advising, as I see Mr. Chute will never execute anything'.⁴⁴⁴

Not wanting to further hurt Walpole's feelings, *The Gift* sees Chute bundling all of Walpole's rejected suggestions together and hiding them out of sight, behind the main staircase. Unable to throw away the unwanted tokens and trinkets, Chute masses the divergent objects gifted to him, objects that map Horace's travels and magpie-like search for beauty. Their collective display is adorned with strings of pearls. The pearls, while referencing innocence and good taste, also alludes to the term 'pearl necklace', slang for ejaculation, working with the unsolvable high/low, tasteful/distasteful, celibate/sexual dichotomy at the heart of their relationship.

⁴⁴³ Camille, "Editor's Introduction," 2.

⁴⁴⁴ *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford: including Numerous Letters Now First Published from the Original Manuscripts Vol 3, 1753–1759* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840) 314.



Figure 5.14 Matt Smith, *The Gift*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.



Figure 5.15 Matt Smith, *The Gift*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.

By recasting the discordant objects in the same material, and firing them together, they have been reworked to create ‘*family resemblances* between objects’.⁴⁴⁵ Whitney Davis⁴⁴⁶ has proposed the idea of queer family romance, where collections of objects can come together to form substitute queer family groups. He has suggested that this can work with the collector becoming either an inheritor – placing himself within a group of historical objects or queer biographies – or as a progenitor – creating new links between objects, sometimes physically as in the Walpole Cabinet in the V&A’s collections or the pietra dura casket at The Vyne to which John Chute added the rococo stand.



Figure 5.16 (left) Walpole Cabinet, 1743, padouk veneered onto a pine carcass with carved ivory plaques, figures and mounts, Victoria and Albert Museum, W.52:1, 2-1925. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 5.17 (right) Pietra dura casket bought by John Chute in 1741–5 with rococo stand and glass cover which he added, The Vyne. ©National Trust Images/John Hammond

Queer family romance offers an interesting counterargument to the heteronormativity of historic house histories based around family trees. If we are to accept Davis’ suggestions, then *The Gift* in some way acts as Walpole and Chute’s love child – admittedly one created via immaculate conception and

⁴⁴⁵ Davis, “Queer Family Romance,” 310.

⁴⁴⁶ Davis, “Queer Family Romance,” 309–329.

surrogate delivery. It seals the relationship between the two men further as the installation visually resembles a contemporary wedding cake.



Figures 5.18 and 5.19 Matt Smith, *The Gift (details)*, 2013, white earthenware, freshwater pearls, wire, 60cm tall, The Vyne.

The second intervention, *Dandy*, looks solely at John Chute and his self-presentation. *Dandy* is cast from a relatively contemporary mass-produced figurine of a dandy with a dog. This figure is placed on a tower of cast objects, formed from classical vases and plinths with neoclassical additions and pearls. The piece is placed on the central staircase at The Vyne, one of the areas of the house that Chute remodelled.



Figure 5.20 Matt Smith, *Dandy*, 2013, white earthenware, enamel, decals, freshwater pearls, wire, 130cm tall, The Vyne.



Figure 5.21 Matt Smith, *Dandy*, 2013, white earthenware, enamel, decals, freshwater pearls, wire, 130cm tall, The Vyne.

Figurines based on eighteenth century dandies were ubiquitous, cheap and mass-produced in the twentieth century and aimed at the mass market. They occupy an interesting place in popular culture, since they refuse to move with popular taste and are often imbued with nostalgia. Working with them 'raises questions about high and low culture, class, taste and value in general'.⁴⁴⁷

The eighteenth century has been a recurring motif in interiors and has gone in and out of fashion, oscillating between being a source of good and bad taste. Referencing the work of Lisa Dowling, Jasmine Rault⁴⁴⁸ suggests that it is a period synonymous with decadence and gender abnormality:

for late-nineteenth-century artists and writers hoping to break from what they saw as stifling Victorian morality and dogmatic sincerity, the eighteenth century represented an era of languorous pleasures, 'licentious freedom', 'inverted satire' and 'ambiguous effeminacy'... an eighteenth century understood as 'elegantly sensual, artificial, uncommitted to anything but pleasures'...

The ceramic dandy therefore fuses two sensibilities affiliated with queer: camp and licentious freedom. The figurine from which the cast was taken was specifically chosen for the installation since it echoes 'the cruising style that has come to be known as "stand-and-pose" – a decidedly self-contained form of cruising that telegraphs something like: "I am indicating that I want you only to the extent that I am showing how desirable I am by demonstrating that I am capable to complete indifference to you"'.⁴⁴⁹ This work therefore places John Chute as a queer, cruising man, and also shows him presenting himself to the world propped up on a collection of classical vases and plinths, which brings us back to the notion of camp:

⁴⁴⁷ Alison Britton, "Old Stuff – New Life – Still Life: The Lure of Junk," *Ting Tang Trash: Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics*, ed. Jorunn Veitberg (Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts and Arts Museums Bergen, 2011) 33.

⁴⁴⁸ Jasmine Rault, "Designing Sapphic Modernity: Fashioning Spaces and Subjects," *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*, eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 196.

⁴⁴⁹ Crimp, "Coming Together to Stay Apart," 52.

Theatrical self-presentation and the establishing of subcultural taste are central factors in the manifold concept of camp. The collecting of objects, artworks, interiors, clothes, and memorabilia, and the ways that they are displayed, can be considered as two practices that allow for camping both as the objects are collected and as they are appreciated.⁴⁵⁰

The decision to use an original object of questionable taste was a conscious one. Exploiting camp, where ‘an engaged irony which (as the best definition of camp puts it) allows one a strong feeling of involvement with a situation or object while simultaneously providing one with a comic appreciation of its contradictions’⁴⁵¹ charges the installation with a queer sensibility, for although John Chute is placed in prime position as the emperor of all he surveys, it is a slightly comic emperor at best. In addition to it being part of the house that Chute remodelled, there is another reason for the installation to be placed in the Staircase Hall, since it forms a queer triangulation with the two busts at the base of the staircase. These busts, of Caligula – with his indiscriminate sexual activities – and Antoninus, who was adopted by Hadrian following the death of Hadrian’s lover Antinous, resonate with queer once the installation is in place. In this way, the installation also fulfils Whitney Davis’ idea of queer family romance,⁴⁵² but in this case with John Chute acting as inheritor rather than progenitor.

⁴⁵⁰ Steorn, “Queer in the Museum,” 131–132.

⁴⁵¹ Gavin Butt, “How I Died for Kiki and Herb,” *The Art of Queering in Art*, ed. Henry Rogers (Birmingham, Article Press, 2007) 91–92.

⁴⁵² Davis, “Queer Family Romance,” 309–329.

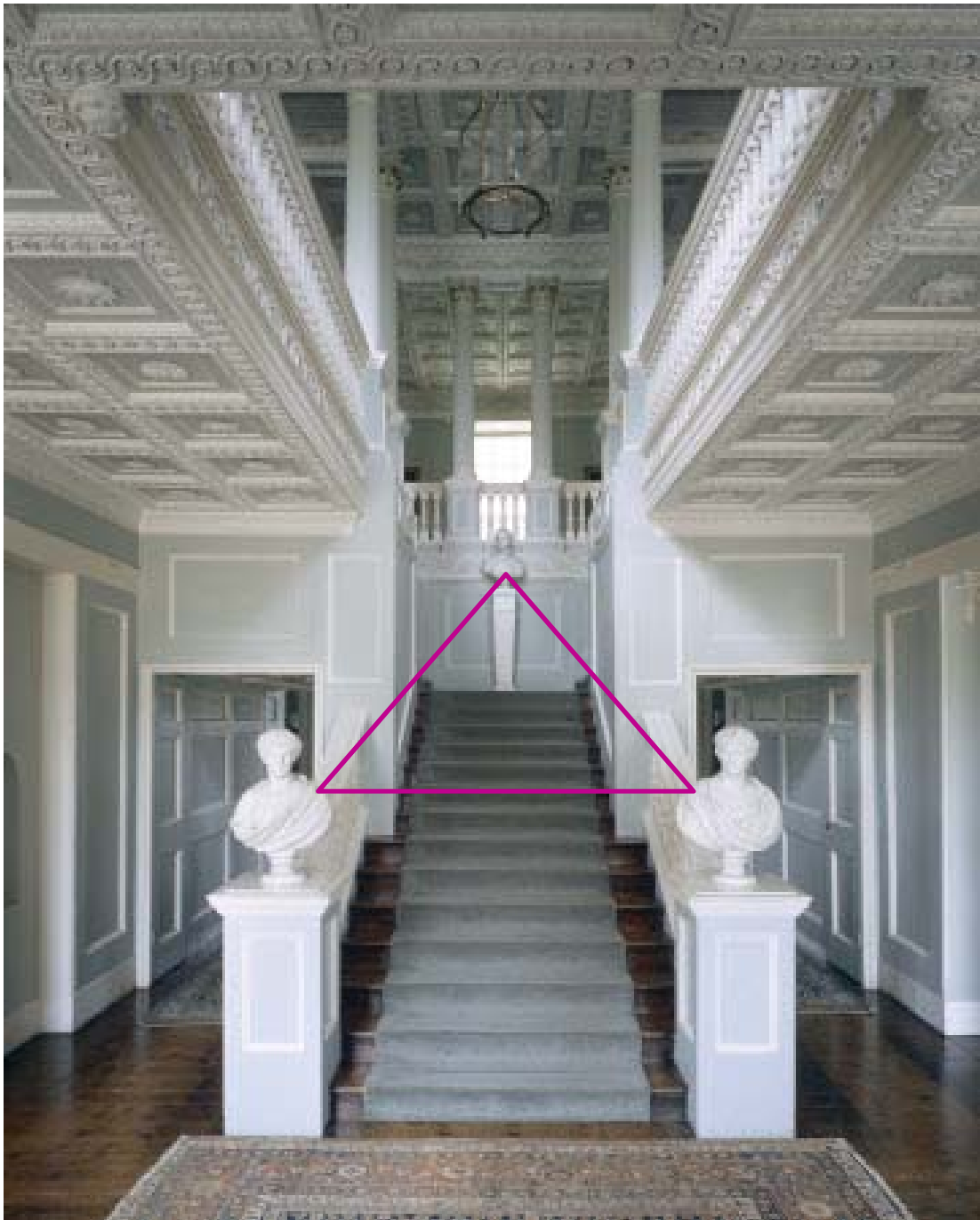


Figure 5.22 Triangulations of Staircase Hall, The Vyne. ©National Trust Images/James Mortimer

John Chute, is therefore placed at the apex of queer-associated historical biographies, '[q]ueer family romance would be the romance of a queer family – a romance that might make such family socially possible'⁴⁵³... a 'queer self-genealogy',⁴⁵⁴ and inheritor of an extraconsanguinary family tree.

⁴⁵³ Davis, "Queer Family Romance," 315.

⁴⁵⁴ Davis, "Queer Family Romance," 316.

5.3 Conclusion

The emphasis in historic houses on the genealogy of the wealthy families that had owned them gives them a strongly heteronormative bias. However, there is a dichotomy at play, for in addition to being sites of heteronormativity, they were also sites of intimacy, including non-normative and queer intimacy, and lend themselves to exploring these intimacies in a way that objects held by museums seldom are. One of the criticisms levelled at historic houses – the elite nature of their owners – here benefits one minority – the lesbian or gay visitor. While identification will need to be ‘mobilised across class lines’,⁴⁵⁵ historic examples of lesbian and gay life have often had their ‘origins in the elite or the creative upper-middle class’⁴⁵⁶ partially since economic independence allowed for lives to be lived outside the bounds of social norms.

The historic house – which provides us with collections of objects and environments developed by individuals in order to reflect their interests and desires – has the potential to provide us with rich and, as yet, under-mined, seams of knowledge about queer pasts. In addition, if we start to re-view the historic house as a site of queer family romances rather than merely one of heteronormative family trees, we have the potential to uncover the emotional and queer affects presented at the sites.

When considering these interventions in historic houses, it could be argued that the debates and discussions generated could be undertaken in other formats – though writing or speaking. However, I would argue that the physical interventions, with their ability to not only direct discourse, but to also confuse it and allow room for the viewer to draw independent thoughts and conclusions has a stronger potential. Beth Lord argues that:

The heterotopia is a site for discursive analysis because it already does the work of discursive analysis: it undermines the relation between words and things and maintains the space between them as a space. In other words, heterotopias are spaces of the *difference* of words and things.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Oram, “Going On an Outing,” 193.

⁴⁵⁶ Oram, “Going On an Outing,” 193.

⁴⁵⁷ Lord, “Foucault’s Museum,” 10.

In order to interrogate these heterotopias, and the things they contain and display, these new inserted objects work *with* those things in a way that words on their own cannot.

Working with the National Trust has shown how diverse the different sites and house teams can be. Even within a house team, there has been disagreement as to whether to, or how to, present queer histories and intimacies. These discrepancies can make it difficult at times to negotiate working with these histories and sites. In the summer of 2012, Nymans was representing the National Trust at Brighton Pride, where a spokesperson for the Trust was quoted as saying: '[w]e feel strongly that the Trust must get out to where people are and we were delighted with the response – members loved seeing us at the event and there was lots of interest from others too'.⁴⁵⁸

In a pilot study of LGBT visitors to cultural institutions in North America by Heimlich and Koke, when visitors were asked 'What makes a visit or attendance different for a [LGBT visitor] than for a heterosexual, if any?',⁴⁵⁹ '[r]espondents articulated three main concepts... the ability to be demonstrative, feeling represented within the content, and feeling accepted with[in] the context'.⁴⁶⁰ As Heimlich and Koke were told by LGBT interviewees, to experience a sense of truly belonging in cultural venues, they would like to see 'inclusions of [LGBT] individuals, couples and groups within the imagery and narrative associated with exhibits [which would]... truly model its institutional acceptance to all patrons'⁴⁶¹ and address the fact that '[LGBT] history is so hidden that often times [LGBT] artists and performers are presented as asexual or heterosexual, or their gender non-conformity is not mentioned'.⁴⁶²

While the National Trust's attendance at Pride may help visitors feel that they would be welcome at National Trust sites, there is still work to be done in order that LGBT lives are represented and discussed within the curated histories of those sites. As museums have already realised, and we are starting to begin to see with this work in historic houses, these sites have the potential to help

⁴⁵⁸ National Trust Website, 30 May 2013. <http://www.nationaltrustjobs.org.uk/articles/proud-to-be-national-trust>

⁴⁵⁹ Heimlich and Koke, "Do they Come? Do they Care?" 98.

⁴⁶⁰ Heimlich and Koke, "Do they Come? Do they Care?" 98.

⁴⁶¹ Heimlich and Koke, "Do they Come? Do they Care?" 100.

⁴⁶² Heimlich and Koke, "Do they Come? Do they Care?" 100.

societies to heal.⁴⁶³ The representation of ‘the other’ in these sites should not be seen as an intellectual exercise but as a step towards a more honest representation of the pasts. As these properties become more comfortable with negotiating and telling their queer histories, they may come closer in achieving their mission ‘to promote the National Trust as being relevant to everyone’.⁴⁶⁴

In their own ways, each of the interventions commissioned for Nymans and The Vyne operate in a manner that Hein equates with feminist practice: ‘[o]ne tactic advanced in both feminist and museum endeavours is the reversal of foreground and background, which draws attention to the overlooked and suppressed, and, having exposed it, asks why it has been neglected’.⁴⁶⁵ For curators holding onto a position of absolute knowledge, this unpicking of histories can be very challenging, since feminist theory also ‘adopts the mundane and unexpected, the trivial and horrendous, disruptions of ordinary circumstances that undermine the determination to simplify and celebrate, which it shows to be premature and often meretricious’.⁴⁶⁶

Historic houses allow visitors ‘the recognition of the house as an emotional framework, a space in which to “live”’.⁴⁶⁷ Personal narratives are imbedded in these houses in a way that they seldom are within museums and galleries, and allow for a more intimate and personal response to the environment. This ready-charged atmosphere provides the potential for interventions in historic houses to connect with LGBT affect in a unique way.

For many, and complicated reasons, queer histories have been omitted or treated differently from heterosexual ones in many historic houses. This is unsurprising given the relatively recent and rapid changes in social and legal attitudes towards same-sex relationships, and we are in a period where historic houses are playing ‘catch-up’. These two case studies have attempted to

⁴⁶³ Lord, “Foucault’s Museum,” 11.

⁴⁶⁴ National Trust website, 30 May 2013. <http://www.nationaltrustjobs.org.uk/articles/proud-to-be-national-trust>

⁴⁶⁵ Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 57.

⁴⁶⁶ Hein, “Looking at Museums from a Feminist Perspective,” 55.

⁴⁶⁷ Molly Behagg, “Museums of the Self, House Museums: Emotional Space and Personal Narratives,” *Engage: The International Journal of Visual Art and Gallery Education*, Vol 31 (Autumn 2012) 67.

facilitate this catch-up process and provide a practical means of addressing their histories of non-normative sexualities.

6 Conclusion

This research started with an exploration of what queer art made using craft techniques looked like and whether there is such a thing as a queer craft sensibility. What began as a mapping exercise moved into a practical analysis of the mechanisms that underpin cultural organisations and privilege heteronormativity within them. This change of direction is possibly unsurprising since '[q]ueer adoringly embraces fluidity, change and the process of coming to know that which one senses in the body, but cannot quite, yet, conclusively define through language'.⁴⁶⁸ The question of what queer craft is would possibly be best answered through a cross-disciplinary show of queer craft, which then leads onto the curatorial questions of what would be included and excluded by the terms queer and craft. As the chapter on curating has outlined, the question of what queer is has many answers and can be tackled curatorially in many ways. To some extent, this was the joy of the work: queer and craft's slippery and elusive qualities always keeping them slightly out of grasp.

As an umbrella term, queer encompasses a large and diverse group. While attempts during the research have been made to be inclusive, the research has privileged the gay, white male viewpoint. This is partly due to the pre-existing knowledge of the researcher but also, in the examples of the historic house interventions, was based on the historic source material available to work with. It is hoped that the methodologies developed in the research may be used by other artists in the future to interrogate other aspects of queer. The research has also privileged queer over other identity terms such as race, nationality and class. The research has drawn heavily of the work of artists such as Fred Wilson and Glenn Ligon who have interrogated the representation of African Americans in museums and art galleries. This overlap suggests that in addition to exploring any unique aspects of identity, the work can be seen as a critique of overarching grand narratives and a troubling of institutional interpretation which, through the omnipresence of heteronormativity, gender and racial bias and class privilege, presents the history and voices of certain groups in society to a greater extent than others.

⁴⁶⁸ James Sanders, "Nick Cave: Soundsuit Serenade," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, Vol 4 Issue 1 (Harrington Park Press, 20016) 11–12.

Craft's status as an umbrella term has similar, but different, issues attached to it. 'Craft is like any other word. It has no sacred right to exist, and the word may well fade in the coming decades... the individual disciplines have a strong identity as jewellery art, metal art, ceramic art, glass art, textile art, and wood art. It is their collective identity as craft that has lost its meaning'.⁴⁶⁹

A queer craft exhibition could make visual connections between works, and the chapters on queer craft objects and queer curating drew out visual strategies that link some queer objects. However, the curatorial methodology would inevitably steer those associations and privilege some visual languages over others. It became clear during the research, that this exhibition, while potentially fascinating, was not necessarily the best way to address the subject for an academic thesis. As Susan Sontag explained in "Notes on 'Camp'", '[t]o snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble. The form of jottings, rather than an essay (with its claim to a linear, consecutive argument), seemed more appropriate for getting down something of this particular fugitive sensibility'.⁴⁷⁰ Therefore rather than attempting to identify overarching visual strategies, the research began to unpick how cultural organisations represent difference, and particularly queer difference. In doing so, the research followed the assertion that '[q]ueer projects work to disrupt insidious, normalizing ideologies by way of re-appropriating parts of discursive systems and explicitly advocating for social change'.⁴⁷¹

The linking of craft with identity was a recurring theme in the research. As the chapter on queer craft explores, the intersection of craft with identity politics is a longstanding one. Whether this is owing to craft's linking of the haptic and the intellectual, the ability of craft to allow for heterogeneity, or the under-exploitation of craft in the art world which left it open to feminist artists is debatable. Issues of the handmade, the personal, the domestic and the decorative all link with craft and are addressed by artists including Nick Cave,

⁴⁶⁹ Veitberg, *Craft in Transition*, 86.

⁴⁷⁰ Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'," 54.

⁴⁷¹ Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams, "Autoethnography is a Queer Method," *Queer Methods and Methodologies – Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed Kath Browne and Catherine J Nash (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 209.

Robert Gober, Virgil Marti and Kent Hendricksen whose works resonate with queer. That their work is placed in the art world rather than the craft world raises interesting questions about the relationships and hierarchies involved. While there may be economic benefits of association with art rather than craft, I would suggest that these artists are drawn to craft materials and practices for a very specific reason, what Bruce Metcalf describes as craft's role as a 'social movement, often intuitive and without leadership... a collective attempt to relocate personal meaning in a largely indifferent world'.⁴⁷²

The capacity of queer craft to address the past and examine revisionist readings of objects and collections formed a large part of the practice in the research. 'Culture in general, and gay and lesbian culture in particular, interprets and reconfigures the past in terms of the present'.⁴⁷³ For an identity group whose history has often been hidden or erased, this reconfiguration is a key strategy and the links between this reconfiguration of the past and the postmodernist technique of re-appropriation provides one of the strongest links between queer identity and a queer visual sensibility.

'[Q]ueer readings and positions can (and do) become modified or change over time as people, cultures, and politics change'.⁴⁷⁴ That any examples of those historical understandings of queer sensibility still exist is, to a large extent, only a matter of chance. Whether cultural organisations will be better able to catalogue and preserve queer histories and associations is still debateable, but becoming more probable as society becomes more tolerant of difference. A possibly greater potential threat to the historical preservation of queer may be queer itself. Cathie Cohen, writing in response to the call to deconstruct identities has suggested that '[q]ueer theorizing that calls for the elimination of fixed categories of sexual identity seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one's survival'.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Metcalf, "Contemporary Craft," 17.

⁴⁷³ Rinder, "An Introduction to In a Different Light," 4.

⁴⁷⁴ Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Cathie Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,' *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol 3, No 4 (May 1997) 437–465, p450.

This tension between queer theory and queer studies – the desire to destabilise and the desire to historicise and understand identity – shows no sign of abating. Likewise, queer craft practice, by its very nature will never be static, and the ‘unknown potential for queer suggests that its most enabling characteristics may well be potential looking forward without anticipating the future’.⁴⁷⁶ Having said that, the potential for queer to interrogate the effects of identity and the bias of contemporary cultural organisations towards certain groups in society suggests that the need for queer filters to highlight organisational workings will not be a short-term project.

During the research, I found that in order to explore these organisational underpinnings hybridity was required: fusing the roles of artist, curator and historian together. This enables an examination of the cracks and fissures within cultural organisations, exploring what Potvin terms the narratives of difference.⁴⁷⁷ The case studies, *Queering the Museum, Other Stories* and *Unravelling the National Trust* all provided different methodologies and attempted, in different ways, to overcome arguments that have been used to explain why queer representation in museums and galleries is so scarce.

Hybridity was not limited to working methodologies. Bruce Metcalf has argued that ‘many of the most interesting objects in the craftworld today are hybrids: they take characteristics of both craft and art’.⁴⁷⁸ The erosion of binaries provides fruitful and exciting opportunities. That one of the most notable overlaps between craft and queer identity – the NAMES project – occurred outside of both the craft and art world suggests that there is still a long way to go towards cultural acceptance of difference. Fortunately, for some working on the intersection of queer and craft, the desire to reposition curatorial bias is an irrelevance since for many in the craftivism movement, “the radical potential” of an activity [takes precedence] over the actual object⁴⁷⁹ and craft therefore moves from materiality into performativity.

⁴⁷⁶ Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 131–132.

⁴⁷⁷ John Potvin, ‘The Velvet Masquerade: Fashion, Interior Design and the Furnished Body,’ *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*, eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Bruce Metcalf, ‘Contemporary Craft: A Brief Overview,’ *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory & Critical Writing* (Coach House Books and Harbourfront Centre, 2002), 21.

⁴⁷⁹ Black and Burisch, “Craft Hard, Die Free,” 610.

Returning back to the original, and unanswered question – what is queer craft? Possibly the more appropriate questions to ask are why do we not recognise queer craft when we see it, and why might curatorial organisations and artists not want to take ownership of, and use, the terms queer and craft. While this might raise uncomfortable feelings in some, heteronormativity as an institution, which is so pervasive that it has become almost invisible, will continue to ensure what Monique Wittig identifies as ‘you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be’⁴⁸⁰ unless more is done to question how identity is discussed in cultural organisations.

The potential of queer craft as an investigative technique is almost unlimited. The interrogation of white cube spaces was outside the scope of this research and has the potential for investigation in the future. Ideas around installation art and the creation of immersive, alternative environments and non-normative responses to gallery spaces both chime well with the notion of what queer craft could be.

Regardless of the specific arena queer craft is used to explore, it will be fluid and slippery. To try to pin down an ‘an identity without an essence’,⁴⁸¹ while a very seductive prospect, is in reality an ultimately unrealisable project in any definite way. Rather, both queer and queer craft present an alternative to the normal, whatever that may be; and that alternative may or may not be restricted to individuals who identify as L, G, B or T.

⁴⁸⁰ Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” *Feminist Issues* Vol 1, No. 1, (1980) 103–111, qtd in Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003) 121.

⁴⁸¹ Halperin, *Saint=Foucault*, 62.

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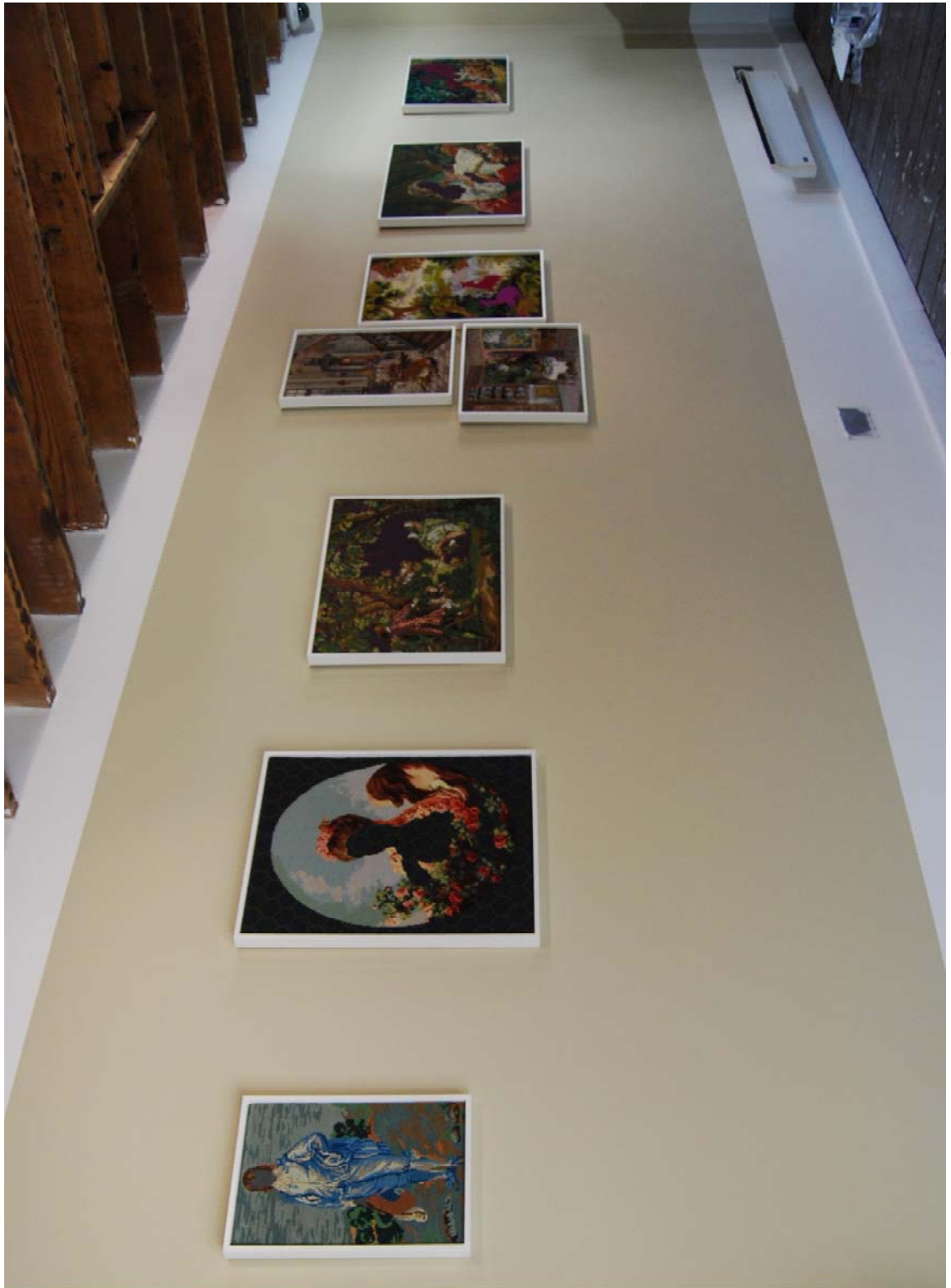
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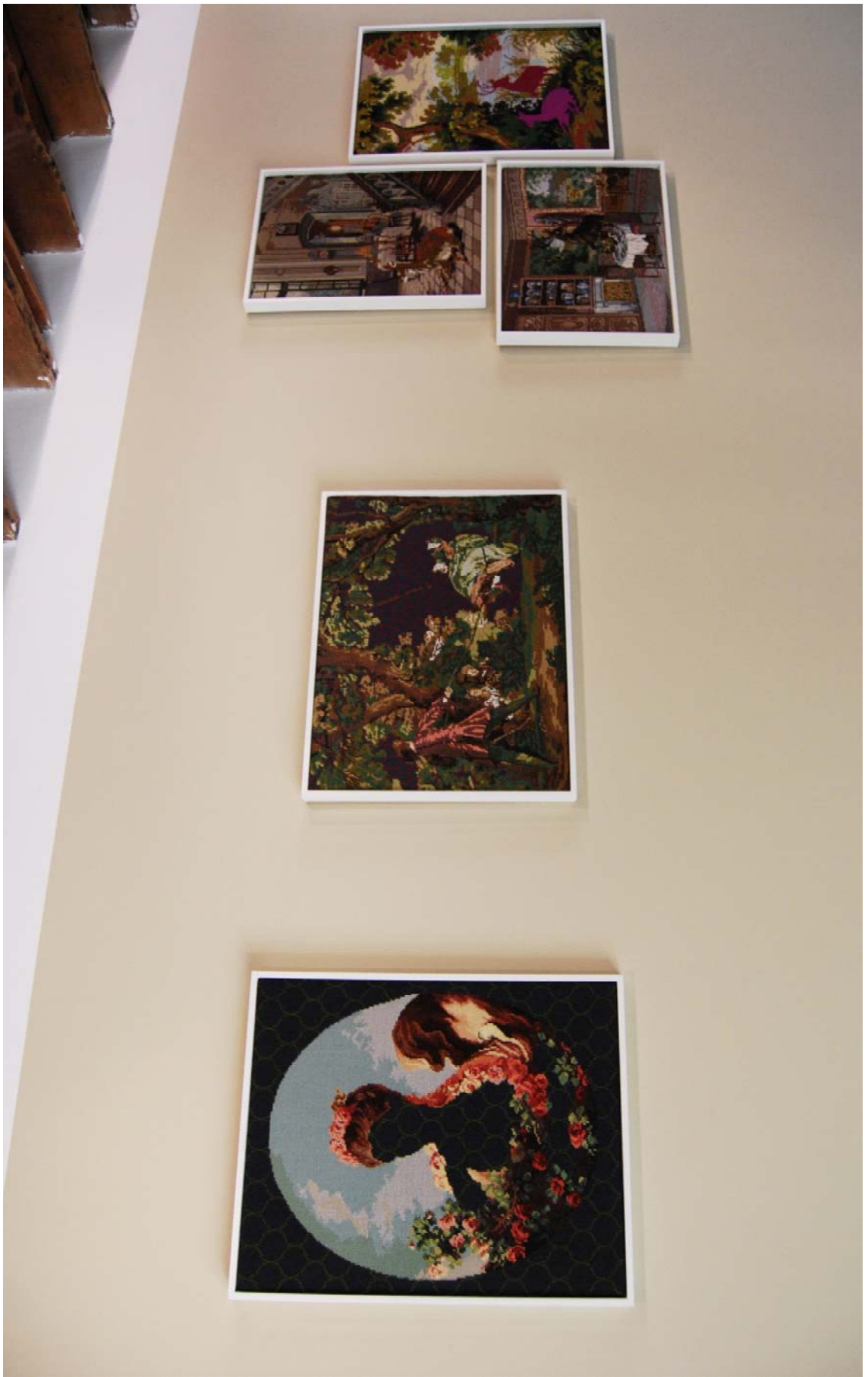
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Appendix 1 Installation images from *The Problems with History/Trouble with History*



















Queering the Museum

Queering the Museum
Andy Horn
Exhibitions Manager, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Of chaotic desire and the subversive potential of things
Oliver Winchester
Research Department, V&A

Queering the Pitch
Matt Smith
Artist and Curator



Civil Partnership
Figure Group

The brides are missing.



Queering the Museum

Andy Horn,
Exhibitions Manager, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

The process by which museums acquire their contents are many and various, the result of thousands of acts of donation and acquisition that happen for a multitude of motives. In the calm atmosphere of gallery displays, whether permanent or temporary, these contents are presented within often simple rationales - a brief history or description - which belies their rich and complex histories. The messiness and diversity of human life can be difficult to represent, and until recently has often been neglected in the agendas of museums which are often seen to present their collections with a single authoritative voice.

Museums are becoming more responsive to their audiences, and particularly to those constituencies of existing and potential visitors who are on their doorstep. As society changes, and has changed, in recent decades, there is a greater recognition of the different needs and interests of audiences; audiences who want greater representation within cultural institutions. As a consequence, museums such as Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, invite people to work with and re-interpret their collections to explore their appeal and meanings to visitors. Artists in particular delight in challenging and subverting the status quo and can have a natural affinity with objects and works of art which provide material for

The Ladies of Llangollen

Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby ran away together from their aristocratic Irish homes in 1778. They set up home together in rural Wales bonded by 'something more tender still than friendship' and lived there together for 51 years.

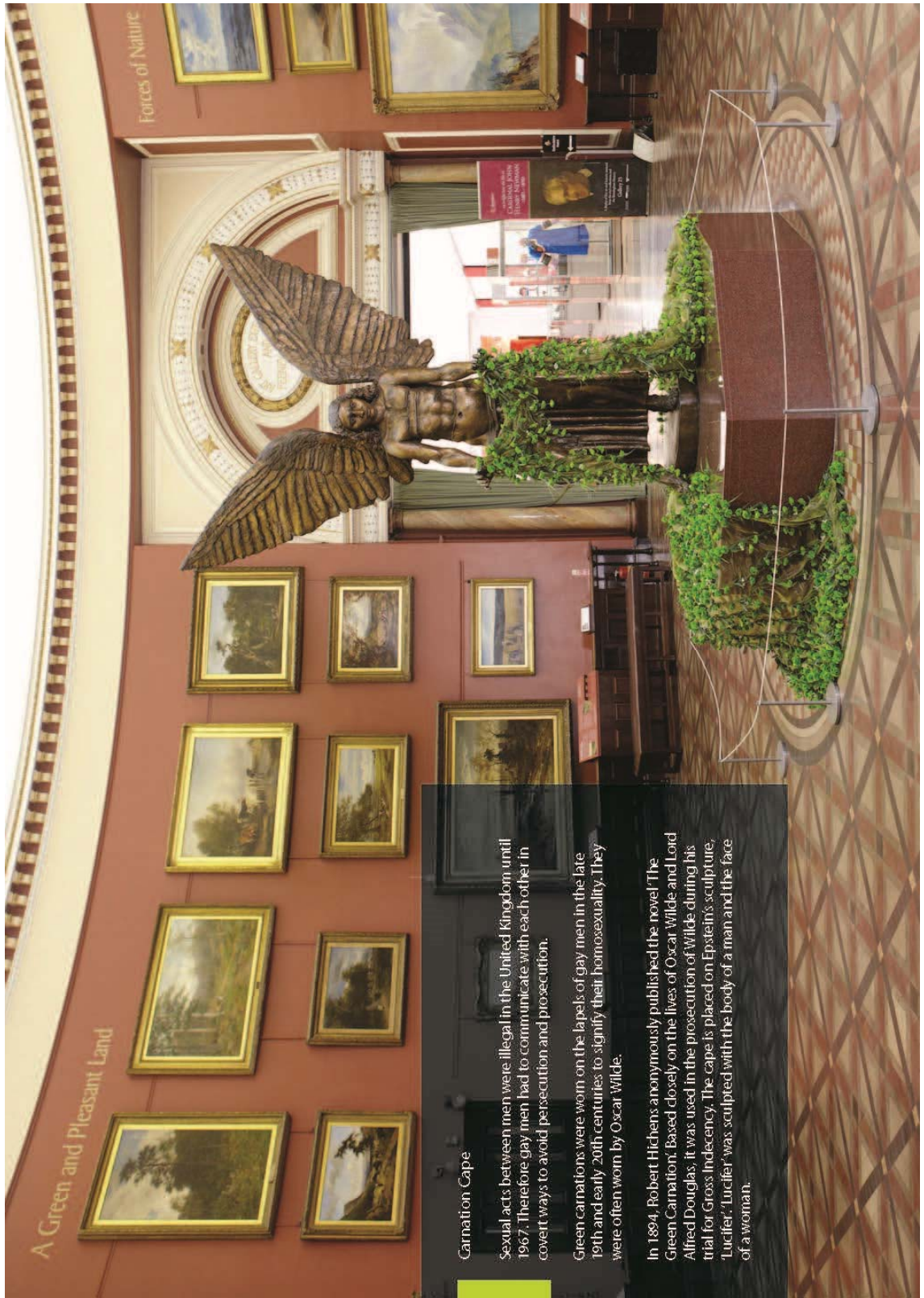
They attracted the attention of the outside world and visitors to their home at Plas Newydd included the Duke of Wellington, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.



them to work with, often taking at once both a playful and serious approach to how they engage with collections.

Society has historically placed very different values on the material it chooses to represent and the means by which it does this, whether this is the printed page, a work of art, television or organisations that control these – publisher, gallery or media channel. Objects are made and displayed according to social norms – figurines in heterosexual couples, the lives of artists suppressed in preference to the art historical value of the work, social history collections that respond to the concerns of the day such as rural or trade histories.

Queering the Museum is an opportunity to look at our collections with a fresh eye and explore further the multitude of possible perspectives and readings. As environments that showcase the creativity of others through the displays of fine and applied art, it is important that we continue to work with artists such as Matt Smith in order to communicate the currency of creative practice and the value of what art brings to society.



Carnation Cape

Sexual acts between men were illegal in the United Kingdom until 1967. Therefore gay men had to communicate with each other in covert ways to avoid persecution and prosecution.

Green carnations were worn on the lapels of gay men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to signify their homosexuality. They were often worn by Oscar Wilde.

In 1894, Robert Hichens anonymously published the novel 'The Green Carnation'. Based closely on the lives of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, it was used in the prosecution of Wilde during his trial for Gross Indecency. The cape is placed on Epstein's sculpture, 'Lucifer', 'Lucifer' was sculpted with the body of a man and the face of a woman.

The Pre-Raphaelites

A Tribute to Simeon

Simeon Solomon (1840–1905) and Lord Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) were both painters with links to the Pre-Raphaelites. Both were seen as great talents at the start of their careers.

There are numerous indications that, were they alive today, both men would identify themselves as gay. Solomon had numerous same sex encounters, two of which led to his arrest in London, and later in Paris. Leighton was much more discrete about any sexual relations he may have had either in England, or in North Africa. Solomon's arrests and the subsequent scandals limited his career. Leighton, in contrast became a pillar of the Victorian arts establishment, was knighted and made a baronet.

The trophy in the cabinet is of a bear playing the part of the tortured Saint Sebastian. It is a small compensation for the difficulties that befell Solomon and a celebration of his living his life regardless of the consequences.



Of chaotic desire and the subversive potential of things

Oliver Winchester, V&A

Museums keep our culture safe. Their four walls keep objects that have been selected as historically significant or socially representative secure and hauled up in elegant stasis, protected from physical decay. Once admitted into the museum, objects are kept alive on the vast life support of interpretation, narrative and meaning that the museum machine generates and sustains. Principally organised around a taxonomic categorization of knowledge and its material remains, the museum project 'conjoin[s] multiple experiences of time and space [...] in order to preserve, order, educate and collate.'¹ It is this drive to order that distinguishes a visit to a museum to view objects from a visit to the Bull Ring Shopping Centre to look at commodities. Visitors to museums expect to benefit from time spent there (spent willingly or under duress) and the stories suggested by the displays define the identity of a museum, and in a much broader sense, contribute to and reflect our sense of gender, class, racial, local, national, religious or political identity.



Drug Jar

The popular willow pattern design tells the story of two lovers who, when put to death, transformed into two doves.

Advances in drug technology have massively increased the life expectancy of people with HIV. Tragically, many people died before the drugs were available. The gay male community was hit particularly hard by the HIV virus.

Over 70,000 people in the UK are currently living with HIV.

However, this warm and fuzzy communitarian logic conceals the always present fact that museums function through exclusion in order to make sense of the material to hand, separating ideas from the chaos of things. A museum's potential to explain is always based in its ability to focus on a particular set of relations and meanings. In the silence of the museum gallery, the cacophony of potential associations that the exhibits display is suppressed to ensure the communication of a singular, coherent and audible intellectual narrative. Thus the luxury of this authoritative and contemplative educational space is always predicated upon exclusions that may slip into an authoritarian, exclusive or undeniably dismissive mould, intolerant of atypical narratives or unrepresentative stories and ideas.

But of course museums do not stay still in this way and the ideas, narratives and objects that they deem important flow and change with time. Over a long trajectory, museums are far from quiet and they throng with intellectual change and movement. The key to successful museum collection management is to keep pace with society's mores and desires. Exclusions must therefore be considered, rather than arbitrary, and meaningful in their absence, rather than pointed in their denial.

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans experiences and histories are a relatively new area for examination within the museum sector. An area of research currently in its infancy, the telling of such histories - and



Contemplating Mr Buturo

Consensual acts between same-sex adults are criminalised in 80 member states of the United Nations and being charged with homosexuality can result in the death penalty in six of these countries.

In 2009 James Nsaba Buturo, the Ugandan Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity campaigned for the death penalty for gay men. He said of same sex acts: "not even animals do that". These half man-half animal figures are concerned as to their place in this logic.

Mr Buturo has also denounced sub-standard service delivery and the wearing of miniskirts.



Dandies in Love

Civil partnerships have given same-sex couples an opportunity to publicly and legally celebrate their relationships.

Civil partnership photographs have increased the regularity with which lesbian and gay male couples are shown in a positive light.

the methods for so doing - is exciting, complex and difficult: a field littered with political, moral and personal challenges. Any investigation into this area throws up many questions and provides only partial answers. Perhaps the most complex question stems from the inherent contradiction that lies at the centre of the gay liberation movement and its legacy - the desire to eradicate discrimination whilst enshrining difference.

Thus, when sexual identity is discussed with any kind of thoughtful sensitivity beyond that of a simplistic, restrictive trans-historical essentialism, the museum project hits a problem. Many recent exhibitions have sought to address the exclusion of same sex desire from their collections and displays by presenting a series of 'discovered' identities and 'hidden' histories, telling self consciously bright and optimistic narratives that are built upon a retrospective outing of notable men and women of the past whose sexual desires could be described as non-normative.

Yet, as is well documented, the crystallisation of homosexuality as an identity rather than a set of activities occurred only towards the end of the nineteenth century and the simultaneous medicalisation of desire led to the disregard for, and in many cases willful persecution of, homosexuals. How then can museums play catch up without producing reductive and overly simplistic stories of gradual transition from repression to liberation over the course of history, a form of telling that fetishises a breaking free from the closet? Desire is chaotic and can not be confined to neat binaries and tidy labels.

Donkey Man

In addition to describing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and activities, 'queer' can also mean odd or unusual.

Most people will experience situations where they are the odd one out. Donkey Man never fits in.



What can be said of the post-op, male-to-female transsexual lesbian for example? How can this radical desire be translated into the museum without a tacit acknowledgement of the gaps, disruptions, fissures and exceptions that such desire inflicts upon the objective museum system? How can museums engage with this messier, more confusing, far more chaotic queer reality?

Queering the Museum by Matt Smith is a deliberate act of wilful confusion and disorder, a rummaging through the museum dress up box to see just what we might be missing. Consisting of a series of calculated and provocative additions, amendments and small changes to the gallery displays and sealed vitrines of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, each change that Matt has made - each object that Matt has inserted, moved or recontextualised and that now patiently lurks around the corner of each successive gallery space for the visitor - is intended to playfully upset the museum appercept, play with visitor expectations, upend the sober, educational and rigid conceptual boundaries that usually constitute a museum display. Matt's interventions confuse and question the conventional narrative of objects on display and thereby undermine the authority of that same system. Matt is messing about with the museum.

The fun Matt has had with the gallery spaces signifies and enables much more than a wry smile or bemused shoulder shrugging. Matt's deliberate provocations and mischievous changes are made from the inside out and counter the typical idea of the museum object as

Fitting In

Unlike ethnic groups, the gay, lesbian and bisexual community does not share visually identifiable characteristics. This has allowed us to hide within the heterosexual population during times of persecution. It also means that we have to actively 'come out', telling family and friends that we are queer.

Drag refuses to fit in and is linked to performance and camp. Drag queens are men dressed as parodies of women, with make up and clothes that few women would wear. Drag kings are women dressed as men, often with extreme masculine looks.

Drag's aims are very different to those of transsexual people. Transsexual people want to live in a different gender to the one they were assigned at birth and generally seek medical interventions to support that.



representative, as standing in for a larger intellectual idea. Rather, what we have here is an exploration of the ways in which meaning is made through relationships, the chatter between objects, and perhaps most importantly the assumptions that we as visitors bring to a gallery space. The baggage that most museum displays attempt to suppress is the very texture of Matt's interventions, the untidy association we may have as visitors Matt welcomes with open arms.

The confused visitor, staring blankly at the garland of green carnations that currently adorns Jakob Epstein's Lucifer, will readily perceive a breakdown of meaning within the museum system. The question is not so much 'what does that mean' as 'why is that there?' In fact if these garlands mean anything the question should read 'what do these garlands here mean to me?' As Bob Mills has noted, in these kinds of circumstances, queerness is less a state-of-object that a position-as-subject, a 'relational concept that comes into view against the backdrop of the normal, the legitimate, the dominant, and the coherent – and it would be precisely the challenge that queer poses to the normative structures of the museum that constitutes its subversive potential'². The museum visitor is thus implicated within the creation of narratives and meaning through the use of jarring, confusing or 'provocative juxtapositions' in a model of active experiential participation. Here the meaning of objects and their display is always an unfinished process and meanings are necessarily provisional, dependant upon the freedom of the visitor to bestow significance upon a chaos of things and the subversive potential of desire. Emphasis is upon the 'provisional and



partial, the ways in which meaning is made and felt by the visitor[...] a multiplicity rather than a single authoritative museum narrative, and the ways in which meaning becomes a process rather than a product, one in which the visitor in wholly implicated:

Chaotic? Perhaps.
Subversive? Certainly.

Radical in its embrace of the contingencies of spectatorship as part of the museum's open ended project? Well yes.

But most importantly, go see for yourself.

¹ Mills, R, 'Theorizing the Queer Museum' in *Museums & Social Issues*. A Journal of Reflective Discourse. Where is Queer. Volume 3, Number 1, Spring, 2008. (Michigan State University), p.46

² Ibid, p.46

Polari

Polari is a secret gay male vocabulary which was popular in the 1950s and '60s as it allowed same-sex activity to be discussed secretly at a time when being homosexual could lead to imprisonment.

Polari probably developed from Parlyvaree, a 19th century slang used by fairground and circus people as well as prostitutes, beggars and buskers. It became widely known when it featured in the 1960s' radio show, 'Round the Horne'. The programme featured Julian and Sandy, two out-of-work actors, who used Polari to say explicit things whilst avoiding the censor's radar.

Polari is seldom used – or arguably needed – today. However, some words live on. Naff, bimbo and camp were all part of the Polari lexicon.

Bona arm: nice penis

Reflection

"Living in a body that did not fit my self-image was like living in a very personal prison."
Lore M Dikey

Few people feel delighted with every part of their body. For some, the sex of the body they inherited at birth and their innate gender do not match at all.

Lore was born with a woman's body, but identified as male. He is now living as a man and has made the decision to have gender confirmation surgery.



Figure of a Youth Cruising

When displaying human figures, there is a tendency to pair up male and female figures into heterosexual couples. Often this is done with no historical evidence that the artist intended this to happen.

The carnation and the handkerchief were both used historically to let other men know you were gay.



SIMEON SOLOMON (1840-1905)
Bacchus 1867
oil on panel

Solomon was a close friend of Burne-Jones and the poet Swinburne. This is one of Solomon's most celebrated works. **Bacchus** represents the god of wine in classical mythology and was inspired by a portrait by the fifteenth-century Siennese Renaissance artist Sodoma in the Uffizi, Florence. The art critic, Walter Pater described this picture as an embodiment, not of the joyous Dionysus of the Renaissance, but a melancholy and sorrowing Dionysus: 'the god of the bitterness of wine, "of things too sweet"'.¹¹

Solomon's sensual but androgynous images can be linked with his own homosexuality. His career collapsed in 1873 when he was convicted of homosexual offences and spent the last twenty years of his life living mainly in a London workhouse.

Bequeathed by Miss K E Lewis, 1961 (P52'61)

 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Label, circa 1990

Queering the Pitch

Matt Smith, Artist and Curator

Queer has a number of meanings. Its primary use in this exhibition is as an inclusive word for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. However, its dictionary definitions also include: 'differing from the normal or usual in a way regarded as odd or strange' and 'to be put in a difficult or dangerous position'. This ambiguity is one of Queer's biggest allures.

In the early 1990s, when I first started visiting Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, there was one mention of same sex relationships. It was a label that accompanied Simeon Solomon's painting of Bacchus.

The world was a different place in the 90s: Clause 28, which prohibited local authorities from promoting same sex relationships had been in force since 1988; the age of consent for gay men was different to that for heterosexual men and civil partnerships hadn't been dreamt of.

Before civil partnerships were introduced in 2005, there was no positive state recording of same sex relationships. Particularly pre

Double-Spouted Teapot

'Tea-rooming' is American gay slang for anonymous male-male sexual encounters in public toilets.



1967, when being a gay male could result in criminal prosecution, most gay men and women kept their sexuality a secret. Since Oscar Wilde was a married man with two children, a degree of judgement needs to be taken with historical 'facts' and records of 'bachelor uncles' who were 'married to their work'.

Most museums have been slow to represent the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities. Even when there is willingness on the part of museum staff, few objects can relate to all sections of the diverse queer community, and museums rely on material culture – objects, things – to tell stories.

This lack of material culture created a dilemma when we were developing the exhibition. A more lateral – and fragmented – approach to the subject matter was needed. If an exhibition of 'queer' objects wasn't possible, could we 'queer' the whole museum instead?

Interventions using the existing collections and galleries enabled us to draw out queer stories and themes, exploring subjects that a queer viewer might overlay onto objects the museum already held.

Same sex pairings were an obvious starting point. Once we started to look, male and female pairings were ubiquitous. Sometimes they were originally made to form pairs, on other occasions it was curatorial decision-making that paired these men and women together.

Looking for a Chicken Hawk

Chicken is gay slang for younger men and 'hawks' are older men who are attracted to them.



In some cases we swapped female figures with male ones from the collections, in others I made new figures, and same sex couples, which were placed with their heterosexual counterparts.

Using craft to tell these stories seemed a natural decision. It has strong gendered links – woodwork for boys and sewing for girls – as well as a domestic connection. Its homely connotations make it an idea vehicle for conveying potentially unsettling messages.

The museum allowed me access to its stores to search for objects which could be brought out to tell other queer stories. Museum objects are categorised by material or subject matter. It is unusual to have the opportunity to select objects from across a museum's collections.

It brought up exciting connections: pairing a stuffed otter with ceramic bears to explore slang and stereotypes; linking polychrome figures from a fairground organ with coded language used by itinerant travellers and the gay community.

Other connections were quieter and more difficult. Using drug jars to explore the impact of HIV, and ceramic sphinxes to consider homophobia in Uganda.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has taken a very positive and proactive step towards further social inclusion with this exhibition. Their commitment to the project is possibly best illustrated by



allowing one of their most iconic objects – Epstein’s figure of Lucifer - to be ‘queered’ with a cloak of green carnations at the entrance to the museum.

No exhibition could adequately, and equally, convey the subtleties and complexities that are inherent in such a large and diverse group as the queer ‘community’. Rather, I hope this very individual take on the museum’s collections reminds people that there is more than one story to tell about any object.

This exhibition could not have happened without the good natured help and support of numerous people. I’d like to thank Dave Viney at SHOUT! and Andy Horn at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery who have backed and facilitated the project from the outset.

Andy’s colleagues at the museum have ensured that it was a pleasure to work there. They include Fiona Slattery, Linda Spurdle, Oliver Buckley, Victoria Osborne, Zelinda Garland, Brendan Flynn and Dave Rowan.

Thank you to Arts Council England for financing the project, Carolyn Conroy for her advice on Simeon Solomon, Lady James (aka Robert Clothier) for the loan of his heels and lashes, Gavin Fry for sewing assistance, Richard Sandell and Maria-Anna Tseliou at Leicester University, Catherine Harper at Brighton University and Oliver Winchester at the V&A.

All Photography by David Rowan © Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



Tiles Decorated with Jake's Progress
 White earthenware transfer printed overglaze
 2010

Looking for Linn Minnelli	At the Bar	Tobacco	Pride Day	Circle	Daddy in the Bushes
Sea Club	Savona	Tramway	Falling down at K-hole	Swimming in Myra	Feeling Summer Tunes

Opening the Museum is a series of displays which explores Ladbroke Grove, Bristol and contemporary art using the museum's collections. It is located by Arts Council England in connection with the artist's work using the 'Opening Programme'.

Tiles Decorated with Jake's Progress



Stereotypes

Stereotypes and slang abound within the queer community. Twinks, daddies, lipstick lesbians and femmes are joined by muscle marys and rice queens.

Bears are larger, hairy gay men who often have beards. Otters are slimmer hairy gay men. They are sometimes seen playing together in the wild.

Appendix 3 *Queering the Museum* Evaluation Report

Structure of the evaluation report

1. Aims of the evaluation
2. Methodology
3. The sample
4. Findings
5. Conclusions
6. Additional notes

1. Aims of the evaluation report:

- ❖ The overall scope of this evaluation is to assess the success and impact of 'Queering the museum' from the visitors' perspective
- ❖ Who visited the exhibition in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, and religion
- ❖ Visitors' motivation/purpose of visit
- ❖ Visitors' likes and dislikes
- ❖ Visitors' perceptions about Ig representation in the museum
- ❖ The message that visitors got from the exhibition
- ❖ Visitors' interpretation of the word 'queer'
- ❖ 1) Demographics, 2) Visitors' motivations and expectations, 3) Quality of visit and its outcomes

2. Methodology:

This report aims to present an evaluation of the exhibition 'Queering the Museum'. Its sample is not a big one; however, it does include a variety of visitors. In more practical terms, the evaluation consisted of face to face semi-structured interviews with visitors who were approached mainly at the Round room because this particular space seemed to be the best place to monitor who appeared to be interested in the exhibition so they could be approached later on. It was also good for approaching people at the end of their visit, leaving the museum, rather than interrupting them during their visit. However, in some instances interviews were also held in Gallery 23, which seemed to be the 2nd most popular gallery after the Round room. They usually lasted no more than 7 minutes. Overall, the interviews were held during 12 days. Each time almost 30-35 people were approached, and these were the ones who appeared that they may be engaging with the exhibition either because after having a closer look at Lucifer, took a leaflet, or because they were seen staring at a particular object of the exhibition. From these, the majority replied that they could not take part in the evaluation, mainly because they were not aware of the exhibition or less often, because they were aware of the exhibition but did not choose to engage with it. From those who had seen the exhibition, almost everybody was willing to take part, apart from a couple of persons each time who said no, due to lack of time, or in two cases due to lack of interest in taking part in an evaluation.

3. The Sample:

- The sample consisted of 61% male and 39% female visitors.

Gender	No. of visitors
Male	19
Female	12

- A broad age range was represented with 6,5% aged 17-24, 29% aged 25-34, 22,5% aged 35-44, 35,5% aged 45-60 and 6,5% aged 60+.
- The sample also consisted of 54,8% identified as heterosexuals, 3,2% identified as

Age	No. of visitors
Under 16	0
17-24	2
25 -34	9
35-44	7
45-60	11
60+	2

bisexuals, 35,5% identified as homosexuals and 6,5% who did not reply.

- The sample consisted of 32,3 % religious people and 67,7% of people with no religious beliefs.

Religion	No. of visitors
Have religious beliefs	10
Catholic	5
Christian	1
Jewish	2
Jehovah's witness	1
Quaker	1
No religious beliefs	21

Sexual Orientation	No. of visitors
Heterosexual	17
Male	9
Female	8
Bisexual	1
Prefer not to answer	2
Homosexual	11
Gay	8
Lesbian	3

To sum up, in terms of the visitors seeing the exhibition it appears that:

- *There were 20% more male visitors than female ones*
- *the vast majority of visitors were between 25-60 years old*

- 17% more visitors identified as heterosexual than LGB
- almost 2/3 of the visitors did not hold any religious beliefs

4. Findings:

1. **What was the reason for your visit today?** 54,8% of visitors found out about the exhibition randomly whereas 45,2% came specifically for it, and in particular, 6,5% of them came for the guided tour of the exhibition.

	LGBT	Heterosexual	Unspecified	Male	Female
54,8%	4	11	2	12	5
45,2%	8	6	-	8	6

2. **Which part(s) of the exhibition did you like the most or find more interesting and why?** Among visitors' answers it was clear that the most popular exhibit was the Carnation Cape which was mentioned by 1/3 of the visitors whereas the second most common answer was the general idea of the exhibition and the way it was developed, in that it repositioned things, changing their meaning and re-interpreting them, which was mentioned by 1/3 of the visitors. The rest of the positive comments were about the green carnation idea (2 references), the Fitting In case (2 references), the ceramics in general (3 references), the Stereotypes case (1 reference), "the exhibits' inscriptions" (1 reference), "the spreading out of the exhibition" (1 reference), the Reflection case (1 reference), the title of the exhibition (1 reference) and the Figure of a Youth Cruising case (1 reference).
3. **Were there any part(s) of the exhibition that you didn't like or you found least interesting and why?** Almost 1/3 of visitors replied that everything was interesting whilst the rest of the answers were mainly about specific exhibits, such as the complexity of Reflection (4 references) or of Ulysses (1 reference), the displeasure with the jokes with bears in Stereotypes (3 references). However, there were some negative comments about the lack of lesbian and transsexual representation (2 references), the lack of connection with Newman's exhibition (2 references), the difficulty of getting to Gallery 33 (2 references) whereas there was one person who expected to see more exhibits. Finally, it seems interesting that there were 2 references to the difficulty caused by the nature of the exhibition, that is the fact that it was spread out within the museum space, but both visitors explained that despite this, they understood the reasons behind this choice.
4. **Were there any particular parts of the exhibition that prompted you to pause for discussion or to share your thought? For example, was there any part that you found especially provocative?** Almost 40% of visitors said that the whole idea of this exhibition and in particular its topic, along with the way it was developed within the museum space were thought-provoking. Furthermore, 4 persons replied that this exhibition made them think about the developments that occurred in LGBT history and in the law concerning the LGBT community here in the UK. The only specific exhibits that came up as parts of the exhibition that prompted discussion or pausing for thinking were Polari as an exhibit that made them think about the existence and usefulness of such a language in the past (3 references) and Reflection as an exhibit that appeared quite complex and not easily understood by people (4 references). In terms of whether or not the exhibition was provocative, nobody found it as such. Instead, visitors kept mentioning that it was thought-provoking but not at all provocative.

5. **Do you feel that the exhibition is trying to communicate any particular message?** Almost 1/3 of visitors replied that this exhibition promotes diversity, either in terms of the existence of diverse communities within society (5 references) or of ways of looking at things (4 references). The next most popular answer was about the exhibition's objective to increase visibility of LGBT community (5 references). Among the rest of the responses, 'Queering the Museum' was identified as trying to present a mix of old and contemporary ideas (3 references), to celebrate homosexuality (2 references), to promote acceptance of LGBT people (2 references) and finally, to inform public about the life of homosexual people in the past and how it has changed so far (2 references).

6. **Do you think it is appropriate to have gay and lesbian culture represented in museums? / Would you like to see more gay and lesbian culture represented in museums?** All the interviewees answered to yes to the above questions. Out of them 74,2% said agreed whereas 25,8% said yes but with some specifications. These specifications included not being displayed all the time (2 references), to have it displayed at museums but to reach a point where it will not be a big deal (2 references), "to be done discretely like 'Queering the Museum'" (1 reference), "to represent it but in more provocative ways" (1 reference) or "without labels" (1 reference) and finally, one person said that "it is fine to have it displayed although he disagrees with this life" (1 reference). Regarding more specific suggestions for future exhibitions, visitors said that it would be nice to include in the permanent BMAG's collection Dana International's dress that she was wearing at the final of Eurovision song contest (1 reference), to display more contemporary gay and lesbian artists (1 reference) or more contemporary gay and lesbian history (1 reference), to present the stories of homosexual people in 2nd World War (1 reference), to have more permanent exhibits that are LGBT related in BMAG's collection (1 reference) and finally, to display homosexuality with an exhibition on the history of sexuality in general (1 reference).

7. **What does the word queer mean to you?** In almost half of the answers it was obvious that queer had negative associations for visitors, with only 7 interviewees being aware of the word having been reclaimed and re-appropriated by the LGBT community. Furthermore, almost 1/3 of visitors said that 'queer' is kind of synonym for LGBT (10 references) whereas it was also explained as something different or unusual (7 references).

8. **Where did you hear about the exhibition?** The majority of visitors who were interviewed learnt about the exhibition at BMAG (54,8%) either through the leaflets or because of having seen the Carnation Cape. Among the rest of the interviewees who came specifically for visiting 'Queering the Museum', the most popular sources were Internet (8 references) and word of mouth (6 references).

	54,8%	45,2%	LGBT	Heterosexual
BMAG	17	-	4	13
Internet	-	8	4	4
Shout	-	2	2	-
Word of Mouth	-	6	5	1
Personal Contact with the artist	-	2	1	1
Magazine	-	2	-	2

To sum up, visitors' answers to the above questions show that:

- almost 4 in 10 visitors visited BMAG specifically for seeing 'Queering the Museum'
- the idea of introducing visitors to 'Queering the Museum' with the Carnation Cape at the round room was very successful, especially in terms of prompting it to visitors who were unaware of the exhibition before visiting it
- the methodology of 'Queering the Museum' and its particular features, such as the idea of re-positioning or re-interpreting things, was highlighted as an effective way of producing and presenting an exhibition
- the only parts of the exhibition that were quite problematic, such as Reflection and Stereotypes, were exhibits whose interpretation appeared quite difficult
- the nature of 'Queering the Museum' regarding its spreading out within BMAG was well-received even in cases when people found it hard to get around, as the importance of presenting it in such a way was clear to them
- the messages received by visitors were mainly related to the main concern of LGBT community, that of visibility and acceptance, and to the significant role that choices about the exhibition design and development play in interpretation
- representing the LGBT community in a balanced way within museums in general, and BMAG in particular, was well-received by all the interviewees, even in cases where their personal beliefs were opposed to LGBT lives
- the word 'queer' is a term most commonly perceived negatively and as a synonym for LGBT
- Internet, such as BMAG's website and Facebook, as well as suggestions for visiting 'Queering the Museum' by people who already had seen it, were the main reasons for prompting people to come and see the specific exhibition

5. Conclusions:

- ❖ According to the many visitors who missed 'Queering the Museum', it could be summed up that it was not very easily accessible to the general public of BMAG, but according to those who saw it, it seems that this exhibition managed to have an impact on the majority of them. This impact was identified as a spark for thinking or changing attitudes/beliefs ('thought-provoking') and as gaining new knowledge ('informative'). It could be argued that although the main concern was to reach out particularly the LGBT community, it was a success that many people identified as heterosexual were tempted to engage with the exhibition.
- ❖ Although this was only a small sample, the exhibition was well received by visitors and it had an impact on the majority of them, either in terms of knowledge/learning or of attitude/opinion towards LGBT culture. What became very clear among the 31 visitors' answers was that for the vast majority of them this exhibition appeared very effective and thought-provoking. It made them aware of the importance of content and object positioning in museums and the diversity of ways of living but more importantly of ways thinking and looking at things but also realizing how much progress has been made and the developments that happened during the last decades in LGBT history.
- ❖ The exhibition was not easily noticeable. Even when I explained to the visitors which exhibition I was talking about while showing them the leaflet, most of them appeared to have no idea about it. I also made a reference to the green carnation saying that the cases with exhibits of 'Queering the Museum' exhibition were signified by a green carnation, but again the majority response was that they had not noticed it. Therefore, since the nature of the exhibition was not like the typical temporary exhibitions placed within a specific gallery/space, perhaps more effort should have been made regarding the exhibition's marketing.

6. Additional notes:

- On the 5th of February a woman in her sixties commented about the lack of detailed information about the shoes in the Fitting In case at Gallery 23. She told me that overall she found the exhibition really interesting and that she came along with her friend specifically to see 'Queering the Museum', and her only disappointment was about the Fitting In case. She was so interested in this particular case but as she said she wished she could learn more about what she enjoyed more in this specific exhibition.

7. Observation notes:

- Due to the lack of interviewees, I attempted to get some data through observation, which was also useful to see which visitors noticed the exhibition and could be approached for an interview later on.
- At the Round room, Lucifer drew the attention of people mainly under the age of 50 and was one of the most popular exhibits, even for people who didn't see the rest of the exhibition.
- The least popular galleries appeared to be Gallery 26 'Ulysses Bending the Bow' and 33 'Civil Partnership Card'. Regarding Gallery 26 it seemed that people were just passing by it without noticing it whereas for Gallery 33 it appears that the location of this gallery was the problem and not the lack of interest to this specific exhibit.
- The most popular gallery appeared to be Gallery 23 'Stereotypes', 'Contemplating Mr Buturo' and 'Fitting In'.

Appendix 4 Review: *Social History in Museums* Vol 35

Queering the Museum

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

4th November 2010 - 30th January 2011

The question of whether museums are doing enough to address LGBT audiences has been raised on several occasions in *Museums Journal* and other publications. In October 2007 Jack Gilbert argued that most museums or galleries were not collecting, framing or interpreting the lives of LGBT people meaningfully. The Museum of London's *Pride Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London* (1999) and *Queer is Here* (2006), along with *The Warren Cup: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2006) at the British Museum, were significant temporary exhibitions but for Gilbert they were exceptions.

There have been some notable museum displays, exhibitions and other initiatives since Gilbert's article. *Gay Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery (July – October 2009) was a particularly high profile exhibition and some significant literature has been published recently (see below). References to LGBT history and experience within exhibitions or collections-based interpretation have arguably continued to become more frequent. The recent British Museum and BBC Radio 4 series *A History of the World in 100 objects*, for example, included two programmes which addressed same-sex relationships in ancient and modern times. The question of whether museums are doing enough, however, remains pertinent and there is still plenty of scope for thoughtful critiques of the different approaches that have been adopted to date.

Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (November 2010 – January 2011) is the latest addition to the growing corpus of exhibitions to explore LGBT experience and arguably one of the boldest and most innovative. Visitors arriving at the Museum encounter Jacob Epstein's (1880-1959) bronze statue of Lucifer, the head of which was modelled on a woman, the body on a man, creating a figure which suggests a merging of genders. The statue is a permanent feature at the Museum but for the duration of *Queering the Museum* the statue holds a green cape, a contemporary creation made by Matt Smith that is adorned with green silk carnations, a flower worn by men in the 19th and early 20th century as a symbol of gay identity. The transformed Lucifer acts as the introduction to *Queering the Museum*, an exhibition that features eighteen further displays distributed throughout the building and integrated with the permanent galleries. These displays are identified with a green carnation graphic and a distinctive label that reflects aspects of LGBT history and experience. Most visitors will encounter some of these displays serendipitously as they move through the Museum. On the other hand visitors who have come specifically to see the exhibition, or who have become aware of it on arriving at the Museum, will probably proactively seek out the displays, particularly if they have collected a *Queering the Museum* map from the holder next to Lucifer.

The nature of the displays is varied. In a *Tribute to Simeon*, works by the artists Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) and Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) are displayed together in a freestanding case along with a new ceramic work by artist and exhibition curator Matt Smith. At first glance the display blends into the rest of gallery. It is only with a closer look that the distinctive carnation logo on the side of the case and the green strip on the label become apparent, revealing that there is something different about this case. The text explores the impact that Solomon's sexuality had on his work and career in contrast to that of Leighton. Solomon's same-sex encounters resulted in his arrest in London and later Paris, events that led to the collapse of his career whereas Leighton's

Exhibition Review: *Queering the Museum*

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discretion meant that his career continued to prosper. Historically biographical references to same-sex encounters or relationships have usually been excluded from interpretation in museums and galleries: in contrast equivalent references related to the heterosexual experiences of artists and other figures are commonplace in many institutions.

Two male sculptures from the Museum's own collections, a statue of Ulysses and one of Adonis, have been paired together in the Medieval & Renaissance Room with a text that argues that curators have a tendency to unconsciously heterosexualise displays, for example by often 'pairing' unrelated male and female sculptures. Elsewhere a Civil Partnership Card from 2005 has been added to an existing display which explores celebrations. Both of these thought-provoking interventions, which utilise objects in the Museum's collection, underline the varied ways in which heteronormative assumptions have led to omissions in museum displays or subtle biases in interpretation.

The majority of the *Queering the Museum* displays feature new ceramic art works made by Matt Smith, and at first glance most of these look like as though they are 'antique' objects that have always been there. For example, it is only on closer inspection that Smith's *The Ladies of Langollen* reveals itself to be a contemporary interloper amongst genuinely historic ceramics. The piece represents Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, two ladies who set up home together at Plas Newydd in rural Wales after running away from their aristocratic Irish homes. They received visitors as illustrious as the Duke of Wellington and William Wordsworth. The new piece creates an alternative narrative: the Ladies of Langollen are included amongst the historic displays where they seem to be quite at home.

In other cases the new pieces are juxtaposed with objects from the Museum's own collections to create a stimulating dialogue between old objects and new artworks. Some of the displays are playful, others are more serious. Two half-man animal figures, titled *Contemplating Mr Buturo*, draw attention to the persecution that same-sex adults still face around the world. The title refers to James Nsaba Buturo, the Ugandan Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity who has campaigned for the death penalty for gay men. Other displays highlight issues such as the use of gay slang, stereotypes, the use of symbols and transgender experience.

The labels that support the displays in *Queering the Museum* are always close to the objects and in a clear visual relationship with them. The texts themselves are clear, concise, informative and thought provoking. However there is only one point for collecting the overall exhibition leaflet and plan, and this is discrete and easily missed. More leaflet holders alongside other displays might have been helpful for visitors encountering *Queering the Museum* for the first time elsewhere in the Museum and in converting these chance encounters into a deeper interest.

The historian Robert Mills has argued that some recent LGBT themed exhibitions have offered an overly simplistic narrative and have run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing the idea that individuals are either completely heterosexual or homosexual, what Mills terms the "homo-hetero binary calculus". These are not criticisms that can be made of the interventions that form *Queering the Museum*. The integration of the displays throughout the Museum building with the main collection ensures that it is encountered by a large and diverse audience, including those who perhaps otherwise might not visit a self-contained exhibition with an LGBT focus. The exhibition's dispersed and subversive approach is likely to have posed challenges for some visitors but *Queering the Museum* succeeds on many levels, fulfilling the aims outlined in an essay in the online catalogue (available as a PDF). It is to the Museum's credit that it has embraced an alternative approach that will have elicited a wide range of responses from deep engagement to some bemused shrugs of the shoulders and confused glances.

Queering the Museum will close at the end of January 2011, just as LGBT history month is about to begin. By working with an artist Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has been able to look at its collections with fresh eyes, to make new connections between objects, histories and audiences that have usually been overlooked. Collectively the displays in the exhibition capture the diversity of LGBT experiences in an imaginative and creative way, arguably more effectively than many previous approaches. Although *Queering the Museum* is a temporary exhibition it underlines the potential that exists for museums to reinterpret their existing collections in thought-provoking ways and provides another case-study for the museum community to consider.

Stuart Frost is Head of Interpretation at The British Museum

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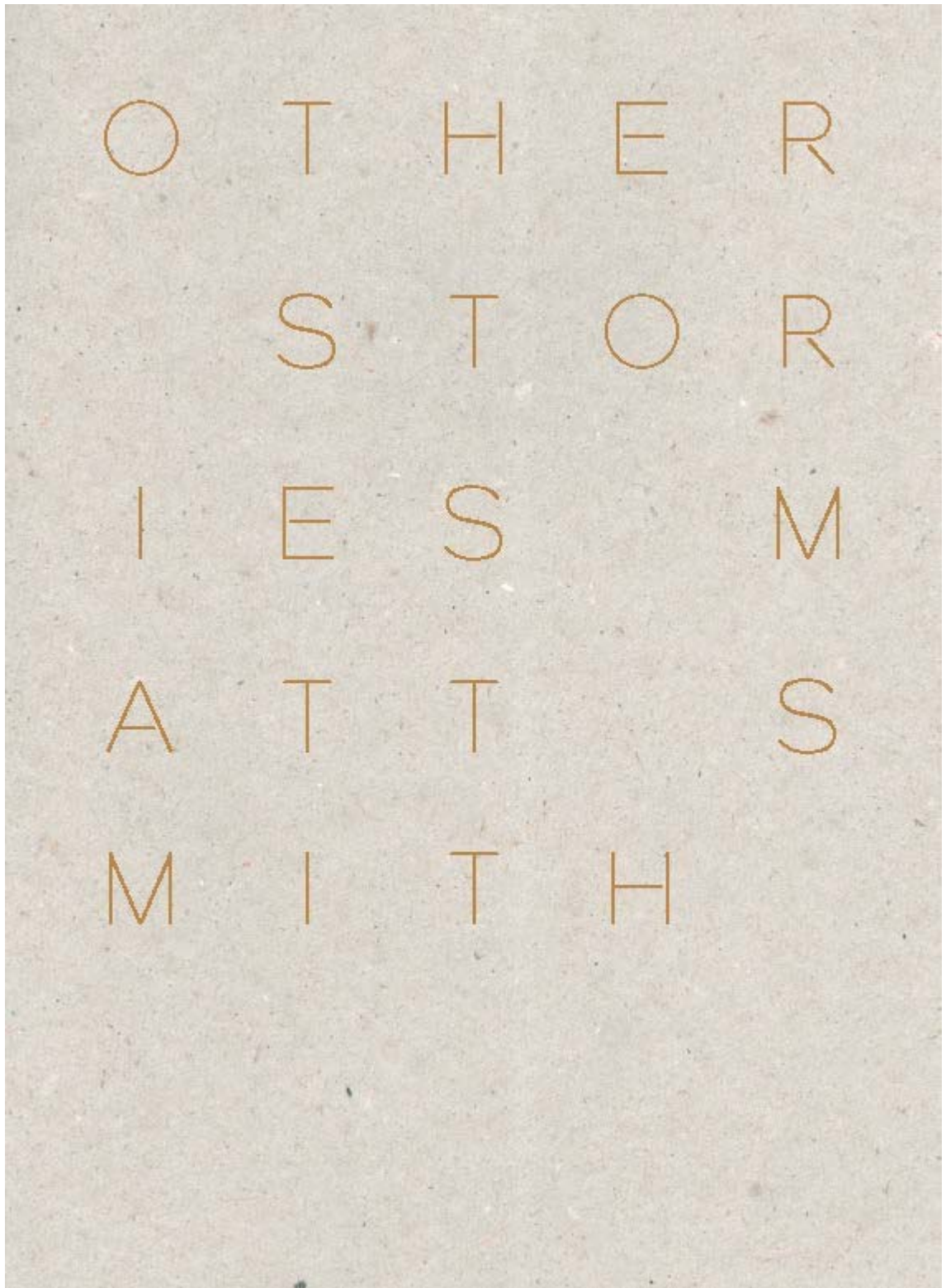
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Online Resources

LGBT History Month
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
<http://www.bmag.org.uk/events?id=1013>

Appendix 5 *Other Stories* Exhibition Catalogue



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Foreword
Layla Bloom

This catalogue has been published to coincide with the exhibition 'Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection' part of wider celebrations throughout the UK for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) History Month. In recognition of this occasion, the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery presents a two-part exhibition: the first part concerns the life of Victorian writer, philosopher and gay rights activist Edward Carpenter, whose letters can be found in the University of Leeds Library Special Collections. The second views LGBT history through the lens of contemporary art, creating 'interventions' in our main collection room by the artist Matt Smith. Smith researched personal stories from the LGBT community at Brighton Ourstory and inscribed selections from these on found objects. Each work connects to a piece in the University Art Collection, offering new ways of understanding and reading these objects, as well as opening up debate about the meanings given to objects in museum and gallery displays. It is hoped that Carpenter's vision of a better world alongside Matt Smith's very personal responses to our collection will encourage visitors to reflect on alternative and multiple possible interpretations of these objects, perhaps - like Smith - drawing on their own personal associations and experiences.

Special mention must go to my colleague Dr. Zuzanna Reed Papp, who conceived this project. Her passion and dedication - through extensive research, writing and organisation - has allowed the Gallery team to bring together this special exhibition during her absence on maternity leave. Many thanks to my Gallery colleagues, especially Laura Millward, Paul Whittle and Liz Stainforth, for helping make these plans a reality.

We are immensely grateful for support from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, which has made this project possible.

Layla Bloom
Curator

Matt Smith, *Unsettled III*, 2021
Cotton, hand-stitched dresses, hand embroidery



Ordinary Queerness

Lara Perry

Among the pleasures of viewing a work of art from the past in the present is in entering into a dialogue with artist and subject that defies the gulf of time. However many years may separate the act of making an artwork from the act of looking at it, the gap can be closed by the mutual presence of artwork and viewer. Matt Smith's exhibition for the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery engages with this most powerful dynamic of the art exhibition, devising contemporary works that explore and exploit our individual relationships with historic artworks from the University of Leeds Art Collection. His installation renews and expands our sensitivity to the art of the twentieth century, and reshapes the relationship we have in the present with the past; it represents, in particular, this exhibition opens up for us a relationship with the usually repressed histories of lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships in England.

This renewal of our relationship with the historic artworks is achieved in part by removing the works from the conventional discourse of the art display. In what is usually described as an *intervention*, Matt Smith's work follows that of artists who have scrutinised and criticised museum collections by directly reworking the presentation and interpretation of their collection. Influential artists' interventions have included Fred Wilson's expose of the racist histories told in American museum collections (*Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, 1992-3); Andrea Fraser's explication of the classed culture of the art museum in 'Museum Highlights, A Gallery Talk', (1989); and Susan Hiller's 'After the Freud Museum' (1991-96), which probes the conscious and unconscious significances of Sigmund Freud's art collection. These are just a few of the pioneering examples of the genre of artists' intervention, which has developed into a key mechanism through which art institutions interact with living artists.¹

In this exhibition at Leeds, the artist's intervention is focused on elaborating a sense of queer history, the history of the many people whose intimate relationships are not arranged by straightforward heterosexuality. This is a history that is almost always omitted from museums and galleries, even when it is integral to the lives of the artists and artworks that are exhibited there.

In the most extreme cases, the museum offers us an extremely astringent version of art's history which focuses on its formal innovations: Varesa Bell's *Still Life (Fripie Alliance)* (1914) or Trevor Bell's *Image of Elites* (1960), for example, are recorded as exemplars of an evolving British modernism (the painting of 'significant form' followed by the adventures of abstraction). In Smith's display, the emphasis is not on the formal qualities of the artworks, but on their relationship to the historic field of social and sexual practices in which they emerged. Artworks always take shape within the specific network of friendships and working practices, and the acts of social experimentation (and conformity) that accompanied the aesthetic gestures of the artworks are inseparable from them.² For some audiences, and for

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some artists, the social gestures that are implicated in artworks are at least as compelling as the aesthetic ones. The juxtaposition of the historic artworks from the University of Leeds Art Collection with Smith's own works opens a dialogue between the pairs of objects that enjoins us to reflect on the ways the artists capture the mood and dynamics of a specific relationship with their models, and with their canvases.

This is not achieved through the sensationalising of particular episodes in the artists' biographies, ever where such a move is possible (it is sometimes the case that histories of Bloomsbury artists, for example, dwell rather prudently on the unconventionality of some of the relationships that formed the friendship circle). Instead the display invites us to reflect on the ordinary qualities of queer history and desires, and of their seamless integration – and not segregation – from more familiar versions of the past. Smith's use of domestic objects in his work is key to this process. Desktop photo frames, children's clothing and coffee sets are normally not admitted to art gallery displays. They belong to the realm of the familiar because our own homes are populated with similar kinds of things, and give us a direct mode of access to the 'foreign country' that is the past.³ These objects anchor the University of Leeds Art Collection in the ordinary but profound currency of the domestic world, and the daily intimacies of the relationships it shelters. Their general connotations are however accorded a definite and particular queer character through the texts that are recorded on the objects. Cleaned from the Ourstory archive of oral testimonies from the Brighton and Hove lesbian and gay community, the quotations reproduce the speaker's own voice, and allow the women and men who recorded their experiences of queer life to speak to us directly.

Each of the quotations and objects that Smith has used in his own works expresses a moment of crystalline clarity about the speaker's situation, and the way that an individual's life is shaped by its encounters with the sexual habits of a society. This aspect of Matt Smith's installation brings much more to this exhibition than the simple elaboration of queer social history. At the same time that Smith's embroidered, impressed, stencilled and otherwise articulated objects bring the University of Leeds Art Collection artworks back to the level of the everyday, they also reanimate them aesthetically. In each quotation is recorded a struggle to give shape to unfamiliar and queer desires, a struggle which parallels the attempts of the artist to create a form and image. In Gaudier-Brezka's *Standing Male Nude (Horace Brodsky)* or John Currie's *The Seamstresses*, the effort of the artist to call forth a particular vision of his subject is visible in the strained lines that both record the natural world and begin to reshape it. Through Matt's vision of ordinary queerness, we can see the University of Leeds Art Collections artworks as attempts to redraw convention, and give new form to everyday desires.

- 1 For an introduction to this practice, see K. McShine, *The Museum as Muse*, edn. cat. (New York, 1999)
- 2 Lisa Tishner, 'English Modernism in the Cultural Field', in D. Corbett and L. Perry eds., *English Art 1860-1940: Modern Artists and Identity*, (Manchester, 2003), 15-30.
- 3 The description was popularised by David Lowenthal in his influential book, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).

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Edward Carpenter: Sex, Spirit, and Social Reform
 Joy Dixon



Edward Carpenter was born in 1844, the seventh child of a well-off family in Brighton. He went on to become one of the best-known reformers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as a feminist, a pacifist, an animal rights campaigner and as an early campaigner for sexual reform. Recent interest in Carpenter has been significant, as the themes that were central to his work—a concern with social justice and sexual politics, and an effort to make connections between various radical causes, from socialism to feminism and sexual reform—are important issues in our own day. In her new biography of Carpenter, Sheila Rowbotham notes ‘the remarkable range of *interconnections* evident in his life, through his networks, his mix of causes, his interests and his thinking,’ which forces us to recognise the ways that his many interests intersected and complemented each other.

Those interests included both sexuality and spirituality, which Carpenter saw as operating in dynamic relationship to each other. Carpenter was one of a number of figures who were trying to connect ‘sex’ and ‘spirit’ at this time. In America, for example, the spiritualist and free love activist Lois Waisbrooker argued (as Sarah Willburn puts it) that ‘sex is the way to heaven and is also the vehicle through which spirits rule the world, making women a natural, sexually active, sexually evolved part of the divine order.’¹ Within the spiritualist movement, the silence was also a space in which both men and women found opportunities to break social, sexual, and gender rules, assisted and sometimes encouraged by the presence of ‘spirits.’² For most of these writers, though, it was heterosexual sex which was seen as linked to salvation; so-called ‘sexual perversion’ was still often linked to ‘spiritual perversion.’ Carpenter was unusual in the very positive role he gave to non-marital, non-heterosexual forms of sexual desire. Influenced by Walt Whitman, Carpenter saw desire (or ‘love’) as at the core of all personal, social, and evolutionary change. In a chapter of his book *Civilization: Its Course and Cure* (1889) Carpenter described how ‘[d]esire, or inward change, comes first, action follows, and organization or outward structure is the result.’ Whether the result was a person building a house or a gastropod growing antennae, evolution was a ‘true unfolding of a higher form latent within—an organic growth of the creature itself.’⁴ Naming this process ‘Evolution’—the point at which the old forms are ‘thrown off like a husk’⁵—emphasised the moment at which desire or feeling broke through into the material world, transforming it. The result was to blur the distinctions between the ideal and the real, presenting the material world as a kind of crystallization of desire, and as continually susceptible to being modified by the power of that desire. For Carpenter, ‘love’ had to be the driving force behind all change; love was the life-force ‘bursting’ through the old dead forms of western civilisation to make way for new possibilities.

Roger Fry (1864-1933), *Edward Carpenter*, oil on canvas, 1894. Gifted by Roger Fry, 1930. ING 3447 © National Portrait Gallery

Carpenter was writing about love and sex at a time when both were controversial and highly politicised. Socialist and feminist critiques of marriage and male sexual license sometimes opposed and sometimes made common cause with eugenic and imperial concerns.¹ In a context where the dominant 'progressive' position on sexuality was represented by the social purity movement—which demanded sexually 'pure' behaviour from both sexes² — Carpenter attempted to make positive connections between love, sex (including same-sex love), desire, and the body.

In his early writings on sexuality—the publication of which was interrupted by the closing down of public discussion of homosexuality in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895 — Carpenter even attempted a limited defense of lust: what he described as 'the corporeal amatory instinct', stressing the interchangeability of lust and love, body and soul, and of the cultural and biological under the heading of the principle of 'Transmutation.'³ These slippages between and deliberate confusions of the boundaries between soul and body, the spiritual and the physical, are one of the reasons why Carpenter has been so variously characterised by historians, who have described him both as an advocate of a 'strongly biological theory of sexual behaviour' and as arguing that 'homogenic [homosexual] love was primarily a question of sensibility rather than of congenital "orientation."⁴ In his writings on homosexuality, which he characterized as an 'intermediate sex', Carpenter refused to resolve these questions, portraying the 'sexual intermedie' as a distinctive (and perhaps superior) way of being, and as a potential future for all humanity. The 'intermediate' was bisexual in the sense that he or she combined the characteristics of both male and female; in an 'extreme specimen' both body and behaviour might evidence traits usually associated with the other sex. The 'intermediate' was also a transitional type in the sense that she or he stood between the extremes of the manly man and the womanly woman. In *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), Carpenter concluded that the most recent and most reliable authorities agreed 'that the individuals affected with inversion in marked degree do not after all differ from the rest of mankind or womankind, in any other physical or mental particular which can be distinctly indicated.'⁵ The 'intermediate sex' was, for Carpenter, a natural variation, the result of what he described as 'a mixture of male and female elements in the same person; so that for instance in the same embryo the emotional and nervous regions may develop along feminine lines while the outer body and functions may determine themselves as distinctly masculine.' The 'problem' of the intermediate temperament (if it was a problem) was, therefore, 'of Nature's own producing' and same-sex love was, according to Carpenter, 'not only natural, but needful and inevitable.'⁶

This material has been drawn with permission from Joy Dixon, "'Out of your clinging kisses ... I create a new world': Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter," *Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, eds. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Ashgate, in press).

- 1 Rowbotham, Edward Carpenter, p. 4.
- 2 Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Akershott, 2006), p. 72.
- 3 See Alex Owen, *The Domestic Domain: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London, 1997); Marjorie Thompson, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drug, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Britain* (London, 2006). Both Owen and Thompson include same-sex encounters. See pp. 37–8.
- 4 Carpenter, *Civilization*, pp. 155–6.
- 5 See Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford, 2003).
- 7 Lucy Bland, *Enriching the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (1995; London and New York, 2002), p. 52.
- 8 Carpenter, *Sex-Love and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester 1894), p. 8.
- 9 For the first position, see Vincent Geoghegan, 'Edward Carpenter's England Revisited,' *History of Political Thought* 24(2) (Autumn 2003): p. 514; for the second, see Harry Cock, 'Glasius in Bolton: Spirituality and Homosexual Desire in Late Victorian England,' *Gender and History* 15(2) (August 2003): p. 217.
- 10 Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (1908); in Edward Carpenter, *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: Sex (London, 1997), pp. 194–7, 267. The English term 'intermediate' was used by Carpenter to describe a third sex, which he articulated particularly in the analysis of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (published in German in 1903; English translation 1906), which Carpenter quoted on the first page of his text.
- 11 Carpenter, *intermediate sex*, p. 213.

Other Stories

Matt Smith

When I started talking with Zuzanna Papp and Layla Bloom at the Starley & Audrey Burton Gallery about developing a series of art installations using the Edward Carpenter material as a base, I naturally spent some time reading his biography.

A true Renaissance man, Edward was born in 1844 and had a very open relationship with another man, George Merrill. They met in 1891 and lived together until Merrill's death in 1928. This openness ran counter to the historical 'truth' that late Victorian homosexuality was all about covert and persecuted lifestyles and the trial of Oscar Wilde.

At about the same time as we were having these discussions, I heard Amy Tooth Murphy, from LGBT History Month Scotland, talk about her work with LGBT oral histories and how many of the interviewees painted a picture which differed from the 'grand narratives' of the past that we can believe to be universal and true.

Museums and galleries form and develop collections. They often present narratives based on their holdings – which by their very nature are selected, and edited, creating 'universal histories' which include some and exclude others. Since museums and galleries are usually based around object collections, those groups in society that own, use and consume objects tend to be privileged in museum displays.

Unlike most other minority groups – those linked by religion, ethnicity and race – the LGBT community produces a paucity of unique material culture. There are few 'gay objects': it is also a group that seldom passes knowledge down through familial, intergenerational lines. In light of this, the role of the oral history archive becomes pressing. If members of the fragmented, diverse LGBT community feel the need to place themselves within a wider historical setting.

Similarly, traditional museum and gallery classifications which record object details, such as date, medium and maker, provide a basis for categorisation and order, but often ignore the role those objects played in daily life – the reasons they were made, bought, used and retained. The emotive memories that become embedded in cherished objects are too often lost as they fall outside the normal means of classification.

For all these reasons, I was interested in working with the material in an oral history archive to find out what people thought and felt in the past and to discover what discrepancies the archive may contain and what links and connections such material could make with the fine art collection at the University. I therefore contacted the Ourstory oral history archive in Brighton.

The Ourstory archive's remit is to document the lives of people who have same-sex desire.¹ Like any collection, the archive is obviously selected. Whilst it contains many voices, the

archive is limited by whose stories are told and collected, who is asked to speak, and who is willing to be recorded. Layered over this, was my further sifting and selecting. Going through the archive, I was looking for those voices that interested me – that made me stop and want to consider what was being said.

Working with these first person narratives, I embedded them permanently into contemporary objects. As a counterpoint to the argument that LGBT stories become hidden histories, I wanted to make these memories visible, tangible and permanent by indelibly etching them into objects that these interviewees could have owned, held or viewed.

Throughout this process, I kept coming back to the third equal player in this exhibition – the University of Leeds Art Collection, since this series of interventions forms a three-way connection between the oral histories, the contemporary objects and the art collection at the University of Leeds.

Some of the connections were immediately obvious – the Duncan Grant artworks were a key starting point given his widely documented history of same-sex relationships whilst in a long term relationship with Vanessa Bell. Others, such as the *Image of Blues* by Trevor Bell, were connected visually, whilst the relevance of others came out in discussions with curator Layla Bloom.

The oral history archive – whilst certainly not unedited or unselected – provides us with a more rounded, representative portrayal of lives and loves than we can often find through objects alone. By using these contradictory histories, and utilising them to reinterpret the pictures from the collection, I hope to reposition the artworks away from curatorial conventions and certainties and instead within the worlds of emotion, subjectivity and identity.

For some of the pictures in the collection, the links are tenuous and fleeting; for others, they are integral to the biographies of the artists. For all, the intention is that the interventions allow for the pictures to be curated and considered in a new way.

There are often many histories of an object. Trying to reduce history into a single, unified narrative erases the lives of those who lived outside of that mainstream and ignores that the past has always been a collection of complex, fragmented and contradictory stories.

¹ Whilst this doesn't necessarily exclude trans people, I couldn't find appropriate reminiscences and therefore, unfortunately, trans voices are not heard in this exhibition.

Untitled I

Lasercut oak and brass tray, 2012

Until recently, same-sex relationships fell outside state records and family trees. They are often only found by looking at what is omitted and left unsaid.



*At the age of eight or nine, and long before distinct
sex or feelings declared themselves, I felt a friendly
attraction toward my own sex, and this developed
after the age of puberty into a passionate sense
of love.*

— Edward Carpenter, circa 1885



George Herrell Photo by Jane Cassell. From: Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dream*. Penguin Anthropological Notes (London, 1916).



Untitled II

Wool blanket, hand embroidery, 2022

Apparently, whilst painting *The Seamstresses*, artist John Currie read Dostoevsky to the two models, who look less-than-enraptured by it, and instead seem to be honouring the male presence in their lives.

'She and I started dancing and the feeling between us was getting a bit powerful. We disappeared one night up into my room. We were just overcome with desire. I didn't seem to care about people knowing. Well, I didn't think there was anything wrong in what we were doing. So, they would see us lying on the bed and, in fact, we used to by outside, on the lawn, and concede in full view of everyone.'

— Gill, circa 1949



John Currie 01805-1910. *The Seamstresses*, oil on canvas, 1913. Gift of Sir Michael Sadler, 1925. The University of Leeds JLF Collection.

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Untitled III

Shelby's Forgotten address book, ink, 2012

Sex between men was legalised in the UK in 1967. Dennis' account highlights his belief that anonymous sex was the safest way of having physical contact in an era when men loving men could result in arrest and imprisonment.

As well as combining decoration and entrapment, Sir-a-Cage also shares its name with the 1996 adaptation of Jean Poirret's 1973 play *Lo-Cage* our Folles.

I never kept the names and addresses of ... friends written down, it was in my head but I never wrote it down on anything and I would certainly never dream of keeping a diary because I knew loads and loads and loads of queens who were arrested and then they'd go to their house and go through their rooms and they'd find a diary and they'd go through names in that and it could snowball, it was a terrifying thing.

I always thought it wasn't safe to have affairs. One night stands with someone whose name you didn't know and certainly whose address you didn't know and they'd ain't know yours was really a much better idea.

— Dennis, circa 1960



Frank Lidz (1916-1986), Sir-a-Cage, oil on canvas, 1985.
Transfer to the Educational Resource Service, Whitefriar, 2002.
The University of Leeds Art Collection. © Estate of Frank Lidz

Untitled IV

Laser-etched Babycam glasses, 2012

Not all the narratives in the archive agreed. For many, the illegality of male same-sex relationships before 1967 did not have a major detrimental impact. For George, however, it did. His bleak testimony is in stark contrast to ideas of the 1960s as a time of sexual liberation and youthful exuberance. I tried to capture this discrepancy with the use of the Babycam glasses, engraving his story on the glasses made for one of the campiest of drinks. Placed in front of Vasarely's painting which utilizes optical tricks: the messages play and hide from the viewer. The painting's combination – to my eye – of celebratory bubbles and constricting bars echoes the contradiction of this period for some gay men.

I had a great sense of relief when the law changed. I was terrified of the law. When you grow up and you find that you're against the law – it worries you. Just the very fact that your existence is threatened all the time and you have to behave in certain ways. And you're vulnerable.

In bars, for example, you never discussed where you worked, you never gave your name, never gave your real name anyway. You'd be Bill or Harry. I have friends who don't even know my real name...

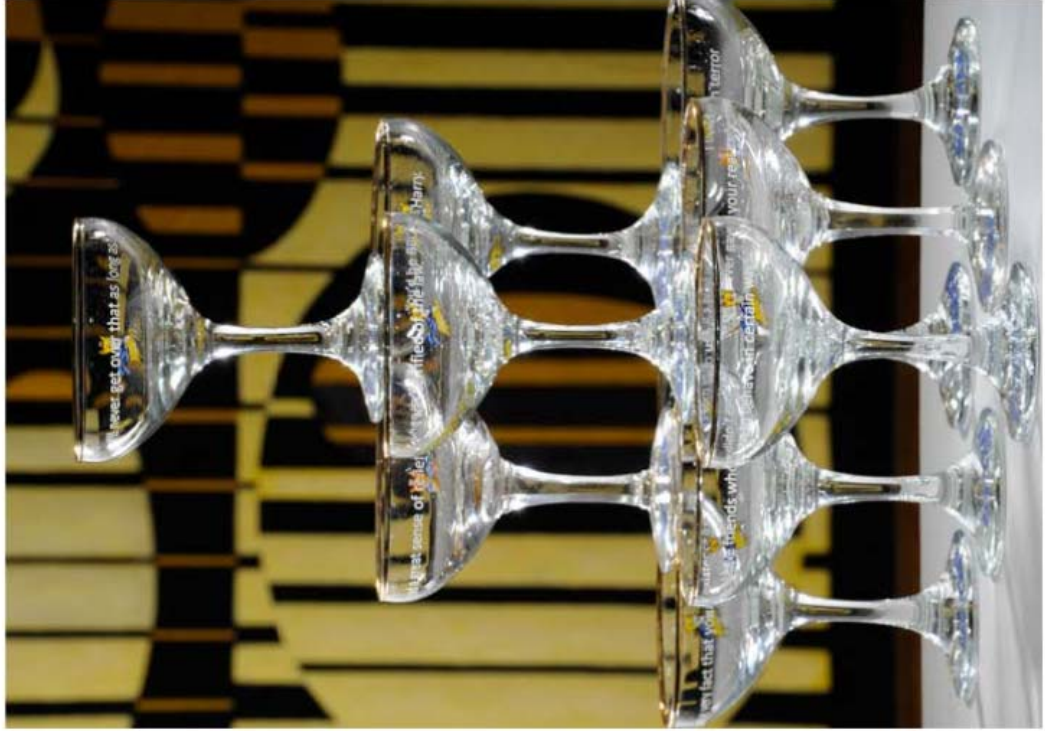
I lived in terror! I never get over that as long as I live. It's born into us. It's bred to feel ashamed of what we are. I will die feeling that way."

– George, circa 1967



Victor Vasarely (1908-1997), *Untitled IV*, oil on canvas, 1965-7, Gift of the Audrey and Stanley Brinko Charitable Trust, 2009. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © ADAGP, Paris and DAC/S, London, 2012.

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Untitled V

Ceramic coffee set, ceramic fragments, 2012

Virginia Bell and Duncan Grant lived together and had a child. Their relationship was open, and saw Grant have concurrent same-sex relationships. These two pictures show Bell and Grant's different views of the same triple alliance.

'Bob and I were in a pretty bad way and she asked me if I wanted to talk about it. Her husband was upstairs, doing the ironing.'

'She sat around looking very uncomfortable, drinking coffee and not saying anything. About ten minutes before we had to go and collect the children from school, she suddenly said, "I think I'm in love with you."

'I remember being absolutely rooted to the ceiling, thinking, "Shit, what's the answer to that?" After about ten minutes I said, "Well, I'm a bit shocked but I actually think I feel the same..."

'I couldn't believe how easy it was to slide into a relationship with a woman. I'd always thought you had to be very different from what I thought I was, in order to be able to do that.'

'Bob was relieved that I'd got some emotional contact with someone else. Her husband, however, had a nervous breakdown for nine months when she told him.'

— Val, circa 1980



Duncan Grant (1865-1928), 568 Lf, A. Wilson House, oil and collage on board, 1914, Acquired, 2011. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved. DDC1101



Virginia Bell (1877-1950), 568 Lf, Wright's School, collage, semi-print, oil and paper, 1914, Gift of Sir Michael Sadler C1922. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © Estate Virginia Bell, Courtesy: Heidi Gannett



Untitled VI

Soap, the *www* dixide, 2012

This is the last permanent intervention in the exhibition. Graham's oral history was recorded months before he died of an AIDS-related disease. When I read his history, I knew I wanted to work with soap. It took much longer to realise all the connections that were inherent in it as a medium. There was the connection with the repetitive nature of caring and cleaning for the chronically ill. Other cultural responses: linking washing with AIDS range from Ed Lang's video *So In Love* to the sink pieces by Robert Gober.

The intervention is paired with Trevor Bell's *Image of Blues*, blue being the title of Derek Jarman's 1993 film in which he conveyed his experiences with AIDS. As the interviewee lost his train of thought and Jarman his sight, this soap will eventually lose its shape, its message and its form.

... I knew that it was almost male or break, you know, that I'd been feeling ill for the last five or six weeks, you know, I had a temperature every night sometimes during the days well as, had these different things wrong with me - the, the anal bleeding, the pain, the...

— Graham (1945-1990), 1989



Trevor Bell (b.1932), *Image of Blues*, oil on canvas, 1960, Gift of Audrey Burton, 2007. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © The artist

Untitled VII

Collage of children's dresses, hand embroidered in 2012

For many people in same-sex relationships, having children was not seen as a possibility. The changes that have happened between when these dresses were made and when they were embroidered - new family groupings, artificial insemination and changes in adoption legislation - are enabling people in same-sex relationships to make decisions about whether they want to become parents.



My mother said she would have regretted if I could have been a parent, she would like it to still be my decision, and when she knew that I was planning to have children, she was really pleased. I don't think she's mentioned that to my father.

I would like to have children, I don't know how easily and I don't know how easy it would be, it would take a lot of thinking about. You'd have to choose where you live quite carefully.

— Ellen, 2000



Bernard Meusnier (1891-1920), *Mother and Child*, oil on canvas, 1919. Gift of Sir Michael Sadler, 1925. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © Courtesy of the estate of Bernard Meusnier / Bridgeman Art Library.

Untitled VIII

Chinese photo frame, laser-etched glass, 2012

The complexity of the relationship described by Keith illustrates that 'family' can be used in many ways to describe many relationships.

He cooks me dinner and listens to my problems, he's a good listener. His walls are covered with pictures of me he's taken. We've got an understanding. He leaves my money on the side board every week... He's like the family I never had.

— Keith, circa 2005



Keith Haring - *Standing Man's Head & Torso* (1991-1995). Standing Man's Head & Torso (1991-1995), pen and ink on paper, c. 1993. Gift of H. S. Eds, 1996. The University of Leeds Art Collection.



Keith Haring - *Nude Figure* (1985-1970). Nude Figure, pen and ink on paper, Acquired 1985. The University of Leeds Art Collection. © Estate of Dušan Grant. All rights reserved. DGS 2012

Appendix

Full texts used from Brighton Oursitory.

Brighton Oursitory is a lesbian, gay and bisexual history centre producing shows, exhibitions, books and newsletters, which celebrate same-sex relationships and relations. As well as recording the lives of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in Brighton and Hove, we catalogue, archive, share and display a vast wealth of information and imagery that captures the history of our communities, enabling everyone to find their place and a sense of belonging.

You can find out more about Oursitory at www.brightonoursitory.co.uk or email us at info@brightonoursitory.co.uk.

Brighton Oursitory was established in 1985, is an independent community-run organisation and a registered charity. We rely heavily on subscriptions and donations to carry out our work.

Untitled 1

At the age of eight or nine, and long before distinct sexual feelings declared themselves, I felt a friendly attraction toward my own sex, and this developed after the age of puberty into a passionate sense of love.

— Edward Carpenter, "Self-analysis for Hewick Ellis", in Noel Grig, ed., *Edward Carpenter: Selected Writings*, Volume 1: Sex (London, GMP Publishers, 1984), p. 289

Untitled 11

I went to an agricultural college for a time and met this Lucie Army girl. In the evenings a common room and join in talking. They had an old wind up gramophone and put dance music on. She and I started dancing and the feeling between us was getting a bit powerful. We disappeared one night up into my room. We were just overcome with desire.

I didn't seem to care about people knowing. Well, I didn't think there was anything wrong in what we were doing. So, they would see us lying on the bed, and in fact, we used to lay outside, on the lawn, and canoodle in full view of everyone. Someone stuck a drawing of us kissing on the door but that still didn't bother us at all.

— Gill, circa 1949

Untitled 11

I never really had a steady affair, certainly not that stage in my life. I didn't like the idea of an affair. I don't think it was safe to have an affair anyway. It was really causing trouble. You had to be terribly, terribly, terribly careful if you did have an affair. I'll give you a case in point. While I was in the army, I met a queen, well, I couldn't help but meet her, called Percy. Well, he had an affair. I think it was 1957 when it all blew up, anyway he had an affair, who was about his own age. They'd been going out together for about two years and Percy was at work one day and his father went into his bedroom and went rooting around in Percy's drawers and found this letter. Well, I don't know what was in the letter but 'sither read the letter and went to the police with it, you see, so they arrested him at work, they arrested the boyfriend at his work as well,

Untitled 19

At that time I was a member of an educational pressure group and through that, we in fairly close contact with a woman who was the parent of a child I had taught. I had to make contact with her around the time I was discussing with Bob about getting a divorce. I went to her home to get a letter, counter-signed. Bob and I were in a pretty bad way and she asked me if I wanted to talk about it.

Her husband was upstairs, doing the ironing. We were downstairs in her lounge having this conversation for most of the evening. Afterwards we both moved towards the taps, recorder to pick up a tape she said I could borrow and I can only describe the atmosphere as becoming totally electric. I couldn't work out what the hell was happening. It was a feeling of something very bizarre happening, physically, which I'd never experienced before.

The next day I saw her as she dropped her child off at school and she said "Can I come off for coffee?" She sat around looking very uncomfortable, drinking coffee and not saying anything. About ten minutes before we had to go and collect the children from school, she suddenly said, "I think I'm in love with you." I remember being absolutely rooted to the spot, thinking, "Shit, what's the answer to that?" After about ten minutes I said, "Well, I'm a bit shocked but I actually think I feel the same."

The next afternoon we just sat on the floor with our arms around each other and she said, "God, I've never felt such a powerful feeling." We listened then. It was a week before we actually made love. I couldn't believe how easy it was to slide into a relationship with a woman. I'd always thought you had to be very different from what I'd thought was, in order to be able to do that.

Bob was relieved that I'd got some emotional contact with someone else. Her husband, however, had a nervous breakdown for nine months when she told him. He was violent towards her, did a lot of drinking, threw things at my windows, sang me up in the middle of the night. There were threats of custody over the children. He stopped going to work and chaperoned her everywhere. He roared and screamed around the place, yelling at her and calling

her a whore. She spent three hours telling me she was breaking it off. Four days later she said, "I can't do this, I can't stop seeing you." I said, "What the hell are you going to do?" She said, "Use through my teeth, there's nothing else I can do."

— Val, circa 1980

Untitled VI

And it's, it's kind of, it's that kind of thing day to day, and I want to, you know, I want to have a blood transfusion a couple of weeks ago or, and I was so 'cause for some time after that, it felt probably fill me up, to some extent because I knew that that it'd been feeling ill for the last five or six weeks, you know, I had a temperature every night, sometimes during the day as well, or had these different things wrong with me - the, the and bleeding, the pain, the throb, the, the the difficulty eating, diarrhoea, the, the, you know, all the stuff that I talked about in that article. But it was also, it was also beginning to be the lack of energy and the, just the, difficulty really of keeping going and the sort of blood transfusion seemed very important because I know, I know other people who had, you know, lost their energy and lost their drive and so on, and they'd had a blood transfusion and you know, it was like a miracle, you know, from, they were different people immediately, you know the next day, well I wasn't, you know it, didn't, it didn't have that effect on me. And in fact it was the, it was because it was, it was because I was having a blood transfusion for another reason, it wasn't because of the AZT side effects, it was because of general debilitation and bleed, actually losing blood, you know (mm), and illnesses and so on.

— Graham (1945-1990), 1989

Untitled VII

Do you want a family?
I hope so. I don't think I would want to be the one that has to give birth. One advantage of a gay couple might be that the other one can do that. That might be quite a good idea, you can draw straws for it. And blobs have children, I'd really like to be a parent... My mother was really

shocked when I said "Do you worry that you wouldn't have grandchildren?" She was shocked, she was absolutely horrified that I would think she would want me to live my life in some way for her. But she said she would have regretted if I couldn't have been a parent, and when she knew that I was planning to have children, she was really pleased. I don't think she's mentioned that to my father. I would like to have children, I don't know how exactly and I don't know how easy it would be. It would take a lot of thinking about. You'd have to choose where you lived quite carefully.

— Ellen, 2000

Untitled VIII

I make it a rule not to get too involved with punters but there's one old queen I've been seeing for about two years and we've got quite close. I go and see him once a week for a machine. He cooks me dinner and listens to my problems. He's a good listener. His walls are covered with pictures of me that taken. We've got an understanding. He leaves my money on the sideboard every week. All the neighbours think I'm his grandson. I call him Grandma and he calls me Cheryl. He's like the family I never had.

— Keith, circa 2005

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Very special thanks to Matt Smith.



THE PICK

Artefacts of LGBT life

Other Stories: Queering the University Art Collection
Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery
University of Leeds
27 February to 5 May

Bernard Meninsky's *Mother and Child*, painted in 1919, is a touching image of a woman breastfeeding in a bedroom. Next to it, the artist Matt Smith has hung two vintage christening dresses embroidered with the reflections of a lesbian recorded in 2000. Although she would "really like to be a parent", she says, "I don't think I would want to be the one that has to give birth. One advantage of a gay couple might be that the other one can do that. That might be quite a good idea - you can draw straws for it."

For LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) History Month, the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery in Leeds is mounting a two-part exhibition. One strand is devoted to the Victorian gay rights campaigner, pacifist and advocate of "the simple life", Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), whose papers are held in the university library's special collections. For the other, Smith has produced eight separate "interventions" in the permanent collection.

Each is a domestic object inscribed in some way with a testimony of gay life from the Brighton Ourstory archive. And each is juxtaposed with a painting, drawing or photograph already on display. His aim, explains Smith, is to "repurpose the collection in terms of the oral histories that would normally be discounted".

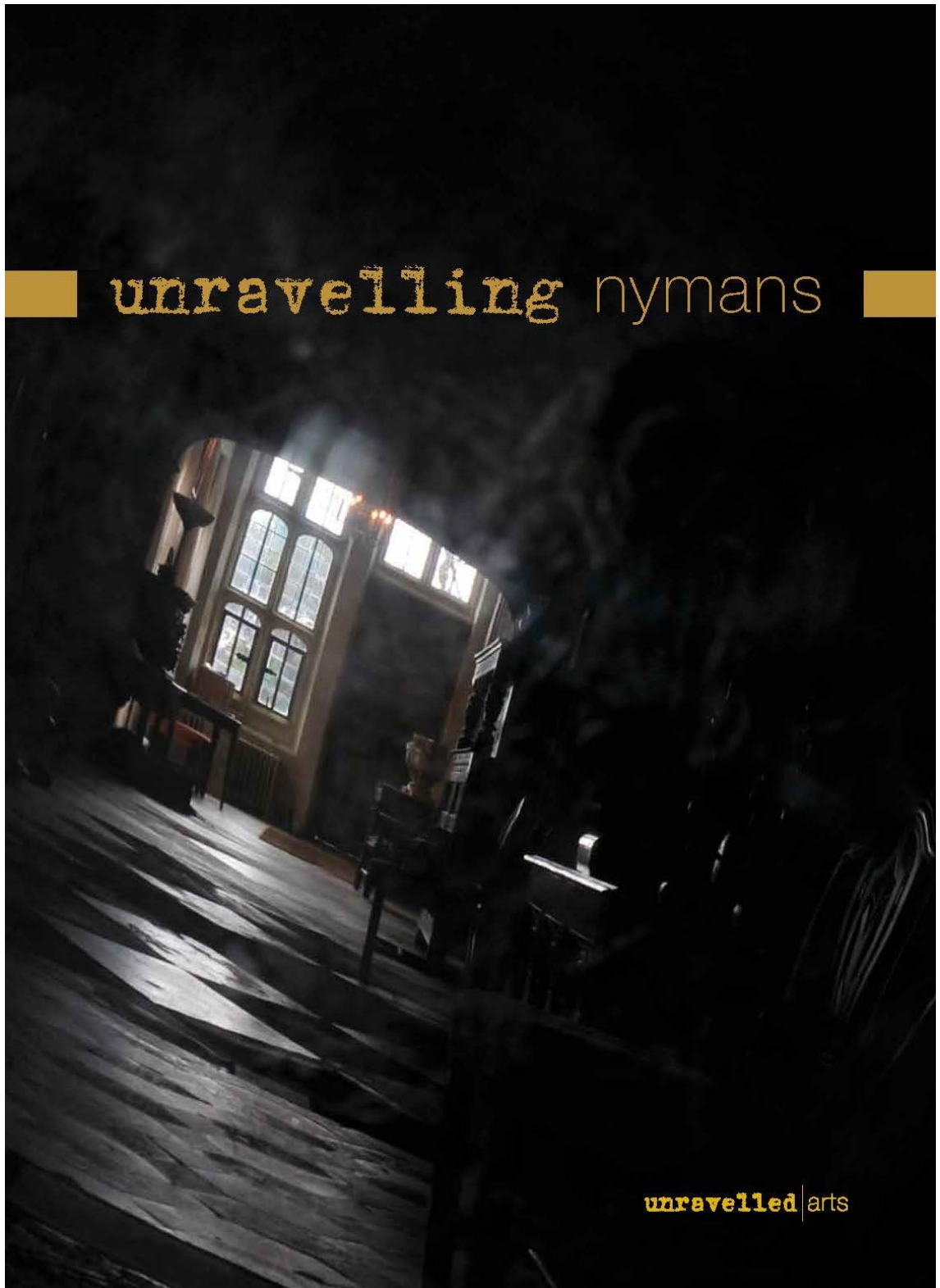
There are stories of satisfied desire, blossoming romance and even a surprisingly tender description by a young sex worker of an "old queen" who had become "like the family I never had" ("I call him Grandma and he calls me Cheryl"). But there are also harrowing accounts of the time before male homosexuality was legalised in 1967, when anonymous one-night stands were safer than even the most secretive "steady affair", and when a boy spent three years in jail after his father reported him to the police.

These reminiscences are cut into a Victorian tray, written into an old address book, engraved into an Art Deco photo frame or Babycham glasses, often to startling and discordant effect. Looking back to the 1980s, Smith recalls "the constant cleaning and caring of people with Aids. The sheer repetition altered one's sense of time." In one of his "interventions", he has attempted to create a "transient memorial" to the losses of that era, carving a terrible description of the ravages of the disease into a huge marble-like slab of soap.

"Unlike most other minority groups - those linked by religion, ethnicity and race," he notes in the catalogue, "the LGBT community produces a paucity of unique material culture. There are few 'gay objects'. It is also a group which seldom passes knowledge down through familial, intergenerational links." By "queering" the Leeds collection, he has attempted to challenge that situation.

Matthew Reisz





unravelling nymans

Nymans House and Garden
4 May – 31 October 2012

unravelling | arts



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National Trust

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

THE HEADLEY TRUST

HOUSE



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Unravelling at Nymans • Geraldine Rudge

In the **Book Room at Nymans** is a bulbous-screened, black and white, lifelike television – nothing especially interesting about this apart from the element of nostalgia. What is striking about this object is the fact it has been customised, transformed into a theatre. Framed by a proscenium arch of rich-red silk swags, this witty intervention is the work of Oliver Messel and is just one example of the artistry which gives Nymans its unique style. This summer Oliver's theatre will be joined by a number of other such interventions commissioned from a new generation of artists.

Art interventions – works that change an existing environment in some way to give new meaning – have become increasingly popular with both the public and practitioners alike. For the artists there is the unique opportunity to use context and existing meaning as a vehicle for change and to display work beyond sterile-white gallery walls. For the public there is more sense of involvement with the art, in part due to a less inhibiting environment.

Unravelling has commissioned twelve artists to make site-specific works responding to aspects of the social and cultural history of Nymans House and Gardens. As the name implies, these artists aim to challenge the status quo, sometimes in extreme or alternative ways. The resulting works demand response; they surprise or change our perceptions. Some are tongue-in-cheek, others poignant, but all are amusing. The twelve participating practitioners all use craft skills and a mix of traditional and avant-garde materials including Perspex, soot and aeropoly. All are committed to conceptual exploration. As such, these are not commercial pieces but exercises in stretching and developing the craft vocabulary, moving their disciplines forward. *Unravelling Nymans* is the first of these *Unravelling* exhibitions at National Trust properties over the next three years.

The word craft is an umbrella term for a wide range of practice from a homemade patchwork to an installation in a fine-art gallery. Within the term craft is an implicit understanding and knowledge of materials. The crafts have always been adaptable, with an almost amoebic ability to adapt to



unravelling nymans



Screen Fan, from
The Messel-Rosse
Fan Collection

prevailing artistic demand. Where once there was a clear demarcation between art, craft and design, today the divisions have blurred and blended. Where once the material itself was the subject of the piece, now it is just as likely to be the idea expressed by it. The work of the 2003 Turner Prize winning potter Grayson Perry illustrates this point well. Today, contemporary makers are stretching the boundaries, combining traditional skills with new technology and new materials to develop new aesthetics.

As a site for artistic interventions, this National Trust property in West Sussex, could not be more apposite. Home to generations of the Messel family from the 1890s, the estate not only has a fascinating history, but a dramatic one – surviving two events that radically changed its appearance. In 1947 a fire reduced the original house to a fraction of its former size leaving in its place a much smaller one and an atmospheric faux-gothic ruin, while the Great Storm of 1987 destroyed large numbers of mature trees changing aspects of the garden forever. In addition to these events there is the accretion of history for artists to draw on and, last but not least, the colourful lives of the Messel family themselves.

The Messels were gifted, artistic and wealthy. Perhaps best known was Oliver, a celebrated designer of theatre, film sets and costume in the 1930s and 1940s and latterly, in the 1950s, an architect and interior decorator. Oliver's maternal grandfather was a cartoonist for *Punch* while his mother Maud and his sister Anne, Countess of Rosse, both worked with textiles. While Maud set up a local embroidery guild, Anne produced fine embroidery and cut-thread works which decorate the rooms and remain a testament to her artistry. Displayed in the house are also photographs by another artistic member of the Messel family, Anne's son Antony, later Earl of Snowdon.

At Nymans, artists have worked in both the house and garden and have found no shortage of sources of inspiration. The house is filled with fine examples of seventeenth-century furniture, Flemish tapestries and an abundance of objects, textiles and paintings, while the gardens have the line bone structure of arts and crafts garden design, with a collection of rare plants from around the world providing interest all year round.

Art has been an integral part of garden design throughout garden history, but during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, pioneering events such as the *International Festival of Gardens* at Chaumont-sur-Loire in France have had a significant impact on the appearance of outside spaces. The resulting installations and interventions have pushed established boundaries and helped publicise and promote more conceptual approaches to artworks and planting schemes for outside spaces.



The formal gardens at Nympsos cover some 30 acres. They are intimate in scale and laid out as a series of rooms punctuated by fountains, statuary and topiary. Working with the existing garden statuary, Alec Stevens has mischievously given one of two stone cherubs above the Italian archway in the Wall Garden a bright-red slingshot, changing an angelic expression from benevolent to malevolent with one simple gesture. I'm sure Oliver Messel would have appreciated the wit and theatricality of the naughty cherub and the many other strange happenings in his old home this summer.



Unravelling Nymans • Polly Harknett, Caitlin Heffernan, Matt Smith

Unravelling offers opportunities to artists who work conceptually using craft skills. This aim is expressed through the three year project *Unravelling the National Trust*. *Unravelling Nymans* is the first of three exhibitions staged within National Trust properties and follows on from the organisation's debut exhibition, *Unravelling the Manor House*.



What we do (unravelling) is intrinsic to what we call ourselves (*Unravelling*), and it is what draws us to working with historic properties. We unravel and decipher the different and multiple histories that can exist within a single property. This is in contrast to conventional ideas about historic properties, where often a unified story is told from a single viewpoint. These tend to concentrate on the architectural details of a house and its refurbishments, or look at the achievements of the first-born males of the family who owned it. We unravel by commissioning a number of artists to produce site-specific responses to the property. Importantly, these are displayed temporarily within the property, and placed very carefully and intentionally to respond to particular rooms, spaces or objects.

Our motivation is to give artists working in this genre the opportunity to exhibit in a venue that attracts a large audience, and to challenge their working practice by giving them a constraining environment within which to work. We also value the opportunity to present multiple histories in our exhibitions, releasing the historic properties from their frozen moment in time, and offering visitors a glimpse of the complex and messy lives of the people who lived there. We deliberately select artists who are working at different stages of their careers, often giving newly emerging artists a chance to exhibit with the more established.

Artists who work with craft skills, however conceptually these are realised, automatically tap into a heritage of making. This provides them with a tangible connection to the past, as often the skills they employ have not changed over hundreds of years. When we, as visitors, recognise these skills through a contemporary employment of them, it helps us to make a connection with the past that we may not have been aware of before.

One way we select artists is for their ability to express alternative or multiple realities through their work. We support artists who tell us something from a different point of view, and can enlighten us to a different way of thinking about the world. This is enriching, entertaining, and of course very revealing.

When we first visited Nymans we were instantly drawn to Maud Messels television, which sits proudly in the corner of the cosy Book Room. She wasn't fond of the television's form, so her son, the theatre designer Oliver Messel, made a stage set for it, complete with red curtains and tassels. He has presented the television within a theatrical set, as if what appears on the television isn't quite enough in itself. This object symbolises the atmosphere of fun and frivolity that the house once exuded, but which is less obvious when visiting the property now. The National Trust currently shows the house as it was when Arnie lived in it during her retirement and up to her death in the mid 1980s. We felt that the theatrical television set represented a small but significant window onto the world of how the house had been used in earlier times – when it was a place for socialising and partying and dressing up and playing, for adults and children alike. To reveal something of this and the many other stories to be told at Nymans, was the challenge that we gave to the twelve commissioned artists.

Of light and dark

Nymans house is a shadow of its former self. This is realised physically since much of it lies in ruins following the accidental fire that wiped out its large botanical library and Great Hall in 1947. In addition, National Trust conservation policy requires light levels to be kept low in the house in order to preserve the rich textiles made by the Messel family that furnish the house. This gives a cold and detached feeling to the house, and divorces it from the light and colour of the gardens that surround it. Add to this the choice to stage the house as it was at the time of Arnie's death, and there is a palpable feeling of loss and encroaching darkness.

Steven Folan has intervened directly with this concept and made a light for the porch that combines an irregularity from the interior and pine cone and monkey puzzle tree forms from the gardens. It is a beacon, quiet and restrained in its form, but shouting 'look at me' and 'come inside' at the same time. In contrast, Sally Freshwater's work *Multifora*, made of over 80000 flowers on canvases, brings the garden into the house. Born from a repetitive action comparable to other textile practices evident in the house,

this reflects both Anne, Countess of Rosse's desire to wear the colours of the garden, and the frequent references to flowers in the textile work visible in the house.

Matt Smith's work *Piccadilly 1830* brings Oliver Messel back to the house by reimagining a costume designed and worn by Messel and displaying it on an antique Roman statue. The costume refers back to the heyday of partying, youth and possibilities, but sits in a different reality of emptiness and abandonment, suggested by Smith's placing of it in the time between 1979 and 1985 when brother and sister were both widowed.

David Cheeseman addresses the devastation of the fire directly, as well as responding to the 'dark hermetic quality' of the interiors. His work physically encapsulates a world of burnt botanical imagery within a perspex sphere. It sits like an alien form within the Gun Room. A whole world is played out within it, which has already happened outside of it. We are invited to play with ideas of time, place and perception of our history. As we look into, through and beyond the sphere, inside and outside become blurred and confused.

Lucy Brown's work invites us further into this world. Her installation in the Long Gallery *They loved to breathe beauty, tradition and romanticism* sets up a stage for an intervention that centres around her invention of Elsa Messel, a distant and fictional relative. She converts the long gallery into a space reflecting on objects that have previously been used but are currently unseen or underobserved within the house, looking particularly at the work of the Messel women and those who served them. The work includes a first for Brown: a moving image piece starring Elsa. This has used the house like a film set, exposing the spaces within the property that the public don't get to visit or which are condoned off, helping us to experience those spaces for ourselves.

Julian Walker's works deal with loss in contrasting ways. *I Don't Want To Lose* turns mockery to sadness, by referring to a romantic fake-medieval plaster scene that hangs on the wall in the Old Staircase Hall. The lovers in the scene play out the fictional farewell of a knight going to war and his lover, but Walker's contemporary piece refers at the same time to Muriel Messel, who died during the First World War. His piece *As if* uses a teary phrase spelled out with white embroidery on white linen to emphasise



the invisible but essential work undertaken by servants at Nymans. It is as if, once the room is quiet and uninhabited, these voices can come to the surface, voices that would normally be completely unheard.

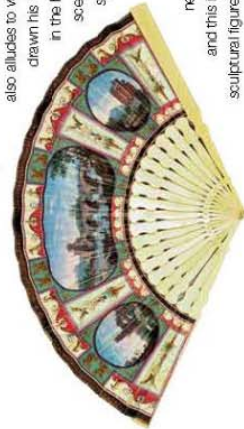
Make Believe

The Messel family were nineteenth-century immigrants to England and made their money through business. Nymans was a fabrication and pretension of a medieval manor, and represents the Messel family's attempt to be accepted as an aristocratic family with a history that began in medieval times. Looking closely at the details of Nymans, this fabrication becomes obvious: in the gardens cherubs are stuck upon walls with steel bars holding them up from the back, and in the house, oak-pannelled walls are put together from a mish-mash of architectural fragments salvaged in the 1930s. Artists like Gavin Fry play with this idea, his over-aborned *Zorroise* lurchers in front of the fire in the Garden Hall, weighed down with a wonderful gaudiness of beads and golden petals. It is at once a reflection of the family's inventiveness and creativity, and an expression of their wealth and the opportunity it afforded them to indulge in their own playful fantasies.

Lauren Adams has used the fan form, taking her inspiration from Leonard Messel's fan collection, now held in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, but enlarging this to a ridiculously oversized scale. Her use of contemporary imagery plays with the bylls of bucolic scenery by deliberately subverting them, depicting Gatwick Airport in *Grand Tour Fan*. There is a subtle suggestion that, banal as these scenes may be, Gatwick Airport represents a gateway to the rest of the world. We often refer to contemporary celebrity self-made families as being jet setters, and the Messels in their heyday at Nymans were their equivalent. Guy Holder's oceanic work *Field of Vision* also alludes to what it means to create an identity, as he has

drawn his inspiration from the heraldic symbols he found in the house, as well as the hunting and sporting scenes that traditionally appear in paintings to symbolise a family's degree of aristocracy.

The architectural and interior design at Nymans suggest that what we see isn't necessarily the truth of what we are seeing, and this is strongly expressed in Caitlin Helfeman's sculptural figures *Tree Boys* and *Hide and Seek*, as well as



Grand Tour Fan, from *The Messel-Posse* Fan Collection



Evacuees moving the lawn

In James Sutton's marble sculptures, *Toy III* and *Toy IV*, Helfeman's figures at first suggest cuddliness, innocence and softness, and Sutton's giraffe and elephant are calm and unthreatening in their rounded quiet presence. However, this gives way to a sense of mischief, and an uncertainty about how we should relate to these forms prevails. Helfeman's figures look ready to pounce or spring into action at any moment, their chunky limbs are full of energy but it is not clear how positively this energy might be expressed. Sutton's pieces whilst looking like toys and giving the impression of softness, are cold and unyielding and too heavy to lift or hold.

Also Stevens has looked at childhood and play from the perspective of the outsider. He has reimagined how the schoolboys who were evacuated to Nymans during the Second World War played, and in response has created wooden carved objects, *Rifle* and *Stingshot*. There is a warmth to the carvings, especially because Stevens' manipulation of the materials is very sensitive to wood's natural form. *Stingshot* is carved naturalistically, connecting it back to its source and giving the work the impression of speedy execution, reminiscent of youth and vitality.

As we have asked artists to reconsider the house and its histories through objects, we were interested in how contemporary writers would in turn respond to the interventions. Therefore, we are delighted to have commissioned four writers, Paul Jobling, Eleanor Thompson, Julian Waller and Gerabine Rudge to bring four very different views on the re-contextualised house: interpreting the interpretations.

Nymans House and Garden is a place for experimentation, affectation, inebriation and fun. The artists represented in *Unravelling Nymans* have explored these themes, bringing their own interpretations into play at the same time. It is a huge privilege to work in such a setting and be allowed to delve beneath its surface. *Unravelling* would like to thank Nymans staff Simon Lee, Rebecca Graham, Vicky Phipps and Pomyli Meredith and the National Trust Contemporary Arts Programme Manager Tom Freshwater for their support and enthusiasm for this project.

Growing up and dressing up • Eleanor Thompson

Objects hang before the eyes of the imagination, continuously representing ourselves, to ourselves and telling the stories of our lives in ways which would be impossible otherwise.” Susan Pearce

The women of the Messel family, Maud and her daughter Anne, understood the importance of objects in creating and retelling family identity and genealogy. The Messel women inherited from each other a sentimental attachment to the ‘material culture’ of their family’s past, expressed by their motto: ‘we have what we hold’.

Maud Messel’s mother Marion Sambourne began a family tradition of keeping for posterity the clothes worn by maternal relations; following Marion’s mother’s death, Marion preserved in memoriam two of her mother’s mourning bodices. Maud took up this practice, adding not only Marion’s clothes to the growing collection, but her own garments, which were no longer fashionable enough to be worn, but were too special to be discarded. Her daughter Anne determinately took on the mantle of custodian of this collection of clothing. She christened the assortment of boxes stored in her

grandmother’s home at 18 Stafford Terrace, Kennington (now known as Linley Sambourne House), her mother’s home Nymans in Sussex, and her own residence, Birr Castle, Ireland. *The Messel Family Dress Collection*. Whereas Maud and Marion most likely kept clothing to retain and pass down precious memories through the family line, Anne realised the potential of her family’s collection to project what museologist Susan Pearce terms, ‘a prestigious narrative of genealogy’ beyond their familial circle. In 1962 Anne offered a handpicked selection of garments to Brighton Museum & Art Gallery with the wish

Maud Messel, 1903



that they might one day be exhibited as collection. Anne ensured that the specific stories and associations attached to garments in the collection were

accessible outside of family memory by adding little handwritten notes to the boxes. Pinned to her own floor-length green wool dress was a message reading: ‘Had a wonderful time in this dress am ashamed to say, 1914!’ Lou Taylor writes that when viewed as a collection, these dresses reflect ‘in fabric and stitches the factual and emotional stories of their lives’. They speak of the Messel women’s shared creativity and romantic vision of the past.

Maud and her daughter Anne had unusual childhoods, growing up in households that prized imagination over traditional education. The creativity of their early lives was translated in adulthood into a passion for dressing up that enabled the women to maximize the status of their genealogy. Maud was born in 1875 into the artistic and somewhat unconventional home of Punch cartoonist Edward Linley Sambourne and his wife Marion. Her parents’ social circle brought Maud into contact with many of the leading figures of late-Victorian painting, theatre and literature; the Sambournes counted Alma-Tadema and Joseph Boehm as close friends. Linley Sambourne’s studio was located in the drawing room of the family home and from here his artistic practice spilled out into the activities of daily life; servants and family members, Maud included, were often re-directed to act as models for his cartoons, wearing various costumes and draperies. The artistic vivacity of this milieu would have a profound influence on Maud’s adult preoccupations. Her education came from a governess, but the skills that most engaged Maud came informally from her parents. She inherited her father’s artistic sensibilities, and was an accomplished illustrator with sketches published in *Punch* and *Pail Mail Magazine*; she learnt needlework to a high standard from her mother, who was herself a talented dressmaker and embroiderer.

Following her marriage in 1898 to the wealthy stockbroker Leonard Messel, Maud was elevated into upper-class London society and was able to attend high-profile ‘fancy’ dress balls, most notably the Internationally-famous Chelsea Arts Club Balls. These occasions afforded distinguished guests an opportunity to highlight their social status by dressing as famous reathes. The Sambourne family had long claimed to be direct descendants of Elizabeth Linley, the famous eighteenth-century beauty whose story had been popular in the public imagination since the late nineteenth century. Although in reality the Sambourne’s link to Elizabeth Linley was highly tenuous, Maud adopted the persona of her fashionable ‘relation’ to the



Sawing box at Nymans House



Film still from Lucy Brown's. They loved to breathe beauty, tradition and romanticism

1911 Chelsea Arts Club Ball, undoubtedly aware of the impact such a connection would make on her social profile.

In 1915 Leonard inherited Nymans, the Messels' country residence, and it was here that Maud spent the majority of her time with the couple's children, Linley (born 1899), Anne (born 1902) and Oliver (born 1904). Life at Nymans was shaped by Maud's romantic imagination; on taking possession of the house, she had it painstakingly remodelled into a pastiche of a medieval manor, the perfect backdrop for the frequent pageants, plays and fancy dress parties she organised.

Involvement in the cultural life of the neighbouring villages also channelled Maud's creative energies; she directed the local Shakespearean Society and the May Day festivities on Staplefield Village Green. All the May Day costumes were designed by Maud and made by her with assistance from the ladies of the Women's Institute. Her vision for the festivities was that of a historical past, drawing heavily on a fantasy of the medieval and the 'picturesque'. Local resident Daphne Deingate remembered that: "There was always a procession with characters like... Robin Hood and his Merry Men The May Queen was crowned after the dancing by the Maypole which was the traditional one with garlands of leaves".

Maud put her embroidery skills to philanthropic use with the establishment of 'The Nymans Needlework Guild', which aimed to provide training and an income for local women. Unemployed girls from the surrounding villages were taught to create little embroidered bags, tabernacles and runners which Maud sold to family and friends. A selection of these textiles remain in storage at Nymans, some of which have been included in the installation by Lucy Brown.

Anne's recollection of her own upbringing at Nymans is that it was 'most eccentric ... laced with the whims and wisdom of rare parents'. Maud and Leonard circulated in cultured, artistic circles as avid collectors of fans, textiles, porcelain, heralds and furniture. The couple benched art dealers, museum curators and connoisseurs. Anne recalled that: 'Museums came into our lives very early on. Oliver and I started being taken to the V&A as

small children - which was my only real schooling'. Maud and Leonard engaged the services of a traditional governess, but the true education of the two youngest Messel children came from the 'endless stream of specialists and continental teachers' who taught weaving, needlework, music, singing, painting and gardening, but not traditional academic subjects. Anne rejoiced in her unconventional lessons which provided fond memories of rambling through the Sussex countryside collecting wool with an eccentric old weaving instructor, dressed as a shepherd, lace-making taught by a nun and 'Umbrian needlepoint from a charming Italian?'. There were, Amy de la Haye writes, extended periods without any form of schooling, at which time the children

let loose their vivid imaginations in fantastical games of dressing-up.⁸ Photographs exist in Nymans which capture the children in costume: Oliver as Cupid with crane wings, or as a Harlequin, and Anne in whimsical muslin dresses with either flowers in her hair dressed as a May Queen or with wings on her back looking like an ethereal fairy. The Messel children's games left a powerful impression on Oliver, whose earliest memory went back to when he was four years old and dressed as a French soldier.

The idyllic, creative freedom of their childhood was to have a profound influence on the direction of both Anne and Oliver's professional and personal interests. Oliver's meteoric rise to fame as a stage, film and costume designer is well documented. The pleasure of making and creating instilled in early childhood assumed no less importance for Anne.



Image of Anne Messel from her scrapbook



Newspaper cutting, titled: A few beautiful women in modern society. Do they excel the former generation?, from the scrapbook of Anne, Countess of Rosse

Before her marriage, she put her needlework skills to use professionally in the fashionable London shop Victoire and continued her mother's example of creating and embellishing clothing for herself and her daughter Susan. So accomplished was Anne, Amy de la Heye notes, that both her brother and her friend, the couturier Charles James, drew on her skills to help realise their costume and fashion designs.⁸

The hours Anne and Oliver spent playing together as children forged a close relationship between the two youngest Messel siblings, which continued throughout their adult lives. During the 1920s and 1930s Anne was Oliver's frequent companion at fashionable London parties and fancy dress balls. Following their mother's example, the pair's evocations of historic personas on these occasions were carefully constructed for maximum impact. Dressed as the mythological beauty Ariadne for the

Pageant of Great Lovers in May 1927, and accompanied by Oliver dressed as Bacchus, Anne was singled out by the Duke of Kent as 'the best looking girl in the room' – a great compliment considering the Hollywood actress Tallulah Bankhead, dressed as Cleopatra, was also present. Anne reinforced the family's Linley association wherever possible by portraying historical figures from that period, giving her the opportunity to wear late eighteenth styles and even original period dresses. For the 1922 Devonshire House Ball, she wore the same dress Maud had worn to the 1911 Chelsea Arts Ball dressed as Elizabeth Linley. An undated cutting from the *The Sketch* described Anne attending a ball wearing '... a gorgeous brocade gown which was worn by one of her ancestors'. This dress was in fact, most probably, a gown purchased by Maud and Leonard in 1924 from an antiques dealer in Bath, though the Messels did not dissuade any observations that it was a family heirloom. A similar eighteenth-century dress, also purchased by the Messels in the 1920s, remains in *The Messel*

Family Dress Collection at Nymans and continues to reference the family's romanticised historical lineage.

The fascination for dressing up that the Messel family shared was not confined to childhood. Even as adults, fancy dress was core to the Messel identity, it enabled them to represent an idealised genealogy and became the medium by which family stories and mythology were passed down through the generations. The women of the Messel family were acutely aware, in Amy de la Heye's words, that 'memories can be drawn and histories constructed from deep within the fabric of our clothes'⁹. The dresses they preserved in *The Messel Family Dress Collection* live on as testament to the emotions, aspirations and sensitivities of their wearers.

1. Susan M France, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1983, p. 47.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
3. Amy de la Heye, Lou Taylor, Eleanor Thompson, *A Family of Fashion: The Messels, Six Generations of Fashion*, Philip Wilson, London, 2005, p. 34.
4. Daphne Dargatzis, 'The Memoirs of Daphne Dargatzis', unpublished document, 2004, Shipstead Village Archive, pp. 5-6.
5. Anne Rosse, 'The Economic Linking of a Collector, Daughter', unpublished document, early 1980s, Nymans Archive, A/2322.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Amy de la Heye, Lou Taylor, Eleanor Thompson, *A Family of Fashion: The Messels, Six Generations of Fashion*, Philip Wilson, 2005, p. 96.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 110

the artists



Lauren Frances Adams

Grand Tour Fan
sitra, paint, wood

My work explores historical propaganda and the role of decoration in the construction of political and cultural identity. Strategies of appropriation are at the core of my practice, and archival research is a large part of my process. I am interested in the intersection of contemporary global reality with an often idealized collective past. I aim to slow down a capitalist sense of time by making art: 'products' with a shelf life, such as the expendable consumer hand-held fan commercially produced today.



This project explores the Messel-Rosse collection of antique fans at the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge, UK. It is inspired by several fan forms from the collection that serve as templates for new iterations that merge ornament with contemporary landscape scenes from around Sussex. Following the example of fans which appear to be windows into other worlds, I bring 'other worlds' into the Nyrmans gardens, with the eye of a tourist looking for the not-so-picturesque. *Grand Tour Fan* appropriates from the original eighteenth-century Grand Tour Fan on display in Cambridge. This fan inserts intentionally banal public places from contemporary Sussex life into the historical framework – substituting scenes of Italian ruins with those of Gatwick Airport (just a few miles from Nyrmans House).

Made of expanded PVC material and hand-painted, the fans are like our-of-scale theatrical props. Their placement in the Nyrmans setting provides a rich contrast to the work of the National Trust, in protecting and preserving historic heritage. Representations of Gatwick Airport (historically a manor and dairy farm), or the M23 roadway (the basis for the *Road to Nyrmans fan*), are elevated into absurd revisions of the ornamental fan scenes, challenging site-specific concepts of fantasy and utopia.



Lucy Brown

I serve only you...
human hair, vintage embroidery threads, early 1900s steel hair curlers

My work for *Unravelling Nymans* has been driven by the desire to get to know the Messel women, Maud and Anne. Both women were talented, creative and highly skilled costume/dressmakers, embroiderers and designers with a passion for collecting, preserving and archiving textiles, dress, antiques, their lives and family heritage. I have also been interested in Maud's lady's maid, Miss Barbara Adamson – Addy – and her silent, loyal role as employee.



They loved to breathe beauty, tradition and romanticism is an upstairs installation consisting of vintage garment woven sculpture, a short film and small woven hair mementos.

In my normal practice, the tying on and wearing of raw materials takes place in private. For *Unravelling Nymans*, I was asked to make a short film of this process, through which the fictional character of Elsa emerged. Elsa is descended from Lina Messel (1851-1926), a sister of Ludwig Messel (1847-1915). As Elsa moves through the gardens, ruins and interior rooms, she senses the presence and lives of Maud and Anne. Elsa has left a photograph of herself on top of the piano in the Garden Hall, amongst the Messel family photos and hopes to return one day....

The vintage-garment woven sculpture developed in response to investigations into Maud and Anne's personal styles and characters. The small woven hair mementos interact with the layers of Maud's Regency sewing box and Anne's sewing machine and explore Maud's and Anne's favourite tools for sewing, crafts(wo)manship and a mother-and-daughter's unique connection through their creativity.

There is a separate woven hair memento titled *I serve only you....* Addy gathered hair from Maud's hairbrush and made the hair curler mementos. The work references how Maud and Addy aged alongside each other and Addy's repeated tasks for Maud during her sixty-plus year service.



David Cheeseman

*There is a gardener who works night and day in the garden,
his name is Death*
acrylic sphere, soot

I am fascinated with how the body apprehends and interprets the world. My work has been trying to come to terms with this ontological predicament for some time and sculptural activity has been my mode of analysis and means of exploration. A significant aspect of my practice has been an interest in responding to particular historical and cultural locations. In site-specific installations, material processes and craft skills are selectively chosen to provoke or complement prevailing aesthetic or ideological values. Alongside these concerns, formal preoccupations with surface, light and reflection generate phenomena that encourage the audience to focus on our haptic, experiential and temporal encounters with things.

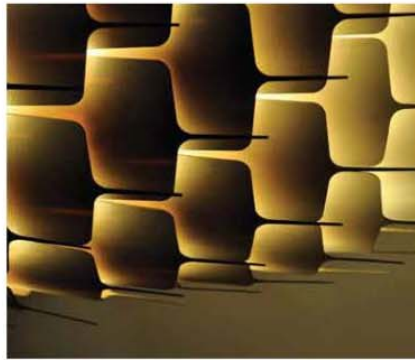
What interests me about working with Nymans is the opportunity to make something that references aspects of the inside and outside of the site. I feel there is a strange, dark, hermetic atmosphere in the house that is in contrast to the open and expansive feel of the topography in the landscape. These intense spaces full of charm and privilege feel divorced from the real world. The theatrical manor house provides fuel for the fermenting of ideas, releasing fragile, fantastical bubbles that are burst by the fateful fire in 1947. The work in situ, *There is a gardener that works night and day in the garden, his name is Death*, is my response to this extraordinary place and the loss of the unique archive of botanical illustrations.



Steven Follen

Light Fitting
laser-cut plywood

Nymans is full of stories and snippets of information. Like the house, disparate components come together to build a picture of what once was and no longer is.



I visited Nymans several times, getting a feel of the place, listening to the stories told by the staff. I learnt about the Pinetum and the Monkey Puzzle Tree, and was drawn into the forms and geometric patterns in the plants. I was intrigued by the witch's marks¹ at the entrances to the house, the beautiful panels of embroidered floral designs produced by the Sewing Group. I learnt about the Messel-Fosse collection of fans, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Many of the stories grew from the family's love of plants and I wanted to make something inspired by these. Light caught my attention, I was aware of visual layers, being able to look through to different spaces. I liked the way in which archways, entrance-ways and empty windows framed the view to other parts of the house or the grounds beyond.

The porch in the forecourt garden had a special atmosphere. A place to shelter, or to meet, it linked the inside of the house to the garden, a bridge between the two parts of the site that were important to the Messels. The curves of its arches echo around the gardens in the natural and man-made structures. A light had once existed but was no longer there. It seemed appropriate to design a new one for this space, inspired by the curves of the urn, the patterns and forms of the plants and the shapes of the fans, making use of components to form a larger whole. At night a light would make the place feel safer. It offers an opportunity to re-tell some of the stories of the house and family and for a new tale to begin.

¹ Nymans was built from parts of many older houses, some of the elements of these older houses are said to contain examples of 'witches' or 'Apotropaic' marks. In some houses built in the 16th-18th centuries, ritual marks such as a cross, arches, a 'daisy wheel', 'P' or the initials 'V' and 'M' were incorporated into the fabric of a building. They were placed at entrances to the house (windows, doorways, the porch) as a ritual act for good luck or protection against ill fortune from entering the house.



Sally Freshwater

Multiflora

pressed flowers, funeral net, linen, gold thread

I began working with pressed flowers in response to an invitation to make work for the exhibition *The Honey/bee and the Hive* at Contemporary Applied Arts in 2010. Commenting on the potential demise of the bee, and by implication man, the resulting piece for this exhibition used only blue larkspur, though there is an intensity and variety in the range of blue in the flowers, trapped behind black funeral veiling, inaccessible and useless to the bee in its pressed state.



Researching the history of Nymans and the people who lived there, visiting the house and the gardens, accompanied by continuing thoughts around colour-field painting and the potential of stepped canvases such as those of Richard Smith, I took the Messel family's passion for their gardens and aspects of their interior décor to create a new work responsive to the location and history. A new flower work on a large scale reflects aspects of the long borders, the constant seasonal regeneration of the planting and the floral motifs etched in the rugs and tapestries in the house as well as in the Messel women's dresses through the generations.

As a location, the fireplace in the Library was proposed, as this was a focal point for Anne, Countess of Rosse, in her later years, as her health was failing and she was no longer so active. So a scale was prescribed by the fireplace, possible colours were suggested by the room, flower types by the garden....

Sourcing enough pressed flowers in my intended colour range was problematic – attempting to locate 8,000 similar flowers in the middle of winter with a short timescale was near impossible. The range of colour and flower type was dictated by what was available so there is more variety in the piece than first planned.

Filling the void of the fireplace, the final view of the work by the visitor to Nymans is held at a distance by the access to the room, so the detail of the individual flower motifs and the intermingled gold thread lines remains hidden, the surface seemingly defined by bands of merging colour. Hovering somewhere between painting and carpet, the rhythmic geometric pattern of the surface becomes more chaotic and meadow-like towards the centre as the flowers take control.



What's in the cupboard, Anne?

At Nymans a gilded tortoise footstool prowls the fireside. The furniture in the house is an impressive collection of period styles but is predominantly suited for comfort, not so this domesticated lap-creature. A hurndrum stool transformed to guard the Messel family in their romantic rock-Elizabethan Sussex Utopia.

I wanted to add what Meud Messel would have described as 'a bold experiment' to the house. This sparkling hybrid is there to bewitch us and guard the inventiveness of the family.

Oliver Messel made things; he loved plastered string, dishcloths and bath scrubbers, celophane, polystyrene and roasting foil. They became steely-fairy and exotic materials, suggestions of the strange or of the familiar made strange. Ordinary materials were expertly utilized but using loolians, pipe cleaners and felt tips was beyond the conventional approach of some costume makers so Oliver worked on ideas himself, helped by his sister Anne.

Similarly, passementerie designer Linnet Hamman helped me, I too needed an accomplice for Tortoise.

Many pet tortoises remain at the same property for a great number of years, but unfortunately their arrival is often forgotten, thus a creature's length of stay is a matter of conjecture. In the year 1600, Elizabeth I received as a New Year gift, four hundred and fifty-four 'buttons of gold like tortoises, in each one a pearl'. If Oliver and Anne had found one, its carapace would sparkle with hand embroidery, blown-torched sequins, metal discs, tufted and shredded celophanes and chandelier-clips.

No further confirmation of the details of the origin or species of this creature has been found.

1. Noel-Hume, I & Noel-Hume, A (1964) *Seaborne, Terrestrial & Terrestrial*. W&A Foyle Ltd, Liverpool Letter Press Ltd, Liverpool & London, p19.



Caitlin Heffernan

Tree Boys

children's clothes, wood, fabrics, polyfibre, wire, hand stitching, card

I use craft, practice, in particular stitching and fabrics, to unsettle the viewer via a combination of the seemingly domestic and mundane and a sense of the uncanny. My work for Nymans draws on themes of childhood, fancy dress and play.



Prompted by the childhood of Anne and Oliver Messel and the family's love of dressing up, the sculptures reflect the family tradition of theatricality and their love of commissioning flamboyant costumes for parties. In particular I was drawn to the poignant photos of the Messel children – Oliver wearing a pair of wings and Anne and Oliver as teenagers or young adults in fancy dress.

The series *Tree Boys* has been developed directly in response to Oliver Messel's *Tree Men* drawings, which were part of the many costume ideas he developed for the Karl Vollmüller play, *The Miracle*, which opened in April 1932 at the Lyceum Theatre.

I wanted my child-size sculpture/costume pieces to convey the sense of exuberance and play that I found in these drawings. This wonder and delight at dressing up has also been closely felt and experienced in my own relationship with my young son Willie.

The two sculptures situated in the Book Room reference Anne and Oliver as children playing hide and seek and also relate directly to this simple notion of childhood play.

On first visiting Nymans I was struck by the spectacular gardens, full of froth and colour, and the spectacle of ruins nesting atmospherically next to the house. The house and the extraordinary Messel family who once lived there, have been a rich source of inspiration. Their stories were central to the process of making the costumes and sculptures and their house offers a wonderful stage-like location.



Guy Holder | *Field of Vision*
porcelain, cobalt, celadon glaze, serving platter

I notice the martlets carved in stone on a shield, above a doorway outside. A martlet is a heraldic bird based on a swallow. Here they are again. I see them occasionally around Sussex, on crests, mounted on county buildings or stitched onto cricket shirts.



Then I go into the modest Dining Room that is sort of a thoroughfare as well, which has the effect of marginalizing what would have been, once, before the fire, the room where the servants ate. More recently though, it was the only dining room. It is not a banqueting hall. It is hardly even a dining room. This passage room where the lady of the house sat to eat is full of images on blue and white pottery from Stoke. It reminds me of the willow pattern, with its story of forbidden love and the swallows that symbolise the spirits of the murdered lovers, depicted in blue and white on plates.

And in my mind, a connection is made, between the pottery and the swallow, and the swallow and the martlet. And that these birds and their stories connect with the paths of the diminished house, set in the tended natural splendour of its grounds. And eventually, I think of the ground that yielded the clay and glaze that make up the images of these birds. It is the ground, to which all birds must return. I think of the ground under my feet, that does not belong to the National Trust or the clay company that supplied my clay, ground that is common to all living things, and where all living things begin and end.



Matt Smith

Piccacilly 1830

turkey & ostrich feathers, ceramic, wool, linen, mirror-backed beads

In 1830, Oliver Messel designed a highlander stage costume for a production called *Piccacilly 1830*. Following the production, the costume was adapted for Oliver to wear at a party in Paris given by Daisy Fellowes, the editor-in-chief of French *Harper's Bazaar*.



Military dress is one of the few occasions for men to wear feathers without raising eyebrows. Oliver took this one stage further by incorporating ostrich plumes, more commonly associated with showgirls than soldiers. Contrary to Oliver's original design, and counter to his utilisation of the cheap materials for the maximum effect, I hand-beaded the jacket with thousands of individual mirror-backed glass bugle beads.

When Anne Messel was widowed in 1979, she reluctantly moved to Nymans from Blair Castle in Ireland. Nymans had been a house where she and her brothers had played as children, but was now where she would live alone. The slow repetitive task of beading the jacket, mirrored Anne's solitary counting of time at Nymans.

When making this piece, I imagined Oliver coming into Nymans buoyed up with excitement from the London show and the after party and throwing the jacket over the statue in his haste to see and cheer up his sister.

However, time isn't kind to this story. By the time Anne moved back to Nymans, Oliver was himself a widower. His partner of almost 30 years, Vagn Flis-Hansen had died.

It is only when finally placed in location that the true impact of a site-specific work becomes clear. The Roman sculpture *The Antique Youth* on which it is placed has lost its nose, lending the intervention sense of the macabre; maybe it was too late to bring the exuberance of youth back to the house and what began as a celebration has become a *memento mori*.



Alec Stevens | *Rifle*
wood, maroon dye

During the Second World War, Nymans House housed and educated numerous young people evacuated from London.



The two pieces *Slingshot* and *Rifle*, displayed in the Wall Garden and the exit of the country house respectively, are linked by their dyed colour, chosen to match the school uniform in which the evacuees arrived. Both are hand carved with the notion of them being used by the children that were relocated to Nymans. The pieces were made as toys, with the added functions of subverting and highlighting their surroundings.

I made *Rifle* by first drawing the piece and then making based on that drawing, so the piece evolved like a childlike game of Chinese whispers. I made it with the intention that it would be used by the children that were there, as a toy, made to be played with, to have fun with and to make mischief with.

Rifle is placed at the exit of the home to highlight that the children evacuated to Nymans were nearly of age to fight in the war they were escaping.

P. Clover was one such child who was later to become part of the armed forces.

I carved *Slingshot* from a block of wood and crafted to look like a common stick. It was made through drawing what I thought a slingshot looked like, then making the carving true to this drawing. The main

function of the piece is to change the way we perceive the cherubs. The red of the piece draws attention to the intention because it is the brightest part of the composition. Giving one of the cherubs a toy that a child evacuee might have used changes the scene from innocent to impish.



James Sutton

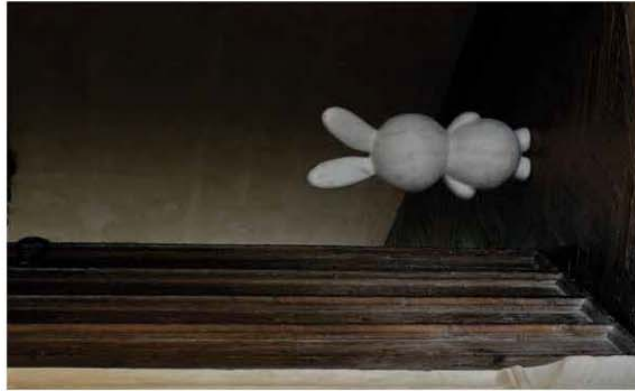
Toy III (rabbit) and Toy IV (giraffe)
Portuguese marble

Working mainly in stone and bronze from my studio on Hall Farm in Gainsborough, I experiment with sculpture and ideas, and have spent the last six years establishing my practice and studio.

My work is often inspired by nature and emotions, both figurative and abstract but is often simply an interpretation of simple, beautiful shapes I observe and try to bring to the awareness of others. *Toy III* and *Toy IV* are part of a series of marble sculptures inspired by children's toys. I was getting a little bored of just creating the beautiful, simple shapes that I had been obsessed with for the last five years.

So I began to experiment with what I could do with the stone, how thin I could take it and what I could get away with. I was also looking at sculptors who were pushing the boundaries with stone including Alexander Saxon and Fabio Viale, creating unusual objects like paper planes, t-shirts and flags.

The toy series came about just after my daughter was born. I loved the softness, shapes and curves that her toys contained but also the emotions they evoke.



Julian Walker

As if
silk on linen

In the embroidered works made for *Unravelling Myrmas* I have worked on existing textiles. In some cases undoing work embroidered on them. The works thus created become conversations, with the site, within the object, and with myself, intervening in and altering another person's work is not undertaken lightly



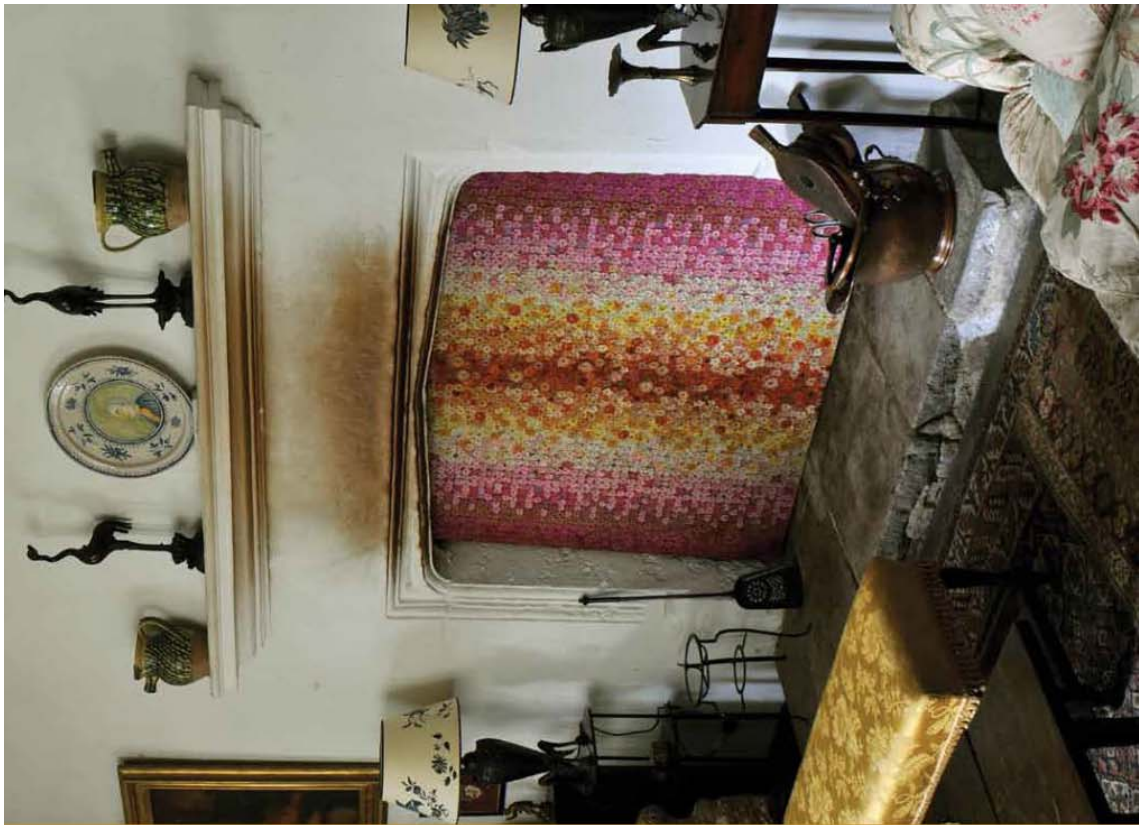
! Don't Wait To Lose You is about the pseudo-medievalist plaque above the chair on which the cushion sits. A knight says goodbye to a lady before going off to fight, just as Leonard Messel would have said goodbye to his family before going to serve in the First World War, the words reference a contemporary song, *Your King and Country Wait You*, from 1914. In embroidery, the name of the maker – usually a woman – tends to be lost, similarly, it was Muriel Messel, not Leonard, who lost her life during the war.

The involvement of the housekeeping staff in the embroidery guild set up by Maud Messel is referenced in *As if*, the white on white (stitch on linen) reflecting the invisibility of the competent running of a large household.

Culture, in the Library, considers the relationship between inside and outside. Plants from the exterior world become the materials used to create the fabric of the building and the objects within it, as well as being the subjects of study, guarded behind glass in the bookcase. The plants' scientific names are sewn onto an anti-macassar, designed to protect the cloth fabric of the chair from human contact.

The time-consuming nature of hand embroidery, especially embroidered text in a world of instantaneous digital text production, is an enabling anomaly. Taking an hour over each letter is a luxury of slowness allowing time for the consideration of the potential for multilayered approaches to the text-object-site relationship. The texts refer to the business of making art, justifying it, and the relationship between artist and work, one of skill, learning, intimacy and parallel growth followed by loss and distance.





A Twitch on the Thread: Oliver Messel between Past and Present • Paul Jobling

I might seem ironic, if not downright perverse, in a project whose leitmotif is *Uhrverlekt* to try to weave strands together again. However, like something of a latter-day Penelope, I want to enact this as a matter of simultaneously picking and unpicking the threads of the day's hard labour so as to keep the end view in sight. But what is the end view here? What is the bigger picture? And what is on the surface and what lies beneath? These are the questions that seem to subvert and unify the work of the three artists/craftspeople I concentrate on in this essay, Gavin Fry, Caitlin Hefferan and Matt Smith, all of whom enter Nymans House under cover, so to speak, and through the strategy of masquerade and artifice seek to represent – to one degree or another – the mythological entwining of past and present in the work and life of one its inhabitants, the celebrated theatre and costume designer Oliver Messel.

Headress for the stage production Twang! designed by Oliver Messel



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As Fry attests, one of the hallmarks of Messel's practice was his sense of experimentation with materials and sleight-of-hand in making something synthetic or cheap pass as authentic or precious as with Maud Mariani's headress, made from lures, beads and artificial jewels, for the 1965 production *Twang!* The remarkable footstool cover, which Fry has fashioned as a collage of blowtorched multi-chrome metallic sequins, plastic buttons and glass beads and stones mimics this sense of invention and improvisation, while at the same time symbolising the way that a mundane object from the everyday world can metamorphose materially into something extraordinary. Set against the oriental carpet of the Garden Hall and echoing Messel's interest in the exotic, this shimmering object resembles a spangled crown to the extent that it conjures up how, in Handel's opera *Giulio Cesare* (1724), the decadent Egyptian ruler Ptolemy XIII desires to have the head of the Roman potentate for a footstool.

And yet, it signifies more than this, for Fry likens his resplendent footstool to a gilded tortoise. We do not know whether the Nymans household ever owned such a pet but, appearing to be as much a bouquet with trailing garlands as it does a crown, Fry's object is in turn redolent of the jewel-encrusted tortoise that appears in Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel about the wealthy decadent aesthete Des Esseintes, *A Rebours/Against Nature* (1884). Joseph Halpern has described this work as 'written against itself'... Its language is that of "untruth"... expressed in the bloom of truth', and certainly its anti-hero inhabits an escapist dream world that is threatened by disruption as soon as reality encroaches on it. For Des Esseintes, it is not the thing itself that matters but ultimately the vision it evinces and he meditates at length on how acts of consumption and imagination interact. Hence, observing the drab tortoise against the lustrous colours of a Turkey carpet, he designs a bouquet of flowers in which 'the leaves and petals of each and every flower are to be executed in precious stones and mounted on the actual shell of his tortoise' so as to bring out the tessellated pattern of the carpet. Moreover, as Fry iterates, while most tortoises may live at the same property for many years, Des Esseintes' pet was not to share a



Music room stool design by Oliver Messel for Caesar and Cleopatra

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similar fate. Since things exist for him only to stimulate an acutely personal memory or mood, once this is achieved he feels no regret if the object fades away or dissolves. Thus he shows no remorse when he discovers that the unfortunate creature has died under the weight of its jewelled carapace. A similar sense of things spinning out of human control is also connoted by the stone-capped twine and loose threads of the footstool which suggest it is fraying or unravelling at the edges.

The symbol of the tortoise and theme of loose ends and embodiment also spill over into Matt Smith's commission, a military jacket studded with glass beads and a plumed ceramic guardsman's helmet, with which he festoons a herm, a form of Ancient Greek sculpture with a divinity's head on top of a squared column onto which male genitals are also sometimes carved. The name of the god Hermes, son of Zeus and the nymph Maia, is derived from the same root, and it was he who was responsible for inventing the lyre by stretching strings across a scooped-out tortoise shell. Herms was also originally associated with roads and travel and thus votive herms were often placed at crossings and borders as a form of protection. Draped in a costume based on Messel's designs for *Puccini's* 1830 as worn by the Russian dancer George Liar in Charles B. Cochran's 1930 *Revue* that was performed at the Palace Theatre, Manchester on 4 March and the London Pavilion on 27 March, the Nymphs' herm instantiates another kind of border crossing in time and space.

As Doreen Massey has argued in *For Space* (2005), the meeting place/passage involves a fresh understanding of past and present, or the 'here and now': 'Here is where spatial narratives meet up or form new configurations, conjunctures or trajectories, which have their own temporalities (so 'now' is as problematical as 'here') ... 'Here' is an intertwining of histories in which the spatiality of those histories (their then as well as their here) is inescapably entangled'. Thus the web of associations that is embodied in Messel's original costume design suggests a kind of near temporal symmetry in the hundred-year leap from 1830 to 1930. And yet, in keeping with Massey, his



Serge Liar dressed in Oliver Messel's costume for a *highlander* in Puccini's 1830



Oliver and Anne Messel, photographed by Cecil Balaban

design and Smith's reconstruction of it also signify that the web is a tangled one and the cross-crossing of time between past and present it involves is far from straightforward when it comes to male dress and masculine identities.

It is illuminating, for instance, that Cochran's production and Messel's costumes travel back in time to the reign of George IV and its attendant dandyism. Certainly, military-style dress was incorporated into the dandy cut both through its archetype George Beau Brummell, who in 1794 had joined the regiment of the 10th Hussars, as well as two other masculine stereotypes: the hyper-masculine Hercules, and the excessively vain Adonis. This intense interest in looking good and *bon ton* informs contemporary accounts of the dandy's lifestyle, from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul and Paulina*, or *Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828) to Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly's

Opposite:
 Oliver Messel dressed
 up for a Christmas
 card

seminal tract *Of Dandyism and of George Brummell* (1844), in which he alludes to the dandy's 'very special kind of vanity'. Thus to see and to be seen were at the core of the dandy's existence. Brummell, for instance, resigned his military commission in 1797 when his regiment was about to be posted to Manchester for fear that a fashionable life could not be sustained there on the same basis as in London. But this narcissistic preoccupation with superficial appearances also lays dandyism open to the charge of effeminacy and decadence. D'Aurevilly stated that 'A Dandy is a woman on certain sides'⁴ and, indeed, several dandies of the period were reputed to have unconventional sex lives. Lord Byron had several male lovers, including John Edleston, a 15-year-old Cambridge choirboy (Byron featured in another part of Cochran's 1930 *Revue* called *Heaven*, also costumed by Messel). While the Comte d'Orsay, a leading light in Paris and London fashion between 1820 and 1845, was widely believed to be bisexual because of his peculiar living arrangements with Lord and Lady Blessington.

Although in *Piccadilly* 1830 Lilar's character flirts with a woman, the subversion of gender norms in the dandy's lifestyle is signified by Messel's military dress, where he substitutes ostrich feathers for bearskin in his helmet design and thereby echoes D'Aurevilly's axiom that dandyism is '... almost as difficult a thing to describe as it is to define. It is thus Frivolity on the one hand ... on the other Imagination'. Moreover, as a haunt for fashionable upper-class men in 1830, Piccadilly and its purlieu were a distant cry from what they had become by 1930. Alongside the bespoke Savile Row tailoring trade, the area was then the locus of middle-market menswear retailers – Austin Reed had opened its flagship Regent Street store in 1925 and Simpson went on to open its on Piccadilly in 1936. Yet it was also known as a cruising ground for the working-class gay Dilly Boys, who were typified and vilified by the police and the popular press alternately as 'effeminate looking people', 'West End Pests' and 'Poots'. One wonders, then, if rather than associating Piccadilly with its seedy synchronic reputation for casual sex, Cochran's 1930 *Revue* transposes the action diachronically to 1830 in order to rehabilitate its former reputation as a site for fashionable males to promenade, while not losing sight also of the dandy's queering of masculinities. It is interesting to observe how Smith embodies a parallel double identity in his adornment of the Nymans' herm: on the one hand he mimics Messel's original costume design for *Piccadilly* 1830 by using ostrich feathers; and on the other, in decorating the jacket with thousands of mirror-backed, glass bugle beads, he evinces the way that Messel customised





Oliver Messel costume design for 'Tree Man'

It is, of course, well known that Messel demonstrated such a supplementary set of standards in his love for masquerade and that fancy dress was an integral part of both his and his sister Anne's life since an early age. Hence, photographs in the Messel family album of them dressing up became the springboard for Caitlin Helferman to explore and recapture the creativity and theatricality of their childhood years in her sculptures with fabric covered in fan motifs and exotic birds. By contrast, Messel's series of *Tree Man* drawings, which he executed when designing costumes for a 1932 production of Karl Vollmoeller's Expressionist wordless pantomime *The Miracle* (1911), led her to evolve an uncanny and mutant embodiment of childhood in the form of the treee hybrid tree-boys, stitched together from organic shapes of stuffed fabric. Just as Fry's footstool trades on the convulsive aspect of 'this one' becoming 'that one' before one's very eyes

so also, therefore, do Helferman's fabric sculptures. And just as Smith's dandy costume has a lineage with Antibuty through its link with the herm, so too is there a correspondence between her dendroids and the Latin poet Ovid, who in *Metamorphoses* relates several instances of the relationship of human life to trees, such as the prodigious oak inhabited by one of the nymphs of Ceres, or Perceus and Gaia's transformation of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree in order to save her from the amorous pursuit of Apollo. At the same time, *The Miracle* is separated by only two years from Cochrane's 1930 *Revue* and the sense of fantasy evident in Messel's designs for both productions also share a social or political dimension; that is to say, in common with Hollywood cinema, they satisfied the public thirst for escapist spectacle as the world economy was beginning to unravel during the Depression era.

This is to suggest, however, only a set of equivalences in the illusive work of Messel and the three artists represented in this exhibition rather than to bundle it all up into a neat package. For I am mindful that when I started this essay I also wanted to respect the theme of unravelling, and what sets their work apart, as much as what binds it together into a tangled web of associations. On this level, then, we might speak of their individual responses to Oliver Messel's rich legacy as a theatrical designer as a matter of the harmony of difference. And we might also frame the way that their site-specific installations at Nythans thoughtfully enact a twitch on the thread (to coin Evelyn Waugh's phrase from *Brickshead Revisted*) between time and space in regard to Pierre Nora's concept of *les lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) and the concomitant 'push and pull' between history and memory that it entails.⁷

1. Joseph Helfman, 'Decadent narrative, A Revue', *Shenandoah Review* (Spring 1978): 100.
2. Dawn Messel, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005): 139.
3. Jules Ferry, *Journal of the Ministry of Education* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1879): 26.
4. *Ibid.*: 70.
5. *Ibid.*: 31 and 43.
6. Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"' (1964), *A Susan Sontag Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982): 108-111 and 117.
7. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 12. 'History did not obliterate memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and pacifying it, there would be no lieux de mémoire. Indeed, it is this very push and pull that produces lieux de mémoire.'

The Nature of Intervention • Julian Walker

Let us accept **straightaway** that Nyman's is preserved in a way that renders it very different from how it was when people lived here. It is not the business of the National Trust to pretend that we are all invisible, and that the real inhabitants have gone out for the day. As we walk round enjoying objects and views we may not see ourselves in the space, but our presence is an intervention, and the nature of the site as it is depends on our engagement with it. The positioning of new artworks within a site like this disrupts our vision, putting us in a position where we can acknowledge our own presence.

Nyman's is a site which is about change; the destruction of one form on the site has created space for a different form, a number of times, both deliberately and through the agency of catastrophe. How do we read the removal of the pre-nineteenth-century house, the extension of the Italianate villa, or the replacement of this with a medievalist building? How do we understand the burnt part of the house beyond the locked door, which confounds our sense of space; is it outside or inside, is it predominantly resentful, romantic, challenging, anomalous or mournful? Do we read it as documentation of history, as a reference to the Gothic, as a form hope for reconstruction?

In this context, where the site is a palimpsest on which people and life have inscribed new identities for the building and its surroundings, proposing different kinds of engagement, the insertion of works of intervention and alteration is entirely appropriate. It is the house, as a site, that the former owners engaged with and reacted to and it is this that invites contemporary engagements and reactions from others.

Works made to engage with a site can enlighten, inform, critique, outrage, delight and amuse; they can lead us to look at things and places in new ways, and they can ask us to



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look at our own way of looking – even in leading us to reject them they help us to confirm our own standpoint and opinions. Making work that reacts to and is situated within a site of heritage is bound to excite comment, often discomfort, annoyance and frustration. Both as makers and as viewers we should note these feelings, and use them as a space to look at our expectations, to consider and note the relationships others have with things and places that mean something to us.

My own work has involved taking things apart, undoing, worked levels before I rework them; this is not preliminary to the work, it is part of the work. Making work that involves a certain amount of destruction of 'heritage' material opens a door to many difficult questions. Having initiated the process of alteration, can I complain if someone takes my work and alters it? – No, I cannot. What gives me the right to change another's work? – The same right with which I change anything in the world. Does not presenting this kind of work here run counter to the role of the host organisation as a custodian of heritage for posterity? Art is in a position to ask new questions about how we relate to the culture we operate in, we should not allow the concern that things will not survive for posterity to prevent us from asking those questions in the present. What about the cultural value of the thing I am altering? – The intervention shifts its cultural value, inviting new ways of thinking about both the item and the structure of cultural value surrounding it.

Destruction has a recognised place in contemporary art. In 1963 Robert Rauschenberg was making work that involved erasing his own drawings; fascinated at that time by the work of Willem de Kooning, he asked that artist for a work that he could erase. De Kooning gave him a crayon-and-ink drawing; it took Rauschenberg a month to remove, almost completely, all the marks, creating *Erase! De Kooning Drawing*, in 1960



Toy IV, work in progress

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ground, the mark tying itself down. The act of taking away, seen through the deliberately left marks of undoing, is a greater irremovability, a deliberate act marked by a trace, a mark of memory; the unmaking is permanent, while the making is capable of being changed.

The works I have made for this exhibition are clearly specific to this site, but the items I start with, having histories before they come to me, have become sites themselves; as such the context of my working on them has to be considered. There is no question of avoiding the issue of gender in this medium. It is fundamental to the process that we should be aware that embroidery in the West has traditionally been undertaken by women, and my intervention as a named individual thus is a male intervention in a female site. I am working with a clear knowledge of, and a clear reference to, the embroidery school set up by Meud Messel, in which local girls were taught embroidery, with the help of some of the housekeeping staff of Nymans. Given the context of the work, the process of named intervention in embroidery here turns works of 'craft' into works of 'art', explicitly authored, and with the rights of authorship.

Yet, despite the anonymity of the makers who originally created the objects I work on, the context of all of these handmade embroideries is that they were once closely associated with individuals, and mostly became family possessions. The process of becoming commodities detached them from those associations, rendering them more able to accommodate new stories, imagined, adapted, projected or transferred. In this sense they are 'rehoused' into a new context of meaning, very domestic artworks given a new home.

Each of these works must then be about loss, the loss of the previous work or the loss of the empty clean space. The work *Don't Want To Lose You*, while referring to the medievalist plaque, also relates to the loss of the work on the cushion, necessary to make the new work just as much as it is about the history of loss within Nymans itself, the desire not to lose the medieval, and the desire not to lose the part of the house destroyed by fire. We carry the past around with us. Ultimately these works open up a conversation with the role of the National Trust, which alters the route towards entropy by preserving sites such as Nymans, allowing the continuing questioning of how we see and know this aspect of the world and of ourselves.

Overleaf:
Film still from Lucy
Brown's *They Loved to
Breathe Beauty, Tradition
and Romanticism*

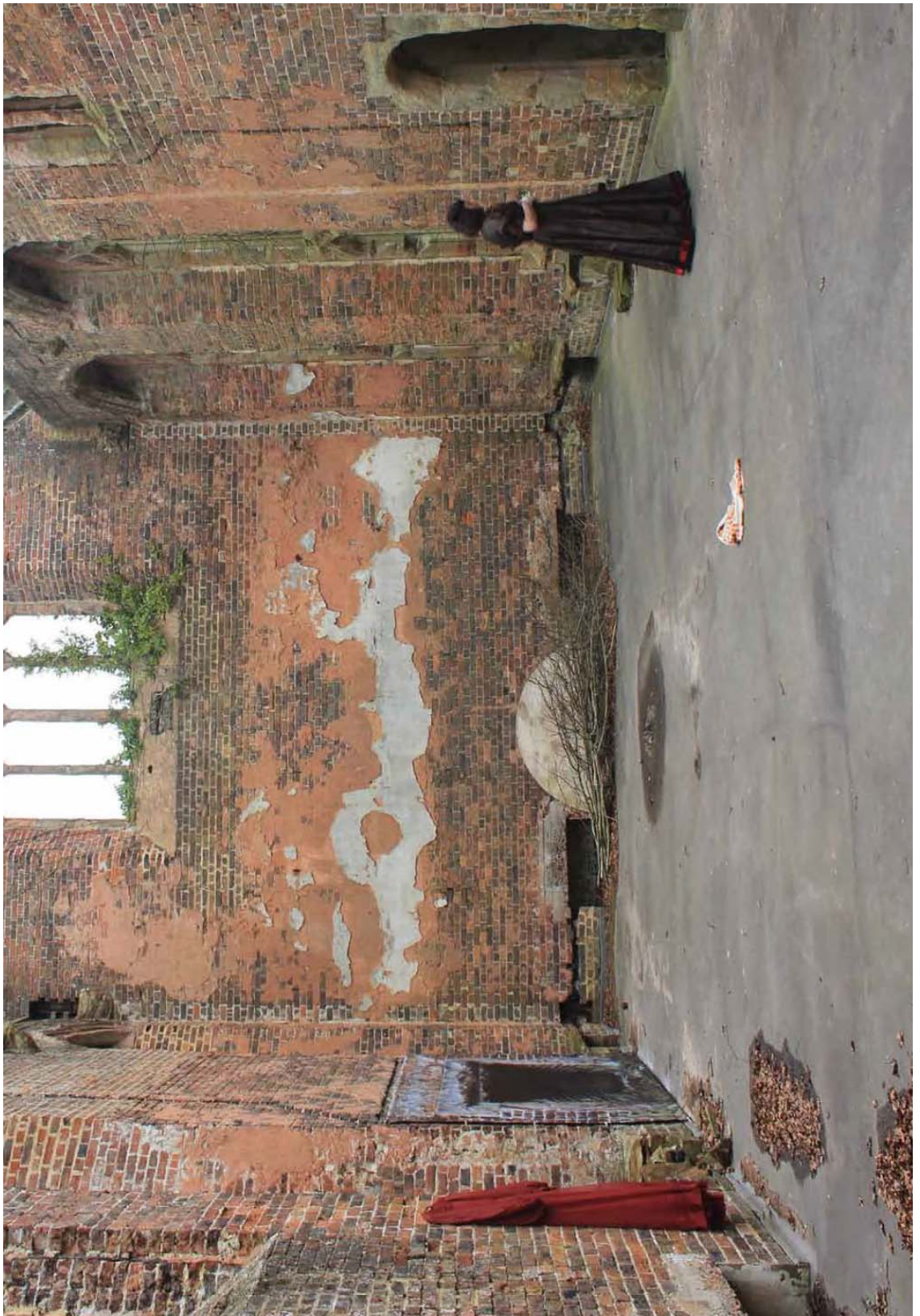
1. Pallares's a manuscript in which two or more successive texts have been written, each one being erased to make room for the next. (Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, Collins, 1982)



Rite, work in progress

Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York* destroyed itself, as it was designed to do, and in 2001 Michael Landy destroyed all 7226 of his belongings, including a Tinguely drawing, in the work *Break Down*. In 2003 the Chapman Brothers exhibited *Inslit to Injury*, a 'rectification' of Goya's *Disasters of War* etchings (1937 printing), the heads of the subjects being overdrawn with the heads of puppies and clowns, in what Jonathan Jones described as 'an extension of his despair'. All of these works are reactions to something already in existence, reactions that build upon that existence and create something which was not there before. They are works that are wholly related to the context of the material they developed from.

The irrevocable works just considered operate through a complex series of actions and marks. In the case of my interventionist embroidery works made for Nymans, the undoing is irremovable, but the marks made are infinitely removable, like digital marks; the mark made is patently a committed three-dimensional thing, the thread inserting itself through the





Callin Heffernan | www.axisweb.org/artist/callinheffernan

Tree Boys
children's clothes, wood, fabric, polyfibre, wire, hand stitching, card

Hide and Seek
children's clothes, wood, fabric, polyfibre, wire, hand stitching, card

Guy Holder | www.guyholder.com

Field of Vision
porcelain, cobalt, oxidized glass, sewing plaster

Matt Smith | www.matthsmith.com

Procedly 1830
turkey & cat's paws, celamite, metal cage, wood, linen, mirror-backed beads

Alec Stevens | www.alecstevens.co.uk

Rifle
wood, macon dye
Stringshot
wood, macon dye

James Sutton | www.jamesutton.co.uk

Toy II (Rabbit)
Portuguese marble
Toy IV (Clarife)
Portuguese marble

Julian Walker | www.julianwalker.net

As If
silk on linen
Culture
linen, cotton
I Don't Want To Lose You
linen, wool

Lauren Adams | www.ladams.com

Grand Tour Fay
silk, paint, wood
Road to Nyzeans
silk, paint, wood
Crawley Near Town Mock Tudor
100 individual, commercially printed, cotton and wood, hand-held fans

Lucy Brown | www.axisweb.org/artist/lucybrown

I serve only you
human hair, vintage embroidery threads, early twentieth-century hair curlers
They loved to breath beauty, tradition and romanticism
vintage garments including a Victorian and a 1890s dress, rose waxed ribbon, vintage table ribbon, digital film
Moover hair, meowic inventions
human hair, vintage embroidery threads, Georgian shoe buckle, pewter and silver plated thimbles, fragments of vintage dresses and buttons, vintage sewing tools

David Cheeseman

There is a garden who works night and day in the garden, his name is Death
acrylic, spines, soot

Steven Follen | www.stevenfollen.co.uk

Light Fitting
laser-cut plywood

Sally Freshwater | www.sallyfreshwater.com

Murfbone
pressed flowers, funeral hat, linen, gold thread

Gavin Fry | gavinry.blogspot.co.uk

Torinese
mixed media

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Cover photograph: There is a garden who works night and day in the garden, his name is Death (selected detail)



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Appendix 8 *Unravelling The Vyne Catalogue*



unravelling the vyne

The Vyne

28 June - 22 December 2013

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Inside front cover: Costume from *An
Eloise Oweason*, Sharon McElroy

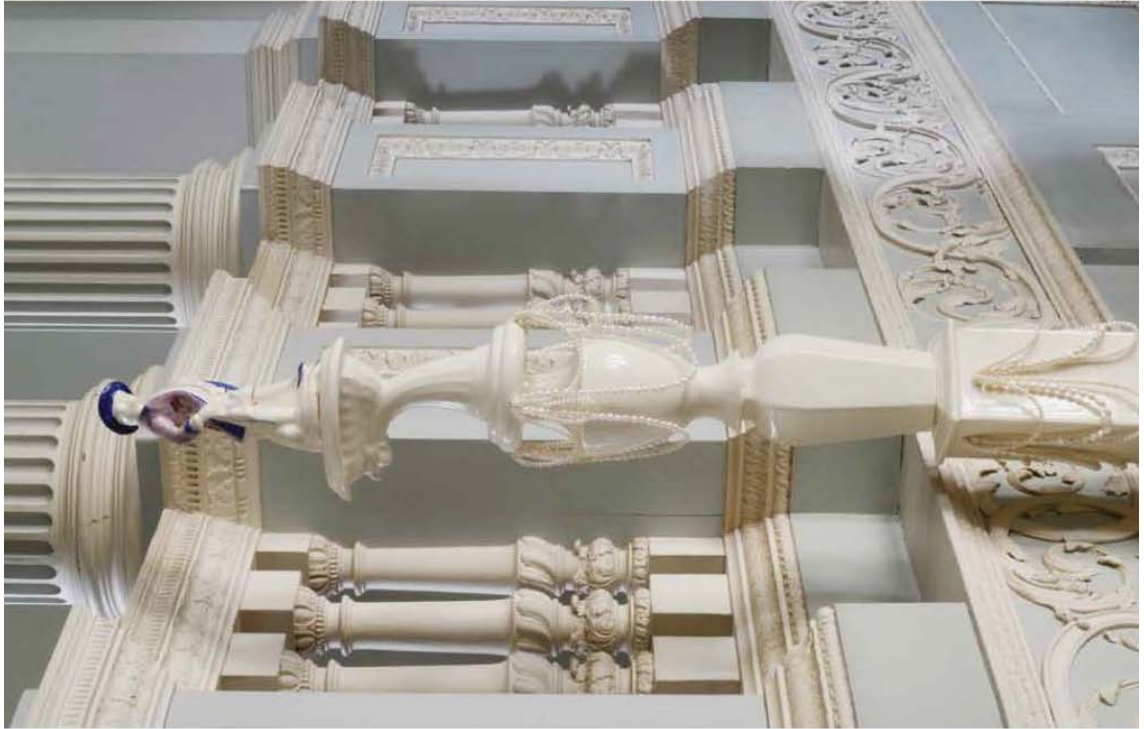
Opposite: Dandy, Matt Smith

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- Sharon McElroy
- Lisa Pettibone
- Maria Rivans
- Matt Smith
- Mrs Smith
- Alec Stevens
- Charlie Whinney

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Walpole and John Chute: Strawberry Hill and
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George E. Haggerty

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Unravelling The Wyne

Polly Harknett, Caitlin Helferman, Matt Smith

Unravelling commissions artists working at the interface of fine art and craft to create site-specific works. Formed in 2009, Unravelling is led by Polly Harknett, Caitlin Helferman and Matt Smith. We are currently midway through *Unravelling the National Trust*, a three-year project responding to National Trust properties.

When Unravelling first came to the Wyne, we were excited by the possibilities of working with a building and its interiors that spanned five centuries and boasted a lineage that began with the patronage of Henry VIII.

Set in the countryside on the fringes of Beesingstoke, this former Tudor powerhouse was originally built by Henry VIII's Lord Chamberlain, William 1st Lord Sandys. In 1653, the house was sold to Chaloner Chute who worked on both modernising the house and drastically reducing it in size. However, he died before being able to complete his work and the house was left in an unfinished state for several hundred years. In the mid 18th century it was inherited by John Chute, who also significantly altered it, and the property remained within the Chute family until it was bequeathed to the National Trust in 1956.

The Wyne has thus been a site of constant change over time. Many generations have owned and altered it, social norms have changed and allegiances have been formed and broken. With its opulent interiors and equally rich history, the property offers a stimulating environment within which to create art and bring stories to life. It provides today's visitor with a complex history; it operates as both a public space and a private home, a showcase and a retreat. Its many owners and occupiers have continually adapted the house and its contents to reflect their lives and interests and it is this accumulated collection of objects, lives and ideas that we are left with today.

Trying to understand and communicate a singular story through a house of this age is difficult. For every story told, a dozen remain unsaid. We were therefore delighted to ask ten artists to pick out the stories of the house that appealed to them and create work in response to those stories.

Historic houses that are open to the public occupy a unique role. What was private—or in the case of The Wyne, semi-private—becomes public.

The private space of the home is a place where we are able to most be ourselves, and express ourselves. When this intimacy is opened to public gaze troubling questions start to arise.

It seems to us appropriate that these personal stories and spaces are responded to in equally personal ways. Each of the commissioned artists makes their own work, and makes that work by hand.

The hours taken to learn each skill and the time taken to craft each object allow a space for the artists to consider the house and the lives they are responding to. Bringing these modern responses to the house's history creates connections between now and then, and also highlights the difficulty of trying to view the past with modern eyes.

To some extent we will never truly understand the past – the multitude of social norms and reference points that interlink and create a backdrop to daily life. However, we hope that each of the ten works will give the visitor a way into one of the histories of the house and highlight one small aspect of its past.

Just as contemporary art can help unlock a deeper understanding of the past, the reverse can also be true. Giving new work a historical context (either through making site-specific work or by placing contemporary work within a historical setting) can help us access the contemporary concepts the new work explores. These connections may be rooted in associations we make with domestic settings or historical events. Either way, they can help make the new feel familiar and allow us to connect with the art in a unique way.

In addition to commissioning the artists, we are delighted that three writers have taken up our invitation to explore aspects of the house and comment on the artists' work. Jill Seddon considers the role of the women at The Wyne. Finncorpentum – the passing of assets through the male line – can focus property histories on the male line. However, as Seddon explains, it is often the women of a house who shaped both the environment and the family connections that ensured its succession.

The Wyne still bears the marks of one of English history's most famous female power struggles, Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. It

therefore seems appropriate that the role and influence of women should be brought to light by the artists Alec Stevens, Lisa Pettibone and Penny Green.

Eliza Gluckman writes about the desire to explore and re-present foreignness and the exotic. Global exchanges of goods and ideas have a long history. The desire to escape into another world mirrors the experience of visiting historic sites and Caitlin Hefleman, John Grayson, Mrs Smith and Charlie Whitney all adopt make-believe and performance in their attempts to recapture the past.

Finally, George Haggerty shines a light on the relationship between Horace Walpole and John Chute. Alongside Richard Bentley, the two men created the Committee of Taste and influenced each other's houses. However, impeccable taste is not the only ideal they bring into question. Masculine ideals of the 18th century were very different from those of today, and trying to understand the intimacy shared by the two men is a fascinating and at times frustrating endeavour. Haggerty, with consummate skill, unpicks the letters of Horace Walpole and re-weaves them to explore their shared lives.

These ideas of taste, dandyism and the hedonistic atmosphere of 18th century Venice – the party stop par excellence of the grand tour – are explored by Maria Rivans, Matt Smith and Sharon McElroy.

Working with the team at The Vyne, it has been clear how dedicated and emotionally invested in caring for the house and its visitors they are. It has been a huge privilege to be invited in, and we would like to thank Dave Green and his team for their help, warmth and generosity throughout the project.

1 Howard, in *The Vyne: History & Architecture*, National Trust Guide, 1986, p4



A Woman's Place: Power, Gender and Work in the Country House

Jill Seddon

The history of *The Wyre*, like that of any other British country house, is woven from the stories of its inhabitants, from the men whose wealth and taste shaped its architecture, to the women who oversaw its daily routines and ensured its survival through the legacies of succeeding generations. The beauty of stories is that they don't require a solid foundation in fact in order to capture our imaginations and they are likely to be embroidered in their telling. The artists taking part in this Unravelled project have embraced the opportunities it offers to engage with the stories of *The Wyre*, spinning their own tales and, through the objects that they have created, contributing an extra layer to the living history of the house.

Words like spinning, weaving and embroidering come easily when describing the process of storytelling and it is not purely coincidental that they refer to activities most frequently associated with women. The interiors of *The Wyre* are full of visual reminders of the presence of women, from the carved wooden emblems of a queen whose expected visit never took place, explored by Alec Steverson, through the portraits that have attracted the interest of Lisa Pettibone and Penny Green, to the tapestries that Caitlin Heffernan has been fascinated by, which, although created by a male professional weaver, were doubtless cut down and altered by female members of the household as they were moved from one room to another. These rooms also display embroideries and watercolour paintings created by women themselves.

The women whose stories have inspired these four artists to create new works all came from the upper echelons of society, from the gentry up to the monarchy, although we know that their social positions, and certainly the maintenance of their houses, were underpinned by a hierarchy of servants. Despite the gulf between the life of a nobly born woman and her maid, however, they were both women who lived their lives under a patriarchal system. Indeed, some of the most poignant, and fascinating, aspects of their stories are the ways in which they were able to manoeuvre within the system and what happened when they came up against its restrictions. Patriarchy, literally the rule of the father, governed the lives of these women, working outwards from the family, with its emphasis on male lineage, to the institutional structures by which the country was ruled.

Up until the 19th century women had virtually no rights as individuals. This is dramatically illustrated by the fate of Catherine of Aragon, given visual

Right: Tapestries from the Scho Factory in the Tapestry Room at The Wyre



expression by Alec Stevens, who envisages the literal 'sweeping aside' of Henry VIII's first wife, their marriage annulled because of her inability to produce a surviving male heir. By engaging with this story, Stevens draws attention not only to the plight of a solitary woman, but reflects on the prevailing condition of her sex. Henry VIII's break with Rome resulted in his obtaining a divorce from Catherine through the offices of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but for nearly three centuries, until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, divorce remained a largely male prerogative, requiring an Act of Parliament and considerable wealth. The decoration of the Inenfold panelling lining the Oak Gallery at The Wyne with Catherine's emblem of the porcupine, in anticipation of a royal visit to the house that only took place after Catherine had been replaced by Anne Boleyn, bears material witness to momentous events in English history. The story also has a more generic significance for the country's great houses and the desirability of passing them down through successive generations of male heirs. Within the Chute family at The Wyne, the direct line of descent was broken three times in three centuries and heirs had to be drawn from the female line, adopting the family name. As has been pointed out, women 'were the transmitters, if not the holders, of the property'.¹

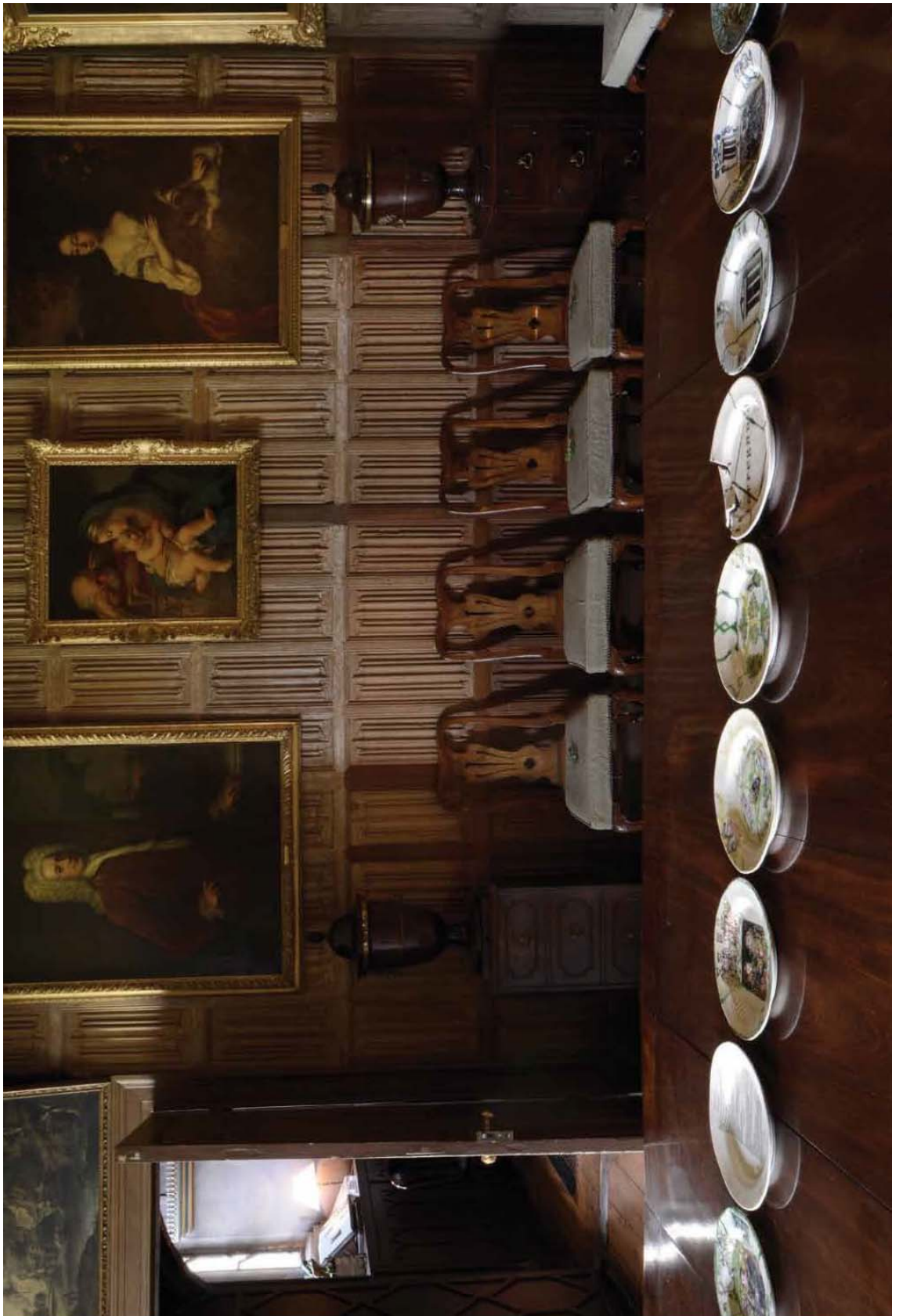
The physical ownership of property, denied to most women, was not however the only indicator of power, as is illustrated by the figure of Dorothy, Lady Dacre, whose story and those of other female family members is taken up by Penny Green, who depicts them on a series of plates she has made to be displayed in the dining room at The Wyne. Lady Dacre confirmed the rise of the male owners of the house from gentry to nobility through her marriage in 1650 to Chabner Chute, following the marriage of her daughter to Chaloner Chute's son by his first wife. The encouraging, if not brokering, of such family alliances was commonly regarded as a female preserve and Lady Dacre seems to have been acutely aware of the importance of herself and her ancestors in the social elevation of the Chute family, as demonstrated by the family portraits she brought with her to her new husband's house on her marriage. She was a figure of some influence and wealth in her own right through a jointure settlement from her first husband.² Nevertheless the management of her income was transferred to her male relatives and her final years were spent in legal wrangles with her son and grandson about their alleged mismanagement of her finances. Her tenacity and willingness to engage with legal processes were echoes of the battles of her predecessor Mary Neville, an earlier Lady Dacre, who fought,

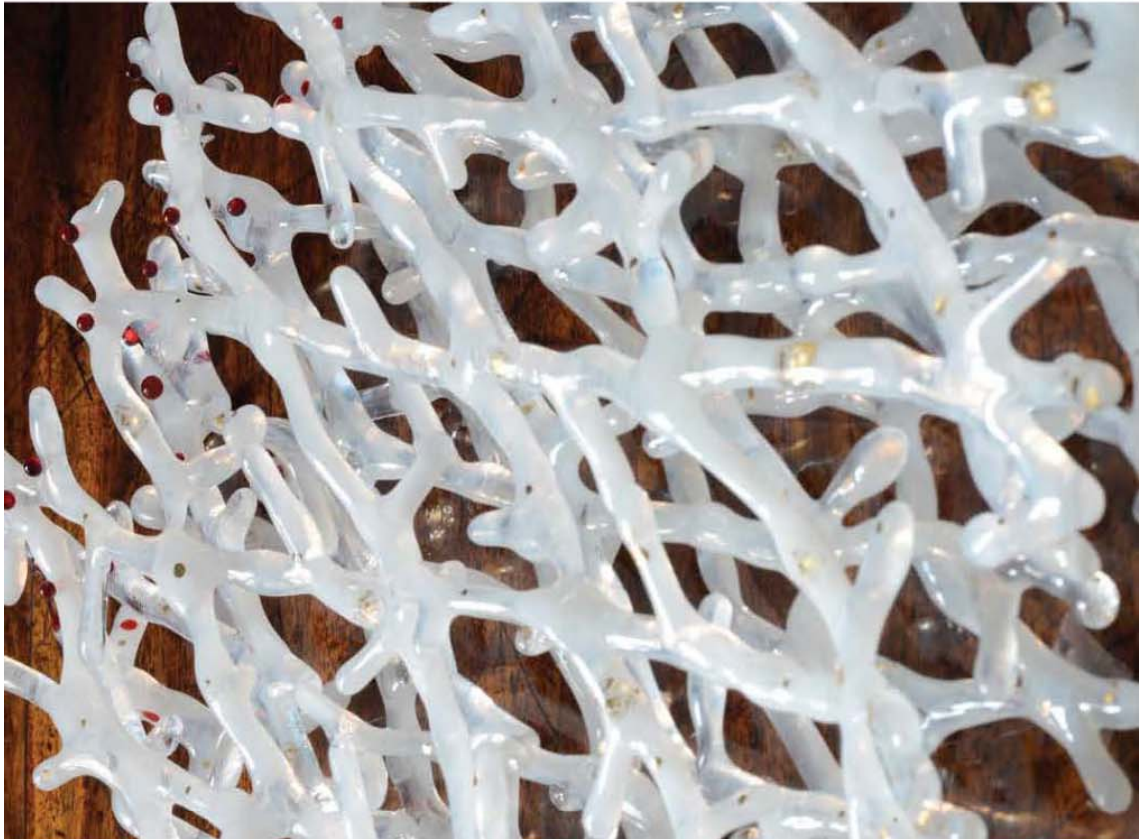
ultimately successfully, to have the land and titles restored to the male heirs of the family following their confiscation by Henry VIII, who in 1541 had ordered the execution of her husband for the murder of a gamekeeper.

The ideology of femininity enshrined in the laws and institutions of the country was also the essence of women's everyday lives. Although concepts of femininity subtly shifted and changed centred around marriage, children and the home. Perceived as more emotional and more intuitive than men, women were expected to assume responsibility for the moral and physical welfare of the family. Aristocratic women, just as much as those further down the social scale, were expected to acquire and practise the skills of housewifery. In the large households of country houses these could be demanding, including as they did the overseeing of provisioning, management of servants, upbringing of children, involvement in the furnishing of the home and its use for entertainment and philanthropic duties within the estate and beyond. Details of the extent of domestic consumption at The Wyne in 1742 survive, which provide a snapshot of the self-sufficiency of the household.³ A major contribution from its female members was through their sewing, both of household linens and of decorative pieces that could be used to furnish the home. The role of embroidery in the construction of the feminine ideal was encapsulated by Rozsika Parker when she wrote '...because embroidery was supposed to signify femininity – docility, love of home and a life without work – it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother'.⁴ Parker has described how, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the stitching of samplers developed into bands of whitework embroidery, which included the creation of the fine needlepoint lace used to trim the fashionable caps and ruffs of the period.



Mary Neville, Lady Dacre, after Hans Eworth





It is the depiction of the ruffs, both in the early family portraits adorning the walls of many of the rooms at The Wyne and in the 19th century sculpted bust of Mary Queen of Scots in the Oak Gallery, that has attracted the attention of Lisa Pettibone. Not only has she explored the cultural and symbolic meanings of the ruff, but also its material properties. Within the interiors of the house the stiff, intricately pleated length of fabric is represented both in hair, unyielding marble and in malleable, formless oil paint. Pettibone adds a third material, transparent, fragile glass. The visual and material equivalences thus created afford the viewer a fascinating insight into form and technique.

The tapestries dating from the 1720s, chosen by Caitlin Heffernan as the inspiration for her installation neatly illustrate the division between amateur (female) and professional (male) textile production. When this was on a commercial basis, in this case in the renowned Soho workshops, it became part of the public sphere and therefore the professional practice of men, exemplified by John Vanderbank, the yeoman areas worker at the Great Wardrobe, who led the work on these tapestries.⁴

Once installed inside the house, their alteration became the responsibility of women and they also served as inspiration across the centuries for 20th-century embroideries by Laura, Lady Chute. She then used her own needlework to upholster two 18th-century walnut stools that currently furnish the Tapestry Room. In Heffernan's installation the tapestries evoke a meditation on the survival of The Wyne and the fortunes of its inhabitants. As with neglected plants that are left to 'bolt', the natural imagery of the apertures has sprouted from the walls, rooting downwards and branching upwards to reclaim the space. This slightly sinister vision perhaps echoes the experience of Caroline Wiggott who, in 1803, aged three, arrived at the house to be brought up by the childless William and Elizabeth Chute, and was terrified of the tapestries that then hung in her aunt's bedroom, where she slept.



Mary Queen of Scots,
William Milligan



The Stone Gallery in 1877, Elizabeth Chute

In the 13th and 19th centuries embroidery became firmly established as a female accomplishment, along with music and watercolour painting, it signified gentility and eligibility for marriage. Material evidence of this ideology resides not only within the embroideries still to be found in the house, but also in the watercolours by Elizabeth Chute, her sister Augusta and their governess Margaret Meen, painted between 1784 and 1807. They include both exquisite botanical illustrations and accomplished depictions of rooms in the house. The group of paintings illustrates another division between amateur and professional, this time based on class. Whilst it would have been socially unacceptable for the female family members to have practised as professional artists, their governess was obliged to earn her own living, which included the teaching of flower painting, itself considered a feminine domain. She demonstrated her skill in this medium in her publication of *Exotic Plants from the Royal Gardens at Kew* (1790).⁶

Despite its status as a female accomplishment, Caroline Wigglett in her recollections of life at The Vine refers to her and her aunt's sewing as

'work'.⁷ The interventions that we can enjoy at The Vine today would also be described by their creators as work, although the meaning of the concept has completely changed as a result of campaigns for women's rights and, more generally, new attitudes towards education, professionalism and creativity. In the early 1980s Rozsika Parker noted that the '...development of an ideology of femininity coincided historically with the emergence of a clearly defined separation of art and craft'.⁸ Since the 1970s, however, the work of many artist-makers has been concerned with exploring and critiquing both this separation and the ideologies of gender that it embodies. The four makers discussed here are, by various means, continuing this project. More than this, through the beautiful and evocative objects they have created, they introduce us to women from the past and invite us to listen to their stories.

1. Trevor Lumis and Jan Misch, *The Mistress's Bedchamber in Country House* (London: Penguin, 1983), 96.
2. A heroine uses a marriage arrangement that most commonly entailed the settlement of the joint tenancy (jointure) of an estate to the use of a husband and wife during their lifetime, with the whole going to the survivor after the death of a spouse.
3. Lumis, op. cit., 95-6.
4. Rosalind Parker, *The Subversive Shill: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), 11.
5. The part of the royal household that provided the royal refuge was known as the Great Wardrobe. It drew upon a great many suppliers of raw materials and highly skilled craftsmen, often from continental Europe, such as John Vandenberg, who was of Huguenot (French protestant) descent.
6. *Exotic Plants from the Royal Gardens at Kew*, Elizabeth Chute, Margaret Meen and Augusta Chute (London: New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 216.
7. Lumis, op. cit., 106.
8. Parker, op. cit., 5.



Linerfold paneling featuring a carved pomegranate in the Oak Gallery at The Vine

Theatrical Engagements

Eliza Gluckman

An English country house. The stage is set. A relic of a wealthy familial lineage that reaches back into history presenting a cosy, or at least secure, trajectory of domestic life and entitlement. And here we have The Wyne, the physical embodiment of aristocratic clans who lay claim to connections with the likes of Henry VIII or Horace Walpole. Lauded as bastions of Englishness and viewed through the safe spectacles of time, the English country house presents a somewhat nostalgic rose-tinted vista. Yet The Wyne in particular is steeped in political power and as such is a monument to times of great turbulence and change, to inequality and hypocrisy, discovery and global innovation. Glass, porcelain, tea and silks all illustrate influences from around the world. Indeed the very items that create a domestic setting in an English country house can often offer the most fascinating glimpses into travel, trade, taste and politics. It is into this mix that interventions of contemporary works of art and design playfully tease out the historical narrative. The suggestive and curious works commissioned in *Unraveling The Wyne* speak to our love of theatricality over reality.

A house the size of The Wyne was always a status symbol. Through its politician owners, the spectacles of trade and politics were played out in self-consciously dressed rooms. Peering over red ropes and reading room guides at The Wyne today, we are not just absorbing a history lesson, we are soaking up a historical variety of global consumerism; aspiration embodied in ornament. Vases, ceramics, mirrors, boxes, fabrics are arranged and displayed – defied by their position in the house. Whilst a new wing by an architect such as Inigo Jones or a garden by Capability Brown may tell us something of the previous owners' connections and wealth, it is the snuffboxes, the Bow, Chelsea, Italian, majolica and oriental blue china, the 'Dogs of Fo' in blanc-de-chine, the tapestries from the Soho Factory, a gold ring – all listed contents of The Wyne – that tell us about the wider world. These decorative trinkets and trophies all tell tales of global travel and trade, and evoke the hand and taste of individuals.

Unusual, exotic, foreign curios were collected to make statements about the owners. 20th-century post-colonial critic Edward Said made popular the term 'the Other', in his seminal book *Orientalism*. By specifically highlighting 'the Other', or exoticising a people, there is a tendency to dehumanise a culture, thereby stressing the power of the less marginalised group. Trophies from around the world that are displayed in houses such as The Wyne, are testament to the exploration of trade in the early 17th-century and the spoils



Right: *The Tapestries Room at The Wyne*



Detail of tapestries from the Soho Factory, the Tapestry Room at The Wyne

of what became the British Empire, based on a deep belief that the British model of monarchy and Christianity was one that should be impressed upon the world.

Glimmering with inlaid mother-of-pearl in the candlelight, or boasting deep glazes on porcelain or lacquer, these artefacts symbolise a theatrical engagement between cultures. The wealthy classes often played out 'foreignness' or staged 'exoticism' (particularly from the 17th and 18th centuries) through masked balls and fictitious visual narratives. A specific example can be seen in the rage for all things chinoiserie, or Chinese-esque, that blossomed with the return of the first voyages of the East India Company in 1600. Wallpaper and whole rooms were decorated in the 'Chinese style'. It was a fashion that infiltrated nearly every niche of the decorative arts and even architecture. Much of it was based on a fantasy of China, with little knowledge and even less regard for the reality. China became a foreign land that represented exoticised beats and an outlet for theatrical interiors. In wallpapers and vases it was often depicted as a peaceful place where

Muslims played in beautiful gardens and philosophy and poetry occupied the peace-loving people.

Each object at The Wyne, like the contemporary pieces in *Unravelling*

The Wyne, is a small hint at the world beyond. Chaboner W Chute wrote a detailed history of *The Wyne* in 1888 which included many inventories of the house's contents. Take for example the 'oriental blue china' and the 'punchbowl chased with quaint figures of oriental character, engaged in various field sports'. These two items illustrate the influence of China on English visual culture. From the 17th to the 19th centuries European countries were regularly sending ships across to the East and returning with holds full of ceramics, tea, silks and spices. The East India Company was granted a Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth in 1600 and went on to dominate, along

with the Portuguese and Dutch, the trade routes to the East. The two terms of chinaware described in Chute's book illustrate the fashion for chinaware or porcelain which first came to England on these ships.

This fashion eventually led to the setting up of myriad English potteries to satiate this new love of porcelain. English imitations of Chinese porcelain created anomalies, not least the mythical 'Chinese' tale about a princess and a willow tree which led to the ubiquitous willow pattern ceramics. Another phenomenon was the export wares that were ordered by aristocrats in England from China in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is likely that the punchbowl 'chased with quaint figures of oriental character' was from one such order. Often the craftsmen in China copied images from etchings sent to them and had never seen a European in the flesh. Ignorance and theatricality went hand in hand for both owners and creator.

Nestled amongst the various artefacts in the Print Room at The Wyne is a newly-made collection of snuffboxes. Snuff originated from the Americas

The Victorious Bunchobd, Henry Thomas Alken



and became hugely popular in the 17th century. Imploding notions of the historical and contemporary, the contemporary artist Joim Grayson interweaves both narrative and craft with his exquisite enamel and metal work. Grayson is interested in the decorative collections of precious owners of *The Wyne* and their links to politics. Each box includes text and image transfers and, on opening, a small brass automaton, all creating a visual narrative. Using both images from 19th century *Runch* magazines found at the house and references to contemporary politics, Grayson's shutboxes become miniature theatres in themselves. Within one of the boxes he takes a story from *The Wyne's* hunting days when a duke was refused passage through a gate by a fieldworker, and mirrors it with the recent 'Plabogate' scandal to great (miniature) dramatic effect.

For some of the artists these contemporary commissions offer up an opportunity to reinvent and capture something of the life that only an inhabited house can generate. Riffing through the history of *The Wyne*, snippets of information about the purpose of the house are revealed. As with most large houses, *The Wyne* was a status symbol and host to great gatherings and parties that helped ease political careers and reinforce large quantities of food and drink. Such glimpses can be seen in throwaway references found in correspondence. In 1525, the then owner of *The Wyne*, Lord Sandys, the Lord Chamberlain, sought a licence to disembark 'twenty turns of wine for the provision of his house'. Indeed in Chaboner W Chute's book there is reference to 'great revellings' in 1601. For *Unravelling The Wyne*, it is the aim of the self-proclaimed textile graffiti artist, Miss Smith, to recreate the party atmosphere with a band of renegade pigeons. A popular dish in Tudor times, this regular pest has decided to stake it up a bit for the National Trust viewer. Trails of party detritus and the glimpses of a pigeon in its glad rags add a dash of humour to the house's show-home status, whilst also echoing the reverberations of years of entertaining. The guerrilla seamstress aims to ruffle some feathers and muck up the orderliness of a house that has seen the excesses of Henry VIII and the dancing feet of one Miss Jane Austen.

By the 19th century when the world was opening up through global trade the swirling Empire line dresses would have graced the oak-panelled rooms of *The Wyne*. Charlie Whitney's steam-bent wood sculptures reference the dancing days of the house. Fashions changed in music, and new



Detail of tapestries from the Sofa Factory, The Tapestry Room at *The Wyne*

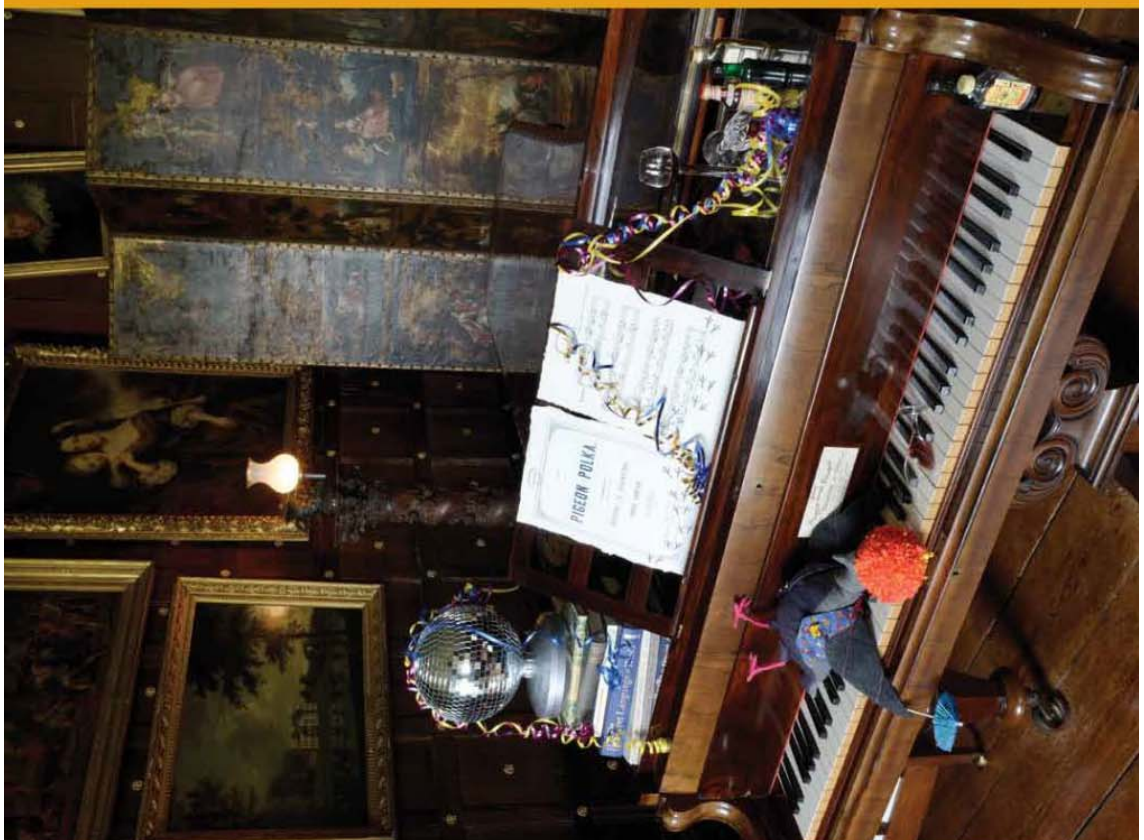
Instruments from around the world influenced the development of song and dance. The Tudor uses of oak and carving are mirrored in Whitney's forms and, using new techniques to emboss and imprint on the wood, the artist incorporates the footsteps of a Tudor dance.

The Wyne's contents and history not only take us on a journey to China and the East, but much further, into the imagination of writers, from Mansfield Park to Mordor. Famously both Jane Austen and Tolkien found inspiration here and it is in this imaginative spirit that Caitlin Helfeman has created a tree to pass through the floors of the house. This fabric-wrapped oak reaches through two floors of the house creating a sylvan dash of theatricality. The tree relates to the ancient wooden elements of the house that date back over 500 years playing on the oak's status as a symbol of strength and endurance and, for many nations, a political symbol of solidity. Yet the tree also seems to evoke something a little otherworldly: a fairy tale destination linked to storytelling, or Titania's bower in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is hard to escape the tree's cultural resonances. Again fiction, otherness and political strategy come hand in hand under the roof of The Wyne.

In essence the house is a theatre for the politics and imagination of the owners. The domestic details of craft and decoration offer physical clues to the world outside the veneer of the establishment of the English country house. Through them we can understand fashion and taste and find clues to the wider world in which these objects were made. The exotic and foreign become props in a fantasy world explored through the safety of the domestic setting. As the curtain falls The Wyne ignites our imagination.

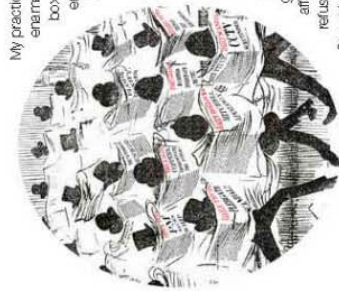


the artists



John Grayson | Gate Gate
enamelled copper, brass

In a world that is reflecting on the environmental legacy of the Industrial Revolution, where manufacturing industry is shunning the old ways of making in favour of new digital technologies, the notion of sustaining dying or defunct Black Country metalworking processes through crafts practice seems anathema.



My practice uses the processes and visual aesthetic of the Georgian enamel box industry of the Black Country. Patch boxes, snuff boxes and other related enamel objects, often small in size, embossed and brightly coloured, provide a fascinating insight into the social and political 'goings-on' of the 18th century. By juxtaposing the visual language of the past with contemporary thinking, I create a world of fakery and obfuscation in order to confuse the viewer as to the origins of my contemporary, satirical craft objects.

For *Unravelling The Vine*, I have created Gate Gate, a large enamel box containing a simple automaton that fuses together two narratives: the historical story surrounding The Vine hunt, where the Duke was barred passage through a gate by a member of staff, with the contemporary 'Peabroke' affair involving the Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP, where he was refused permission to cycle through the main gates of Downing Street by a police officer.

The object collides the 18th with the 21st century. The base is a classically inspired 'enamel pot' form. Initially, a cut is taken out of the fluted side and decorated with a deep red motif drawn from the brocatelle hung in the Large Drawing Room. The brass automaton components are etched with a motif from the same textile pattern, with some elements distressed to mimic the patina of age. The enamel base and lid are held together with a hinge and mount that is clearly traditional in form, but a large section of the sheet brass still remains to make the viewer question the era of manufacture.

The images on the lid are inspired by illustrations from the satirical *Punch* magazines held in the Library and the print of The Vine Hunt gate alteration. These images were digitally manipulated using Photoshop in order to add subtle references to contemporary events including headlines on the newspapers and cuts of meat marked out on the huntsman's horse.

Open the lid and inside is a small automaton!



Penny Green

Lady Dacre's wedding gift – a conceit
earthenware ceramic, oxbles, stains, transfers

In 1636 Dorothy, Lady Dacre, the widow of Chaboner Chute I, commissioned me to make 12 ceramic dishes to give to her grandchild Edward Chute and his bride, Katharine Keck, as a wedding gift. Remarkably these still survive at The Wyne



It might be said that this was her way of making amends after a tumultuous period of intermarriages, intra-family feuds and lawsuits, including her notorious court case against her own stepson, which culminated in her falling all the timber on the estate.

In commissioning the dishes, Lady Dacre has provided an insight into the crucial role of aristocratic women in an age of huge political turbulence and fragility of life. In what may seem to have been purely a man's world, where marriage secured wealth, authority and power, some women were able to exploit the patronage networks essential to ensure their own and their family's success; but widowhood or the whim of a monarch could equally spell financial disaster.

The dishes include references to Mary Neville, Chrysoyona Baker, Dorothy's daughter Catherine Lemard, the effect of the interregnum years and the transformation of The Wyne by John Webb, a family connection of Dorothy's. They also incorporate architectural motifs from The Wyne including the cushion cover Lord Sandys commissioned with the house's name and the Flemish floor tiles in the Chapel.

The story behind one painting in particular offers much insight into the fortune of women of the time: Hans Eworts's painting of Mary Neville. Mary is depicted beside a portrait of her dead husband Thomas Fennes, Baron Dacre, who had been hanged for murdering a gamekeeper and whose lands and titles had been forfeited. Mary banded to gain them back and upon the accession of Elizabeth I the family honours were restored. That she had married twice and had six children in the intervening 17 years was irrelevant to her position as a 'good widow' and keeper of the Dacre dynasty.

Unlike the ancient oak trees in the park that Lady Dacre felled, the Dacre family portraits and dishes still remain at The Wyne – silent witnesses to the determination of Lady Dacre to preserve her family's memory.



Caitlin Heffernan

We Could Have Been Anywhere
fabric, wire, wood, polystyrene filling, thread

In my work I use, adapt and transform domestic objects and create sculptural forms that are inspired by a variety of elements drawn from social and personal histories. I also create immersive installations that use craft elements, drawing and photography as well as traditions of assemblage and installation. I am interested in ideas surrounding memory, home, the real and the imagined, and many of my works have elements that suggest longing, escape and melancholy.



My practice is also informed by the notion of place and landscape and how these strands can be experienced through common domestic objects and materials such as wallpaper, curtains and furniture coverings. I find these mediums offer the chance to rework familiar patterns, adapting them to recall a netherworld between waking and dreaming, a world where images, shapes and memory morph in the mind of the viewer.

My installation of a tree within the Tapestry Room, with the roots seeping and spilling into the room below, may at first seem out of place and alien but equally at home and familiar.

The Vine, as the name suggests, has associations with trees and vines and looking out at the surrounding landscape there are many trees surrounding the building. The history of the house spans over 500 years and the scale of the property has allowed me to incorporate a tree within the house, as though it has transplanted itself within the room and grown quite naturally without effort.

The Tapestry Room was inspiration for both the placing and making of the tree. For me it evokes imagined lands with motifs of trees, birds and people. By sitting the tree within the Tapestry Room and working with bound and stitched fabrics, the tree weaves its own magical spell and I hope becomes part of a new history of the room and house, if only for a short time.

The roots that spill out of the fireplace in the room below are made using satin fabric and are imbued with the red colour of the surrounding brocade wall hangings. The shocking red provides a hint of what might be elsewhere in the house.



Sharon McElroy

An Exquisite Diversion

DVD video projection, duration 7 mins 4 secs

I was inspired to make this work after seeing John Chute's collection of Lattimo ware plates in the China Room. The depictions of ironic Venetian scenes evoke the city's celebrated masked carnivals that John Chute, Horace Walpole and their friends would have experienced during the Grand Tour.



Many young men adopted extravagant and unconventional dress and behaviour on their return from such travels. This was seen as unnatural by society and they were nicknamed 'macaronis'. I have contorted the challenge to 18th century notions of masculinity by the macaronis with the gender flirring and fantasy role-playing of the 1970s glam rock era, both of which were derided and perceived as outlandish and effeminate.

My film recognises the importance, historically, of musical performance and socialising at The Wyrne, and rebekates some of the spectacle and intrigue of the carnival's commedia dell'arte performances to a fictitious party scenario in the house. As the narrative unfolds, Chute's contribution to The Wyrne's aesthetics and architecture is acknowledged when theatrical features of its interior become highlighted. Chute, Walpole and their friends share an aesthetic sensibility and enjoy dressing up. As they re-enact themes of secrecy, love, pursuit, jealousy and betrayal in the guises of Herkulein, Columbine, Eagle and Cupid, they experiment freely with different personas and genders. The role-playing keeps their true identities concealed, and enables the group to ignore society's restrictions and expectations concerning gender, sexuality and class. During Venetian carnival time, costumes and masks similarly maintained a person's anonymity and any perceived transgressions remained unchallenged.

The hybrid costumes allude to the feminine, but confirm the possibility of the existence of alternative genders and sexual identities. The characters' repetitive, affected gestures within stylised tableaux and the film's soundtrack reflect an overarching camp of a type that is found in theatrical melodrama, and in the avant-garde performances of the early glam era. Visitors to the house will encounter discarded items of clothing, which are the traces of the frivolity of the self-styled 'Committee of Taste' as they abandon their usual decorum and their responsibilities.

The Wyrne provides a rich and seductive backdrop in which self-conscious challenges to the constructed nature of gender are made. In a retro-futurist spirit of a glam sensibility, the task transposes from the 'twirling fingers' of the macaronis to their posturing, guitar playing, glam successors.



Lisa Pettibone | *Offering*
fused and gold lusted glass

A fascinating tour of the house in July left me intrigued by its Tudor history. Although the history of the house emphasises the Chute family, I was struck by its pivotal role in the Elizabethan story of power play, grandeur and art. This era continues to surprise me with its rich theatrical texts and costume, both of which are deeply layered with political and religious meaning.

Courtly and aristocratic fashion designs from Henry VIII to the end of the Tudor era were among the richest in history. I was drawn to a variety of objects that reflected this. The statue in the Oak Gallery of Mary Queen of Scots with her stiff, legal ruff served as a poignant reminder that power is fleeting. As Elizabethan style took hold over the next 40 years, the ruff evolved into a theatrical adornment emphasising the head, elevating it away from the body and into another realm. This can be seen in the full-length portraits of women courtiers nearby. These fashion accessories were layered with copious yards of expensive linen or lace and embellished with gold and jewellery that signalled the wearer's wealth, nobleness and political allegiances (coats of arms were often woven into the lace). I was attracted to their sculptural form, construction and use of luminous materials. Building up layers to create a dense mass in fused and bent glass has become an important part of my recent work and I wanted to apply this to a new sculptural form.



In the Dining Parbour the portrait of Charles Chute (1620), the father of Chelmer Chute I, wears a brilliant white ruff made of soft, gauze-like material. Below this painting on dark wood sits a simple, elegant set of white porcelain tableware – the ethereal quality of ghostly white contrasting with dark backgrounds stayed with me. Later deep red was added to my colour scheme as I became aware that aristocrats paid for their stature with their own blood whether by death or through producing heirs.

The stunning and curious objects in the house (more permanent than their owners) convey the fragility of life: the body decays while sculpture, painting and ideas live on and are captured at The Vyne.



Maria Rivans | *Short Cuts and Pop-Ups*
found vintage books and mixed media.

During my first visit to The Wyne, two things immediately struck me – the beauty of the magnificent grounds and the layer upon layer of history in the house, connecting important figures such as Henry VIII and Jane Austen. The intense atmosphere created an emotional response that I wanted to capture using my 3D collage techniques.

Having chosen the Library for my installation, armed with a scalpel I built a micro environment made from hundreds of carefully sourced vintage books, specifically selected to reflect the collection displayed on the library shelves. Importantly the books had to contain relevant imagery for me to cut and collage, including fauna, the hunt and dances on the Grand Tour, enabling me to bring the stories of The Wyne to life.

Whilst exploring the house I felt an uncomfortable, eerie pervading mood. This inspired the ghostly vision of the chair being knocked over and the selection of paragraphs from the horror novel *The Waterfall*, cut into strips, which shape the waterfall and river.

This mini adventure tells a narrative in true pop-up style, flowing across the table, like the river of words, like the river surrounding The Wyne, like the stories the novelists wrote that were inspired by the house.



Matt Smith

The Gift

white earthenware, freshwater pearls

John Chute was the youngest of Edward Chute's ten children. It was therefore surprising that he eventually inherited The Wyne in 1754 when he was in his fifties. Chute, alongside his friends Horace Walpole and Thomas Grey, formed the self-named 'Committee of Taste' which is most famous for its designs for Walpole's home Strawberry Hill. Their influence was also felt at The Wyne when Chute began a programme of remodelling and redecoration of the house. One of the most obvious manifestations of this is the neoclassical Staircase Hall.

In doing so, Chute moulded The Wyne, controlling the domestic space to meet his aspirations and present the world with a carefully crafted self-portrait. The Dandy places a figure of Chute within this setting, propped up with neoclassical detail and oriental-inspired ceramics, raising its height and position. Flanked by marble busts of Caligula and Antoninus, John becomes an 18th century domestic emperor of all he surveys, albeit on a scale which makes these pretensions to grandeur slightly comedic.

Horace Walpole was one of the most prolific letter writers of the 18th century and through his correspondence with John, we can start unpicking their relationship. There was a sizeable age gap between them and Walpole, the younger of the two, comes across as the more excitable, energetic and impetuous.

Their shared loves of collecting and decoration provided a bond that cemented their friendship. Walpole's letters to Chute – especially those written when travelling around Italy – were peppered with the mention of objects that Chute 'had to acquire' and suggestions for improvements to The Wyne. The more considered Chute would act on some suggestions but reject most of them. The Gift is the legacy of those discarded suggestions. Walpole expressed his frustration with Chute's editing of his ideas and enthusiasm writing to George Montagu: 'I have done advising ... as I see Mr. Chute will never execute anything'.

Not wanting to further hurt Walpole's feelings, The Gift sees Chute bundling all of his rejected suggestions together and hiding them out of sight, behind the main staircase. Unable to throw away the unwanted toilers and trinkets, Chute masses the divergent objects gifted to him which map Horace's travels and muddle-like search for beauty. Their collective display, adorned with strings of pearls, questions the subjective and temporal nature of good and bad taste.



Mrs Smith

Party Birds

mixed media including: Columba live parryenses (fabrics, feathers and finery), bespoke bird table (Farrow & Ball 'Pigeon'), cocktail cabinet (Mrs Smith's personal collection)

Mrs Smith is a textile graffiti artist who works incognito – a series of surprise is central to her work. Hazel Cormors and Relicity Clarke act as her voice and aides. Employing traditional skills in a radical, activist manner Mrs Smith creates temporary, site-specific alterations to public spaces. An avid recycler and user of found materials, she makes meticulously crafted creations which celebrate skills usually regarded as purely domestic and feminine. By setting this familiar expertise in an alien environment, she challenges assumptions about value, appropriateness, gender and ageism. Employing humour and lightness of touch, her work is entertaining and accessible to all but, nevertheless, often slips through provoking questions in under the radar.

The summer house at The Wyre has had a chequered history of diminishing status. Originally built in the mid 17th century, it was a place where the Sandys family would invite dinner guests to enjoy their final course in more relaxed and intimate surroundings away from the servants. Wine, fruit and sweets were indulged in while guests listened to music and told jokes and riddles to each other. 200 years later, stripped of its fine fittings, this place of pleasure had become a pigeon house supplying birds for the table and manure for the garden.

Mrs Smith has brought the pigeons back to their former home for a season of serious partying as the tables are neatly turned on the summer house's former inhabitants. Arriving en masse, the pigeons now hold their own revels – drink-fuelled parties where games, acrobatics, carousing and dressing up are the new banqueting code. Local birds too are often tempted to join in the fun. Sometimes, late into the night, seeking greater thrills and wilder times they all take off for the main house to whoop it up in the deserted rooms. The Saloon is a favourite haunt where their loud music, singing and dancing boost the revels to boiling point. Next morning all that remains of these clandestine carousings is the odd party hat and a few drooped feathers...

As the New Year dawns, ever-eager for new excitements, the pigeons migrate south, their destination a mystery. The summer house once again is orderly and empty, seemingly a little forlorn. Listen carefully and you might just hear the birds outside singing a party tune.



Alec Stevens | 49 Pomegranates
oak

Upon exploring the Oak Gallery at The Vine, my interest as a contemporary wood carver lay within the oak panelling that monopolises its walls. Commissioned by Lord Sandy's and made by local craftsmen, the panelling depicts the height of contemporaneous pomp and celebrity through the use of symbols and representative imagery.



The most noteworthy of appearances within the permanent panelling are the visual references to King Henry VIII (the Tudor Rose) and his wife, Catherine of Aragon (the pomegranate). It has been noted that Henry attended The Vine during and after his divorce from Catherine, leaving the panelling to become mangled and subsequently covered up, or disguised in the post-divorce visits so as to not offend the king.

Within my intervention the pomegranates are plucked from their origin within the panelling and piled in haste under the hall rug, moments before being hidden from the king's sight. This multitude of discarded fruit made for the floor of the gallery directly references the number of times Catherine's symbol is carved within the panelling.

This subversive act of making represents a historic moment in time where the king's decision to detach from the Catholic Church in order to divorce Catherine and then marry was prevalent. The crafted intervention (a mass of fruit) also makes reference to Catherine who was fruitful in that she conceived six times in order to satisfy the king's need for a son, but was ultimately rejected after producing only stillborn, short-lived sons and a daughter who would become Queen Mary I.



Charlie Whitney | *Two Dancers*
oak, ash

Two Dancers is a semi-figurative work based on two dancers engaged in a dance from the late 1500s. At that time, The Vyne would have frequently been used for entertaining during festivals and events, and these dances would have been a regular feature.

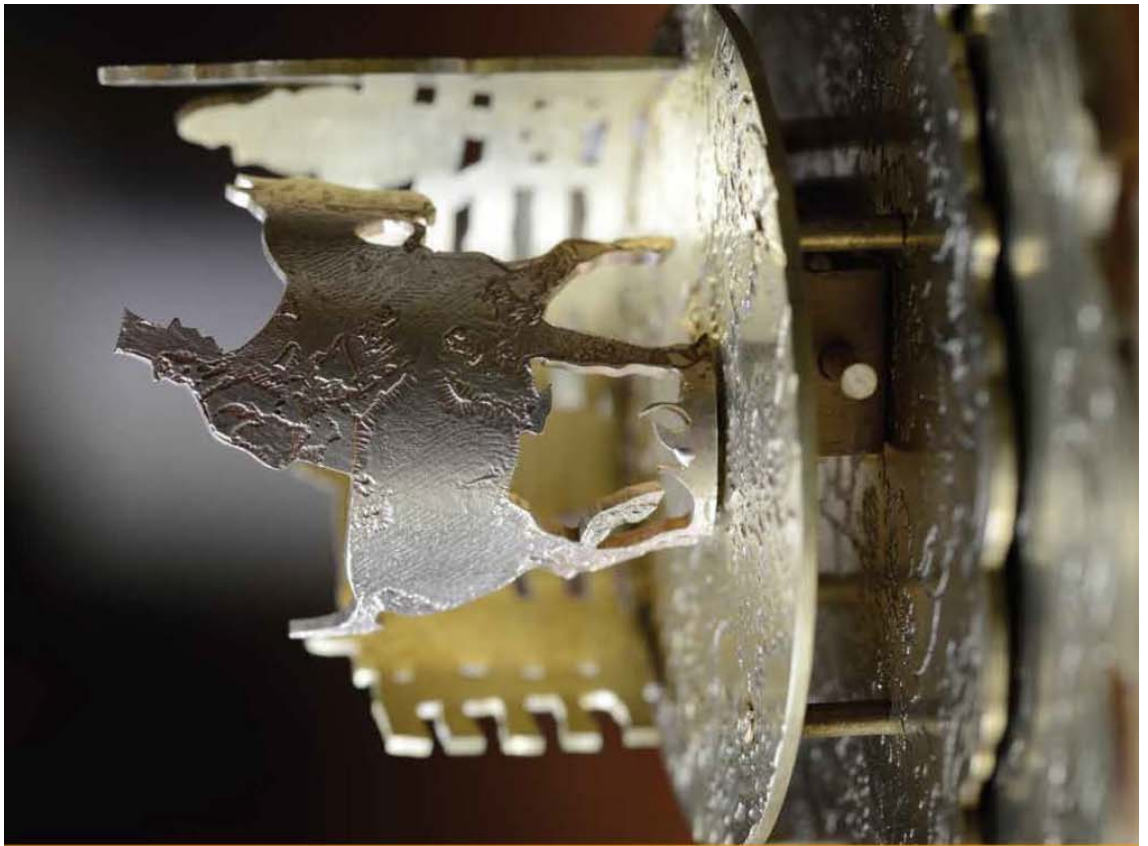
Tudor dance was a formal affair performed by one or more couples. Comprised of a few dozen different 'moves' they were accompanied by music performed on popular instruments of the day including viols, violins, recorders and other wind brass instruments. The three most popular dances were the Pavane, the Galliard and the Almains. It is likely that dances at The Vyne would have been quite sophisticated affairs which would include some of the latest dances from the continent – especially Italy. My main influence for this work was the music and dances of Anthony Holborne (c1545-1602) whose scores would almost definitely have been performed at The Vyne and whose work now features on YouTube!

I wanted to create a piece that communicated some of the movement, drama and restraint of this type of dance.

Two Dancers is made from two different woods, both native to England – the man in ash and the woman in oak. The sculpture shows the tender and restrained rotating embrace, and conveys not only the moment, but also the physical movements and rhythm of the dance both before and after that moment.

The wood has been steam-bent into the organic 3D shapes using an innovative approach to an ancient technique and then profiled to further capture the rhythms and structure of the music. The main structure starts together and unfurls as the sculpture develops and the two figures emerge.





The Architectural Love Affair between Horace Walpole and John Chute: Strawberry Hill and The Vyne in the 18th Century

George E Haggerty

In 1754, The Vyne was inherited by John Chute who was aged

53. As the youngest of ten children, it was unlikely that he would inherit the house. However, the years during which he owned The Vyne saw a fascinating architectural exchange take place between Chute and his close friend, Horace Walpole – an exchange that shaped both The Vyne and Walpole's home, Strawberry Hill.



Horace Walpole (detail), *George Perfect Haring after Portrait of Horace Walpole in his Library*, Johann Heinrich Müntz

Horace (Hbratio) Walpole lived from 1717 to 1797. Educated at Eton College and at Cambridge, Horace was the youngest son of the great Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first prime minister of England.

John Chute (1701-1776) first befriended Horace in Florence in 1741-1742. Horace and Thomas Gray (1716-1771), Walpole's friend from Eton and Cambridge, were there visiting Horace's cousin Horace Mann (1706-1786), who was British Envoy to the Grand Dukes of Tuscany from 1737 until his death. Horace's visit established a life-long friendship with Mann, to whom Walpole wrote eight volumes of letters concerning English politics. While there, of course, Horace took advantage of the availability of local art, which was no joke in 18th century Florence, and he arranged for many things to be sent back to England. John Chute was travelling at that time with his special friend Francis Whithead (1719-

1751). As a sign of their coupledom and the intimacy of their friendship, Walpole called them the Chuteheads which, for Walpole and Mann, became the common epithet for the pair. Walpole and Chute bonded right away over an interest in art and collecting and they fully imbibed the thrill that 18th century Italy had become for generations of Englishmen. The stories of their escapades in Italy are endless – turning around incognito in pursuit of the Young Pretender (Bonnie Prince Charlie) in Rome, dressing up for a masquerade in Venice, or hobnobbing with the expatriate gentry in Florence. But it was collecting and a shared interest in architecture that sustained their bond.

Strawberry Hill was a part playful and part serious accomplishment that had a profound effect on 18th century architectural history. Walpole, Chute, and Richard Bentley (1708-1782), the artist and illustrator whom Walpole

sponsored and encouraged, formed what has often been called the 'Committee of Taste' that worked to make Strawberry Hill a Gothic gem. Taste is of course a loaded term in the 18th century, and if one is accused of having 'exquisite taste' that is sometimes tantamount to a sexual aspersion. As others have noted, taste became a code for a certain mode of shared sensibility that was often understood to suggest something about sexual predilection or at least qualified masculinity.

When talking about Chute and men like him, Warren Hunting Smith, one of the editors of *Walpole's Correspondence*, puts it this way:

Aesthete, dilettante, man of taste, gentleman of leisure the labels which can be attached to John Chute used to sound glamorous, and now merely strictly decadence and aimless fiddling. For more than two centuries England and America have been producing these decorative gentlemen, mostly well-to-do bachelors who have passed their lives in collecting treasures and adorning their homes. The 18th century perhaps saw their finest flowering when Italy's glittering hoards lay open to English travellers and collectors, and when a gentleman's embroidered waistcoats and lace ruffles seemed to typify the richness of his cultural opportunities.



John Chute, Johann Heinrich Müntz

They seldom married, and had few children. Their beautiful collections are dispersed or discredited, their beautiful homes are often in very strange hands; their beautiful friendships are regarded with suspicion by modern psychologists.¹

When Smith mentions 'suspicion', he is talking about homosexuality, and by 'modern psychologists' he means Freud, of course, but also the notorious Kinsey – of Kinsey Report fame – whom the editors of *Walpole's Correspondence* actually consulted on matters sexual when they were confronted with Horace and his friends. If Smith is cagey about bachelorhood and collecting, or decadence and fiddling, the 18th century social commentator Hester Thrale Popham is not.



The Vine from across the Lake, *Johann Heinrich Mützl*

I call these Fellows 'Finger-twisters', meaning a decent word for Sodomites; old Sir Horace Mann and Mr. James the Painter had such an odd way of twirling their fingers in Discourse — I see Suetonius tells us the same thing of one of the Roman emperors.²

Whether or not Piozzi is basing her observation on anything more than hearsay or superficial mannerisms, we can hardly avoid the connection between 'effeminacy' and what she elsewhere calls sexual profligacy.³ George Hardinge (1743-1816) wrote an account of Walpole's 'effeminacy' which included a reference to Chute and George Montagu:

There was a degree of quaintness in Walpole's wit, but it was not unbecoming in *him* because it seemed part of his nature. Some of his friends were as effeminate in appearance and in manner as himself and were as witty. Of these I remember two, John Chute and George Montagu.



Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, from the south, *Johann Heinrich Mützl*

One can only imagine what Hardinge is trying to say about Walpole's 'nature', but we might be forgiven for imagining that he was trying to evoke something akin to our contemporary understanding of sexuality. These witty and effeminate friends are bound by class and interests, to be sure, but there is also a deeper abiding friendship that comes from this shared sensibility. Walpole and Chute, so obviously connected to this world of bachelorhood and effeminacy, offer a special insight into the quality of friendship. Their letters are replete with references to sodomitical scandal and even pikes in this vein:

I must tell you a story, which is rather adapted to the Irish part of my letter, than to the seriousness of the last paragraph. A young Mr. Winstanley happened to go into a coffee-house in the City, where some grave elders were talking over a terrible affair, that has just happened in the country, where a man broke into a house, ravished the mistress and killed the master. Winstanley said very coolly, 'it was well it was no worse!' The citizens stared,



The Chapel at The Vine

were shocked! An old abbeym could not bear it, but chid 'Zounds! Sir, what do you mean? what could be worse?' 'Why,' replied t'other as coolly as before, 'if he had murdered the wife, and --- the husbands' '4. -- What would one give to have seen the faces of the company? Adieu! (20.3.17-18; 13 May 1752)

But I cannot help but think that for these two men, that is as far as it goes. I do not really think that Horace Walpole and John Chute were lovers, even though anyone seeing these two houses and hearing about their intimacy might be forgiven for thinking so. But I think they are friends, and if they are friends that share a 'predilection' — as various historians have led us to believe — that is more likely (really) to intensify their friendship than it is to make them lovers.

The friendship between Walpole and Chute was largely played out in their architectural affairs. After Francis Whithed died, in 1751, Chute devoted himself almost entirely to Walpole, and he made Strawberry Hill one of his fondest projects.

The work of turning the simple farmhouse on the Thames into a Gothic castle was engaging on a number of levels. The simple construction held

a fascination for Walpole, and he and Chute worked tirelessly to lay out plans and design Gothic figures for a staircase or a hallway.

Walpole responded by taking interest in Chute's family house, The Vine, in Hampshire, especially after Chute inherited the house in 1754. As he says to Mann 'Mr. Chute sends love; I am going with him in a day or two to his Vine, where I shall try to draw him into amusing himself a little with building and planting; hitherto he has done nothing with his estate but ... good.' (20.4.49; 6 October 1764).

In the National Trust guidebook about the house, we are told that Walpole offered particular help in redesigning the Chapel with a Gothic cast, offering specific materials and designs that transformed the gloomy room into a Gothic gem.

Walpole's influence is unmistakable in the Chapel at the Vine, which would certainly be a suitable addition to Strawberry Hill

But Chute's input on Strawberry Hill was invaluable to Walpole as well. He offered advice, materials, and often specific designs for construction. At Farmington there are pages of Chute's drawings for Strawberry Hill. When he and Bentley are in conflict over design, Walpole almost always sides with his friend Chute. They seem to understand each other in a way that Bentley can only approximate. In the following letter, Walpole is praising Chute for a design he has offered for the exterior of the obelisk at Strawberry Hill:



The Gallery at Strawberry Hill

Well, how delightfull how the deuce did you contrive to get such proportion? You will certainly have all the women with short legs come to you to design high heels for them. The doister, instead of a wine-collar, has the air of a college. It has already passed the Seals. Mr. Muntz has commended it in a piece of every language, and Mr. Bentley is at this moment turning it outside inwards. — I assure you, Mr. Chute, you shall always have my custom. You shall design every scrap of the ornaments and I ever I build a palace or found a city, I will employ nobody but you. In short, you have found a proportion and given a simplicity and lightness to it, that I never expected. (§5. 110; 4 November 1759)

The slightly peculiar tone that Walpole takes with Chute is a feature of their letters, and it reminds us how deep their friendship is. The letter is also deeply serious though about the planning of Strawberry Hill and the creation of the proper Gothic effects.

Strawberry Hill is remarkable by any standard. The vaulting in the gallery, the ornate Gothic staircase, the library; the images we have of these things can give us a clue into the workings of Horace Walpole's imagination. They are historically evocative; painstakingly designed; and they have the air of country gentlemen playing house in the most elaborate way they know how. This house draws a visitor into its innermost recesses because that is where Walpole hopes to entertain her or him.

Walpole treats his Gothic effects almost like a stage set: they are little more than simulacra of the structures he is trying to echo, but he is concerned with the effect far more than with the authenticity of materials or technique.

More than once, these two men went travelling around England in hopes of finding materials that they could use in either of their homes. Here is Walpole writing to Bentley, when he and Chute are in Battle, Sussex:

Here we are, my dear Sir, in the middle of our pilgrimage, and lest we should never return from this holy land of abbeys and Gothic castles, I begin a letter to you, that I hope some charitable monk, when he has buried our bones, will deliver to you. We have had some pious distresses, but we have seen our glorious sights.

The two friends out in the English provinces searching out Gothic materials for the two grand homes; what more would you need to suggest an architectural love affair between these two men? They were never happier than when they were conspiring together to create two of the most wonderful houses of the century.

When Walpole is writing to Chute, or talking to Mann or Montagu about him, there is a special quality to the correspondence. These men understand the intricacies of one another's sensibilities, and they can talk about the details of wainscoting without having to stop to explain their concerns to each other. They participate, each in his way, in the construction of Strawberry Hill because they know that it brings them both out into the open and forces their secrets from their hiding places. Of course the secrets turn out to be nothing more lurid than the love these men share, the project to which they are devoted, and the thrill of seeing their ideas so beautifully realised.

Walpole and Chute worked together in improving their homes and their friendships from the 1740s until the 1770s. Chute died in 1776, having achieved far more than he (or anyone) ever imagined he would. At Chute's death, Walpole writes one of his most deeply felt tributes:

This fatal year puts to the proof the nerves of my friendship! ... I have lost Mr. Chute! ... His sense illuminated everything — I saw him often, than any man; to him in every difficulty I had recourse, and him I loved to have here, as our friendship was so entire, and we knew one another so entirely, that he alone never was the least constraint to me. We passed many hours together without saying a syllable to each other, for we were both above ceremony. I left him without excusing myself, read or wrote before him, as if he were not present — Alas! Alas! — and how self-presides even in our grief! I am lamenting myself, not him! — no, I am lamenting my other self. Half is gone; the other remains solitary. (24.209-210; 27 May 1776)

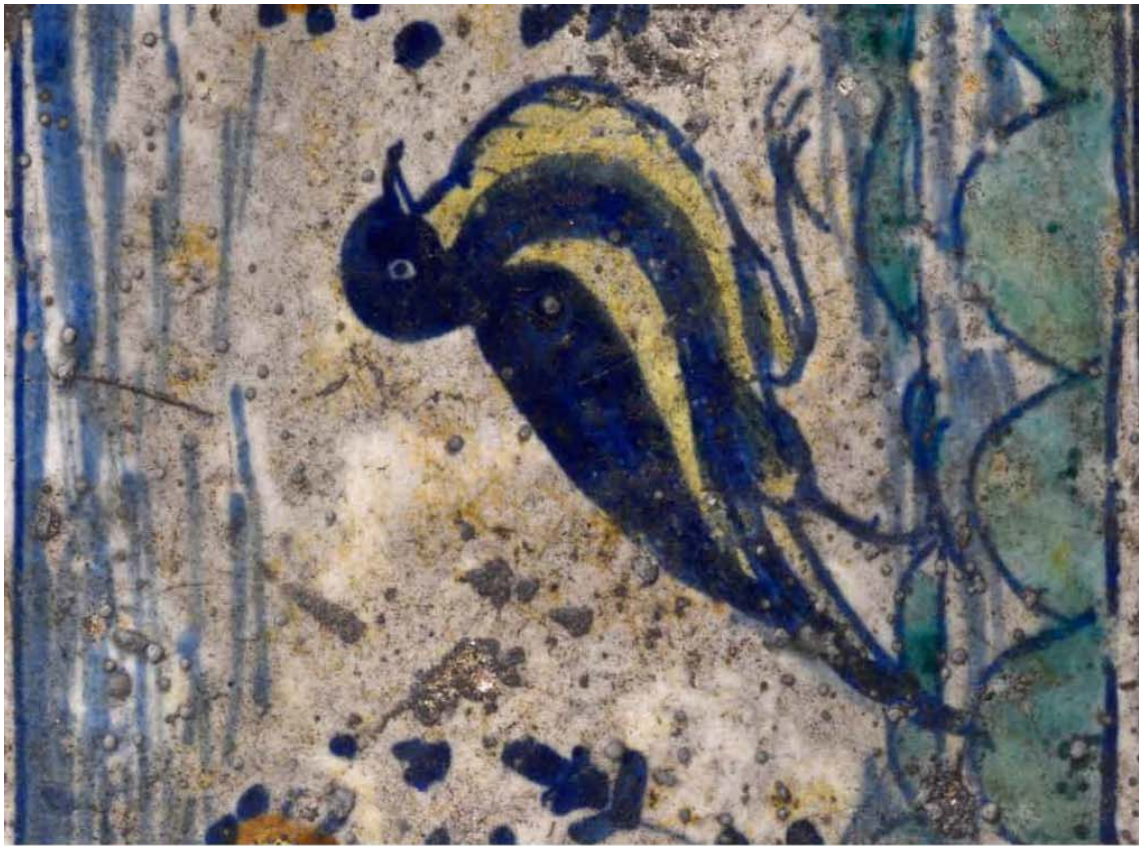
This is a very touching account of the loss that Walpole feels in his tributes on the death of this, his closest personal friend. Chute was energetic,

intelligent, and witty enough to be a match for the indomitable Horace Walpole. 'I am lamenting my other self; this is irritable praise and deeply felt loss, and this loss echoes through the Strawberry Hill that Chute helped to design and decorate. 'I am lamenting myself, not him' — no, I am lamenting my other self. Half is gone, the other remains solitary'; how would it be possible to articulate personal intimacy more powerfully? Walpole identifies with his friend, and in doing so he recalls what Montaigne calls 'perfect friendship': 'the perfect friendship I am talking about' Montaigne says 'is indivisible: each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another.'⁵

As one of the most prolific letter writers of the 18th century, Walpole has provided us with an encyclopedic and intimate account not only of the houses' architecture, but also a snapshot of historical masculinity and intimacy between men.

1. Warren Huntington Smith, *Origins: A History of the Foreign, Crowned of some Eighteenth-Century Britons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 157.
2. Forreget, *The Strawberry Hill*, 54; see also, Timothy Mowl, *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: John Murray, 1989), 58.
3. On the implications of 'epitaphology', see David Hill Haberman, 'How to do the history of Male', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 20(2008), 97-120.
4. Lewis, *Walpole and his World: The New Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937, 1981, 20, 3, 180, 28. 'This passage has been cut out of the MS, but the word "husband" is vaguely suggested by the markings on the margin.'
5. *Ibid.*, 36, 110n. 1.
6. Montaigne, 'On affectionate Relationships' in *The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. M.A. Schoch (London: Penguin, 2003), 219.





Maria Hirons • www.mariahirons.com
Short Cuts and Pop-Ups
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Matt Smith • www.mattsmith.com
Dandy
 white earthenware ceramic, enamel, freshwater pearls
The Gift
 white earthenware ceramic, freshwater pearls

Mrs Smith • www.MrsSmithShare.com
Party Birds
 mixed media including: Columbia live parryense (fabric, feathers and linen); bird table (Farrow & Ball 'Pippen'); cocktail cabinet (Mrs Smith's personal collection)

Allec Stevens • www.allecstevens.co.uk
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Charla Whitney • www.charlawhitney.com
Two Dances
 oak, ash

John Grayson • <http://jgraysondesign.wordpress.com>
Gate Gate
 enamelled copper, brass

Penny Green • www.pennygreenceramics.co.uk
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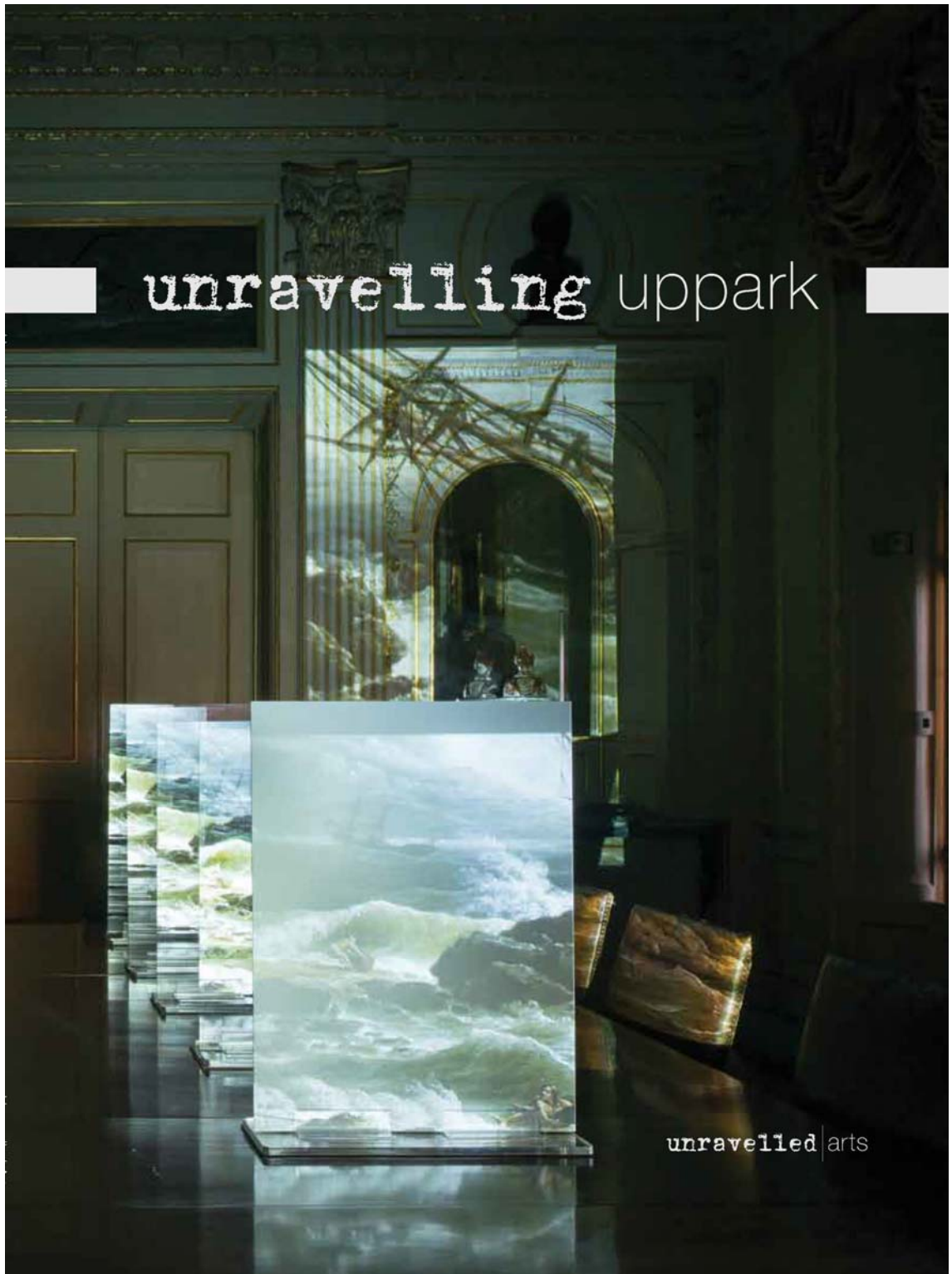
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 Cover photograph: Short Cuts and Pop-Ups



Appendix 9 *Unravelling Uppark* Catalogue



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Uppark

4 May - 2 November 2014

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 National Trust



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Inside front cover: Remnants,
Caitlin Heffernan

Opposite: Salvage, Zoë Hillyard

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Unravelling Uppark – ravelling up

Polly Harknett, Caitlin Helfeman, Matt Smith

Unravelling Uppark is the third and final exhibition of the series *Unravelling the National Trust*. In 2012 we unravelled Nymans House and Gardens, West Sussex and in 2013 The Wyne, Hampshire. *Unravelling Uppark* sees us adding 11 new commissions to this stable of work, where again we have charged artists with the task of making new work that is co-spatial, rooted within a craft practice, and also responsive to some aspect of the historic site where it is exhibited.



Uppark House and Garden

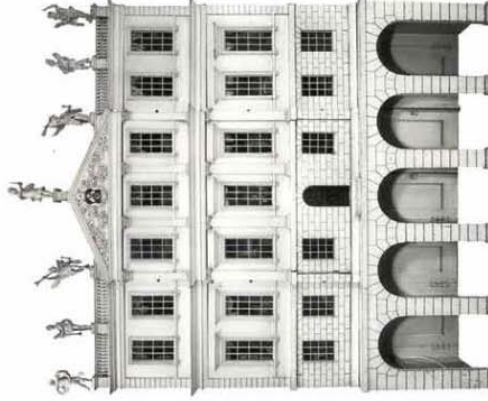
Over the last three years, Unravelling's exhibitions and other activities have explored many different sides of working site-specifically. It was always our intention to work with three National Trust properties that had very different stories to tell. What we hope may be of interest now is to make comparisons between working in those spaces and how our act of unravelling has brought together some common threads that link the three disparate sites of Nymans, The Wyne and Uppark.

Nymans is a folly of artifice, a house that is a jigsaw of different periods of architecture, not achieved through a linear progression of time, but through the intervention of the Messel family. Leonard and Maud Messel built a mock-medieval manor house in the late 19th century, in place of their early 19th-century villa. Here they acted out their lives in an aristocratic way.

making the family, who were essentially 'new money', appear as if they had always been part of the English establishment.

The Wyne was a substantial power house now layered through with complex architectural modifications, political alliances starting from Tudor times, and difficult familial relationships. The estate itself has experienced periods of crumbling decay as well as refurbished glory, reflecting mostly on the disposition of the inheritors of the place.

Uppark is like a giant doll's house perched on top of the South Downs, that is a status symbol of merchant wealth. It boasts views to the sea that have been uninterrupted for centuries. However, in contrast to these unchanging views, the site has been one of transition and possibility. At Uppark, it is as if the grand views have offered people chances to broaden their own personal horizons of potential, and this potential for social movement is reflected in the presentation of two floors of the house – the grand upstairs and the working downstairs.



The doll's house at Uppark: House and Garden

Unravelling has worked with 29 artists across three properties, artists who have exposed myriad different histories within each site. Yet through the very specific and individual responses to the houses, common themes have emerged.

Firstly there is the concept of intervention itself. This is something discussed in detail by Julian Walker both through his works placed at Nymans and his accompanying essay in the *Unravelling Nymans* catalogue.¹ Within this catalogue, Sara Roberts introduces us to the idea that the sites are host to continual interventions and that these interventions, no matter how short-lived, leave a long-lived legacy of change.² We should be under no illusion that interventions in historic houses are a new idea: throughout their histories, these properties and the histories we use them to tell, have

been continuously modified and rearranged. At every stage of the history of these three properties there have been interventions of different natures. These interventions proved fertile ground for artists, whether it be imposing a particular style of new architecture onto an older space, as was very evident at The Vyne where John Chute superimposed a grand neoclassical staircase within a Tudor palace, or the incorporation of the 20-year-old working class Mary Ann Bullock into the centre of the family tree at Uppark through her marriage to Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh, thereby accepting and incorporating a working class sensibility into an upper class environment. Untravelling's interventions have all been brief – six month exhibitions – but



Restoration of the Staircase Hall ceiling at Uppark House and Garden following the 1989 fire

could wear it to parties). Smith placed the costume on an antique Roman statue within the house, staged as if Messel had casually thrown the jacket and bonnet over the figure on a visit to see his recently widowed sister Anne. Anne's two marriages are of course duly noted in the National Trust Nymans guidebook and family tree. Oliver's long-term homosexual relationship with Vagn Riss-Hansen was not noted however, despite it enduring longer than either of Anne's marriages. Smith's work spoke to this relationship, through the story he evokes of one widower (Oliver having lost Vagn) visiting another (Anne having lost The Earl of Rosse). It prompted the National Trust to acknowledge Oliver's relationship and write it into their interpretive materials and the Messel family tree.

Uppark itself is a site of contentious intervention. The disastrous fire that destroyed most of the upper part of the house in 1989 led to international debate around the appropriateness of another form of intervention – the conservation and restoration of historic sites. The National Trust decided to embark on a full programme of restoration. They reopened the house to the public in 1995, re-presenting Uppark as it had looked the day before the fire six years earlier. Helen Carnac discusses this in her essay *Is there ever a first-time visit, and how will we remember it in the future?*²⁸ in terms of how the National Trust have, through this act, stopped and rewound the clocks, thereby distorting time. This distortion can also be construed as the creation of a fictitious reality, since the laws of physics tell us that time moves forwards and continuously. The act of restoration by the National Trust at Uppark can be directly compared to the work of David Cheeseman at Nymans, Maria Rivers at The Vyne and Simon Ryder at Uppark. All of these artists have, like the National Trust at Uppark, created visions of different worlds and other realities. Cheeseman sealed a motionless sooted impression of plant life within a giant acrylic globe, placed in the Gun Room at Nymans as if dropped by aliens. The globe preserved a world of information lost when the collection of botanical books was lost in the 1947 fire at Nymans, a fire that destroyed much of the medieval-style building, including the library. Rivers gave characters from The Vyne's history three-dimensional paper form in the library in her work *Short Cuts and Fog*.

30 August 1989 at Uppark House and Garden

at the same time long-lasting. The properties have purchased objects made for exhibition, which have now become part of their permanent collections, and which will be recognised fully from now on as part of the complex history of each house. As each property purchases work, so they link themselves to each other, through our series of interventions.

Intervention may also not necessarily be physical. Matt Smith's research and conceptual approach to his piece *Piccadilly 1830* shown as part of *Untravelling Nymans*, prompted the recognition of Messel family relationships previously unrecognised. The work centred round theatre stage designer Oliver Messel, who lived at Nymans during his childhood. Smith reinterpreted a costume by Messel (who had originally designed it for the theatre production *Piccadilly 1830*), but then altered it so that the

Ups by creating a chaos of exfoliating hooks, and Frydler encapsulates the songbirds music using rhythmic patterns engraved inside blocks of crystal glass in his work *Songbird*. All of these interventions, including the restoration of Uppark, show us a fictitious reality; all are valid, and remind us that we all create our own realities, constructed through our continuous seeing and learning.

Being aware of these interventions has allowed Unravelled artists to scrutinise concepts of good and bad, as explored more fully by Paul Jellling in his essay for the Nymans catalogue *A Twitch on the Thread*, and the visible and invisible, as explored by Laurajane Smith in her essay *Domestic Aides or the great divide? Country houses and the perpetuation of social inequality in this catalogue*. This scrutiny begins, for some, through the act of staging a contemporary art exhibition within a historic space, but extends through to the work on display. The four concepts are much interlinked and explored by artists within all the properties, most notably by Gavin Fry and Guy Holder at Nymans, Mrs Smith, Penny Green and Matt Smith at The Wyne and Caitlin Helferman and Robert Cooper and Stella Harding at Uppark.

Fry's footstool at Nymans entitled *Zorizzo* is bejewelled to the extent that it is unusable, and in its construction Fry has employed Oliver Messel's approach of transforming cheap and everyday materials into expensive looking items. The work is a bed footstool, but a valuable object made from items that alone have little monetary value, and whose original purpose is hidden from the viewer. The title also alludes to an excerpt from the book *A Peepers/Apartist Maitre* by J K Haysmans in which the evil hore Des Esseintes decides to bejewel a living tortoise to such an extent that the tortoise dies from bearing the weight of the adornment, an unnecessary death brought about from an act of beautification. Holder presents death on a plate in ceramic modelling in his work *Food of Vision*, presenting the reality of the widow pattern plate story, a tale of two doomed lovers who are killed by a vengeful duke and transformed into birds. The piece shows us the darker side of acquiring wealth through the representation of the misfortune of others – in the case of Holder's intervention, literally, through the corpses of the transformed lovers as trophies of the hunt presented on a dining table platter.

At The Wyne, Green explores concepts of good and bad through her work *Lady Dacre's wedding gift – a concept* when considering the history of Lady Dacre, who lost her fortune and fight to live at The Wyne when her husband died. In her essay *A Woman's Place: Power, Gender and Work*

in *The Country House*,⁸ Jill Seddon contextualises this and other newly-commissioned art dealing with the women of The Wyne, by providing historical insight into the roles of women within this environment. Lady Dacre is written up in history (by men) as a cantaracious money-grabbing woman, content to rage prolonged legal battles against her stepson in order to reclaim her assets. Green reconsiders and re-presents the story from a feminist perspective in a series of narrative plates, paying homage to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* by setting the plates out on the dining room table at The Wyne.

At Uppark, Cooper and Harding for *Dish of the Day: chicken in a basket* refer simultaneously to 15-year-old Emma Hart, employed by Sir Harry Fotherstongham as the entertainment for his summer partying, and current underage exploitation, questioning our perceptions about the subject within historical and contemporary society. The concept of the 'safe spectacles of time' has been discussed by Eliza Gluckman in her essay, *Theatrical Engagements*,⁹ which looked at what the English country house comes to represent, in terms of theatricality versus reality. This same thinking can be applied to our understanding of how we should receive the popular and very dramatic story of Emma Hart supposedly dancing nude on the table at Uppark to entertain Sir Harry's party guests.

At Uppark, Helferman explores the plight and visibility of classes other than house-owning families through *Reinvents*; her work in the stables. It reveals the labour behind the sport of horse racing, and what it meant to the stable staff and horses alike. Julian Weikar at Nymans, Mrs Smith at The Wyne and Caitlin Helferman together challenge our preconceptions of the visitor experience of a country house as a place about the rich and for the rich.

These approaches contribute further to the idea that at each property Unravelled has in some way unturned a convention. This is not a moral question of what is conceived as good or bad, but instead a broadening of our own realities, perhaps most prevalent if we consider how concepts of time have been explored across the three sites.

As Sara Roberts points out in her essay, the National Trust often represents a house from a single viewpoint.¹⁰ From this a single, chronological timeframe can be extrapolated. Presenting ten or more artists within one exhibition can undo this convention. As visitors to historic houses, we are used to moving backwards in chronological time as we walk through properties and encounter different life stories and building adaptations. Likewise, the artists we have worked with have often played with time.

juxtaposing historical and contemporary events and attitudes as well as factual and fictional events and historical points in time.

At Uppark, Alice Kettle and Helen Falvey's collaboration *The House of Eboi* places the literary work of the adult H.G. Wells within a space he knew as a child (when his mother was Uppark's housekeeper). At The Wyre, Sharon McElroy for *Exquisite Diversion* fused 1970s glam rock with the Venice carnival as experienced by John Chute in the mid-19th century, comparing the hedonism and experimentation with gender and personas of both eras. At Nymans, Caitlin Helferman placed *Hide and Seek*, child-size sculptures that evoked the childhoods of Anne and Oliver Messel at Nymans, which is now presented by the National Trust as it was at the time of Anne's retirement. These mixings of time allow us to see historical and contemporary events from different perspectives, introducing other, more inclusive stories into our fields of vision, and an understanding that there are always multiple truths.

To conclude, we hope that Unravelled has helped demonstrate that there is value to opening up historic spaces to the imaginations of artists, and undoing our perceptions of truth, convention and intervention. Moreover, that objects can be powerful storytellers, and their authenticity is not necessarily bound up with origin or age.

Unravelled would like to thank Sarah Foster, Andy Lewis, and all the team at Uppark for their invaluable help in making *Unravelled Uppark* possible.

1. Julia Walker, *The Nature of Intervention*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Nymans* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 57-58.
2. Sara Roberts, *Accented Histories*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Uppark* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 12-20.
3. Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Uppark* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 58-62.
4. Paul Jobling, *A Titch on the Thread*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Nymans* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 45-56.
5. Laurence Smith, *Domestic bliss or the great divide? Country houses and the perpetuation of social hierarchy*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Uppark* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 40-56.
6. Sara Roberts, *Accented Histories: The Wyre*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled The Wyre* (Howe Unravelled 2013), pp. 13-17.
7. Elin Olausson, *Theatrical Engagements*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled The Wyre* (Howe Unravelled 2013), pp. 18-24.
8. Sara Roberts, *Accented Histories*, in Helfrecht, Helferman, Smith (eds.), *Unravelled Uppark* (Howe Unravelled 2014), pp. 12-20.

Right: Fire bucket at Uppark House and Garden



Accreted Histories

Sara Roberts

Walking down the great slope of concrete, the vast space seems perfect in its modernity, and the distractions of its vastness mean it is a while before you notice the scar. But it is there, and you will notice it, sneaking and jagged, a rough diagonal across the expanse of the floor, a smooth, expert repair of concrete, in concrete.

This is the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, the great entrance hall to one of Europe's most significant spaces for contemporary art,¹ offering a daunting challenge to the artists commissioned to exhibit there: a huge space, taller than it is wide, interrupted by a raised walkway and staircase, overlooked from several levels on one side. Whose work then is the subtly filled crack in the concrete surface? It is nobody's as such, but is nonetheless a permanent and vivid physical trace of Doris Sabado's commissioned piece, *Shobolekh* (2007), part of the *Unilever* series. This work was a great fissure where the visitor was expected to walk, contemplating its depth, making decisions about which side to walk on, navigating its meandering length.



Salvaged fragments from the fire in 1963 at Uppark House and Garden

The Sabado repair is a clear, mechanical example of how artists' interventions leave traces which become contributory presences in the projects which follow. But these connections are not necessarily physical.

Each action becomes part of the history of the space and charges it with expectation, contributing to the meaning of whatever happens there. Thus the movement of people across and around the crack in the floor seemed to be echoed by the crowds of visitors who ran with the choreographed participants of Tino Seghetti's later work, *These Associations* (2012), and listened

to their confessions. In turn, the very particular blend of confidence and disoriented uncertainty exhibited by performers and audience together in this piece seemed also to call up the ghosts of the giant spades of Louise Bourgeois' first artist intervention on the site. Meanwhile, the sheer self-aware spread of people throughout the great space was a reminder, as large crowds there so often are, of the crowd of friends and strangers which lay on the floor in 2003 to see their own reflections on the far-distant mirrored ceiling, in the glowing sun of Oclair Blasson's *Weather Project*.

Of course, this particular space also had a whole other previous life as the heart of a power station, the essence of industrial strength and modernist





Emma, Lady Hamilton,
George Romney

ambition for the capital city. Any art placed within these huge walls has to contend in equal measure with this history, as well as the history of recent usage, and it is open to discussion as to where the Turbine Hall sits on the spectrum of exhibition sites, which runs from white cube to non-gallery venue.

Its counterparts at Tate Britain, the Duveen Galleries, as purpose-built sculpture galleries, are unequivocally gallery spaces, but similarly laden with a sense of their own history. When Simon Starling was commissioned in 2013 to develop a new work in response to the Tate collection, his *Phantom Ride* highlighted exactly this aspect, presenting on large screens in the space a rollercoaster view of it, in which the major works that have been shown there over the years reappeared like ghosts.

This is the challenge of making all site-specific art, whether for gallery- or non-gallery spaces: it requires not just creative acts and aesthetic judgements, but associative play with existing narratives, and with layers of history. This process is selective, offering a choice of one narrative over another, and of one aspect of the fabric or history of the building over another. And the process is cumulative: once the work has been installed in a space, it too becomes part of its story.

Naturally, the histories of older buildings tend to be more complex: many have served several purposes; they have been altered, extended, damaged and repaired; rationalised and restored. The social and political events to which they have borne witness have changed not only their use but also

the attitudes of society towards them; some have been commandeered in times of war and served as playgrounds to the wealthy in times of peace. Their expansion and occasional contraction bear witness to the prosperity or failed fortunes of their occupants.

The experience of such properties in the care of, say, the National Trust, tends to be driven by simplified narratives: editorial decisions are made about which stories should be told and how best to tell them, with which artefacts and decoration. Stories tie objects together in a comprehensible and appealing way, and locate the houses themselves within wider historical narratives. The practical challenge for artists are not to interfere with the fabric of the buildings, nor to confound visitor expectation of access to authentic historical material. Compensation for these difficulties comes from the reassurance of the scale of rooms, the familiarity of domestic idiom, and the scope for alterations in scale or material to be conspicuous and sometimes startling. Artists become amateurs – they curate and re-frame, they present and perform, draw out new connections and references, allow new readings of old stories and refresh attitudes to familiar objects.

At Barrington Court in Somerset, for example, the entire volume of the kitchen was recently filled with filigree screens made of tied parabolas of willow? The tradition of basketry is well established in Somerset and the material is local, but there is no specific link between this craft and the house or the kitchen area. But this intervention by Laura Elen Bacon, with its human-scale gestures, functioned as an analogy for the kind of activity which would once have taken place in this kitchen: piece work, assembled later into a palatable whole, the repetition of fairly simple actions to make a spectacular collective presentation. The art was neither literal nor narrative, but still conveyed a sense of the history of the site and, once again, contributed to that history.



Mary Ann Bullock,
photographer unknown

the day: chicken in a basket, a sally, sixpence faux porcelain woven platter, sils in the Stone Hall surrounded by oil paintings of humored game, and its decorative motifs reveal instances of tafficking of the young then and now: of exploitation, for sex, cheap labour and cheap food. The pragmatism of this intervention, necessarily and very lightly favoring new entrepreneurs upon an old tale without replacing it, and allowing the old to readily show through, sums up the challenge of the site-specific when dealing with the historic fabric of a building.

Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh never lost his predilection for working class women, and at the age of 70 he was entranced by singing emanating from the Dairy. The sound drew him to the young dairymaid's assistant Mary Ann Bullock, whom he loved, groomed expensively into respectability, and – controversially – married. Artist Gan Doy continues ambient sounds with her own singing to make a sound piece for the Dairy. It seems gentle and benign, yet this charming sound had the power to break social taboos and ancestral inheritance. The song marks a transition in the tale of the property; the moment when it became both possible and inevitable that it should eventually fall into the custodianship of the common-born widow Fetherstonhaugh, née Bullock. This sound becomes part of the fabric of the Dairy; an imagined element of a diverting story which has been realised and made audible.

An expanse of luxurious oriental carpet in the Little Parbour becomes an ocean of the imagination, across which Steven Folen's folla of simple folded metal beats convey spores. Folen has used them to demonstrate hidden narratives and unstated origins: they trace the history of Sir Matthew Fetherstonhaugh as a major investor in the East India Company, and he says they are intended as playthings designed to teach boys the principles of overseas shipping and colonial investment, just as girls were to learn household management through constructive play with the dolls' house. For frequent visitors to the house – and National Trust properties support many repeat visitors due to their loyal membership – this kind of intervention casts new light on the sometimes unbrid origins of the fortunes which funded the economies of luxury in Georgian Uppark.

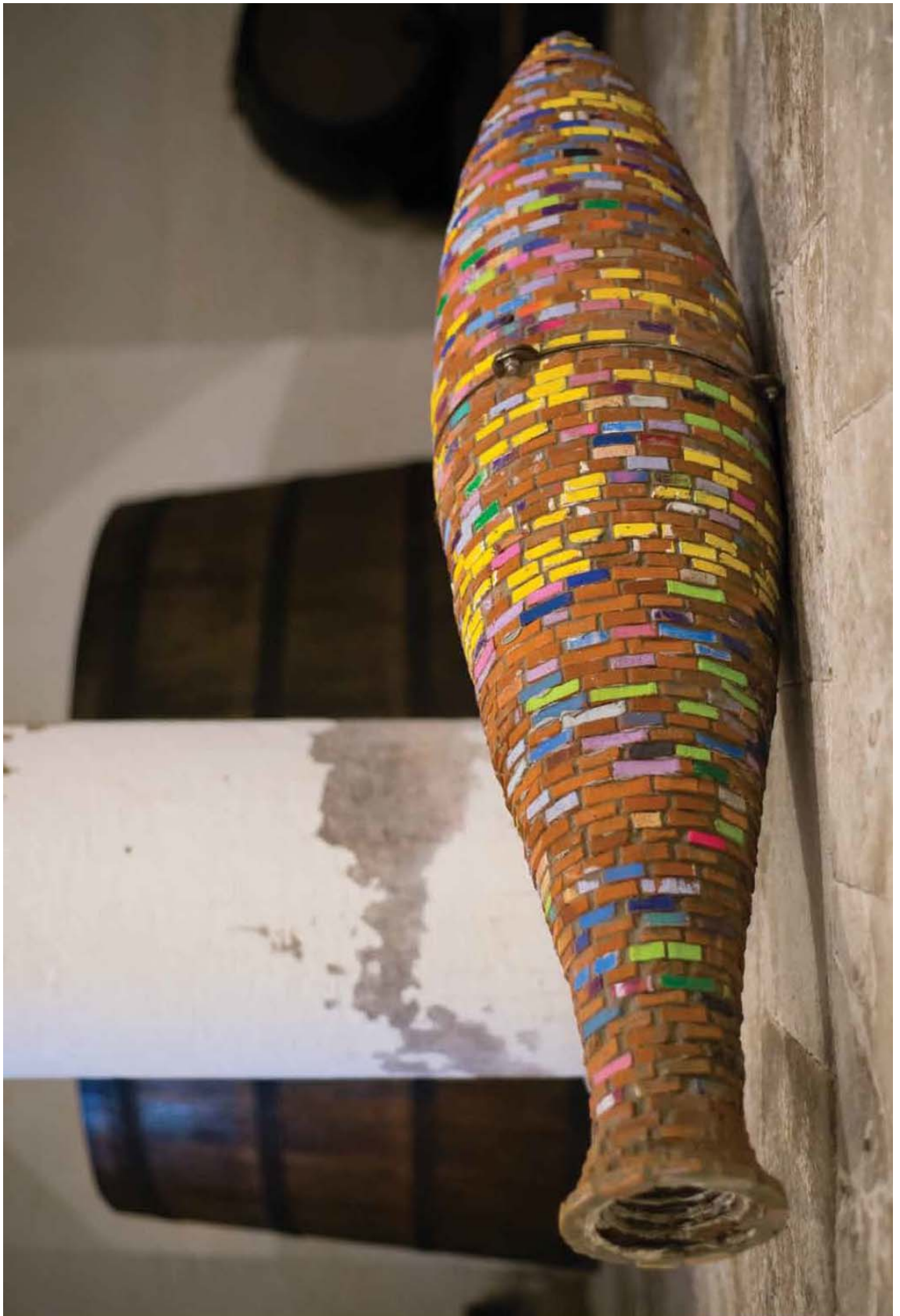
The dual presentation of histories and class on different floors in Uppark reflects the divisions of race in H.G.Wells's *The Time Machine*: the peaceable but dissolute Eloi conduct their lives apparently without function above ground, and their needs are provided for by the darker forces of the Morlocks below. This social division and these characters were influenced by the way of life witnessed by Wells when he visited his mother at work,

At Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, Susie MacMurray in her coolly beautiful installation *Promenade* (2010) provided a contemporary spectacle in the Marble Hall, originally used for entertaining guests and demonstrating wealth and good taste. The piece involved a winding structure of shimmering gold entrobisley thread, supported by the alabaster columns designed by Robert Adam for Sir Nathaniel Curzon's neoclassical 'Temple of the Arts'. The work was in the spirit of the site – an excess of valuable material, rendering rich textiles, furnishings and dances, designed to inspire awe and admiration, operating on an epic scale yet retaining a reference to human scale and interior architecture.

At Uppark, site of the current project, editorial and curatorial control has led to a dual presentation of the history of the building divided on grounds of both period and social standing. This capitalises on the material treasure and evidence available, and, to lay claim to some good stories, associated narratives which afford a glimpse into upstairs and downstairs life and of tangential histories from different eras – of the early lives of Nelson's lover, Emma, Lady Hamilton, and of H.G.Wells, the socialist novelist who brought us *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine*. Life 'below stairs' in the servants' quarters and the kitchen areas, the working areas of the house, is presented as it would have looked in the mid-Victorian era, when Wells's mother served as housekeeper between 1880 and 1893.³

In contrast, 'above stairs' hosts a wealth of Georgian trappings: a collection of fine furnishings and paintings gathered by the wealthy owners Sir Matthew Fetherstonhaugh (1714–1774) and his wife during their Grand Tours of Europe. Their son, Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh (1754–1843), socialite confidant of both the Prince Regent and the architect and landscape designer Humphry Repton, was 'a great seducer of pretty poorish girls, milliners, tenants, singers and servant maids, after the fashion of the time'.⁴ Sir Harry collected young women as easily as his parents had collected European antiques for the house. One such conquest was the very beautiful young teenage Emma Hart, formerly Amy Lyon, whom he brought to Uppark to entertain, dance and smile, and who reportedly lolled naked on the dining table for the house guests. Having become pregnant whilst at Uppark, she was then discarded, taken up by Charles Grosvenor, and finally made a comfortable marriage with his uncle Sir William Hamilton, who celebrated her grand affair of the heart with Admiral Lord Nelson.

For *Unravelling*, basketmaker Stella Harding and ceramicist Robert Cooper have re-cast this story in a 21st century light. Their collaborative work *DST of*





and artists Alice Kertész and Helen Felcey close the creative loop and bring the Ebi home. Their figures are carefully crafted on the scale of the dolls' house, but they play house on a grand scale with the whole building: sequestering themselves in corners, appropriating objects for their own use, conducting a parallel and gently parasitical life. They turn the house visitors into the 'other' race, they embody part of Wales's socialist literary project and give face to its divisions and strata.

The disastrous fire at Uppark in 1989 has laid a different kind of historical narrative upon the building – that of restoration and rebuilding. It is the kind of story the National Trust tells well, and it is appealing to the public in that it involves painstaking craftsmanship, time and tragedy, and ultimately the triumph of endeavour over adversity. For *Unraveled*, Matt Smith thoughtfully reinstates the 'above stairs' fire buckets; the originals were said to be lost in the Titanic disaster en route to their new purchaser, the Metropolitan Museum in New York. As artefacts, however impractical, they draw together narratives and themes from several eras, and contrast mundane purpose with romantic stories of tragic loss, of the crossing of class boundaries through marriage, of the potential of fire to destroy layers of material history.

Zoë Hilliard has supplemented the Uppark ceramics collection, which includes pieces salvaged from the fire, with her own salvaged ceramic patchwork pieces. The works extend the story of restoration of rescued objects through the imagery printed upon their surface. Their meticulous reconstruction, and their cool acceptance of mismatching and missing parts, are part of the evolution of the object and its physical reaction to events. Hilliard's work perhaps sums up the aptness of the historic house as host for artists' interventions: the house is stimulus and receptor; it is both interpreted and altered by the intervention; and every action and installation contributes to its accreted history.

1 The floodroom was the most visited contemporary art museum in the world, with 5.3 million visitors in 2012. www.the.org.uk/aboutus/press-releases/flood-room-attractions-record-53-million-visitors-2012

2 Part of *Make the Most* project, Somerset Art Works and the National Trust at Barrington Court, curried by Cranleaze, June–October 2013.

3 *Wales, H. G., An Experiment in Autobiography* (Ed. J. Discovaine and Co-ordinators of a New Chronology Book) (Since 1985). Vol 1 Traur & Faber (27 Nov. 2008). The account was first published in 1934.

http://www.docu.wales.ac.uk/wales/hg/experman/un_autobiography/complete.html#chapter3 (Accessed 16 December 2015).

4 *Ibid.*

the artists



Andrew Burton | Vessels

glazed clay, paint, glaze, stain, cement

Vessels has been conceived and designed as a series of objects for the Beer Cellar at Uppark. The space has a particular quality that I respond to: its muted colours, curves and vaulting, the stone floor and the white-painted bricks. Its enclosed, subterranean atmosphere contrasts with the rest of the house. The space is full of vessels, beer barrels and other containers. Nearby, in the Butler's Parity, are dozens more glass vessels with their assorted stoppers.



Often, my work responds to the spatial or architectural nature of the space it proposes to inhabit and also to the objects that already occupy the space. My response is initially visual: the shapes, forms and colours that intuitively feel right for a space. My ideas develop as I spend time in a space looking, drawing and making photographs. This group of elongated vessels felt right.

Although these works are new, the tiny bricks that I have used to make vessels have been used in many earlier sculptures and recycled into the current work. Once exhibited, these earlier sculptures were then broken up, the component parts salvaged to form the building blocks for the next work. As the sculptures were often painted or glazed, over time, and with their continual re-use, the tiny bricks have become accreted with scraps of the paint and cement that glued them together. Their enrusted, palimpsest-like surfaces convey a sense of the way that traces of memory and history can remain visible, overlaying one another in apparently simple forms. The bricks are hand-made in my studio using the same process as is used to make building bricks.

This process seems to have a particular resonance at Uppark, where the house itself is a kind of patchwork of the wildly divergent episodes and memories that form its narrative. Most recently, the house has been re-formed after the devastating fire in 1989.

The ambiguous form of vessels, both bomb-like and vessel-like, and the way that the bricks from which they are made have changed across time, struck me as having an oblique association with the narrative of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Perhaps fancifully, I felt a sense of Wells's presence in the Beer Cellar – one could imagine the time machine departing from here. Wells's mother was housekeeper at Uppark and the poignant and sad image of her extraordinarily sculptural ear trumpet, twisted and vessel-like, influenced my thinking.



Robert Cooper
and Stella Harding

Dish of the day, chicken in a basket
porcelain paper clay, on-glaze ceramic transfers

Inspired by H.G. Wells's reference to the child-like Eloi as 'delicious people' in *The Time Machine*, our *Dish of the day* re-contextualises the relationship between Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh and Emma Hart.



In 1780 Sir Harry, connoisseur of ceramics, fine food and horse flesh, brought 15-year-old Army Lyon (aka Emma Hart) to Uppark. He'd hired her for a year from an exclusive brothel in St James where, as one of Mrs Kelly's 'chickens', she'd been groomed as a high-class courtesan.

Tradition has it that Army danced naked on Uppark's dining table for Sir Harry's male guests – possibly in the manner of a posture model, a tavern harlot who performed stripteases on a large powder platter to arouse the punters. In Georgian times, when one fifth of London's female population (including children) worked in the sex industry, their liaison would barely have raised a false eyebrow. Although Army later attained celebrity status as Emma, Lady Harrington, such was the sexual double standard that her reputation never recovered from the gossip surrounding her past.

Playing on the multiple connotations of the word dish: shallow serving vessel, attractive person, scandalous gossip and ruined reputation, we've combined our practices of ceramics and basketry to weave a dish reminiscent of a Soeaux faience basket collected by Sir Harry.

Sited in the Stone Hall amid the ravages of the hunt, pastoral innocence is stripped away and floral decoration is reduced to the dark stains of withered lilies. Lines from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) enliven our dish of contemporary news stories, drawing parallels between the Georgian sex trade and modern slavery. Then, as now, invisible chains of debt bondage, emotional manipulation and fear bound thousands to lives of sexual servitude. Then, the rich gratified their appetite for young flesh with impunity. Now, sexual predators are themselves consumed in a tabloid feeding frenzy of moral outrage – begging the question: who are today's delicious people?



Gen Doy

A Milkmaid's Song
sound, speaker, stand, tablecloth

I work with texts, images, installations, and particularly sound and the voice. The speaking and singing voice has great potential in terms of its sensual and seductive qualities: evoking people, events and meanings, including hidden or forgotten ones.



I like to situate the voice in a "fabric" of sound gleaned from field recordings, often of specific sites. My piece *A Milkmaid's Song*, sited in the Dairy at Uppark, includes recordings made outside the dairy of birds singing, a cockleat crowing, and of traditional butter-making machinery. These then enter into a dialogue with the non-recorded sounds experienced by the listeners when they come to the work. When the visitors come to the Dairy, whisper to one another, walk on the flagstones, more layers of sound come into play.

These layers of sound combine with the recorded sounds, whose source is uncertain, and another meaning is created.

Sound can bring the past into collision with the present. Here I sing a newly composed melody, which supports the traditional words. And the story of the singing dairymaid who married the master of the house is brought together with sounds of Shirley Hill, National Trust employee, demonstrating how to make butter.

As soon as I visited Uppark I knew I wanted to make a work about Mary Ann Bullock singing in the Dairy, and the way in which her voice attracted Sir Harry who had yet to see her. The sound piece works both outside the Dairy – as the sound is directed from a single speaker out of the door across the fields, enticing visitors to approach – and also inside the Dairy, where the hard surfaces and resonant space are like a resonant chamber. The voice is alive, breathing out through flesh. But from what kind of body, one living or dead?



Steven Follen | Trade
tin, tea, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, vanilla, turmeric, cardamom, jute, cotton, indigo

Having spent time in India and Bangladesh I was interested in Sir Matthew Fetherstonhaugh's (1714-1774) connections with the East India Company (EIC). He is said to have been one of its largest stockholders and part-owned several East Indianmen: ships used to transport goods back from the EIC trading centres, including Bengal.

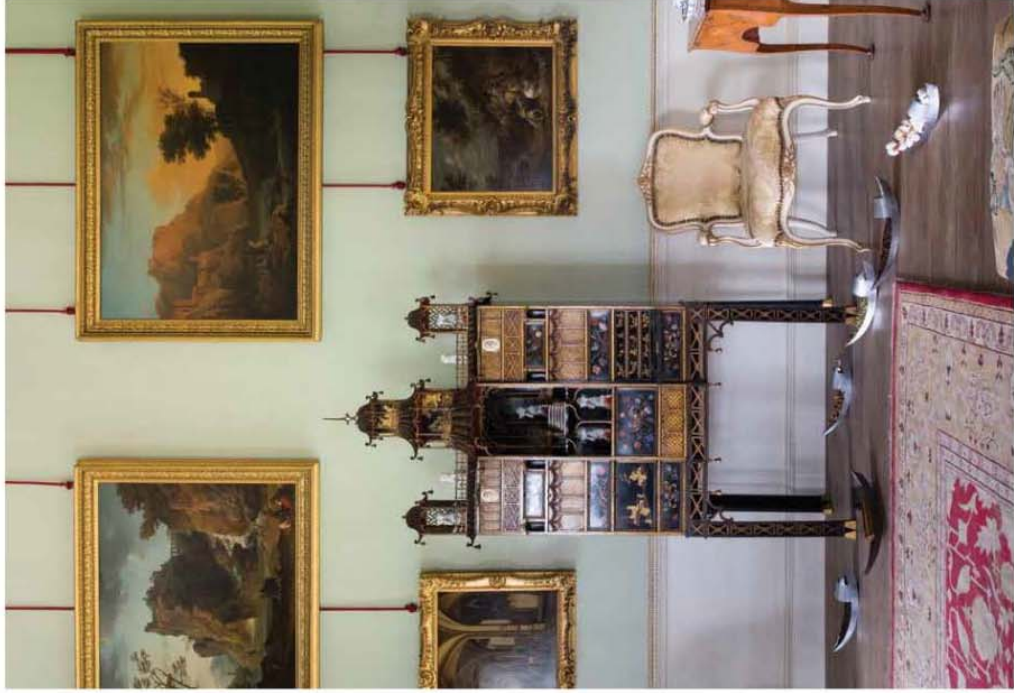
Uppark has a history of play and learning. H.G. Wells wrote of how his experiences in the house informed events later in his life. The grand dolls' house belonging to Sarah (Sir Matthew's wife) was a tool for both play and instruction, encouraging an understanding of how to manage a home. Sir Matthew was heir to a kinsman, Sir Henry Fetherstone (1654-1746), who taught him the trade of investment and speculation.

He made a group of tin boats, inspired by the shapes of traditional vessels from Bengal. They are filled with cargo which the EIC traded such as tea, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, vanilla, turmeric, cardamom, jute, cotton and indigo. They wind their way across the floor, beneath the pagoda cabinet in the Little Parlour, as if left by a child who has finished playing. The boats can be seen as a boy's equivalent of the dolls' house, designed to encourage an interest in shipping and trade.

There were major famines in Bengal between 1769-1773 when approximately a third of the population died. Some believe this was caused by EIC policy in the region, which forced farmers to produce cash crops like opium, cotton and indigo, and forbade the storage of surplus grain.

Robert Clive (1725-1774) was employed by the EIC and was twice the Governor of Bengal. Clive was challenged in Parliament during the 1760s and 1770s for his activities in India, which generated vast wealth for EIC stockholders and himself. Clive received support from a number of MPs, including Sir Matthew.

It is hoped the smells of the spices will gently waft around the room adding to the dreamy atmosphere of the space and evoking far-off places.



Caitlin Heffernan

Remnants

hay bales, hay nets, horsehair, felt, rescued fragments of fabric from Uppark's 1969 house fire, leather reins, jewels

Remnants is a site-specific installation based in the stables. This evocative space houses many of the charred remains from the house fire at Uppark in 1969, but the scuffs and hoof marks of the empty stable bays also reveal the traces of the horses once stabled there.

My response has been to use fragments of burnt and charred fabrics from the house fire to re-create horse coats, feeding bags and partial elements of clothing. There are also objects made from hay, partially-formed horses in thick felt, horsehair and reins made from leather.

Suspended and embedded within the space these fragmentary elements are designed to draw out the stories of the building's history and to play on the idea of horses as status symbols through fleeting glimpses of jewels within the bales hidden in and around the bays.

I am fascinated by the history of the space and the markers – the traces literally etched on the walls and floors – left by the former occupants. It is these elements that have informed my intervention within the stables.



Zoë Hillyard | Salvage
ceramic, fabric, thread

In 1989, Uppark was devastated when a fire, which started on the roof, ended up gutting much of the house. As the fire burnt downwards, a desperate race began to remove artifacts, paintings, textiles and furniture from below. Chains of people passed precious items out onto the lawns. Eventually ceilings and fireplaces caved in, plasterwork and remaining items were smashed and all ground floor rooms were left exposed to the sky.



In the aftermath, the four feet of damp ash and debris which lay in the rooms was gathered and stored in regiments of black dustbins out on the lawn, waiting for their contents to be carefully sorted. After some debate, the decision was made to restore Uppark to 'the day before the fire'. What then emerged was a vibrant community of skilled craftspeople, taking up residence in makeshift workshops and offices in the grounds of the property. Old skills were rekindled and expertise shared. Salvaged fragments were grafted onto replacement sections. Tales of people came and went and slowly Uppark was rebuilt. From the traumatic event came an amazing opportunity for discovery and innovation and the collective energy of the endeavour left its mark on everyone involved. My ceramic patchwork pieces celebrate the painstaking dedication of this remarkable temporary community.

Playing on the aesthetics associated with archaeological restoration and traditions of Japanese ceramic mending, the hand-stitched pieces revive materials, embrace flaws and celebrate the outcome of misadventure. They sit in the Red Drawing Room as 'replacements', alongside 'fire survivors' and substitute ceramics. Their hand-stitched construction echoes the pioneering textile renovation work undertaken by Margaret Meade-Fetherstonhaugh to reinforce Uppark's 18th century curtains, a task that later enabled them to withstand being wrenched from the windows.

Because I am interested in the journeys objects make, all the ceramics I re-work are second-hand finds, making for an interesting play between Grand Tour measures and revived mass-produced reproductions. The fabric's are a mixture of old and new, either gathered on my own Grand Tour of charity shops and vintage sales, or digitally printed with repurposed classical and oriental imagery.

There remains a room, stacked high with bread trays, containing smoky fragments of an array of beautiful ceramics found within the ash after the fire. Photography, digital fabric printing and hand-stitched construction enable these fragments to once again take on three-dimensional form and return to sit, if still incomplete, within the elegance of the Red Drawing Room.



Agnes Jones | *Io and Euthenia*
steel

I am an artist blacksmith who uses steel to draw – I make sketches which I then re-create in steel, retaining the exciting feel and energy of the original drawings. Each piece has a life and character brought out by the use of a single line running through the piece.

Since I work primarily to commission, the location of an object I make is always important, because the work interacts with the environment around it. An object should always fit the location it is designed for, and on the visit to Uppark it was clear that the two niches on either side of the portico would be perfect for work which would tell the visitor something of the people of the house. The two who impressed themselves on me were Mary Ann Bullock and Emma Hart, two women who experienced amazing transformations in the house.



As a young woman, Emma Hart was painted a number of times by George Romney, in the guise of various Greek goddesses and nymphs. Based on Romney's combining of classical dress with contemporary attire, she created a set of charades. These involved her dressing up, dancing and posing to evoke images from Greek mythology in front of an audience who would guess the names of the classical characters and scenes. This, and the huge classical influence of Sir Matthew Fetherstonhaugh, led me to look to ancient Greek goddesses for characters who would work as playful sculptural counterparts.

Emma Hart, who was the daughter of a blacksmith, a society hostess and later the mistress of Lord Nelson, linked perfectly to Euthenia. The daughter of the blacksmith god Hephaestus, Euthenia was the goddess of prosperity, growth and sailing.

For Mary Ann Bullock, the milkmaid who Henry Fetherstonhaugh fell in love with and married, Io was perfect – a nymph that Zeus fell in love with, but had to turn into a cow to prevent Hera from noticing her. Io was forced to wander the kingdom until Zeus could turn her back into a woman. She became a queen and was the ancestress of Hercules.

I drew the two women as these goddesses, showing who they are through the symbols the Greeks used to identify them, and providing a narrative based on the similarities between them which the audience can piece together. Io retains her cow horns and carries an olive branch of peace, whilst Euthenia carries a cornucopia of plenty, has a wheat sheaf crown and a flowing dress to symbolise water.



Alice Kettle | *The House of Eloi*
and Helen Felcey | cloth, thread, beads, glass, perspex, ceramic, plastic

As a child, the doll's house at Uppark had a huge impact on me as a repeat visitor with my mother and two sisters. We acquired our own monumental doll's house and each of us made furniture and rooms for it. I still have the doll's patchwork quilt made by my mother. Alice Kettle



As a young boy, H G Wells spent a great deal of time at Uppark where his mother was the housekeeper in the late 1890s. He immersed himself in the rich contents of the library which influenced his imagination and desire to become a writer.

His science fiction book *The Time Machine* describes an alternative universe, which moves between virtual dimensions of the earthly world; in *The War of the Worlds*, the earth is subjected

to a near-apocalyptic invasion by Martian beings. We have used these novels by H G Wells to make our own futuristic cityscape in the doll's house room.

The House of Eloi wallhanging depicts a city destroyed and inhabited by strange and curious creatures – Eloi – from H G Wells's original text. A futuristic, Perspex house is erected next to the existing doll's houses. The lower section contains the shards: ceramic debris of broken buildings and a destroyed world. In the top section, the creatures make a new environment, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar and magical. The creatures are explorers: they begin to venture beyond their house to occupy devices, corners and cabinets in other rooms.

Helen Felcey (ceramics) and Alice Kettle (textiles) have a history of collaborating with each other, and co-creation. They combine their practices to make collections and environments of cloth, thread, slip-cast ceramics, fragments and stitch. The creatures are both beautiful and strange, which, like H G Wells's visions of the future, question our perceptions of the real and the unknown.



Jini Rawlings

Amy Emily Emma and Four Times of Day (Vermet)
semi-alumined mirrors, acrylic, HD video, sound



The Dining Room at Uppark provided the stage for one of Amy Lyon's early famed performances. Did she or did she not dance on the mahogany table for Sir Harry and his friends when she was 15? Was she ruder? Over the almost two centuries since her death in 1815, Amy – later transforming into Emily Hart and finally Emma, Lady Hamilton – has been a screen for various projected fantasies about women. She is the hyper-sensualised/sexualised object of the male gaze, the beautiful object/subject of painters; the lover of Nelson or his nemesis; the 'vulgar woman' first acclaimed, then rejected, by polite society. Alternatively, she is an important artist whose 'attitudes' – classical and mythological tableaux, created in Naples – are a forerunner of performance art and interpretive dance.

My work is often about the marginalised or outsider and in this installation I use video projected through layers of semi-alumined mirrors to reflect some of the fragmentation of a complex life. There is no one optimum viewpoint, there is always a different way of looking at things.

Emma was always a composite construction. She was partly self-made and partly constructed by others. The piece on the table celebrates her at the height of her self-actualisation before her final, sadder

end. The main performance in the video is intertwined with fragments of the significant series of marine paintings by Claude-Joseph Vermet collected on the Grand Tour and displayed in the Dining Room. Emma's life is intimately connected with the sea, most especially through her relationship with Nelson, and of course Emma herself became a part of the Grand Tour in Naples. The 'stories' embedded in the installation contain a variety of references to her life and times ranging from the statues of dancers uncovered in Herculaneum, Greek vases collected by Lord Hamilton, to the classically inspired dancers on a Wedgwood maquette and the paintings of Emma by many artists and, most significantly for this piece, by Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun.



Simon Ryder | Quartet
laser-etched crystal glass

Do the technological devices by which we enlarge our understanding of nature enhance or diminish our sense of kindness with it?
Richard Mabey, *The Scientist and the Romantic*



Quartet brings the songs of four birds encountered in the gardens of Uppark into the interior of the house. A single phrase from each of the birds' repertoires (one lasting less than a tenth of a second and beyond the ability of the human ear to discriminate) has been analysed to reveal how its pitch and loudness varies over time. This digital process splinters the seamless flow of each song into a mass of numbers, which are then plotted as an undulating landscape – the position, shape and height of the topography an accurate reflection of the song dynamics. To capture and preserve this sonic form within crystal glass, lasers are used to make pinpoint fractures in the vitreous material, each fracture corresponding to a single point of data. As the fractures accumulate, so the song reappears, its cadences now turned into an etching.

So much of our understanding and appreciation of the natural world is mediated through the many technologies that accompany us in our everyday lives. At Uppark, the house is full of different representations of this world in a variety of media and crafts; the whole estate itself is in many ways a grand re-presentation of the nature that was here before. Into this tradition, Quartet offers both a scientific record of that world as well as an etched composition – a murmur from the avian world beyond the window.



Matt Smith

Garniture: The Bullock Buckets

ceramic, screen-printed decals, underglaze, enamel, lustres

In 1825, Uppark's owner Sir Harry married his dairymaid Mary Ann Bullock, 50 years younger than Sir Harry. Mary Ann was promptly sent to Paris to acquire 'the social graces'.¹ I was interested in this transition from below stairs to above stairs and how this transformation could be visualised.



Outside the Still Room in the basement at Uppark is a row of five buckets. The fire at Uppark in 1969 caused most damage to the upper floors. It therefore seemed prudent to bring a new set of fire buckets – suitably embellished – upstairs.

Mirroring Mary Ann's life, these buckets went on their own fictional journey to Paris to acquire social graces. The once humble buckets now form a 'garniture'² in the Staircase Hall. Whilst on initial inspection they may suit the new location, the effect of manual labour upon their form is still visible in the throwing marks, seams and joins.

The buckets are no longer able to fulfil their original duties and instead occupy a decorative position: static upon a marble-topped table to be gazed at by the master of the house, under the watchful eyes of his parents' portraits.

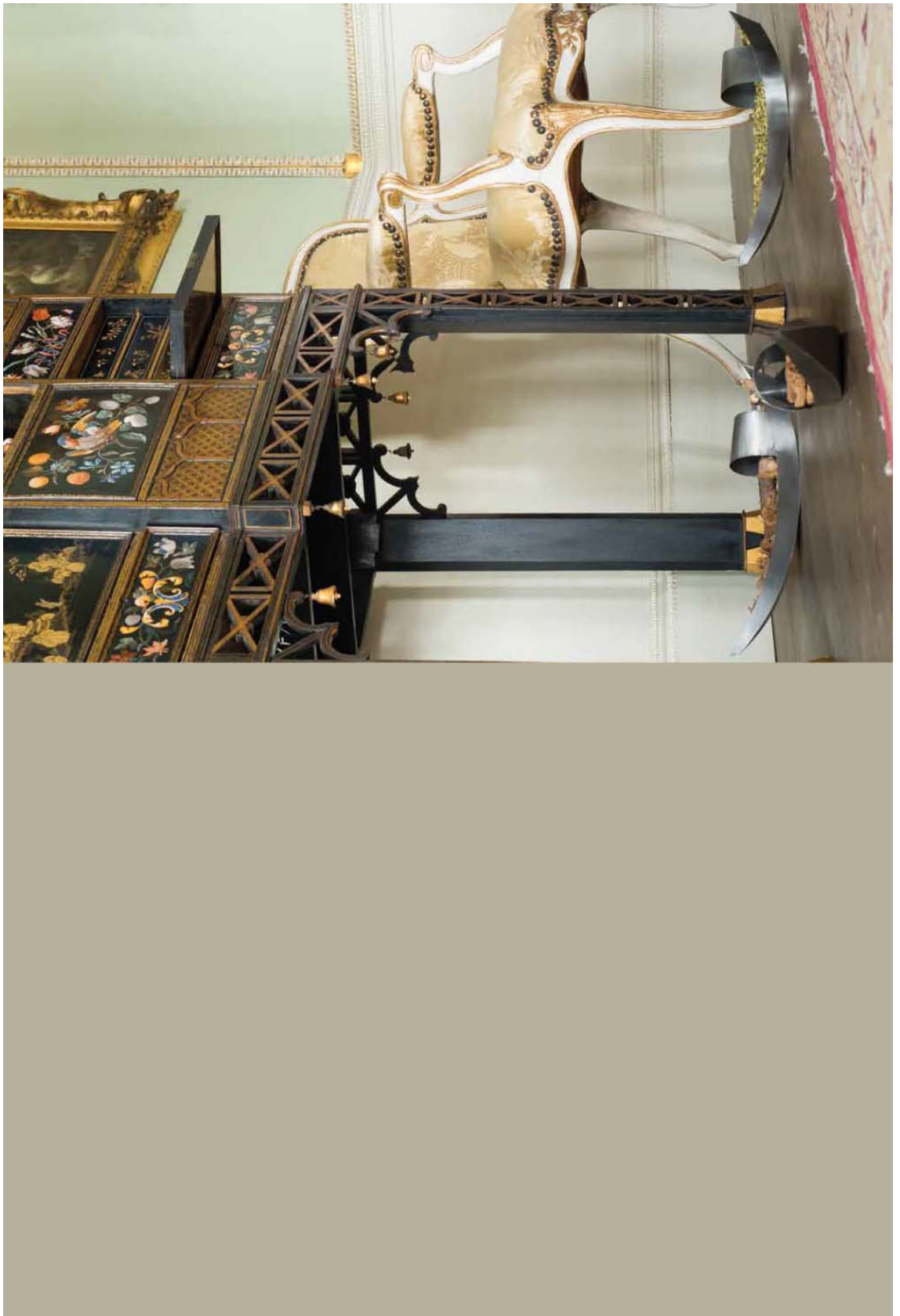
Country houses ran on strict adherence to one's place, and unsettling the hierarchies was unusual. In visual art, treating things that would normally be considered lesser or of marginal importance is a core method of camp. Indeed this garniture embraces the idea of camp, with its 'philosophy of subversion and doubt, which questions the legitimacy and seriousness demanded by social and cultural hierarchies'.³



1 Christopher Rowell, *The National Trust Uppark* (Oxford: 2010), p29

2 *Garniture*, a set of decorative accessories, usually vases.

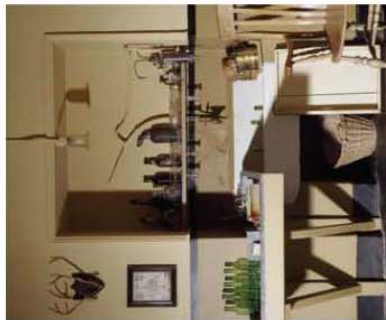
3 Florence Tamagnon, *Movest genre? Une histoire des représentations de l'homosexualité*, La Méthode, 2001, p251, quoted in Paul Bourassa, *The object in its own right* in *Leopold Fourier*, *Shylock*, Musée National Des Beaux-Arts du Québec, 2013, p118



Domestic bliss or the great divide? Country houses and the perpetuation of social inequality

Laurajane Smith

Uppark was the home of Thomas Deiler for 50 years. It is often forgotten, as we peer across the red ropes into gold gilded living spaces, presented as if frozen in time, that country houses were people's homes – dynamic spaces where the day-to-day messiness of living was carried out. We may, as we wander from room to room, imagine what it must have been like to live among such opulence and luxury. However, the collective imagination tends to focus on what it might have been like for 'the family': to imagine Sir Matthew or Sir Harry or Sir Herbert sitting in their dining rooms, or strolling through the halls decked out with the artworks collected on their travels through Europe. However, let us stop and consider what calling Uppark home may have been like for Thomas, as Uppark also happened to be Thomas's workplace as the butler, where the sept, ate, and went about his own life when not seeing to the needs of his employers.



The Butler's Pantry at Uppark House and Garden

Indeed Uppark, like all such houses, was both workplace and home, places where the divisions between 'work' and 'home' became strangely blurred, if not obscured, for domestic servants and estate workers. These houses, often perceived as aesthetic objects, are of course statements of power, built to assert, cement and document the owner's position in British social hierarchies.¹ The employment of servants and estate workers was also part of that statement of social position. Thus, the activities of home and work experienced by those employed to maintain house and grounds, and the privileged lives of their employers, take on more meaning than the completion of the worker's day-to-day tasks. The blurring of work and home experiences, particularly for domestic workers, undertaken within the theatres of symbolic monuments to power and hierarchy, was a daily economic and social performance of the legitimacy and naturalness of the class system. The country house provides a very public, but nonetheless domestic, setting in which class relations were performed, and this sense of domesticity normalises and naturalises the experiences of house employees and the 'places' of workers in British life – a place which ultimately is about providing for social elites. That life 'below stairs' was exploitative has been well documented.² However, the exploitative realities and consequences of these lives has often been obscured or lost, as the performance of a 'good' servant was measured in the degree to which they could go about their duties

unnoticed and unregarded. Thus, in the domestic performance of the country house, workers fade into the background, playing supportive roles for the star performers of British history, and are easily forgotten.

The country house performance in the 21st century has not substantially changed since the times of Sir Matthew or Sir Harry, but the players have. While these houses may no longer be the workplaces and homes of large numbers of domestic or estate workers, the houses nonetheless, as theatres of memory, play a role, reminding visitors to them of their place in British society and the place of the social and political elites. Visiting Uppark and other historic houses is itself a performance, which might be part of a pleasant Sunday afternoon excursion – a 'nice day out' – or as a place to take an overseas visitor, but nonetheless our visits and the maintenance of these properties has meaning. The way we use and maintain these houses spells out and sends a social message about the historical importance (or unimportance) of the people who called these houses home.

Visitor research at historic houses has illustrated that visitors engage in individual and collective acts of remembering and forgetting, which help perpetuate the social meaning and significance of these houses in the present.³ Visitors will often look with envy or awe at the lives of owners and employers, and the following are examples of visitors talking about the emotions conjured up while touring houses like Uppark:

A bit envious, but proud of the history.
(CH102, male, 50-59, painter and decorator, 2004)

Overawed by opulence.
(CH006, female, over 60, retired, 2004)

Yes it's very grand, very awe-inspiring to see how much, how big an area it covers.
(TN42, female, 25-34, sales, 2007)



Cleaners at Uppark House and Garden in 1930

In awe of it, I wouldn't be able to live here.
(CH218, male, 18-29, student, 2004)

The size produces awe. How nice the people are.
(CH219, male, 21, student, 2004)

Awesome to think one family needs such a huge place to live.
(CH266, female, 18-29, teacher, 2004)

These feelings of awe work to focus attention on the experiences of 'the family', as CH266 does, to consider what it might have been like to live in such surroundings. Such feelings also help to reinforce pride in the country's history, and offer reassurance that the elites who lived here were, as CH219 observes, 'nice people'. Often coupled with this sense of awe are feelings of comfort:

I like the house – it is warm and welcoming. I feel comfortable and at home here.
(CH269, female, 30-39, computer systems operator, 2004)

Comfortable, pride as well
(CH328, female, over 60, housewife, 2004)

Proud and comfortable
(CH363, female, 40-59, teacher, 2004)

Exciting, and feel very comfortable being here.
(CH343, female, 40-59, engineer, 2004)

Contented – wouldn't change my lot for this.
(CH329, male, over 60, company director, and who identified that their mother had been 'in service', 2004)

Visitors touring the house know that they are simply visiting, they know, as CH218 states, that they could never live here. Nevertheless, feelings of being in a comfortable 'home', of domestic bliss, staged and on display, reassure. The largesse of the social elites is recognised, and although awestruck and humbled by the display of wealth there is nonetheless comfort in knowing one's place in British society. CH329 would not change his 'lot' in life for such a lifestyle, he can feel contented with what he has. When walking through Uppark and similar establishments the roped-off rooms let us know that such lifestyles are beyond our reach. 'I fell in

on the outside looking in' (CH265, male, 40-59, teacher, 2004), as one visitor noted. The position of looking in reinforces the idea that it is the upper classes that are both the caretakers and subject of British history, a history that they alone made, and were and continue to be responsible for. Stately homes embody the gravitas and weight of a particular understanding and vision of history, and solidify the intractability of historical consciousness, so that the survival of these houses offers assurance for those anxious about social change and lost traditions, and provides a sense of historical and social continuity.

Feeling of satisfaction of solidarity of continuity in this modern restless world.
(CH267, male, 40-59, writer, 2004)

Honoured that these places existed and still do. We need to maintain them for our identity and future generations.
(CH270, male, over 60, stores manager, Ministry of Defence, 2004)

Thus, these houses come to stand in for a particular vision of British national and social history – and even national identity – their grand solidity lending literal weight to a particular collective remembering and forgetting in which only the elites have agency. Mary Ann Bullock, who at 20, and from the position of dairymaid, married the septuagenarian Sir Henry, inherited Uppark on his death and herself passed on the house after her death to her sister Frances Bullock. Interestingly, the tenure of these women from working backgrounds as owners of the house has been described as a 'long Victorian afternoo', a sleepy period in which both women were



asserting that the lesson to be learned from these houses is knowing when to 'bite your tongue', be deferential, to know your place and, in effect, not voice your rights. How we interpret and remember the past influences the way we understand and give meaning to the present, and it shapes how we think about and envisage the future, and the roles and rights individuals and collectives might have in it. In the traditional heritage performance context on other visiting or preserving country houses we often engage in the forgetting of the lives and experiences of workers, women and the enslaved⁴ at the same time as the lives, genealogies and experiences of the elites are remembered and commemorated. A choice is made as to what is or is not remembered. If history and heritage is about informing the present, and allowing the present to learn from the mistakes and injustices of the past to inform current and future social debate, then the challenge of the country house as a heritage attraction is to engage in an *active* remembering of the lives and experiences of all the people who called these places home. What might putting ourselves into the shoes of workers within these houses tell us? In what ways will we choose to allow such reflections to inform our understanding of past and present?

1. See Stephen Greenall, *Practices of Memory* (London, Bloomsbury, 2016); Peter Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: The Story of the Twentieth Century* (London, Abacus, 2002); Peter Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: The Story of the Twentieth Century* (London, Abacus, 2002); Peter Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: The Story of the Twentieth Century* (London, Abacus, 2002). Also for a general reading of the history and use of these houses see Jill Stoddart, *A woman's place: power, gender and work in the country house in Unravelling the Veil* (New, Unpublished, 2013).
2. Pamela Hirst, *Life Below Stairs in the 20th Century* (Thames, Sutton Publishing 2003).
3. Visitor interviews were undertaken at the following houses. In 2004: Audley End, Bakewell Hall, Bowdoin Hall, Harewood House, National Priority and Waddesdon Manor. In 2007: Bowdoin Hall, Burton Constable, Harewood House, 'Impey House'. The 2004 research was funded by the British Academy and reported in *Small Spaces of Power* (London: The Heritage Foundation, 2006). The 2007 research was funded by the Heritage Foundation and reported in *Small Spaces of Power* (London: The Heritage Foundation, 2006). Further research on visitor use and responses to heritage houses is continuing as part of ongoing research funded by The Australian Research Council (2014-2014).
4. Christyann Flower Uppenk 'House guide: National Trust 2010', 20.
5. *ibid.*, 93.
6. *ibid.*, 20.
7. Christyann Uppenk, *Visions of Colonialism: Remembrance at Christyann Uppenk University Press 2002*, Paul Christyann Uppenk, *Visions of Colonialism: Remembrance at Christyann Uppenk University Press 2002*, Paul Christyann Uppenk, *Visions of Colonialism: Remembrance at Christyann Uppenk University Press 2002*.
8. The work to which I refer was undertaken by the author and the author's research on the processes of historicised labour is an under-researched topic, but see for example James Walsh, *Women's Slave Empire* (Adelaide: The History Press 2008).

It was how it was.
(TN73, male, over 65, camp director, 2007)

That's just the way it was.
(TN78, male, 55-64, postman, 2007)

...but [they] were generally treated well, so yes. And back then, they had their place, that was the way of the world ... That's the way it was.
(BH1, female, 45-54, nurse, 2007)

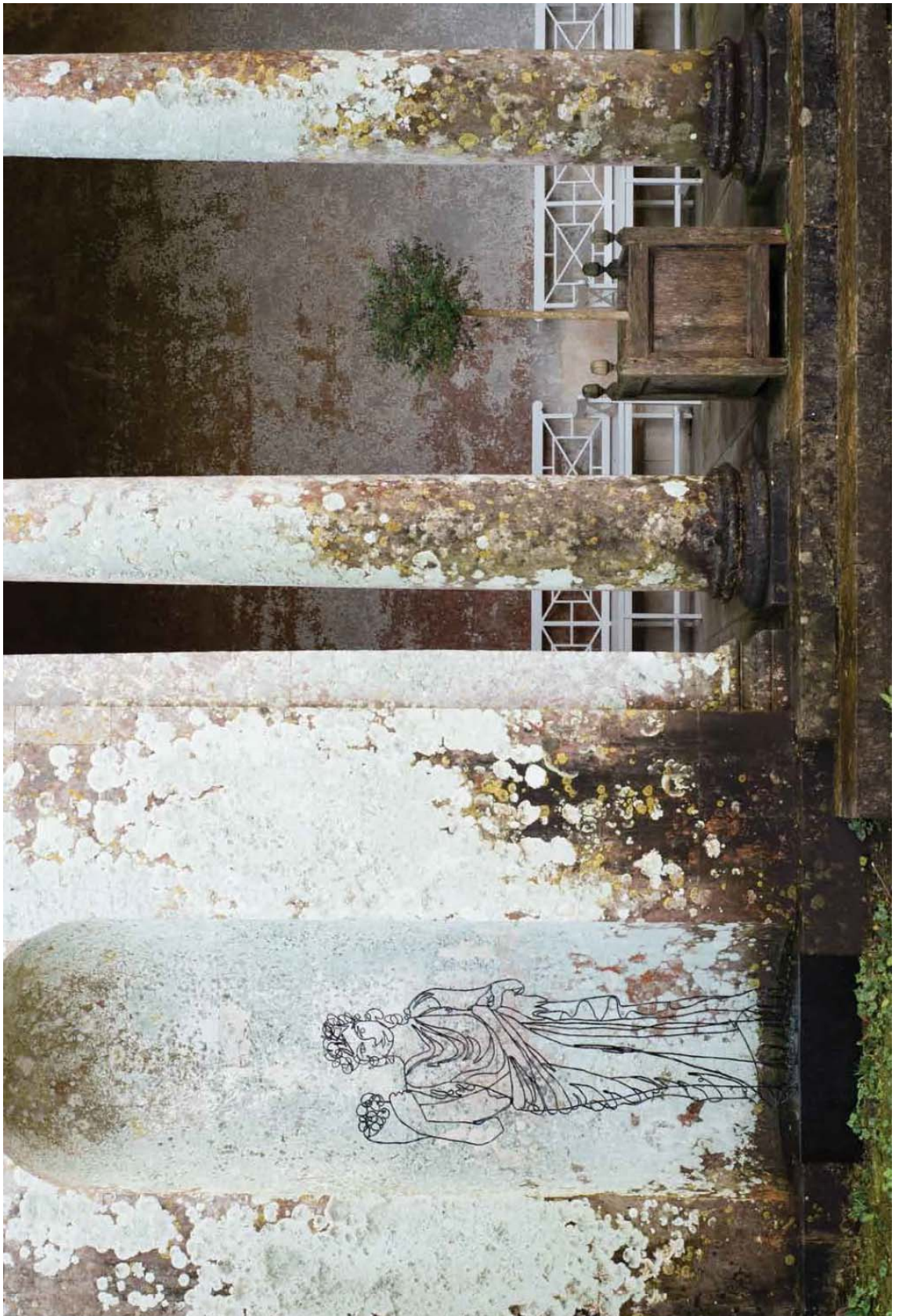
Well actually that we cannot live in the past, we have to move on.
(HH70, female, 55-64, welfare benefits officer, 2007)

These sentiments express the belief that our understanding of the past is immutable, that we should accept that immutability and move on from it, or that we cannot judge the past based on the values of the present. However, our understanding of the past is not immutable, and is indeed understood and interpreted through our contemporary social values and experiences. Our subjective selves interpret and give meaning to the past through the way we remember it – either individually or collectively as a nation. Remembering is never politically neutral, nor is it possible to engage in absolute recall, so that forgetting is an integral part of remembering.⁵ Here are three visitor interpretations of and responses to an exhibition on domestic and estate workers at one country house:

TN89: I think most history concentrates on the family and the lords and ladies and ... I think ... social history should be considered with the whole running of the house and the estate.
TN40: Me too, I feel like that, as well, I feel social history is very important because without the estate workers these people would have been, well they wouldn't have been able to exist
(TN39, male, 55-64, lecturer, TN40, female, 55-64, lecturer, 2007)

Well the people who lived in these houses were way out in front weren't they? ... We worked and you know when to bite your tongue but these days young people don't do that, do they? They open their mouths and out comes abuse or whatever because they have rights
(TN73, male, over 65, camp director, 2007)

These are two very different interpretations, one considering the integral part workers played in maintaining and enabling these houses, the other



Is there ever a first-time visit, and how will we remember it in the future?

Helen Camac



Boulton clock case with ornate mounts in the Staircase Hall at Uppark House and Garden

The sensation of succession and so duration imbues human experience, providing it with its unique character. We are able to compare the present held in memory with the present as currently experienced.¹

Part I

Time is an ever-present feature of all our lives, we can't and don't get away from it: the seconds and minutes that course through each day, and the seasons shifting, light changing and memories fading. Sometimes it is the small details that fade in and out that can bring to bear the memory of something distant, that can't quite be recalled and yet is still there, lurking in our minds. Visiting somewhere for the first time can trigger a feeling of remembering and having seen something before.

When I was seven years old my family visited a Greek island for our summer holiday. During our stay we went on a day trip to Turkey, which I still remember as, while we were there, even though for the first time, I remembered being there before. I recall now that, even at that young age, I had a real sense of déjà vu and more than that I seemed to know where things were and how to walk to them. I often recollect this episode and wonder about it – about memory and time and how we remember – and it has made me wonder whether we can really experience a place as if for the first time.

What we remember...

of ourselves

As we move about in space we are constantly accruing memory, a bodily memory, how we walk, how we move, what we feel as we move, a brush of air across the face, through the hair, a stiffness in the back, the leg, a creak of bone, a feel of stone through shoe. We take this accrued memory with us

of others

When we see something familiar in or of a person, that reminds us of another, a slight movement, a touch to the hair, the crease of a brow, the way someone smiles, a distant wave.

of everyday objects

When we see a familiar or everyday object it can bring to bear the memory of use, of a familiar person or a particular moment in time, an enamel jug, a teapot, broom, spoon, fork or pile of pins. A reminder of something in object form.

of unfamiliar objects

Of recognising something in the unfamiliar, a shape, a form, a material that makes something all the more familiar? Perhaps a familiarity in the unknown

of tasks being undertaken?

The knitting, stitching, threading, folding, polishing, chopping, cutting, tying, reaching, packing, writing, planting, mending, that remind us of something else.

of a landscape and place

Over time and through generations we remember through landscape and the form it takes. The word 'scape' is a derivation of ship or shape – working or understanding the landscape is a mediation of a shaping process of social and material things. Simon Schama writes in *Landscape and Memory*:

'Here was the homeland for which the people of Galby had died and of which, in a shape of their memorial humbuck, they had now been added. Their memory had now assumed the form of the landscape itself. A metaphor had become a reality, an absence had become a presence.'²

of material

Memories held in the creases in curtains: in the colour of the wallpaper, the fading of lead paint: 'to a silver grey, the faded furniture, the light dispersed through a stained glass window, or the reflection in a gilt mirror'.³

of a fleeting ...

view from a window, sound of birdsong, smell of beechwood and bracken, voice...



The house seen from the Dairy at Uppark House and Garden

red drawing room, which was a bright crimson in 1851, has been restored to resemble its faded 1989 colours.⁷ We are taken to something that has gathered a different version and notion of time, a stopping and then a restarting of time.



Whilst the clock (even though dependent on the consistency of its winding) presided over events, maintaining a regularity of time, time in the house seemed to stop between 1989-1995 while it was restored to its 1989 version. And if time did stop, what of the real time taken in the restoration by the craftsmen and women who rewound this time, un-made, in their minds and capabilities, the locked walls and colour of the paint to understand something of what had been before, to then recreate it?

My mind now travels forward to the future and the Untravelled exhibition and installations which will be at Uppark from May 2014. How will these pieces intervene with time and place and add to the memory of any visitor's

Part II
I still have not visited Uppark and so I have no physical memory of it. My research into it has taken place completely online. In this search three pieces of writing have helped me to think about this place from afar and about the physical nature of place changing, and yet and at the same time, the things that stay the same.

In extracts from *Experiment in Autobiography*, HG Wells recounts his memories of Uppark: from its 'wide undulating downland park' to 'the walled gardens containing the gardener's cottage which my father occupied' – which really still give a sense of the life of the land. Wells also recounts being with his father at Uppark:

'Once when I was somewhere in my twenties and he was over sixty, as I was walking with him on the open downs out beyond Uppark, he said casually, "when I was a young man of your age I used to come out here and lie on the night, just looking at the stars."⁸

It made me wonder that we still see the same stars and sky as he did, that this is something that changes somewhat but ostensibly remains the same regardless of other things. The stars are not controlled by human forces. In a blog post, recently written by the current assistant gardener at Uppark, Jennifer Swatton gives thought about time passing and things changing and yet the same things occurring as they have for centuries, when she writes of one of her 'unexpected jobs' – winding the clock at the top of the east Pavilion at Uppark, which she describes as:

'... a weekly ritual that must have taken place since the 1750s (albeit with occasional gaps) (end) while winding away ... it occurred to me that the clock had chimed its way through centuries of change in the garden.'⁹

Some of this 'change' occurred in the house too and I read about it with interest in an article in the independent newspaper about the re-opening of Uppark after it was 'ravished' by fire in 1989 and subsequently restored and re-opened in 1995 in a 'determination to restore the house to its state the day before the fire.'¹⁰ Here we seem close to a notion of time stopping for a short while, a forced stop in which things are rewound.

In the restored house where the 'Gilt decoration has been painstakingly burnished and then distressed with an overcoat of artificial dirt designed to resemble two or three centuries of grime' and 'A flock wallpaper in the

encounter with Uppark? Will they freeze something in time – an idea, a material or a gesture – or will they activate something more transitory and fleeting? Will encounters with these installations enable us to experience something new of the place through the work? And as, in so many ways, the installations are fleeting, as they are temporary, what of them once they are gone – will they leave a ghost of their presence, will their memory only remain in the pages of this catalogue and in photographs, or will they permeate further? Will they exist somewhere else or are they gone forever, confined to a memory now?

And when these memories intertwine with your current present and one thing reminds you of another, will you experience time in a different way? Something that isn't linear, but unwavering over time, overlapping and expanding – a layering and/or condensing of time?

What I find fascinating about some experiences of visiting a place is how, as Cees Nootboom has written, you may have a feeling of another time where a '... constant intermingling of now and then, and ... associated layers of memory...'⁵ exist. And as W.G. Sebald noted in *Austerlitz*, '... memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, [are] all interlocking...'⁶ perhaps drawing us in to remember something

I will end now at the beginning again – is there ever a real first-time visit? I will visit Uppark for the first time in 2014 but right now I imagine I have almost been there before. My paternal grandmother's family lived in Midhurst, very close to Uppark, and as I have written this I have wondered if they ever visited, if they walked the land or heard the chime of the clock bell. But there is one thing I am sure of, that they saw the stars in the sky.

1. Ekins, V. 2005. *The structure of flow: Language, meaning and temporal cognition*. John Benjamins Publishing, p.204.

2. Schama, S. 1996. *Landscape and Memory*. Fontana, London, p.25.

3. Ollis, C. July 1984. Independent newspaper, Restoration of mansion conveys 1901 life to hotel memory. The damaged Uppark has been re-created in meticulous detail.

4. Wells, J. 201. *Esperanto Autobiography, Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain* (London, 1989). Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

5. <http://upparkandcountryhousing-wells.com/journal/14-december-2013-memory-the-damaged-uppark-has-been-re-created-in-meticulous-detail>.

6. Ollis, C. July 1984. Independent newspaper, Restoration of mansion conveys 1901 life to hotel memory. The damaged Uppark has been re-created in meticulous detail.

7. Ollis, C. July 1984. Independent newspaper, Restoration of mansion conveys 1901 life to hotel memory. The damaged Uppark has been re-created in meticulous detail.

8. Nootboom, C. 2013. *Roach to Swath*. Macmillan Press, London, p.274.

9. Sebald, W. G. 2001. *Austerlitz*. Penguin Books, London, p.162.





Agnès Jones
www.agnesjones.com
 Jo and Euthenia
 steel

Alice Kettle and Helen Foley
www.alicekettle.com

The House of Elix
 cloth, thread, beads, glass, Perspex, ceramic, plastic

Jeni Rawlings
www.jenirawlings.com

Amy Emily Emma and Four Times of Day (Nero)
 semi-finished mirrors, acrylic, HD video, sound

Simon Ryder
www.simonryder.org

Quarter
 Besenched crystal glass

Matt Smith
www.mattsmith.com

Gameface The Bullock Studios
 ceramic, screen-printed decals, underglaze, enamel, lustre

Andrew Burton
www.andrewburton.org.uk
 Veeza
 fired clay, paint, glaze, stain, cement

Robert Cooper and Stella Harding
www.robertcooper.net - www.stellaharding.co.uk

Dish of the day: chicken in a basket
 porcelain paper clay, on glaze, ceramic transfers

Gen Doy
www.gendoy.com

A Millmaid's Song
 sound, speaker, stand, tablecloth

Stevan Follan
www.stevanfollan.co.uk

Traces
 tin, tea, pepper, cinnamon, cubes, ginger, vanilla, turmeric, cardamom, jira, cotton, indigo

Colin Hoffman
www.colinhoffman.org.uk

Reverie
 hay bales, hay nets, horsehair, felt, recycled fragments of fabric from Uppark's 1980s house fire, leather heels, jewels

Zoe Hlyard
www.zoehlyard.com

Salvage
 ceramic, fabric, thread


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