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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

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Buddhism and Silk: Reassessing a Painted Banner from Medieval Central Asia in The Met

MICHELLE C. WANG, XIN WEN, SUSAN WHITFIELD

Among the Silk Road artifacts in The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a painted silk banner that depicts a Buddhist deity standing beneath a canopy (fig. 1). The relatively small size of the banner belies its significance as an object of transcultural exchange between the Silk Road oasis city of Dunhuang, located in present-day Gansu Province in northwestern China, and the neighboring kingdom of Khotan, along the southern branch of the silk routes in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Furthermore, the iconography and materiality of the banner demonstrate the intertwined resonance of Buddhism and silk and offer tantalizing insights into cross-cultural practices of artistic production and display.

Aided by recent conservation work by the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Textile Conservation, this



fig. 1 Banner with
Mahāmāyūrī (recto).
Guiyijun period (848–1036).
Ink and color on silk, 22½ ×
11 in. (57 × 28 cm). The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Purchase, The Vincent
Astor Foundation Gift, 2007
(2007.294a, b)

article examines the painted banner from multiple perspectives, including religious, geographic, and its provenance. First, the banner is placed in its religious and cultural context through comparisons made to silk banners recovered from the city of Dunhuang. Second, a careful examination of a hitherto undiscovered inscription points to the close ties cultivated between Dunhuang and Khotan, which played a critical role in the transmission of Buddhist material culture (see fig. 10). The third and last part of the article reconstructs the probable route taken by the banner from

Dunhuang to London during the early twentieth century, and the roles played by the archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and his assistant Frederick Henry Andrews (1866–1957). In doing so, the continued transcultural significance of the banner into the present day is foregrounded.

MAHĀMĀYŪRĪ: THE GREAT PEACOCK WISDOM KING

Standing atop a lotus pedestal, the central motif of the banner is a deity exquisitely bejeweled and sumptuously attired in colorful textiles. A flowered canopy is adorned with tassels that fall behind an arched halo, and this floral motif is echoed by small blossoms that descend from the sky and appear as if suspended in midair, lending an imagined fragrance to the scene. Bearing implements of religious significance in both hands—a single peacock feather in the right and a golden bowl in the left—together they identify the deity as Mahāmāyūrī, the Great Peacock Wisdom King. In the East Asian Buddhist canon, Mahāmāyūrī appears in the six translations of the *Sutra of the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra* completed between the fourth and eighth centuries.¹ Several of these texts were made by monk-translators from oasis kingdoms in the Tarim Basin, indicating the popularity of this deity along the silk routes.² A mantra or dharani (the terms are often used interchangeably) refers to a verbal incantation recited in order to harness the titular deity's efficacious powers.

In the framing narrative of this particular sutra, the protagonist is the young monk Svāti, who resides in the Jetavana Grove, a monastery located in Śrāvastī, India, where Śākyamuni Buddha spent the rainy seasons during the last twenty-five years of his life. One day, while gathering firewood for the monks' bath, Svāti is bitten on the right foot by a poisonous black snake.³ Witnessing Svāti's pain and suffering, the Buddha's disciple Ānanda pleads with the Buddha for help.⁴ The Buddha tells Ānanda that he should recite the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra, which has the power to save Svāti's life by neutralizing the snake's poison.⁵ For this reason, Mahāmāyūrī became widely known as the deity who protects against snakebites and is associated with medicine. This information is conveyed with Mahāmāyūrī holding a golden bowl that represents a bowl of medicine.⁶ The medical properties of the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani likely resulted in the sutra's incorporation into the Bower Manuscript, which dates to the Gupta period (ca. 320–550) in India. The manuscript was recovered in 1890 by the British Army officer Hamilton Bower from the underground crypt of a stupa

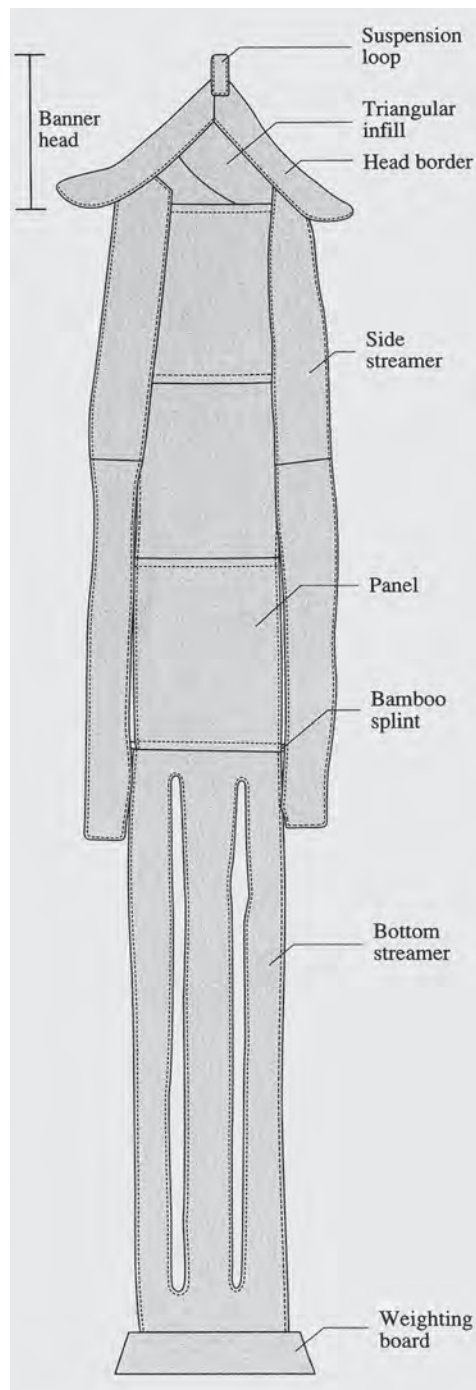


fig. 2 Diagram of a banner, after Wang Le 2007, p. 58, fig. 23



fig. 3 Bodhisattva Guide of Souls. Tang dynasty (618–907), second half of the 9th century. Ink and color on silk, 31 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 21 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (80.5 × 53.8 cm) (without mounting). British Museum, London (1919,0101,0.47) (Ch. lvii.002)

fig. 4 Banner Head with Seated Buddha from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (fig. 1)

(Buddhist reliquary mound) in Kumtura, a Buddhist cave site located in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁷ Composed in Sanskrit and written in the Brāhmī script on birch bark, the Bower Manuscript contained several additional Indian medical treatises.

The peacock feather held by Mahāmāyūrī refers to the deity's elevated status and the creature with which it is closely associated. According to textual sources, if the deity holds peacock feathers in one hand and is in a seated position, a golden peacock king is its vehicle.⁸ This relates to another framing narrative of the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra that concerns a golden peacock king (a bird), who daily recites



the sutra for self-protection, once in the morning and again at dusk.⁹

From the above examples, Mahāmāyūrī was closely associated with healing and protection, which were properties common to dharanis and mantras.¹⁰ In medieval China, dharanis and mantras were not only recited, as prescribed by the Mahāmāyūrī Dharani Sutra, but also copied and worn on the body as talismans so that their efficacy could be transferred via direct contact with the devotee.¹¹ However, painted banners with dharanis and mantras, which were placed on public display, had very different material properties from smaller talismans.

MATERIALITY OF BANNERS FROM THE SILK ROUTES

Banners from the silk routes are distinct from the more familiar hanging scrolls of East Asia. Unlike the conventional hanging scroll, painted banners were originally composed of multiple parts: the triangular banner head, which consisted of decorative silk or a painting typically depicting a seated Buddha; the rectangular body, on which the painting was executed (this could also consist of one or multiple pieces of fabric stitched together); side streamers, attached to the wide border of the banner head; and bottom streamers, attached to a wooden weighting board. A loop at the top of the banner head enabled it to be hung from poles or to be suspended from temple beams or stupas. The Mahāmāyūrī banner is preserved in two pieces, which include the triangular banner head painted with an image of a seated Buddha (fig. 4) and the rectangular painting bearing the Mahāmāyūrī motif (see fig. 1). The two pieces are no longer attached (fig. 5), and the border of the banner head and the streamers are also missing. Nevertheless, the similarity in style, painting technique, and color palette between the present painting and the banner head suggest they may have originated from the same object.

Silk Road painted banners were made from a variety of materials, although the vast majority of banners



fig. 5 Banner with Mahāmāyūrī, including Banner Head with Seated Buddha (recto) (see fig. 1)

fig. 6 Mural painting fragment from the Balawaste Buddha, showing banners hanging from a stupa. 7th–8th century. Painted on plaster, 18¼ × 13¾ in. (46 × 35 cm). British Museum, London (1925,0619,0.31)

fig. 7 Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (verso; see fig. 1 for recto)



from Dunhuang were made on a silk support. In the early twentieth century, Stein collected 230 banners from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang: 179 were made of silk, 42 from hemp, and 9 from paper.¹² The lightweight and translucent quality of plain silk, in turn, was directly connected to the production of painted banners and their display (see the silk banner in fig. 3). As previously mentioned, the efficacy of dharanis and mantras was marshaled not only through oral recitation but also by wearing talismans bearing the syllables of the dharani or mantra. Yet there were other ways in which the efficacy was transmitted, such as the nonhuman agency of shadows and wind.¹³ In medieval China, dharanis and mantras were often carved on the sides of stone pillars, and it was believed that the shadows cast by a pillar or the dust lifted from its surface by wind had the capability to transfer the dharani's benefits onto devotees.¹⁴

There was a productive conflation of Buddhist texts with regard to the lexicon of stone pillars and banners. Both objects were known in premodern China by the same word, *chuang*.¹⁵ It is therefore intriguing that dharani pillars and painted banners were similarly constructed according to a tripartite structure of head, body, and base (or bottom streamers). But whereas stone pillars were static, silk banners, by the lightweight and flexible nature of the material, could sway in the wind (fig. 6). This implies that unless hung directly against a wall or pillar, banners could be viewed from both sides.

Dunhuang manuscripts contain references to the visual impact of vibrantly colored silk banners that swayed in the wind. For example, a passage in the manuscript Pelliot chinois 2044, in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, describes the

skillful division of colors in woven silk and artful stitches in vermilion; hanging from a tall pole against the clear blue sky, the end of a rainbow flutters and appears in the sky; the wind [blows] it distantly one revolution and in one hundred places, disasters dissipate; its shadow appears to one thousand households and ten thousand kinds of fortune accumulate. . . .¹⁶

When the Mahāmāyūrī banner was acquired by the Museum in 2007, it was mounted onto a textile-covered panel, allowing only one side to be seen. In spring 2019, the banner underwent detailed conservation by Minsun Hwang and her team in the Department of Textile Conservation. The banner was removed from the panel (fig. 7), revealing that the front (recto) and back (verso) of the painting were both painted with the same motif

fig. 8a Banner with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa (this side showing Dhṛtarāṣṭra). Toyuk, 9th century. Ramie, 18½ × 11 in. (47 × 28 cm). Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (III 7305)

fig. 8b Banner with Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa (this side showing Virūpākṣa)

fig. 9 Black and red ink outlines visible in the hands and arms of Mahāmāyūrī from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (recto) (see fig. 1)

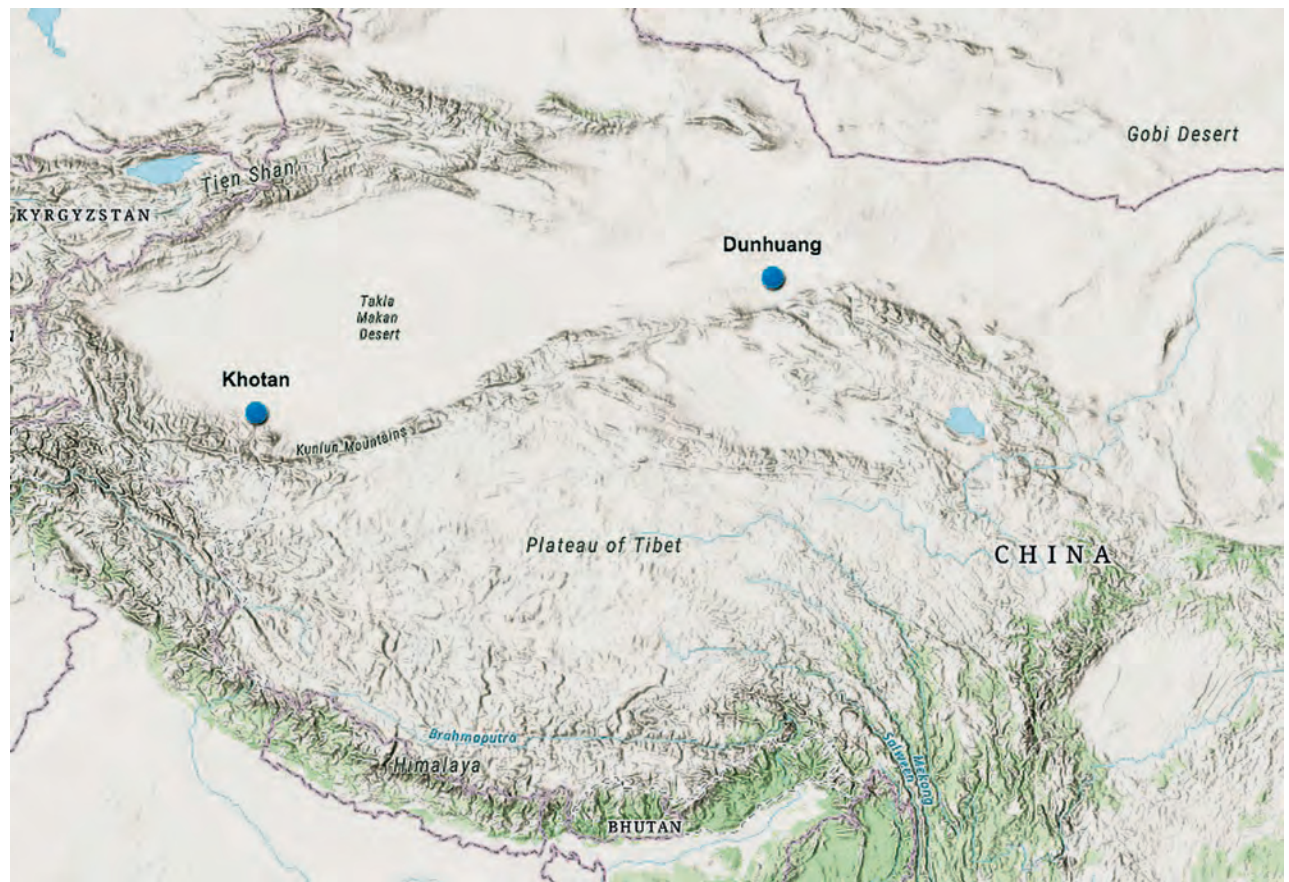


of Mahāmāyūrī, albeit with minor variations. In addition, the verso of the painting bore an inscription written in black ink that was faintly visible on the recto.

Extant double-sided banners from the silk routes were made from hemp, ramie, or silk, but the double-sided imagery was produced in different ways. Because hemp and ramie offer a more opaque painting ground than silk, the images on the verso and recto were drawn or transferred separately, either by freehand or through

the use of stencils. By comparison, paintings from the Turfan Collection in the former Museum für Indische Kunst (now Museum für Asiatische Kunst), Berlin, show variations of double-sided painting, including some paintings with the same image painted on both sides of a banner. Another ramie banner in the collection displays different though related motifs on each side: Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūpākṣa, the guardian kings of the East and West, respectively (fig. 8a, b). They are

fig. 10 Map showing locations of Khotan and Dunhuang



identified by their attributes of a bow and arrow (Dhṛtarāṣṭra) and a flaming jewel (Virūpākṣa).¹⁷

In contrast, the translucent quality of silk enabled underpaintings made on one side to be visible from the other side. In the case of the Mahāmāyūrī banner, black underpainting appears only on one side, therefore designating that side as the recto (see fig. 1). This effect is most visible in areas of bare skin and particularly in the deity's arms and upturned hand (fig. 9).¹⁸ From visual observation, the contours of the underpainting were carefully filled in with colored pigments, after which a deep red outline was painted over the black underpainting, partially obscuring it. The other side of the painting bears no trace of black underpainting, only red outlines, which demonstrates that the silk was sufficiently sheer so as to render the black outlines visible on the verso (see fig. 7). On the verso, the same painting process was followed with the colored pigments applied first, then the tracing of red outlines. The inscription referred to earlier was written on the verso. With the exception of minor motifs, such as the rendering of flowers and the treatment of drapery around the deity's waist, the two paintings of Mahāmāyūrī are mirror images of each other.

Another noteworthy element in this painting is the unusual attention paid to textiles. The deity is clad in an

Indian-style skirtlike garment called a dhoti, which is composed of a pale orange textile decorated with a regular pattern of blue and red quatrefoil-shaped flowers. This resembles clamp-resist dyed silk textiles recovered from oasis cities of the Silk Road. The clamp-resist dyeing technique resulted in symmetrical patterns of the sort seen in the dhoti worn by Mahāmāyūrī. Wooden blocks carved with symmetrical patterns created through a juxtaposition of convex and concave shapes were affixed on either side of a piece of cloth or a folded piece of cloth and clamped together, after which the cloth was placed in dye. The convex areas resisted dye, while the concave areas created space for the dye to soak through the cloth. Multicolored patterns could be produced through a combination of repeated clamp-resist dyeing and hand painting by brush.¹⁹

The garment is fastened around the waist with green, red, and purple cloth, and a double-faced blue-and-red scarf billows artfully along the length of the deity's body.²⁰ As important Silk Road commodities, the representation of silk textiles in this painted banner merits attention. The detailed representation is also evident in a separate group of painted banners, which attests to the vibrancy of banner-painting traditions along the southern silk route, and in particular, the artistic impact of the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan (fig. 10).



fig. 11 Banner with Vajrapāṇi. From Dunhuang, Guiyijun period (848–1036). Ink and color on silk, 21% × 5% in. (55 × 14.5 cm). British Museum, London (1919,0101,0.103) (Ch.Ivi.002)



fig. 12 Mural-painting fragment showing deity holding a peacock feather. Probably from Khotan, dates uncertain. Painting on plaster, 11 × 10 in. (28 × 25.5 cm). British Museum, London (1925,0619,0.27)



fig. 13 Plate with a hunting scene from the tale of Bahram Gur (r. 420–438) and Azadeh. Sasanian, ca. 5th century. Silver with mercury gilding, H. 1% in. (4.1 cm); Diam. 7% in. (20.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1994 (1994.402)

SILK BANNERS ON THE SILK ROAD

Of the silk banners recovered by Stein from Mogao Cave 17, a group of ten that were gathered during his second expedition serves as a particularly instructive point of comparison for the Mahāmāyūrī banner. The group is now divided between the British Museum in London (three paintings) and the National Museum of India in New Delhi (seven paintings).²¹ The works display stylistic traits of Khotanese and Himalayan artistic traditions, the latter of which reflects on the Tibetan occupation of Khotan between the seventh and ninth centuries. Like the Mahāmāyūrī banner, one from this latter group is inscribed on the verso. The Tibetan inscription identifies the deity represented on the recto as Vajrapāṇi (fig. 11).²² The writing of inscriptions on the verso rather than on the recto is more commonly seen among Himalayan *thangkas*, portable Buddhist paintings that are usually painted on a heavier canvas ground. The Mahāmāyūrī banner and the ten banners from the British Museum and National Museum of India do not have cartouches, further distinguishing them from banners that were inscribed in Chinese.

The paintings in this group reveal a number of consistencies, despite subtle variations in the color and quality of the silk ground.²³ Similar to the Mahāmāyūrī banner, they feature a single bodhisattva standing in contrapposto under a round canopy atop a lotus pedestal, wearing a dhoti and scarves and holding a ritual implement, while adorned with gold jewelry and peaked crowns. The use of bright colors and the lavish attention paid to the linear, ikat-like patterned effects of the textiles are particularly striking.²⁴

Does the Mahāmāyūrī banner belong to this group? It shares the motif of a standing deity on a lotus pedestal, and the borders have similarly been sewn rather than painted. However, there are important differences. Although roughly the same height, the Mahāmāyūrī banner is nearly twice as wide as the ten banners in London and New Delhi. Its painting style also displays a greater sense of refinement, and the floral textile pattern is distinct from the striped ikat textiles of the other banners. Nevertheless, the Khotanese stylistic elements of the Mahāmāyūrī banner are corroborated by visual and epigraphic evidence stemming from the painting itself. Several features in the painting suggest that it was made in Khotan, or in Dunhuang by a Khotanese artist or one familiar with Khotanese stylistic idioms. A mural-painting fragment probably from a site in Khotan shows a peacock feather wielded in the hand of a deity (fig. 12). The three-dimensional modeling in the face and body of the deity and in the petals of the lotus pedestal are also

characteristic of the Khotanese painting style, as are the broad facial features, high arched eyebrows, heavily lidded eyes, and long nose bridge of Mahāmāyūrī and the seated Buddha in the banner head (see fig. 5).²⁵ The painting further displays visual evidence of the cross-cultural exchanges that typically characterize Khotanese painting by the dramatically billowing ribbons attached to either side of the crown, for example, which originate from those worn by Sasanian kings (fig. 13) and demonstrate the afterlife of earlier Iranian motifs.²⁶

The lightweight nature and portability of painted banners offer a glimpse into how Central Asian iconography and painting styles were transmitted along the silk routes. Importantly, as our knowledge of Khotanese painting is largely informed by mural-painting fragments and paintings executed on wooden panels, the Mahāmāyūrī banner provides valuable insight into Khotanese visual culture and Buddhist practice. Equally of value, the association of the Mahāmāyūrī banner with a Khotanese donor is demonstrated by a close reading of the painting's hitherto unexamined inscription.

A KHOTANESE OFFICIAL'S DONATION

*Yaraiṣā nāmai āmācā haṣṭe tcahauryām paṣāṃ
ba'ysuṣṭe brrī[ye. . .*

(The *āmāca*-official named *Yaraiṣa* donated, in love
of bodhi of the Four Assemblies. . .)

This inscription on the Mahāmāyūrī banner was written on the left edge of the verso side of the painting (fig. 14) in Khotanese, a middle-Iranian language, and in the Brāhmī script. After the painting was completed, the writer must have turned the painting sideways and inscribed the text from left to right.²⁷ The text begins below the canopy and above the image of Mahāmāyūrī. The first syllable is unclear, but there is space for only one syllable in front of the second and third syllables, which are clearly *rai* and *ṣā*. The first syllable may be tentatively read as *ya*. Thus, the first three syllables, which constitute the name of the donor, may be reconstructed as **Yaraiṣa*.²⁸ Due to damage, it is impossible to know how much text is missing at the end of the inscription. The last, partially visible syllable is that of *brrī*, no doubt the beginning of the word *brrīya*, meaning “love.” The space of the torn section of the banner would have allowed for several more words. One would assume, based on similar inscriptions, that the intentions of the donor might have been expressed. The missing part might have also included the date when

the painting was made, but this scenario is less likely because the date is usually given at the beginning of a dedicatory inscription.²⁹

The meaning of the extant part of the inscription is otherwise clear: an official with the title of *āmāca*, possibly named *Yaraiṣa*, donated something “in love of bodhi of the Four Assemblies.” The verb used here, *haṭiṣ-*, has the general meaning “to give.”³⁰ But in religious contexts, it often means more specifically “to donate,” which better fits the context of this inscription.³¹ The inscription does not specify what this *āmāca* official donated, but it is very likely that it was the painting on which this inscription was written. The phrase “in love of bodhi” is commonly found in Khotanese donation texts. For instance, when commissioning a text about the Buddha's former births, titled *Jātakastava*, the donor “ordered it to be written in love of bodhi.”³² The phrase “Four Assemblies” refers to the four groups of Buddhists: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The genitive plural construction “of the Four Assemblies” shows that the donation was not merely for the personal benefit of the donor but that of all Buddhist devotees.

The title *āmāca* held by the donor of this painting derives from the Sanskrit term *āmātya*, meaning “minister.”³³ In eighth-century secular documents from Khotan, the term was often used in combination with other titles to denote an official of the highest status in the government of Khotan.³⁴ Because of the centrality of this title in the Khotanese bureaucracy, it also appeared in Chinese (*amozhi*) and Tibetan (*a-ma-cha*), the languages of the two empires that ruled Khotan between the seventh and ninth centuries. In Khotanese documents from Dunhuang, most of which date to the tenth century, *āmāca* remained an important title.³⁵ For instance, in the preface to the *Jātakastava*, the author of the text prays for the people of Khotan: after mentioning the king, the queen, and the princes, the author continues to list “the great prime minister (Khotanese: *tsai-syāṃ*; Chinese: *zaixiang*), *āmāca* the servant of the god,” as well as “the good, the bad, and the middle, all the people in the country.”³⁶ From the hierarchical sequencing of the prayer it is clear that in the tenth century, *āmāca*, while a lower title than prime minister, was still one of the most important titles in Khotan. It is therefore fitting that an *āmāca* should have had the means to commission such a lavish silk painting. But how did a painting commissioned by a Khotanese official end up in the library cave in Dunhuang? To answer this question, we need to place the life of this painting in the context of the political history of Central Asia in the ninth to the tenth century.



fig. 14 Inscription from Banner with Mahāmāyūrī (verso; see fig. 1 for recto)

DUNHUANG AND KHOTAN: SILK ROAD ENVOYS AND BUDDHIST PATRONAGE

There was an era of political fragmentation across Asia during the ninth and tenth centuries. The three ruling empires—the Tibetan Empire (618–842), the Uyghur Empire (744–840), and the Tang dynasty (618–907)—that dominated Central Asia in the previous centuries were defeated in the mid- to late ninth century.³⁷ Both Khotan and Dunhuang were under the rule of the Tibetan Empire until the mid-ninth century, when they each acquired political independence. While it is very likely that Khotan and Dunhuang exchanged envoys in the ninth century, the earliest documentation about such an event dates to 901.³⁸ The diplomatic relations between the two states were further solidified during the tenth century by intermarriage of the Khotanese royal

family and the Cao family that ruled Dunhuang.³⁹ As a result, there was no major warfare between these two states for at least a century, and images of the kings and queens of Khotan appeared next to images of the lords of Dunhuang in the Dunhuang caves.⁴⁰ Although Dunhuang and Khotan were separated by about a thousand miles (or 1,564 kilometers on the closest modern highway), they had a uniquely close relationship in the ninth and tenth centuries.

This relationship was sustained by a frequent exchange of personnel. Scholars have noticed that a large number of the Khotanese-language documents found in the library cave in Dunhuang are reports by Khotanese envoys.⁴¹ The Dunhuang government and monasteries often provided accommodations for Khotanese envoys and monks.⁴² Similarly, many Dunhuang residents also traveled to Khotan, evidenced by the several contracts made by these travelers.⁴³ As a result, there was likely a constant presence of Khotanese elites, including princes, princesses, government officials, and Buddhist monks in Dunhuang during the ninth and tenth centuries.⁴⁴ At the same time, these Khotanese luminaries engaged with the local society of Dunhuang as Buddhist patrons. Dunhuang was known as a particularly important place for Buddhist activities, and in Khotanese texts, Dunhuang is sometimes described as a “land of god” (Khotanese: *gyasta/jasta-kṣīra*).⁴⁵ Many Khotanese travelers who visited Dunhuang were monks. According to an envoy’s report, for instance, a diplomatic mission to China from Khotan, led by a certain Ana Saṃgaa, had eleven *ācārya* (Buddhist teachers) and six *gṛhastha* (householders).⁴⁶ But even laypeople like these householders were probably Buddhists. Khotanese monks and laypeople were engaged in Buddhist devotional activities, such as the lighting of lamps, the organization of vegetarian feasts at Buddhist monasteries, the building of stupas, and the construction of Buddhist caves. For instance, a Khotanese envoy named Ṣaṃdū “went around the city to 121 shrines” and “sent 502 litres of oil for use in all the temples situated throughout the city” when he was in Dunhuang.⁴⁷

One of the most important and visible ways Khotanese people engaged with the Buddhist communities in Dunhuang was through the making of paintings. A prime minister from Khotan commissioned paintings in the Dunhuang caves to pray for good relations between Dunhuang and Khotan and the health of both sovereigns. In this prayer, he described the painting process as “Yielding the precious treasure of exotic nature, I summoned crafty artisans of the red and black colors. [The

artisans] drew the ornamentations of *tathāgata*, and painted the true image of bodhisattvas.”⁴⁸ Among the nearly five hundred caves in the Mogao Buddhist Cave Complex, several have been identified as having been either repaired or constructed by Khotanese donors.⁴⁹

On the topic of the sponsorship of paintings by Khotanese donors, one letter is particularly relevant to the painted banner under discussion. In 964, a female Khotanese servant residing in Dunhuang wrote a letter to Khotan, in which she asked the princess and prime minister to send support for the construction of a cave shrine. Among the things she asked for were “colors for painting” (Chinese, *huacaise*) and “colored thread for making an embroidered image for the Sanjie Monastery” (Chinese, *Sanjiesi xiuxiang xianse*).⁵⁰ The “embroidered image for the Sanjie Monastery” likely refers to items that were donated to the monastery. As historian Rong Xinjiang has shown, the Sanjie Monastery was the original repository of many manuscripts and artifacts that were later deposited in the Dunhuang library cave.⁵¹ The letter from 964 provides a firm example of Khotanese officials donating religious images to the monastery, and in a similar way, the Mahāmāyūrī banner may also have been donated to the Sanjie Monastery, after which it was deposited in the library cave. The *āmāca* official *Yaraiṣa could have had this painted banner made in Khotan and brought to Dunhuang, or he could have traveled to Dunhuang himself and commissioned the banner there. In either scenario, the distinctive Khotanese style reflects the impact of Khotanese visual culture upon artistic production in Dunhuang.

The Mahāmāyūrī banner is not the only painting bearing Khotanese inscriptions that was found in the Dunhuang library cave. There are about half a dozen known examples of paintings on paper and silk with Khotanese inscriptions, and this recent acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum is a significant addition to this small but important group of materials.⁵² A few common features unite the Mahāmāyūrī banner and the other pieces. First, they were commissioned by Khotanese donors, probably officials and other social elites. Second, either the objects were made in Khotan, then brought to Dunhuang, or they were made in Dunhuang at the request of Khotanese donors. Thirdly, these items were likely donated to monasteries in Dunhuang, particularly the Sanjie Monastery, as offerings. Because of their similarities, the paintings merit further scholarly attention as a coherent set of materials, which will allow a better understanding of the presence and the role in Dunhuang of Khotanese art and Khotanese people.

THE MAHĀMĀYŪRĪ BANNER SINCE ITS DISCOVERY

In 2007, the Mahāmāyūrī banner was auctioned at Christie’s, London, as part of a sale by the Andrews family, who were stated as owners of the painting through their descent from Frederick Henry Andrews.⁵³ Frederick Andrews had been a friend and sometime assistant to Stein from their meeting in Lahore in the late 1880s until Stein’s death in 1943. During four expeditions to Central Asia between 1900 and 1930 (Andrews did not participate), Stein acquired numerous artifacts, and Andrews assisted with their cataloguing and study. If we begin with a reasonable assumption that this painting came from the library cave, then how did Andrews acquire it?⁵⁴ Did he buy the painting himself or could it have been given to him by Stein?

The former seems implausible. Andrews’s financial situation was not robust.⁵⁵ It is unlikely he could have afforded the painting were it offered for sale. Second, the piece was in a fragmentary and unconserved condition when it came to Christie’s. If Andrews had bought the banner either for his own pleasure or for resale, it would be a reasonable assumption that he would have had it mounted and framed—or that it would have been mounted before sale to him—to increase its worth. So, while we cannot state with certainty that Andrews did not buy this piece, it is not a well-supported hypothesis. Is it possible that it was gifted to him by Stein? It was a condition of Stein’s grants that all finds were to join museum collections in Britain and India, and he was meticulous in recording his finds in situ, making such gifts unlikely.⁵⁶

If Andrews did not purchase the painting or receive it as a gift, and it was originally part of Stein’s collection, then how might it have found its way to Andrews? As argued below, it is plausible that he acquired it accidentally because of the nature of this particular collection. In order to understand the situation, some background on the relationship between Stein and Andrews and on the acquisition and documentation of material from Dunhuang is necessary.

Andrews, a graduate of Saint Martin’s School of Art in London, arrived in Lahore in 1890 to become vice principal of Mayo School of Arts. In Lahore, he met Stein, with whom he remained lifelong friends. Stein was meticulous about recordkeeping and gave most of the artifacts that he excavated a unique site mark when in the field, writing on the artifact itself. He kept lists of the site marks so that, when unpacked, the material could be cross-checked. These lists were also published in his expedition reports, so that all the material was deposited in public collections.

In 1907, Stein visited Dunhuang on his second expedition (1906–8) and acquired thousands of manuscripts and hundreds of textiles and portable paintings on silk, paper, and hemp from the library cave. This material was not acquired through excavation but in rushed and clandestine circumstances in which Stein and his expedition assistant and interpreter, Jiang Xiaowan (d. 1922), were given bundles of material by the unofficial guardian of the cave, Wang Yuanlu (ca. 1849–1931), to examine secretly.⁵⁷ These items were inscribed with a site mark, such as Ch.i.001, “Ch.” indicating Dunhuang (Ch’ien-fo tung), “i” as the bundle number, and “001” as the serial number (although it is probable that the serial number was added later).⁵⁸

When preparing for their departure from the field in July 1908, Jiang started to unpack, number, list, and repack all regular bundles, making index slips as he went along.⁵⁹ He only had time to record about one-third of the material and although his index slips were used during the unpacking at the British Museum, the authors of this article have been unable to locate them. Consequently, unlike other material, there was no complete master list to use for checking when unpacking the Dunhuang material in London, nor did all of the material contain a site mark.⁶⁰

When Stein’s finds arrived in England in 1909, Andrews was employed by the India Office Library, London, to unpack, sort, and list them. Stein notes in July 1910 that seventy to eighty banners had been flattened.⁶¹ Most of the paintings required some basic conservation before they could be identified and catalogued. In many cases, pieces of paper or silk were discovered in crumpled balls or stuck together with other pieces, either deliberately—old textiles and paper being used for patching—or accidentally, as a result of being squashed together in storage.

The scholar Raphaël Petrucci compiled two sections of a catalogue on the paintings, which were published as Appendix E to Stein’s expedition report.⁶² Laurence Binyon, assistant keeper in charge of the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Manuscripts at the British Museum, and his assistant, Arthur Waley, took over this work after Petrucci’s early death. A list of all the identified paintings was prepared for the end of the chapter on Dunhuang, but the banner is mentioned neither here nor in the Appendix.

Stein’s second expedition was funded jointly by the India Office and the British Museum, with the agreement that the finds would be divided: three-fifths to India and two-fifths to the British Museum. In 1918–19, the selection for India, still in London, was packed into

sixty-seven crates and sent to the India Store Depot in Lambeth, London, for safekeeping during World War I.⁶³ Those destined for the British Museum were also packed for safeguarding, and in 1919 they were acquired into the British Museum collections,⁶⁴ and the others were shipped to India.⁶⁵ Again, the banner was not listed among any of these records.

However, this does not mean it was not from Stein’s second expedition. By no means had all the material been conserved at this time and some remained in a state that conservators at the time did not feel able to tackle. In these early years, many of the original bundles are marked as having been returned from conservation as untreatable.⁶⁶ So, it is possible that the painting was among the second expedition material kept at the British Museum in an unidentified state. Furthermore, material from Stein’s third expedition (1916–18) was sent to British India to be conserved, listed, and prepared for acquisition. Stein had acquired more material from Dunhuang on this expedition, and while there is no evidence of paintings or banners among them, it is not impossible that some of the material included unconserved fragments, such as the banner.⁶⁷

It is certain that the painting is not described in Stein’s published reports, nor in any of the unpublished lists and correspondence, strongly suggesting that it was not recognized at this time. The reason could be that the work was either pasted onto the back of another painting or hidden between outer wrappers or remained lost in a bundle. It is also possible that the painting was mixed in with material that Andrews had at home. For a scholar to work from home was quite common at this time, and items from the Stein collections were often sent to specialists in London and farther afield. Andrews undoubtedly worked in this manner, as is evidenced by later correspondence from Stein asking Andrews to look for certain items.

Could such an item have remained with Andrews and only later been unfolded to be revealed as an important painting? It is not far-fetched to suggest that Andrews, with his background, familiarity with the material, and knowledge of the conservation work, did this himself. But then if he discovered the piece in such a way some time after the expeditions, why did he not inform Stein about it and ensure that it was returned to the collection? Or was it discovered only after Stein’s death? But then Andrews might have been expected to return it to the museum.⁶⁸

We cannot at present, and might never, be able to answer these questions. But it remains most probable that the banner was from the library cave at Dunhuang,

acquired by Stein either in 1907 or from 1913 to 1916, but then in a condition unrecognizable as a fine painting. It is possible that—still unrecognized—it accidentally remained in Andrews’s possession and only came to light after Stein’s death in 1943, and that Andrews either forgot about it or died before it could be unfolded. The subsequent arrival of the banner at the Metropolitan Museum thus closes the circle on the intriguing journey of this important painted silk banner, from its initial production, its circulation within the cultural milieu of medieval Silk Road oasis cities, and finally, its acquisition in the early twentieth century to the present day.

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NOTES

- 1 The six translations are the Taishō Tripiṭaka texts T19.982, T19.984, T19.985, T19.986, T19.987, and T19.988. The various recensions bear slightly different titles but share in common a focus on Mahāmāyūri and the healing or apotropaic properties of the incantation (dharani or mantra). While these two terms are often used interchangeably, one difference between them is that mantras are usually only a few syllables and dharanis are often longer.
- 2 These are the translations by Śrīmitra (T19.986, T19.987) and Kumārajīva (T19.988). For studies of the Mahāmāyūri Dharani Sutra, see Sørensen 2006, Des Jardins 2011, and Overbey 2016.
- 3 T19.987.479a29–b3.
- 4 T19.987.479b3–9.
- 5 T19.987.479b9–11; T19.988.483a27–29. This narrative framework appears in T19.987 and in the Kumārajīva translation (T19.988).
- 6 For example, a medicine bowl is one of the objects commonly wielded by Bhaiṣajyaguru (the “Medicine Buddha”) in paintings and sculptures.
- 7 Pandey and Pandey 1988, pp. 9–10.
- 8 According to the ritual manual attributed to Amoghavajra, *Ritual Commentary Spoken by the Buddha on the Altar of the Great Peacock Wisdom King’s Image*, the four-armed Mahāmāyūri is seated on a “golden peacock king” and holds peacock feathers in his second left hand; see T19.983A.440a4–10. Although Mahāmāyūri is represented in the Metropolitan Museum banner as a standing deity with two arms, the association with the peacock and peacock feathers remains consistent.
- 9 T19.986.477c7–8.
- 10 Mahāmāyūri was also associated with rainmaking rituals and with Buddhist kingship. For images of Mahāmāyūri in Dunhuang and Sichuan, see Wang Huimin 1996, Hashimura 2011, and M. Wang n.d. (forthcoming).
- 11 See Copp 2014.
- 12 Wang Le 2007, pp. 58–59. For hemp banners from Dunhuang, see R. Whitfield 1998.
- 13 On nonhuman agency in Buddhist rituals, see E. Wang 2011 and Kim 2017.
- 14 For a relevant passage from the *Sūtra of the Revered and Victorious Dhāraṇī of the Buddha’s Uṣṇīṣa*, see Copp 2014, p. 146.
- 15 Based on her reinterpretation of the mural painting on the south wall of Mogao Cave 217, Shimono Akiko argues that visual evidence exists for the practice of inscribing dharanis upon a cloth banner, and then hanging the banner from a tall structure; see Shimono 2004. For an important recent treatment of dharani pillars, see Liu 2008, in which the author argues for the multi-valent associations of dharani pillars, stating that they functioned not only as vehicles for dharanis but also as stupas.
- 16 Pelliot chinois 2044, Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (hereafter BnF), <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc118669x>. See Huang and Wu 1995, p. 159. We thank Allan Ding for this reference.
- 17 The double-sided Turfan banners are also discussed in Zaleski 2016, p. 83. We thank Mélodie Doumy for this reference. The Turfan banners are analyzed extensively in Bhattacharya-Haesner 2003.
- 18 The technique is discussed in Zaleski 2016, p. 85.
- 19 See Zhao 2007b, pp. 192–95.
- 20 Double-faced weave silk fabrics are known from the silk routes, resulting in different colors and even different patterns on each side of the fabric. For an example, see Zhao 2007a, pl. 124.
- 21 For the archaeological report, consult Stein 1921, vol. 2, pp. 1073–75.
- 22 There are two Tibetan inscriptions on the verso, one of which is a rough transliteration of the deity’s name (*ba ca ra pang ne*).

- For the inscription, see S. Whitfield and Williams 2004, p. 210, pl. 131.
- 23 For the British Museum paintings, see R. Whitfield 1982–85, vol. 1, pp. 333–34. For the National Museum of India paintings, see Chandra and Sharma 2012, pp. 221–23.
- 24 Compare, for example, to the solid-colored textiles in “Banner with Avalokiteśvara,” Tang dynasty (618–907) or Guiyijun period (848–1036), ink and color on silk (56.5 × 16.5 cm), British Museum, 1919,0101,0.124 (Ch.00113). Because of the striped textiles of the garments and the ill-defined musculature of the bodhisattvas, which are also present in mural paintings from Balawaste, located in the eastern part of the Khotan oasis in present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, archaeologist Gerd Gropp has argued that they are Khotanese in origin; see Gropp 1974, p. 94.
- 25 In the premodern connoisseurial literature, Khotanese painters such as Yuchi (Weichi) Yiseng (act. second half of the 7th century) were known for their technique of chiaroscuro. For a synthesis of the relevant primary sources on Khotanese painters, see Nagahiro 1955, p. 73.
- 26 Khotanese painting is said to reflect South Asian, Chinese, Sasanian, and Sogdian elements. See Williams 1973, pp. 110–11. It is worth noting that the unusual standing position of Mahāmāyūri, who is usually shown seated on a peacock mount, echoes sixth-century Mahāmāyūri sculptures at the Ellora Caves in western India; see Malandra 1993, pp. 96–97. Geri Malandra indicates that Mahāmāyūri is paired with Bhṛkuṭi in Ellora Caves 6 and 8, which is unique to the site, and there are no textual precedents for Mahāmāyūri’s appearance. Nevertheless, the standing posture is very common in representations of deities in painted banners, so this does not imply a direct connection but rather points toward two distinct treatments of the standing Mahāmāyūri.
- 27 This way of writing Khotanese inscriptions on paintings is more common than when the author writes the inscriptions vertically along the vertical direction of the painting, which is found in Pelliot tibétain 2222, BnF, <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc123610h>. See Filigenzi and Maggi 2008.
- 28 This name is not otherwise attested in Khotanese texts.
- 29 For a similar inscription that begins with the date, see Stein 1921, vol. 2, p. 1012.
- 30 Emmerick 1968, p. 145.
- 31 See examples in Bailey 1979, pp. 448–49.
- 32 Skjærvø 2002, p. 299.
- 33 Olivelle 2013, p. 40. This is the title of the famous minister Yaśa for King Aśoka in the Khotanese legend of Aśoka. See Bailey 1951a, pp. 40–44.
- 34 Wen 2008, p. 124.
- 35 For this dating of the Khotanese documents, see Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 70–105.
- 36 Translation adapted from Dresden 1955, p. 422.
- 37 For this history, see Chavannes 1942, Maeda 1964, Beckwith 1993, and Drompp 2005.
- 38 Rong and Zhu 2013, p. 110.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 151–70.
- 40 This is particularly true in Cave 98, which contains the largest donor image in all the Dunhuang caves: the Khotanese king.
- 41 Kumamoto 1982. These envoys also left records in Chinese and Tibetan in official letters, royal edicts, and notebooks. See Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 1–14. For the Tibetan documents in particular, see Rong and Zhu 2013, pp. 375–412.
- 42 For example, for the Dunhuang government’s provision of food to Khotanese envoys, see the British Library manuscript Stein 1366 in Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 3, p. 285; for a Dunhuang monastery’s provision of food to Khotanese envoys, see Pelliot chinois 2642, BnF (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8303278d/f1.image>); Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 3, p. 209.
- 43 In a tantalizing piece of evidence, of the forty-six people living in Suo Liuzhu Lane in Dunhuang who were late in their payment of taxation in firewood, twelve were recorded as having traveled to Khotan. See the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Δ x2149, in Tang and Lu 1986–90, vol. 2, p. 446.
- 44 Kumamoto 1996.
- 45 IOL Khot S. 21, British Library, in Skjærvø 2002, pp. 522–24.
- 46 Pelliot chinois 2958, BnF (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8302289w.r-Pelliot%20chinois%202958?rk=21459;2>); Bailey 1967, pp. 96–97.
- 47 Bailey 1951b, p. 44.
- 48 Pelliot chinois 2812, BnF (<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc119447n>). The Chinese text reads: *She yilei zhi zhencai. Zhao danqing zhi qiaojiang. Hui rulai zhi puxi, tu pusa zhi zhenyi*. See Zhang and Rong 2008, pp. 91–92.
- 49 Chen 2014, pp. 244–47.
- 50 Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Δ x.2148(2)+, Δ x.6069(1). See Zhang and Rong 2008, p. 293.
- 51 Rong 1999–2000.
- 52 For these inscribed paintings, see Stein 1921, vol. 2, p. 1012, Emmerick and Dudbridge 1978, Emmerick 1984, and Filigenzi and Maggi 2008.
- 53 Sale, Christie’s, London, May 15, 2007, lot 171; <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/an-extremely-rare-and-important-tang-dynasty-4905708-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=4905708>. See also S. Whitfield 2017.
- 54 Although forgeries were produced later of such material, the fragmentary state of this piece, its distinctive subject matter, and its sophistication all strongly suggest that this is not a forgery. See Cohen 2002, pp. 24–30, and R. Whitfield 2002 for discussions.
- 55 At least this is the impression from reading Stein on Andrews, along with Andrews’s dissatisfaction with most of his positions, although Andrews left a reasonable legacy.
- 56 The British Museum Act of 1767 allowed the Trustees “to exchange, sell or dispose of any Duplicates of Printed Books. . . .” This was most probably behind the decision to exchange a Dunhuang blockprint from the Stein Dunhuang collection, 1919,0101,0.241 (Ch.00185.a), with an item from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in 1924 (927.24).
- 57 Stein 1921, vol. 2, pp. 801ff.
- 58 In the expedition report, Stein says, “I may note here that when the marking with serial numbers was made at the British Museum . . .” (1921, vol. 2, p. 814n2).
- 59 While it seems that most of the paintings were listed at this time, some of the lists for the paintings have not been found.
- 60 It is regrettable that the site mark, when given, was not always recorded in catalogues and databases of the material. International Dunhuang Project (IDP) started recording this information in its database at the British Library, but the work is still to be completed. However, from the work done, we can see that the site mark carries important information about the original storage of the manuscripts in the bundles in the cave, as suggested previously by Rong Xinjiang and others. These

results will be published in a forthcoming article by Paschalia Terzi and Susan Whitfield.

61 Stein to Percy Allen, July 17, 1910, “Papers of Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943),” MSS Stein 7/81–2, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Note that the material was not yet acquisitioned into any collection.

62 Stein 1921, vol. 3, pp. 1392–1428, followed by a short essay by Binyon (ibid., pp. 1428–31).

63 An exception was made for the Kharoṣṭhī tablets because many were due for India but still being catalogued. Permission was made for the Kharoṣṭhī tablets to be kept unpacked at the British Museum so that the cataloguing could be completed. The list of the material removed and details of its move on February 12, 1919, are given in “Papers Relating to Sir Marc Aurel Stein,” CE32/23 and CE32/24, Central Archives, British Museum, London.

64 Hence the prefix to their museum reg. number, 1919.

65 Now in the National Museum, New Delhi.

66 For an example of the state of much of the material before conservation and the time-consuming work in flattening folded material, see the British Library’s time-lapse video *Tangut Fragments Conserved by Vania Assis*, filmed by E. Hunter and C. Norman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIP3jMfZkY4>.

67 They included manuscript scrolls and clay relief plaques acquired directly from Wang Yuanlu at the caves, as well as other rolls offered by sellers to Stein in the town and in other places en route. See Stein 1928, pp. 354–62, for a review of this material, which he notes was in good condition—indeed, the Dunhuang manuscripts scholar Fujieda Akira suggested much of it consisted of forgeries (Fujieda 2002). But, more pertinent to the discussion here, it was not in a form that suggests a painting on silk could be hidden among it.

68 It is, of course, also possible that the banner was discovered and unfolded by his family after Andrews’s death in 1957. Apart from small bequests, his estate passed to his nephew, Richard Cuthbert Andrews, and Richard’s wife, Barbara.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATION

T Taishō Tripiṭaka texts (volume and number)

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T19.982
Amoghavajra (Bukong Jin’gang 不空金剛, 705–774), trans. *Fomu da kongque mingwang jing* 佛母大孔雀明王經 (Sūtra on the Buddha’s Mother, the Great Peacock Wisdom King).

T19.983A
Amoghavajra (Bukong Jin’gang 不空金剛, 705–774), attr. to *Foshuo da kongque mingwang huaxiang tanchang yigui* 佛說大孔雀明王畫像壇場儀軌 (The Ritual Commentary Spoken by the Buddha on the Altar of the Great Peacock Wisdom King’s Image).

T19.984
Saṅghabhara (460–524), trans. *Kongquewang zhou jing* 孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra of the Peacock King Mantra).

T19.985
Yijing 義淨 (635–713), trans. *Foshuo da kongque zhou wang jing* 佛說大孔雀呪王經 (Sūtra Preached by the Buddha on the Great Peacock, the King of Mantras).

T19.986
Śrimitra (Boshilimiduoluo 帛尸梨蜜多羅, d. mid-fourth century), trans. *Da jinse kongquewang zhou jing* 大金色孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra of the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra).

T19.987
Śrimitra (Boshilimiduoluo 帛尸梨蜜多羅, d. mid-fourth century), trans. *Foshuo da jinse kongquewang zhou jing* 佛說大金色孔雀王呪經 (Sūtra Preached by the Buddha on the Great Golden Peacock King Mantra).

T19.988
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Joris Hoefnagel's Insects

MARJORIE SHELLEY

The fascination with insects, the most abject and ignoble of God's creations and the subject matter of Joris Hoefnagel's cabinet miniature of about 1594, *Ater* (fig. 1), was a manifestation of the enveloping passion for natural history among sixteenth-century Central European humanists in the circle of Rudolf II Habsburg, the Holy Roman Emperor. This fervor to acquire knowledge and specimens of plants, animals, and the physical world was grounded in the pervasive search to understand the harmony of the universe and the phenomena within it.¹ There was little distinction between nature and art, or between nature and theology, in Hoefnagel's milieu. Divine meaning permeated all God's creations and intellectuals were preoccupied with unlocking their deeper significance. Similar to Hoefnagel's other illuminations,

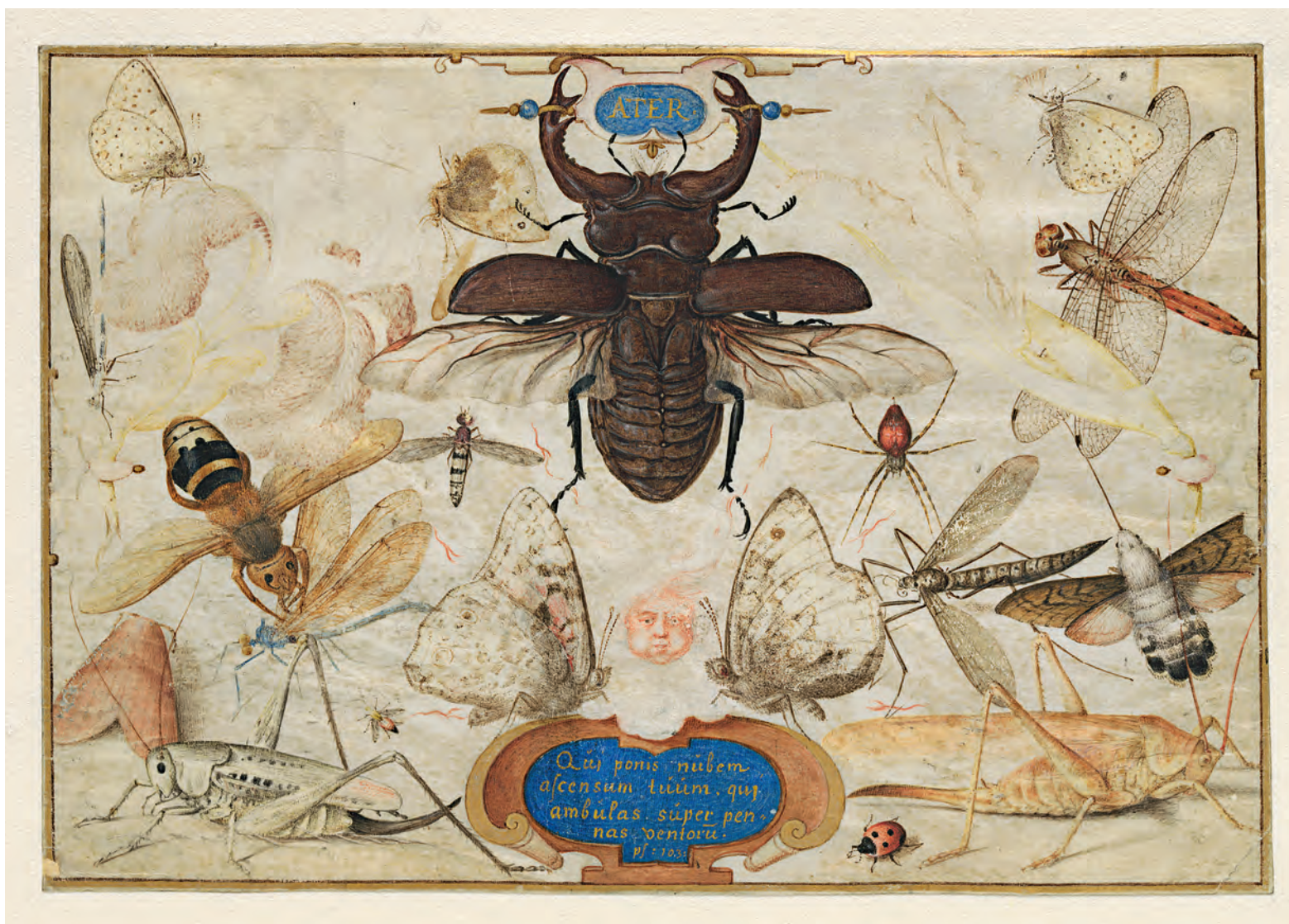


fig. 1 Joris Hoefnagel (Flemish, 1542–1600). *Ater*, ca. 1594. Pen and brown ink, watercolor, opaque paint, shell gold on vellum, $4\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{13}{16}$ in. (12 × 17.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Darwin S. Morse, 1963 (63.200.4)

Ater reflects on these contemporary beliefs through its masterful, lifelike rendering, transcendental meaning, and ability to evoke the spirit of the wondrous in nature, all topics that would have been understood by an elite audience. This article examines the environment in which *Ater* was produced, as well as its tangible and earthly facets, while also investigating the emergence of insect imagery and the sources upon which Hoefnagel drew. The article addresses *Ater*'s materiality and interaction with the viewer, and how this unusual object served as both an amusement and an aid to contemplation in the culture of the court. This multilayered interpretation is based on the presence of fragments of actual butterfly wings among the painted insects, the worn condition of a once princely object, and the ambiguities of technique and title. *Ater* is of further interest, as it is positioned at a turning point between natural history illustration, in its accurate observation and recording of images, and “fine art,”

in its imaginative interpretation of nature and use of Renaissance pictorial devices.

REPRESENTATION OF INSECTS: A SPIRITUAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND CULTURAL AMALGAM

The impulse to describe and gather facts lay at the heart of Renaissance natural history, and is embedded in *Ater*'s insect imagery, a significant component of Hoefnagel's artistic repertory.² Historically, creatures of the earth, such as insects, were disdained and shunned. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, they served as no more than a reflection of sentiments that pervaded Northern Renaissance culture—curiosities referencing the inexplicable and nonnormative events and entities in nature that were bizarre, destructive, or sources of evil. This attitude would seem to imply that the title *Ater* (an age-old Latin term signifying dark, gloomy, and sordid occurrences) was an expression of negative attitudes toward insects; however, this

will be shown in this article to be otherwise.³ Stirred by Protestant and Catholic factions during the Reformation, monsters, prodigies, floods, and earthquakes—cataclysmic events and phenomena that existed beyond the predictable—were viewed as signs of God's wrath and portents of evil. By midcentury, Neo-Stoicism inspired a change in religious thinking, and a more benevolent mood prevailed in which insects and the aberrant were perceived as signs of God's divine presence.⁴ Now celebrated for their elusive habits and strange appearance, such ideas were commonplace, and disseminated in vernacular broadsides, ballads, and pamphlets, as well as through erudite sermons directed to the more learned, including those individuals for whom Hoefnagel made his cabinet miniatures. These images and literary forms encouraged reflection on nature and recognition of the dignity of the humble and inconsequential, among which insects figured prominently.⁵ In the second half of the century, spiritual and philosophical ideas as these persisted, expressed for example by the French essayist Michel de Montaigne, who wrote: "the most ordinary things, the most common and familiar, if we could see them in their true light, would turn out to be the grandest miracles of nature and the most marvelous examples, especially as regards the subject of the action of men."⁶ The English naturalist Thomas Moffett, for whom these lowly creatures were models for human behavior, wrote in the preface to his posthumously published *Insectorum Theatrum* (1634) an admonishment to the reader: "lest we should think God made them in vain . . . that in the universal world there is nothing more divine than these, except Man."⁷

The new charitable attitude toward insects was also supported by secular transformations. During the mid-sixteenth century, Europe was turning away from the dogmatic teachings of classical and medieval authority and poised on the cusp of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. *Ater*'s motifs eloquently convey and bring to mind the multiplicity of flora, fauna, and earthly wonders from all corners of the globe, which rapidly flowed into European ports from extraordinary voyages of exploration during a period that extended over 150 years. Its array of insects reflects the intrigue with all that was natural, artificial, and man-made, as well as the need to amass and collect objects from the exotic and rare to the familiar and commonplace. *Ater* invites close observation of nature that simultaneously attended and inspired the horticultural gardens and zoos that emerged during the Renaissance, and which provided opportunities for firsthand study of their holdings. In addition, *Ater*'s odd, unexpected ensemble

evokes the remarkable collections of the *Kunstammer*, princely cabinets abounding with objects that conferred knowledge and power. The grandest *Kunstammer* belonged to Rudolf II (r. 1576–1612), in whose court Hoefnagel worked, and where this cabinet miniature was likely housed.

Of equal importance in the culture of sixteenth-century Central Europe was the need to spiritually understand all God's creatures, from the least exalted to the "elusive, marvelous, or recondite."⁸ Such theologically inspired ideas corresponded to the new emphasis among natural philosophers, the "scientists" of the era, on empirical observation and description rather than the legends and hearsay of the past, and in turn became the basis of natural history illustration and underscored the pervasive desire among artists to imitate reality. Pictorially, the types of creatures portrayed from the 1550s provided intriguing imagery for audiences who were intently curious about all terrestrial dwellers—the normal and abnormal, exotic or familiar—and fascinated by the illusion of three-dimensional space and hyperrealistic forms imbued with life. To meet this growing desire to accurately record the appearance and habits of these beings, new visual means developed that encompassed perspective, foreshortening, trompe l'oeil illusion, and modeling, techniques that would soon flourish in painting and the graphic arts. It was through this amalgam of social, cultural, and artistic currents that insects, "the miracles of nature that are most conspicuous in the smallest things," entered the margins of mainstream art and thinking.⁹

HOEFNAGEL IN CONTEXT

Hoefnagel produced his miniatures within an inquisitive and vibrant climate. A highly educated and well-traveled naturalist and humanist, as well as a gifted linguist and illuminator, who was referred to as a painter, poet, and Latinist by the biographer Karel van Mander, Hoefnagel began his professional life in his family's thriving Antwerp mercantile business selling tapestries and jewels. Although having little or no formal training as an artist, he would later be appointed imperial court painter and acknowledged by the rulers of Central Europe for his remarkable skill in the illusionistic rendering of natural history and allegorical subjects.¹⁰

Ater, a gem-like miniature that Hoefnagel created in the final phase of his career, would have appealed to the Renaissance humanist in its portrayal of curiosities attributable to God. It is rendered in watercolor, a transparent paint that gradually found equal footing with opaque tempera, the medium that was traditionally

used for miniatures, but present here only in touches and admixtures. It is applied to fine, unblemished white vellum, a support Hoefnagel customarily employed for his illuminations as it imparted an underlying luminosity to the hues of the composition. Like other sixteenth-century miniatures, *Ater*'s palette is composed of the diverse pigments readily procured at the thriving trade fairs and apothecaries of the German states. The most costly colors were ultramarine blue made from lapis lazuli, and shell gold, a finely ground gold paint.¹¹ Set in a decorative framework with cartouches and illusionistic strapwork, the sumptuous materials and presentation were worthy of the emperor and members of the wide intellectual circle to whom such articles of luxury were directed: humanists, natural philosophers, botanists, apothecaries, physicians, merchants, artists, and diplomats. All were among Hoefnagel's colleagues and correspondents, united by a profound interest in worldly phenomena and their representation. Within the corpus of projects Hoefnagel carried out for his great patron and collector Rudolf II was the addition of illustrations to two calligraphy model books by the Hungarian Georg Bocskay. The first is the *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*, made for Rudolf's grandfather Ferdinand I Habsburg, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1561–62 and completed in 1594–96,¹² which Hoefnagel painted with flowers, plants, small animals, and insects. The second is the Viennese writing model book (1571–73, completed 1591–94),¹³ inherited from Archduke Ferdinand II (r. 1564–95). Rudolf II additionally acquired Hoefnagel's four-volume emblematic natural history album, *The Four Elements* (1575–82), of which the first volume, *Animalia rationalia et insecta* (*Ignis*), primarily depicts insects.¹⁴ *Ater* was executed about or after 1594, when Hoefnagel worked at Hradschin, the imperial castle in Prague. Bordered and inscribed in gold, the word "ATER" is written in the smaller cartouche at the top center, and below in a larger cartouche, a praise of God: "Who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind. ps. 103 [104:3]" (fig. 2).¹⁵

EARLY LITERARY AND VISUAL SOURCES ON INSECTS

Even on the threshold of the scientific revolution, there was little information on insects and fewer images documenting the appearance of individual types—circumstances that would have presented Hoefnagel with many challenges in compiling his imagery. Entomology was not yet a named or distinct discipline, and despite the far greater diversity in numbers and morphology than any other phylum, knowledge about

insects and sources for illustration were limited. Investigation into its secrets was thus pursued and shared in the greater context of related subjects: botany, medicine, art, and anatomy.¹⁶ As was the practice among his contemporaries who studied and portrayed the plant and animal kingdom, Hoefnagel corresponded over the course of decades with colleagues throughout Europe who shared his interests.¹⁷ Although there is no evidence that he undertook fieldwork, he and others who depicted these subjects exchanged, borrowed, and copied prints and drawings and worked from preserved, stuffed, and live specimens (though only the most sedentary of the latter were possible to portray). As early as 1563–67, while he was traveling in Spain, Hoefnagel's notebooks reveal that he drew exotic plants and animals directly from life, and in later years, he had access to the innumerable natural history objects and drawings of these subjects by multiple artists in Rudolf II's *Kunstkammer*.¹⁸ Typically, insect material was transmitted by purchase or bequest through generations of naturalists and circulated internationally and within communities of correspondents: artists, draftsmen, apothecaries, merchants, sailors, and others who forged connections through travel and letters. For example, images and specimens were transferred from the Englishman Edward Wotton and the Swiss Conrad Gessner (the "father of zoology") to the Englishman Thomas Penny. They then made their way to the "storehouse of insects" of Moffett, who completed Penny's manuscript that contained illustrations made by the English explorer John White from his travels in Virginia in 1585.¹⁹ Similar transactions originated with the English collector Leonard Plukenet, whose insect holdings came into the ownership of James Petiver, who sold them in 1710 to Hans Sloane, one of the founders of the British Museum, London. This, too, would have been the conduit of some of the material acquired by Hoefnagel.

Specimens and drawings were the most accessible sources of visual material on insects at the time. Apart from biblical stories and fables, written information was scarce but known from the classical authors. Among the few discourses on insects, Aristotle's ubiquitous *Historia animalium* (335–323 B.C.), a compilation of diverse and extensive data, had been greatly acclaimed. But by the late fifteenth century the text was viewed as dogmatic, and the tenets were rejected by Renaissance thinkers who believed that Aristotle's system could "no longer regulate honest inquiry into nature" and encouraged empirical observation to understand its phenomena.²⁰ There is no evidence that

Hoefnagel was directly inspired by Aristotle's text, or by Virgil, who wrote on bees. Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historiae*, which also addresses this category of the animal kingdom, figured more favorably among the artist's contemporaries, notwithstanding criticism for its inaccuracies and exaggerations. In *Ater*, Hoefnagel depicts many of the individuals described in *Naturalis historiae*, including the eight-legged spider. Pliny believed the spider to be an insect, and he equated it with the scorpion, to whom he refers in his maxim as having been "given the power of flight by a south wind."²¹ It would be classified two centuries later as an arachnid because it had neither six legs nor wings. Its presence here speaks of the trust Hoefnagel's era continued to place in classical knowledge, despite the new primacy given to observation and description. Like his emblematic motifs in other illuminations, Hoefnagel transformed the humble being into one of reverence for God and nature as conveyed by the transcendental message in Psalm 103 in the miniature's epigram, and visually references its second phrase with the puffed cheeks: "Who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind."²²

The few representations of insects prior to the sixteenth century were generally not intended as natural history illustrations. Some were associated with devotional practices or were decorative, such as those that appear in the borders of illuminated manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These hand-painted, bound folios had limited dissemination and despite their detail and brilliant color, they did not serve as models for proto-entomologists.²³ Only in the mid-1550s were insects studied for their physiological characteristics in order that they could be systematized into hierarchical schemes. Also in this period encyclopedias of the animal kingdom illustrated with woodcuts were circulated. This activity was spurred by the simultaneous flourishing of printing and papermaking and an interest in understanding divine creation through nature rather than bestiaries, fables, and lingering Aristotelian concepts. Among the general populace, such traditional beliefs would not dissipate for centuries, but books on botany, zoology, mineralogy, and other subjects allied to the physical world rapidly proliferated. Initially insects did not figure in this new literature. Their insignificant place in ancient teachings, the wellspring of inspiration for the Northern and Italian Renaissance, signaled a lower-magnitude importance to the humanist. Furthermore, the staggering number of species in this phylum was unmanageable and challenged organization, creating a stumbling

block to research. This neglected class of arthropods, however, was first addressed in 1602 by Ulisse Aldrovandi, the great naturalist and director of the botanical garden at the University of Bologna,²⁴ and some decades later in 1634 by the physician Moffett.²⁵ Both treatises sought to formulate an objective description of the humble beings with entries extending from nomenclature to discourses on their moral and practical value. The printed images in the compendia were circulated within the international network of correspondents. Despite Hoefnagel's possible familiarity with drawings prepared for these publications, their direct impact on him would have been limited, as they were not published until after 1600, by which time he was deceased. Additionally, though these texts represented most of their subjects accurately, they did not align with Hoefnagel's artistic aims in which nature, inventively presented, was conflated with emblematic art.

HOEFNAGEL'S SOURCES OF INSECT IMAGERY AND HIS FUSION OF ART AND NATURAL HISTORY

In addition to drawing upon the meager written and pictorial information on insects, Hoefnagel turned to other sources to formulate his expressive language. He copied drawings by Hans Verhagen van Stommen and woodcuts from Gessner's *Historiae animalium* for *The Four Elements*, among others,²⁶ but most of the insects depicted in *Ater* were based on Hoefnagel's own repository of motifs used during his twenty-year oeuvre. Among them were his illuminations (as noted above) in the Bocskay model books and *The Four Elements* (vol. 1, *Animalia rationalia et insecta* [Ignis]). Many of his images were also based on his drawings that had been engraved and published by his son Jacob Hoefnagel in the pattern book *Archetypa studii patris* (1592).

But above all, Hoefnagel's greatest inspiration was Albrecht Dürer, whose work he knew firsthand from the holdings of his benefactor Rudolf II. Dürer's exceptional fusion of art and factual description, today often referred to as "scientific naturalism," expressed a new aesthetic sensibility that imbued this subject matter with a lifelike quality.²⁷ The impact of his work on the younger artist is witnessed in particular in Hoefnagel's many repetitions and variants of the exceptional stag beetle (fig. 2), the leitmotif of the Dürer Revival that took place late in the century and the means by which Hoefnagel proclaimed himself heir to the great master. His interpretation of the iconic drawing, as seen in *The Four Elements*, *Archetypa studii patris*,²⁸ and the *Friendship Picture for Johannes Radermacher* (fig. 9),

exemplifies the transmission and reuse of natural history motifs common to this genre. It also speaks of Hoefnagel's emulation of Dürer in his use of nature as an inexhaustible source of subject matter, and of the precision and detail that underscore his art.

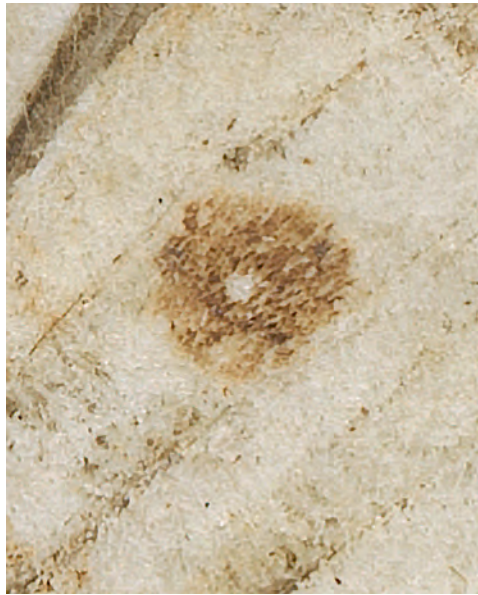
Ater evokes Dürer most profoundly because it is both a work of fine art and a natural history illustration. During the sixteenth century these two modes of representation were not clearly differentiated, in that both traditions employed the same models and described them with equal precision. However, whereas the naturalist sought objective representation or fidelity to nature based on stringent standards, *Ater*, as a work of fine art, relied on a subtle shift of these criteria. Hoefnagel iconographically achieved a spiritual dimension by uniting text with image in the medieval emblematic tradition, and by giving objects human attributes or associating them with venerated beings. For example, in this composition the stag beetle symbolizes Christ, and the iris is associated with the Virgin Mary, motifs to which he continually returned, and the Christian and humanist meanings of which were readily understood by his viewers.

But beneath this emblematic layer Hoefnagel also succeeded in creating an object appreciated for its art

and invention by using various pictorial devices and techniques perfected in the Renaissance that included exacting brushwork, modeling, foreshortening, and *trompe l'oeil*. Collectively, they enabled him to challenge perception with effects that imitated reality and deceived the eye. In *Ater*, unlike the natural history illustration, Hoefnagel visually engages the viewer in the artistic process. His manipulation of paint, rendering of space and volume, and imaginative interpretation of his subject led the eye to question the materiality of the subject matter. For example, his meticulous brushwork and modeling create nearly tactile beings with imperceptible layers and gradations of transparent watercolor, subtle touches of white body color, shell gold (in the wings of the hummingbird hawk-moth); opaque ultramarine blue (the cartouches and spots of the two *Ordonata*); and gum glazes (on the wings of the crane fly, at right, center). Unlike a naturalist's approach, Hoefnagel's brushwork does not simply capture the anatomy, volume, color, and iridescence of the individual insects—as seen in the diaphanous wings of the dragonfly and the beetle's hard shell. With the precision of his stroke he removes all evidence of his hand. This well-known *trompe l'oeil* strategy to deceive the eye was based on negating the presence of the artist to



fig. 2 Detail of *Ater* (fig. 1), stag beetle



make the painted motifs indistinguishable from actual objects and thereby enhance the illusion of their reality.

Hoefnagel also makes the composition lifelike by imparting a convincing sense of space and volume. *Ater* fools the eye in its small scale, dimensions that invite viewing at close range, and in the plausible size of the insects. Positioned on the picture plane, this unlikely assembly is perceived as if in a shallow box or as taking up residence on a sheet of vellum, just as it may have been displayed in a *Kunstammer* or natural history collection, and have entered the viewer's space. Their deceptive volume, produced by subtle transitions of light and shadow, and for some by foreshortening and cast shadows (such as beneath the four foreground insects: moth, grasshopper, ladybug, and cricket), brings the forms into relief and projects them upward off the ground. Rendered inconsistently from one insect to the next, the varied treatment betrays diverse artistic sources. They might derive from individual images by Hoefnagel or other artists, or from specimens that were mounted with their wings spread flat as if flying (dragonfly), or mounted with their wings held vertically or pulled close to the body as if at rest (moth and butterflies).

Hoefnagel further challenges the viewer's perception of reality by his interpretation of the insects

themselves. They are not rare or monstrous, like many of the depictions in animal inventories of mid-century by Aldrovandi or Gessner, but common garden insects. They evoke the prevailing spiritual metaphors on the dignity of the meek, as Montaigne expressed, whereas their familiarity in appearance and habits confers a sense of reality. Unlike Hoefnagel's many illuminations that comprise images from both the animal and plant kingdoms, *Ater* includes multiple insect species but only two flowers. The insect population is heterogeneous: unrelated in type and each singular in color, size, and shape. Some are pollinators, some predators, or plant eaters; they are aquatic and terrestrial; some undergo metamorphosis, and others do not. They are unlikely to appear together or cohabit as they do here. The most prominent, the stag beetle with its spread wings, is the centerpiece of the loosely constructed symmetrical framework, beneath which are opposing butterflies, and a grasshopper and cricket back-to-back. Flanking the stag beetle are a bearded and a Siberian iris, and insects engaged in their customary behavior: the hummingbird hawk-moth with its unfurled proboscis is feeding, the moth reposing, the dragonfly in flight, the hornet hovering over a mayfly. In turn, they are surrounded by a crane fly, housefly, hoverfly, ladybug, spider, and five butterflies at rest with their ventral wings folded vertically.

fig. 3 Detail of *Ater*, butterfly eye spot (original magnification, x40)

fig. 4 Detail of *Ater*, butterfly wing and incised exoskeleton (original magnification, x40)

But Hoefnagel takes his hyperrealistic subjects a step further than he had in his remarkable renderings in *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* with its fictive flower stems piercing the album pages.²⁹ Within this meticulously painted gathering are the most naturalistic yet inventive insects: two of the butterflies are specimens consisting of wings, now only partially preserved. They are adhered to the vellum, and seamlessly integrated into the composition with their bodies, legs, and club-ended antennae applied by brush (foreground, right and left).³⁰ Viewed under 20x magnification, the distinct overlapping scaled structure of the wing (the morphological feature accounting for the Greek name lepidoptera), is visible in the reddish-brown eye spots and along the wing margins (figs. 3, 4). Also visible are impressions of their veins: stiff, bonelike chitinous exoskeletons reinforced with a stylus (fig. 4). These uncanny details simultaneously place them in the realms of natural specimens and of artistic motifs. Hoefnagel had similarly applied dragonfly wings to vellum many years earlier in *The Four Elements*, and presumably, more composite works by him are yet to be discovered, but no earlier examples by other artists are known.³¹ By the seventeenth century, this unusual technique would be described in several treatises.³²

NATURAL HISTORY PRECEDENTS FOR HOEFNAGEL'S BUTTERFLIES

The source of Hoefnagel's unique treatment of the butterfly motif is unknown; however, several possibilities may have inspired him. Iconographically, the presence of butterfly specimens among the painted insects implies a *paragone*, a common humanist debate in the sixteenth century with roots in antiquity. Contesting the superiority of art or artifice, such as between a tactile object and its painted image, this debate was most often played out between sculpture and painting. It may have motivated Hoefnagel to add his hyperrealistic plants and animals to Bocskay's incomparable calligraphy in *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*.³³

It is equally plausible that his inclusion of insect specimens in *Ater* was generated by routine practices of naturalists. In these traditions the emphasis was on the preserved specimen, not its representation. Hoefnagel would have seen albums with insects pasted in them, made by fellow naturalists or housed in Rudolf's *Kunstkammer*, such as that compiled at a later date by Leonard Plukenet (fig. 6). Hoefnagel also would have known of herbaria, albums of dried pressed botanical specimens (*hortus siccus*), the origins of which can be traced to the mid-fifteenth century, possibly earlier, in North and Central Italy, and made as reconstructions of the herbals of classical antiquity. Both types of albums served naturalists as catalogues for study and identification of different taxa long before they were depicted in paint.³⁴ The *En Tibi herbarium* (ca. 1542–44), for example, among the most luxurious of these tomes, is believed to have been in Rudolf II's treasury in Prague and was circulated among the emperor's learned colleagues (fig. 5).³⁵ In the same humanist tradition as *Ater*, it is inscribed with a motto—"Here for you a smiling garden of everlasting flowers"—that combines Christian and classical rhetoric.³⁶ *En Tibi* is similar to *Ater* in its organization of material, in that the folios contain plant species and subspecies that are unrelated but grouped together.³⁷ Another established practice that may have entered into Hoefnagel's invention was the nature print (fig. 7). These printed impressions of leaves had become increasingly widespread in the second half of the sixteenth century, corresponding to the surge of interest in acquiring accurate knowledge of the plant world. They were made by inking the planar parts of the leaf specimen and applying pressure to transfer the image to paper or vellum; the volumetric veins, roots, and stems that could not be reproduced satisfactorily by this method were applied by brush.³⁸



fig. 5 Leonard Plukenet
(English, 1642–1706). Album
page containing mounted
insects, ca. 1680–90. Natural
History Museum, London

fig. 6 *En Tibi herbarium*, ca. 1542–44, *Allium ursinum* L., p. 139. Leiden University, Naturalis Biodiversity Center (L.2111033)

fig. 7 Nature print with hand-painted root system. Italian, ca. 1520. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence (MS NA 995). Reproduced in Cave 2010, p. 27



Hoefnagel's butterflies are evocative of this hybrid technique: their leaf-like flat wings are pasted to the support, and the affixed specimen completed by adding the body, legs, and antennae in brush and paint.

CRITERIA FOR FINE ART AND NATURAL HISTORY REPRESENTATION IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

To the modern viewer, natural history illustration and fine art are intertwined in their motifs and execution, but to the natural philosopher of the sixteenth century, they were not. Hoefnagel's precise handling and realism notwithstanding, *Ater* would not have met the demanding objective standards of natural history representation. Whereas the classical and medieval world had accepted incomplete or "diagrammatic" descriptions, the Renaissance naturalist demanded accuracy.³⁹ In the face of the plethora of specimens within the many emerging proto-scientific disciplines, careful observation and meticulous recording that imparted authority were critical to communicating the new information. To this end, even skilled naturalists would hire artists to illustrate their specimens.⁴⁰ Unlike many of his motifs in *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* that are imaginary or confections of two insects and unidentifiable, the insects in *Ater* are not fanciful, yet they are not entirely accurate according to contemporary standards.⁴¹

To advocates of truthful representation, specific requirements were in place. For example, Hoefnagel's insects are in close proximity, not in isolation as they are in depictions by naturalists, such as Aldrovandi, Moffett, or White (fig. 8), and as they are in the Plukenet and *En Tibi* albums in which the pasted specimens are carefully separated from others, allowing them to be studied without obstruction. In *Ater*, many of the insects' contours are partially obscured by an overlapping neighbor, compromising the clarity necessary for comparison. For example, the dragonfly's wings are interrupted by the iris, the moth's wings by the grasshopper, and the damselfly by the hornet. Close observation reveals that details essential for identification purposes, such as legs and antennae, are missing or summarily rendered (as in the pasted butterflies); patterns are not well defined (hoverfly); wings are not the correct size (mayfly); their segmented bodies (head, thorax, and abdomen), the defining feature of this vast taxonomic group, are not well articulated; and the motifs lack the customary descriptive annotations required for cataloguing. Similarly, Hoefnagel's artistic devices failed to meet the rigorous criteria of natural history illustration: the reflective shell gold and the fanciful mise-en-scène were not true to life. Not least, trompe l'oeil effects, such as cast shadows, were condemned as a

fig. 8 John White (English, 1533–1593). *Fireflies(?)*, 1585. British Museum, London (1906,0509.1.67)



means to deceive, not inform. Plato had rejected them as “nothing but a shadow play obscuring the truth.”⁴² According to Aldrovandi, natural history drawing was not to “suffer stylistic or otherwise ‘artistic’ impositions” or, as asserted by Carolus Clusius, the foremost sixteenth-century scientific horticulturist, lapse into “flights of fancy.”⁴³ These standards, which were primarily directed to botany because of its predominance in investigations of the physical world, were upheld for all natural history subjects. Images needed to contain the necessary visual information for purposes of identification, a point of view that would have made Hoefnagel’s drawings “incomplete and imperfect, and will cause difficulty to the viewers in recognizing [the specimen].”⁴⁴ These criteria were inarguable; natural history images were meant to stand in and to substitute for the living entity that was no longer available or had faded.⁴⁵ The specimen and the image were interchangeable, and to avoid errors, all insects, flora, fauna, birds, and fish were to be drawn from life, or *ad vivum*, a statement often inscribed on a drawing and conferring it with the status of a document.⁴⁶ Accordingly, in this light, *Ater* would not have been regarded as a truthful study and thus not a natural history illustration.

THE HOUSING AND FRAMING OF *ATER*

Ater is neither a natural history illustration nor a work of fine art but a fusion of diverse elements that was understood and enjoyed on many levels by Hoefnagel’s select audience. In addition to the pleasure and significance of its imagery, *Ater* was intended to challenge the eye and to intellectually engage the viewer in the artistic process. This dynamic is revealed when the miniature is interpreted in the context of its housing and framing. Rudolf II’s imperial repository, as that of all Habsburg rulers, had a particular character, and the Prague cabinet, which was accessible to his circle of learned individuals, was not only a center of natural history, art, and culture but additionally distinguished as a “place of study” or a “place of knowledge.”⁴⁷ It was also a place of amusement, as this miniature reveals. Rudolf II’s encyclopedic holdings were contained in four large rooms and corridors, separated into categories of *naturalia*, *artificialia*, and *scientifica* (wonders of nature, those made by human endeavor, and tools and instruments). Despite the abundance of riches, this *Kunstammer* did not aim to astound the viewer with the luxury or preciousness of its objects, nor did it have an antiquarian purpose. Rather, it was to serve in the



fig. 9 Joris Hoefnagel. *Friendship Picture for Johannes Radermacher*, and frame, 1589. Body color, opaque paint, watercolor, shell gold on vellum, 46½ × 64¼ in. (118 × 163 cm). Zeeuws Museum, Middelburg, The Netherlands (M98-O-072-01)

pursuit of understanding nature through the microcosm of its numerous artifacts.⁴⁸ According to visitors' accounts, the repository was cluttered and "more a depot than a display," with objects placed haphazardly and side by side without any hierarchy, organization, or categorization.⁴⁹ Objects stored along the walls in numerous cabinets were further described as "concealed in boxes, chests and cabinets."⁵⁰

These comments on the furnishings and lack of pretension in the Prague *Kunstammer* imply that stored objects were inaccessible for viewing when not being actively studied or admired. Although there are no reports on the framing of cabinet miniatures in sixteenth-century princely settings, the descriptions prompt conjecture as to the type of frame used for *Ater*. Based on its aesthetic and dimensional similarities to the friendship picture that Hoefnagel dedicated to his dear colleague Johannes Radermacher (German, 1538–1617), it is plausible that *Ater*'s frame was like the Radermacher one (fig. 9).⁵¹ Far different from the conventional frame that came into use in the seventeenth century, the Radermacher frame has a matching removable lid that fits into the molding on the front and covers the aperture. The lid lifts by a knob at the center to expose the picture. Since cabinet miniatures were regarded as paintings, not drawings, and customarily did not have glass, it is unlikely that *Ater* was glazed. This unusual construction, with the potential to show or conceal the work of art, suggests an interactive role with the viewer and gives insight into the purpose of *Ater*. Lacking a means to secure the cover implies that the object could not be hung vertically and would have been kept flat on a table or shelf and supported in the hand when viewed. This placement was not unusual for small works, as is known from the imagery in paintings from the period, as is seen in the unglazed framed miniature with a slide-out cover depicted in a luxurious collector's cabinet by an artist in the Circle of Hieronymus Francken II (fig. 10).⁵² In the case of *Ater*, once the drawing was taken from the storage cupboard and the lid removed, the unglazed miniature was revealed. At that moment an immediacy with the visitor was conferred and the beholder became aware of the hyperrealistic insects engaged in their characteristic habits in a simple yet plausible setting. On second glance, the astonished viewer would have touched at least one butterfly to verify what his eyes had registered as real and to distinguish it from the painted insects, inadvertently participating in a well-known trompe l'oeil deception, undoubtedly to the amusement of his companions.⁵³ The perception of the actual insects, coupled with the instinctive impulse to touch the exposed surface, must have been startling in this unexpected context. Over time the delicate wings were worn down to the underlying vellum by rubbing, which would account for the losses in the membrane, the diminished clarity of the pattern, and ultimately the present abraded condition of the butterfly specimens. A century would pass before a printed explanation was



fig. 10 Circle of Hieronymus Francken II (Flemish, 1578–1623). Detail of *Flemish Cognoscenti in a Room with Paintings*, ca. 1620. Oil on panel, 37 3/4 × 48 5/8 in. (96.5 × 123.2 cm). National Gallery, London (NG1287)

offered, cautioning the reader to “handle butterflies and moths with care as the wings were mealy and the color easily rubbed off with the fingers.”⁵⁴ In time, the beautiful coloration of these fragile surfaces would be recognized not as the result of pigmented layers but of minute overlapping scales, each one diffracting and reflecting light.

ATER, AN AMUSEMENT

Hoefnagel’s inventive composition was not merely decorative but intended to enlist the senses of sight and touch and to intellectually engage the viewer. This is evident in several aspects of the miniature. The illogical title, *Ater*, would have provoked a paradox as to whether the word referred to the ignobles and monsters familiar to sixteenth-century viewers, or if the title was intended as a word game. *Aier*, the erroneous title given to the work in recent times, was intended to fit it iconographically into an unrelated group of miniatures. It references air, winged insects, and the epigraph, each alluding to the lightness of air that gives flight to such creatures, manifestations of God with whom nature is imbued. *Ater*, on the other hand, has an ominous meaning and is unrelated to the four elements. The title *Aier* is based on the assumption that the letter “I” was transformed into the letter “T” by crossing it with a horizontal paint stroke, thereby yielding the word *Ater*. However, as revealed by high-power magnification and technical analysis, both the elemental composition of the surrounding gold paint and the brushwork of the letter “T” are consistent and original, indicating that the ironic title *Ater* is intended as a play on words and part of the artist’s lighthearted deception (see fig. 2).⁵⁵

In the same spirit of challenging perception, the viewer might have also puzzled over the exposed, sketchy black chalk drawing depicting the standards or upright petals of the bearded iris in this otherwise highly finished, lifelike composition (fig. 11).⁵⁶ Each of the other motifs in the composition is devoid of underdrawing or visible brushwork and thus appears to have been produced without human intervention. In the context of the surrounding *trompe l’oeil* insects, this discrepancy in technique between the images might have provoked the viewer to question whether the black chalk is simply an unfinished stage of Hoefnagel’s working process, or if the artist purposely left the marks visible to reveal his hand in the creation of a marvel that imitated reality.⁵⁷

Insects were part of God’s wonders and invited contemplation on their emblematic importance, their spiritual role, and their place in the discipline of natural history. Sophisticated “jokes” or deceptions in Hoefnagel’s *Ater*, including the butterflies, enigmatic title, ambiguous exposed underdrawing, the frame that concealed and revealed, and the contemplation they provoked, were both pensive and pleasurable diversions for the sixteenth-century humanist, and they speak of the social and intellectual functions of the *Kunstkamer* and of this cabinet miniature. With their origin in the classical era and much beloved by Rudolf II, these types

fig. 11 Detail of *Ater* (fig. 1),
bearded iris



of jokes were known as *lusus*.⁵⁸ Some were jokes of nature referencing paradoxical objects that could not be rationally explained: objects that looked like something they were not, such as unexpected, remarkable images in stone or wood. Others were jokes of knowledge, or *lusus scientiae*, that simultaneously taught and amused.⁵⁹ *Lusus* were games or manifestations of the widespread playfulness that emerged in many contexts: they were popular at court, at universities, and in books of secrets.⁶⁰ They appeared in scientific demonstrations,⁶¹ were played out in tricks of illusion,⁶² in practical jokes, “sports,” funny stories, and wordplay.⁶³ Picture frames, as the one presumably used for *Ater*, similarly entered into this playful mindset. Humanists and others delighted in artifice, and *lusus* of both types evidenced man’s ability to match nature’s complexity with his own.⁶⁴

Hoefnagel’s cabinet picture would have presented Rudolf II and elite viewers with a *lusus*. The imagery would have prompted the beholder to probe which insects were factual and which were invented, which were real and which were painted, and to examine the paradox of its title. Additionally, *Ater* would have referenced the deception of Zeuxis, the great illusionistic Greek painter of the fifth century B.C., and the superiority of nature over artifice, an ancient debate that continued to amuse and confound viewers. As an object of contemplation, *Ater* must also have provoked thoughts on the role of the commonplace and the meek in the Almighty’s grand design.

Along with the *lusus* one must ask if Hoefnagel’s

ensemble of diverse, lifesize insects was also intended as a humorous commentary on the state of natural history, a practical matter that would have been well known to him from his network of naturalist colleagues and would have appealed to the emperor’s passion for this subject. The proliferation of specimens pouring in from the New World and foreign lands challenged researchers, especially in the emerging field of entomology. No system of organization or binomial classification to accurately document information existed in these pre-Linnaean times. The massive amount of data drove Aldrovandi and Moffett to cut and paste their sheets of printed images of insects to create order that would enable them to assemble sequences and relationships among classes.⁶⁵ Even during the seventeenth century, entomological collections were reported to have been in “considerable confusion” and “disordered chaos.”⁶⁶ Not having the strictures of the natural history artist, Hoefnagel was able to indulge in invention and humor and to appeal to the love of amusement in the Rudolfine court. Perhaps *Ater* encompasses the artist’s reflections on this very real plight, evocative of the disorganization of the *Kunstammer* itself by depicting his insects in only a superficial state of symmetry without the strict underlying order demanded by the naturalist.

A marvel meant to astonish in its wondrous imagery, to amuse and to admire in its sumptuous materials and illusionistic rendering, Hoefnagel’s cabinet miniature of a “stag beetle, insects and head of a wind god” celebrates insects before their widespread aesthetic appreciation in the next century in still life painting and drawing, such as by Georg Flegl and Jacques de Gheyn II. *Ater* stands between objective natural history and the expressiveness and invention that underscore “fine art.” It must have found part of its purpose in the much beloved “sports” that were common in the *Kunstammer* and in the culture at large, but it also offered the viewer much to ponder. Not least, it provoked the viewer to contemplate nature’s complexities and respond to the insatiable desire to unravel its order, be it from the largest of God’s creations to the smallest creatures who walk the earth.

In loving memory of EMS

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MARJORIE SHELLEY

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NOTES

- 1 The discipline of natural history that emerged during the Renaissance, with roots in classical antiquity, the Latin Middle Ages, and the Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, had "neither a clearly demarcated realm of phenomena nor a set of precepts and methods for study" developed within the framework of humanism and philological investigations. Ogilvie 2006, pp. 1–6 (quote on p. 4).
- 2 Ibid., pp. 8–12.
- 3 *Ater* is purported by Thea Vignau-Wilberg to be one of two surviving miniatures from an allegorical set the *Four Elements* (1594–95). The other extant miniature is titled *Terra* (earth) (Prince of Lichtenstein collection), illustrated in Vignau-Wilberg 2017, pp. 180–81, fig. 1. The other two, which have never been seen, are presumed by her to be *Ignis* (fire) and *Aqua* (water). Many of the artist's miniatures were made as sets, but there is no evidence supporting the connection of *Ater* and *Terra*, other than the correspondence of their mottoes, as she proposes. Vignau-Wilberg's claim is based on her misinterpretation of the title as *Aier* (air) and not the correct *Ater*, a title that would not be included in the context of the four elements. See *ibid.*, p. 15n52, on its technical analysis.
- 4 On Hoefnagel's depiction of the marginal and wondrous, see Hendrix 1995. On monsters and their roots in the classical past, see Park and Daston 1981. Monsters were of great interest in the sixteenth century and were depicted alongside the naturalistic animals of Conrad Gessner (Swiss, 1516–1565) and Ulisse Aldrovandi (Italian, 1522–1605).
- 5 Many of these ideas were promoted by Justus Lipsius (Flemish, 1547–1606) in his *De constantia libri duo* (1584) and his *Physiologiae stoicorum libri tres* (1604, 1.2, 1.8–9); see Papy 2019. The Neo-Stoics believed that the laws of nature were a guide to righteous living.
- 6 For example, appearing as the subject of poetry and as a guise for political commentary. See Bourque 1999, pp. 148–50. Montaigne's essay "On Experience," as translated in Koeppe 2000–. The spiritual allusion to insects is similarly evoked by the theologian Tommaso Campanella (Italian, 1568–1639), who states that he had "learned more from the anatomy of an ant . . . than from any book ever written"; as quoted in Del Soldato 2019.
- 7 Topsell and Moffett 1658, unpaginated preface. Moffett's *Insectorum sive Minimorum Animalium Theatrum* was begun in 1588/90, completed by the Genevan physician Theodore de Turquet ce Mayerne (1573–1655) in 1634, and translated from the Latin by Edward Topsell and appended to his *History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents* in 1658.
- 8 Ogilvie 2006, p. 13. Such imagery was included in many mid- to late-sixteenth-century encyclopedias, such as Conrad Gessner, *Historiae animalium* (1551–58); Pierre Belon (1517–1564), *La nature et diversité des poissons* (1555); and the thirteen-volume encyclopedia of natural history by Ulisse Aldrovandi, published from 1599 to the 1640s, including his *De animalibus insectis* (1602) and *Monstrorum historia* (1642).
- 9 Topsell and Moffett 1658, unpaginated.
- 10 Van Mander 1604, fols. 262r–63v. For an accounting of Hoefnagel's life, see Vignau-Wilberg 1985 and Vignau-Wilberg 1992.
- 11 The blue pigment was made from the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli brought from mines in Afghanistan, the richest sources of the valuable mineral. Shell gold is powdered gold mixed with egg white or gum and traditionally kept in a mussel shell, hence its name.
- 12 *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS 20 (86.MV.527).
- 13 *Schriftmusterbuch*, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, Kunstkammer (975).
- 14 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1987.20.5, www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.69668.html.
- 15 "Qüi ponis nübem / ascensum tüüm, qui / ambulas süper pen / nas ventoru / ps : 103." English translation from Vignau-Wilburg 2017, p. 180.
- 16 Ogilvie 2008, p. 6.
- 17 Among them, Carolus Clusius (French, 1526–1609), Abraham Ortelius (Flemish, 1527–1598), Lucas d'Heere (Flemish, 1534–1584), and Joachim Camerarius the Younger (German, 1534–1598) belonged to the prestigious Lime Street Naturalists, a community of English and foreign intellectuals. On the Lime Street group, see Harkness 2009, p. 49. Aldrovandi, Clusius, Hoefnagel, and Moffett exchanged correspondence on insects; see Vignau-Wilberg 2017, p. 14.
- 18 Eliska Fucikova (1985, p. 47) describes the wealth of *naturalia* and *artificialia* accessible to artists in Rudolf's *Kunstkammer*; Lee Hendrix (1984, app. II, pp. 333–34) writes that Hoefnagel borrowed images from hundreds of artists; see Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg 1992, p. 16.
- 19 Harkness 2009, p. 49. On John White, see Sloan 2007, pp. 212–13.
- 20 Casini n.d., section 5, "New Philosophies of Nature." See also Kuhn 2018 and Del Soldato 2019.
- 21 Pliny, *Natural History* 11.30.87–90.
- 22 See note 15 above.
- 23 For representations of insects in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on the borders of Burgundian, Ghent-Bruges, and Lombard illuminated manuscripts, see Pächt 1950, pp. 13–41, fig. 5a; Kaufmann and Kaufmann 1991; and Kaufmann 1993, fig. 8. Insects depicted in other contexts are, for example, an illusionistic fly, possibly a reference to the name of the sitter, "Vlieger," in Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Carthusian Lay Brother* (1446; MMA 49.7.19), and in the borders of an illustrated printed and hand-colored Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historiae* (Venice: Nicolaum Jensen, 1492; British Library [002935943]).
- 24 Aldrovandi's treatise on insects, compiled in 1593–1602, was part of his thirteen-volume corpus on the animal kingdom, fossils, geology, humans, and monsters. See note 8 above.
- 25 See note 7 above.
- 26 See Hendrix 1984, app. 2, pp. 333–34, for a list of hundreds of artists from whom Hoefnagel borrowed images. For animal images that he might have seen in Rudolf II's court, see Maselis, Ballis, and Marijnissen 1999, pp. 24–28, 56–70.
- 27 On the stag beetle and its inspiration on Dürer's followers, see Koreny 1988, pp. 112–18.
- 28 *The Four Elements*, vol. 1, *Animalia rationalia et insecta (Ignis)*, pl. 54 (see note 14 above); *Archetypa studiaeque patris Georgii Hoefnagelii* (1592, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1987.20.9), part I, no. 6.
- 29 Such as the stem of flowers painted on the recto seeming to pierce the actual sheet of vellum in, for example, *Mira calligraphiae monumenta*, fol. 37r, v, fig. 5b.
- 30 Because of insufficient sample material the adhesive could not be tested. Based on the lack of color and sheen, the butterflies appear to have been affixed with parchment size. The butterflies are the only insects in the composition that are specimens. The crane fly (lower right) is painted; it is not a specimen, nor are any insect outlines reinforced as claimed by Vignau-Wilberg 2017, p. 180.

- 31 This is recorded in the literature on this image. It has not been studied by this author. *The Four Elements*, vol. 1, *Animalia rationalia et insecta (Ignis)*, pl. 54 (see note 14 above).
- 32 In the seventeenth century the technique is alluded to by Henry Peacham (1606; 1970 rep., p. 43); and discussed by Samuel van Hoogstraten (1678, chap. 6). Otto Marseus van Schrieck pasted butterfly wings onto his canvases and drawings. In the eighteenth century pasting butterfly wings onto paper with gum arabic and ox-gall is described by Godfrey Smith (1756, pp. 73–74). See also Hildebrecht 2004.
- 33 Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg (1997, p. 7) convincingly suggest a *paragone* is implied in *Mira calligraphiae monumenta* between Hoefnagel's imagery and Bocskay's masterful calligraphy.
- 34 For illustrations of the *hortus siccus*, see Herbarium A and B, mid-16th century, attrib. to Gherardo Cibo (1512–1600), Biblioteca Angelica, Rome, <http://www.bibliotecaangelica.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/322/erbario-cibo>.
- 35 Leiden University, Naturalis Biodiversity Center. See Stefanaki et al. 2018, pp. 1–2.
- 36 Stefanaki et al. 2019, p. 4.
- 37 *Allium ursinum* L. in the *En Tibi herbarium*, p. 139; illustrated in Stefanaki et al. 2018, p. 5, fig. 2; and online, http://bioportal.naturalis.nl/result?theme=en_tibi.
- 38 Cave 2010, p. 27, figs. 3, 4 (illustration of MS NA 995, Italian, ca. 1520. Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence); Reeds 2006.
- 39 Ogilvie 2006, p. 6. Despite strict standards that illustrations were based on direct observation, it was not always the case. Some of the unidentifiable composite images portrayed by the naturalist Aldrovandi in *Monstrorum historia* (1642) were based on dried specimens or were assembled entities. See Kusakawa 2010, p. 304.
- 40 Kusakawa 2010, p. 307.
- 41 For discussions of Hoefnagel's imaginary insects, see Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg 1997, pp. 57–64, and Neri 2011, pp. 3–26. For his confirmation of the realism of the insects in *Ater*, I am grateful to Louis N. Sorkin, Department of Entomology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, personal communication.
- 42 Ebert-Schifferer 2002, p. 21.
- 43 For Aldrovandi, see Swan 1995, p. 359. For Clusius, see Neri 2011, p. xviii. Effects, such as shadows, were also condemned by Clusius and Leonhart Fuchs (German, 1501–1566), and distortions in the proportions or features of a specimen were condemned by Gessner (1551–58, vol. 1).
- 44 MS Aldrovandi 6, vol. 2, fols. 126–27, Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna (<https://amshistorica.unibo.it/204>), as translated in Swan 1995, p. 359.
- 45 Swan 1995, p. 362. This was a critical issue, since specimens were mutable over seasons and life span and thus subject to color variations, a debate initiated in antiquity as to whether these drawings should be colored; see Freedberg 1994. Images made from direct observation of a live specimen were preferred but *ad vivum* representation was not a requirement for illustrated printed books. In the earlier sixteenth century, Gessner and Aldrovandi depicted members of the animal kingdom factually but also as conflations of real and imaginary, living and dead, or preserved specimens, acknowledging that some were false. Disparities in the appearance of animals of the same type stemmed from their diverse sources in books, broadsides, drawings, information from correspondents, or live examples exhibited at fairs, but were justified by many naturalists because encyclopedias were intended to be comprehensive and to serve as repositories of all knowledge on the subject. See Kusakawa 2010, pp. 324–27.
- 46 Swan 1995, pp. 355–72; Kusakawa 2010, p. 307.
- 47 Among the other roles of the *Kunstammer* were meditation and entertaining; Kaufmann 1993, pp. 175–80.
- 48 Dupre and Korey 2009. The contents were inventoried in 1606–11 by court artists Daniel Fröschl (German, 1563–1613) and Anselmus de Boodt (Flemish, 1550–1632); see also Kaufmann 1988, p. 16.
- 49 Simons 2013, p. 83; Dupre and Korey 2009, p. 406. Inventories taken from 1607 to 1621 indicate a variety of open and closed cabinets with careful lists made of the recorded contents, but many rooms did not have their contents organized or recorded, and the vast collection of *naturalia* and *artificialia* is estimated to have been two times the size of the 1621 inventory than it was in 1607, suggesting an unmanageable volume of objects and that the earlier visual impression was accurate; see Fucikova 1985, p. 51.
- 50 Simons 2013, p. 83; Dupre and Korey 2009, p. 406; on the organization of the *Kunstammer*, see also Kaufmann 1993, pp. 175–80.
- 51 Thea Vignau-Wilberg (2017, p. 155) describes the frame as contemporaneous or slightly older than the miniature. The reverse is described as having a slide mechanism with a small wooden knob. According to this author, this would have been the means by which the miniature was inserted and held in the frame.
- 52 The framed nature subject is held by the figure at the lower left. Amendola 2012.
- 53 Sybille Ebert-Schifferer (2002, p. 23) describes this response of touching as “When the object is no longer optically distinguishable from its representation, the sense of touch becomes a corrective to the sense of sight.”
- 54 James Petiver, “Brief Directions for the Basic Making and Preserving Collections of All Natural Curiosities” (1692–95), in MacGregor 1994, p. 114.
- 55 The inscription *Ater* was dismissed without technical examination by Vignau-Wilberg as being reworked from *Aier* by a later hand. Microscopic examination and multispectral imaging with infrared reflectography and long- and shortwave ultraviolet examination by the author, and X-ray fluorescence mapping and Raman spectroscopy, undertaken by Silvia Centeno, confirmed the identical elemental structure, texture, color, and stroke with shell gold applied elsewhere in the inscription. This indicates that the entire letter “T” is the work of the artist and not a reworking of the letter “I” to a “T” by a later hand, as proposed by Vignau-Wilberg (2017, p. 180).
- 56 The compromised condition of the irises results from the proclivity of most organic colorants to fade either from their inherent components or exposure to light. The alteration in the color and modeling of the irises has also impaired the illusion of three-dimensionality. These colorants, according to Silvia Centeno, Research Scientist, Department of Scientific Research, MMA, are below the detection level of nondestructive instrumentation and thus cannot be identified.
- 57 Infrared reflectography of the miniature reveals only traces of lightly sketched black chalk beneath the paint layer in the putto and in some of the insects, which indicates that the artist did not rely on an underdrawing as the means to build up the composition but worked more spontaneously.

Discrete areas of exposed underdrawing may indicate that the composition was not developed uniformly, but instead developed to different stages of completion for individual motifs, a working method seen in many unfinished Renaissance engravings, paintings, and drawings. For example, unknown artist after Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with a Donor*, copy after *The Virgin and Child with Canon Nicolas van Maelbeke*, ca. 1445 (silverpoint on prepared paper, Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg); Michelangelo, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John and the Angels* (“*The Manchester Madonna*”), ca. 1497, possibly as early as 1494 (painting, National Gallery, London, NG809); Hendrick Goltzius, *The Crucifixion*, ca. 1590 (engraving, MMA 17.3.2989); and *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, ca. 1599 (engraving, MMA 17.3.492).

- 58 Dupre and Korey 2009. Fucikova (1985, p. 52) notes that it contained various curiosities to entertain and amuse.
- 59 Findlen 1990, pp. 298, 320.
- 60 Dupre and Korey 2009, p. 412n61. The *Kunstammer* was characterized as a *Spielkammer* by Horst Bredekamp (1993).
- 61 Often based on optical devices in which Rudolf II was intently interested; see Dupre and Korey 2009, p. 412.
- 62 For example, magnets, distorting mirrors, Ouija boards, and puzzles; see Findlen 1990, p. 320.
- 63 Cave 2010, p. 25, as in Luca Pacioli’s *Books of Secrets*, 1409 (*De Veribus Quantitatis*, Ms. 250, Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna).
- 64 Findlen 1990, pp. 292–95.
- 65 Neri 2011, pp. 27–61.
- 66 Salmon 2000, p. 104; MacGregor 1994, pp. 23, 115–18.

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John Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer*: Censorship, Geologic Time, and Truth

AMY WERBEL

Approaching *A Bachelor's Drawer*, the viewer immediately becomes aware that rummaging is not a possibility, even though a drawer typically offers a cavity that may be explored (fig. 1). Instead, John Haberle's imposing painting presents an impenetrable facade. Measuring three feet in width, *A Bachelor's Drawer* is not only unusually large for a still life painting, but is also the second largest of the artist's career. Even more startling are the subjects in the work. The intimate contents of Haberle's bureau, and there is no doubt that they belong to him, are on full display on the external, vertical surface, rather than inside.

To better understand the origins of *A Bachelor's Drawer*, it makes sense to begin with the bachelor himself, John Haberle, who was born and raised and spent nearly all his life in New Haven, Connecticut. Like so many artists



of his generation, Haberle began his professional career working in lithography studios, first in New Haven and then in Montreal. He also, quite happily, was engaged to draw fossils under the direction of Othniel Charles Marsh at Yale University's Peabody Museum of Natural History. At the age of twenty-seven, with the goal of "taking up the brush," this son of German immigrants moved to New York in 1884, where he completed two years of training at the National Academy of Design. Even before he finished his studies, Haberle's extraordinarily fine trompe l'oeil effects attracted both favorable attention and profitable sales. Always a proud son of New Haven, he

returned home, where he spent the bulk of his career creating and selling still life paintings.¹

The autobiographical nature of *A Bachelor's Drawer* has never been in question. Haberle began work on the painting in 1890 at the age of thirty-three, about the time he courted his future wife, Sarah Emack. The timing of their romance is somewhat uncertain, but according to census records, Sarah and John were married in 1892, and their first daughter, Vera, was born in 1894, the year the painting was completed.² Lest there be any confusion about the relationship between artist and painting, Haberle included a tintype photograph of himself (fig. 2) as a form of signature at lower right, a



fig. 1 John Haberle (American, 1856–1933). *A Bachelor's Drawer*, 1890–94. Oil on canvas, 20 × 36 in. (50.8 × 91.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Henry R. Luce Gift, 1970 (1970.193)

fig. 2 Detail of *A Bachelor's Drawer* (fig. 1)



trick he had used before, and a pamphlet titled *How to Name the Baby*, above.

In May 1894, a reporter for the *New Haven Evening Leader* interviewed Haberle about his recently finished painting. Included in the story is a thorough accounting of the many items depicted:

A large number of such articles as might be found in the bureau drawer of any bachelor, are reproduced in oil. . . . On the drawer is represented a penny comic valentine which some mischievous niece has probably sent to the "Old Bachelor," who is shown in lithographic crudeness. At the other end is a group of paper currency. . . . An old corn cob pipe, supported by a leather strap, a number of cigarette pictures, several playing cards, a pawn ticket, lottery tickets, several theater seat coupons, [and] horse race tickets, are among some of the objects.³

Out of this cacophonous portrait of Haberle's "bachelor" life, several unifying themes emerge, including censorship, geologic time, and truth.

CENSORSHIP

The 1894 *New Haven Evening Leader* article that detailed the objects included in "Haberle's Masterpiece" noted the depiction of one particularly audacious item from the drawer: "A cabinet photograph of female model with an envelope band pasted across part of it to avoid confiscation by some disciple of Anthony Comstock."⁴ The journalist might fairly have pointed out that in fact, nearly everything visible in the painting represented an item that in 1894 was subject to confiscation by censorious agents of Comstock.

Anthony Comstock is not well known today, but for more than forty years, from 1872 to 1915, newspaper readers across the country were familiar with his exploits. During his long tenure as secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice [NYSSV] and a special agent for the United States Post Office Department, Comstock held broad authority to investigate and prosecute the production and distribution of obscene materials, as well as other crimes of perceived immorality. His powers stemmed from both state and federal laws passed beginning in 1873, which made a vast array of images and objects unlawful. Birth control and abortifacients became illegal for the first time in federal law under Comstock's watch, and he also gained prosecutorial authority when postal service inspectors gained the power to police these alleged crimes.⁵

Although Comstock began his career as a censor with the goal mostly of eradicating pornography and

fig. 3 Annie Sutherland, from Actresses series of trade cards by unknown publisher, ca. 1888. Albumen photograph, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{16}$ in. (9.5 × 5.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick (Burdick 230, N668.114)



birth control, eventually his beat included numerous kinds of gambling and theatrical performances designed to entertain men, which are alluded to by the stubs Haberle painted in the *Bachelor's Drawer* at bottom right. The partial legibility of these tickets allows the artist to reference but not fully implicate his sources of amusement. Haberle's obfuscation was by no means arbitrary. By 1894, Comstock's arrest blotters reveal that he had seized three million lottery tickets, 1.8 million pool tickets used for betting on athletics, and 900 packs of playing cards, and suppressed seven improper plays. More than 1,882 arrests had been made.⁶ Almost all these raids took place in homosocial spheres, populated primarily by bachelors and "sporting men." As a strict evangelical armed with extraordinary powers to ferret out allegedly illegal materials, Comstock had nearly free rein in these domains to try and improve American morals through censorship. He had some success—at the very least, he arrested hundreds of people and destroyed tons of mass-produced materials. In the art world, he had less luck.

When Haberle arrived in New York to study at the National Academy of Design in 1884, Comstock was engaged in touting an early victory in his efforts to police the exhibitions and transactions of artists and art

dealers. The artist cannot possibly have missed the well-publicized legal battle. The case that cracked the door open to art censorship was *People v. Muller*, which originated when Comstock raided an art gallery and seized photographic reproductions of French academic nudes including the *Birth of Venus* by Alexandre Cabanel.⁷ The standard applied by the *Muller* court was derived from an English case, *Regina v. Hicklin* (1868), in which obscenity was defined as anything that had a tendency "to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall." If even a single individual—for example a child—might be depraved, then the image could not legally be owned, exhibited, lent, or sold.⁸ Comstock and his agents proceeded to threaten art dealers across New York and other states in the following years, by delivering copies of the decision in *Muller*.

In 1887, Comstock's seizures of photographic reproductions of the nude in art became much more widely publicized when he raided Knoedler's Gallery, the haunt of New York's most prosperous collectors. Many of the city's celebrated artists erupted in protest, including William Merritt Chase, who suggested to newspaper reporters that he was raising money to send Comstock to Europe for "a careful tour of the great galleries" that would improve his "taste and judgment."⁹ With this fiery rebuke in mind, the court ruled in *Knoedler* more narrowly that reproductions of paintings blatantly depicting scenes of prostitution were illegal, but more demure nymphs and Venuses such as Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, generally speaking, were fine.

Haberle did not include any of these types of acceptable "high art" images in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, but instead chose to depict the types of "lowbrow" ephemera and photographs that occupied much more liminal legal terrain. From the top down, the "valentine" depicts a stylish dandy, and a pamphlet advises on naming babies. Publications of this type never were swept up in raids. Here they cleverly allude to the artist's transition from a single man occupied by the details of his dress and grooming to a married man concerned with impending fatherhood.

Below that group is a set of images that held more tenuous status. They are the size and character of cigarette cards, which were cheaply produced as collectible inserts by tobacco companies beginning in the late nineteenth century. The fashionably dressed Gibson Girl offers no hint of scandal. She is superseded to her right by an innocuous image of the new baby enthroned, now howling. Innocence quickly yields to prurience: underneath the baby is a photograph of an actress in tights, an

fig. 4 Jules Lefebvre
(French, 1836–1911). *La Vérité*, 1870. Oil on canvas,
104 × 44 1/4 in. (264 ×
112 cm). Musée d'Orsay,
Paris (RF 1981 29, LUX 169)

fig. 5 Guglielmo Marconi
(Italian, 1874–1937).
Photograph from Life, 1873.
Bibliothèque Nationale de
France, Paris (EO 46 [1]
DL 1873)

image of the sort that occupied censors, detectives, attorneys, judges, and juries for much of the 1880s and 1890s.

Actress cards first became the subject of notable courtroom drama during Haberle's years in New York. In 1884, the photographers Otto and Napoleon Sarony and several of their competitors paid for an expensive legal team to defend a peddler named Charles Conroy, who was charged with selling an obscene image of the actress Annie Sutherland. The specific image at issue in the trial appears not to have survived but court transcripts indicate that the outfit Sutherland wore in the photograph included tights and fringed shorts similar

to Haberle's actress in *A Bachelor's Drawer*. Despite, or perhaps because of, the notoriety caused by the trial, Sutherland went on to an even more successful career posing in her infamous tights and shorts on cigarette cards, including several examples in the Metropolitan Museum's Jefferson R. Burdick Collection (fig. 3).¹⁰

Farther down the face of the bureau drawer, Haberle presents a mounted photograph of a smiling woman, looking directly at the viewer. This is no demure and proper young lady, coyly averting her eyes from a flirtatious gaze. Instead, she could easily be a brothel sex worker, tinted with makeup, wearing a



fig. 6 Guglielmo Marconi.
 Photograph from *Life*, 1873.
 Bibliothèque Nationale de
 France, Paris (EO 46 [2]
 DL 1870 492)

fig. 7 Circle of Thomas
 Eakins. *Thomas Eakins and
 J. Laurie Wallace, Nude from
 Rear, in Front of Boat at
 Shoreline*, ca. 1883. Albumen
 print, 3½ × 4 in. (8.9 ×
 10.2 cm). Pennsylvania
 Academy of the Fine Arts,
 Philadelphia, Charles
 Bregler's Thomas Eakins
 Collection, purchased with
 the partial support of the
 Pew Memorial Trust
 (1985.68.2.454)

flamboyant hat, and thrusting her naked shoulder forward, with a small lapdog suggestive of carnal delights. It is difficult to overstate the ubiquity of these types of provocative images in New York, and Comstock's hopeless efforts to stem their flow. In 1888, a raid on a single supplier netted more than 10,000 supposedly obscene cigarette cards ready to be distributed.¹¹

In the lowest reaches of the painting, Haberle finally shocks his audience with the painted representation of a photograph of a full-length standing nude woman. The journalist for the *New Haven Evening Leader* called attention to the paper envelope band, which bars a view of the nude's hip and groin area, claiming that it served to render the image innocuous to "some disciple of Anthony Comstock."¹² However, Haberle has fictitiously torn the paper nearly through at exactly the spot that would be most illicit, thus calling attention to the frisson of potential criminality.

Comstock and his compatriots would not have found the slim band in any way exonerating. By 1895, more than 800,000 photographs had been burned under the auspices of the NYSSV—and many were far less revealing.¹³



In his self-portrait near the foot of this provocative image, Haberle stares wide-eyed, perhaps daring the viewer to take action. To his right, a jumbled residue of virtue and vice provides distraction—a burning cigarette, a pen knife, lottery and theater tickets, and a palm card presumably distributed by an evangelical reform society. “When Tempted / When Afflicted / When Troubled / When Sick,” the card reads, but Haberle’s bachelor buries his opportunity for redemption, foregrounding controversial amusements rather than respectable behavior.

Most intriguingly, the artist has done almost nothing to lessen the shock of the nude; to the contrary, Haberle used his distinctive technique of building up the edges of the represented subject with gesso, to make the photograph appear with even more extraordinary three-dimensionality.¹⁴ The model’s nipple and armpit hair make clear that she has not powdered and shaved herself as was customary to approximate classical statuary and therefore claim the status of art rather than pornography. Instead, Haberle presents the most contested form of nude photography existent at the time of his painting.

Photographs of nudes were made in a variety of contexts in the United States in the late nineteenth century, from medical and scientific efforts such as those by Eadweard Muybridge that were deemed legal, to explicit scenes of sexual activities typically shot in brothels. Haberle shows neither of these, but instead depicts what was most often called a “photograph of a living model,” referring to images made for artists as preparatory studies for figurative works. Haberle’s reproduced cabinet photograph fits neatly into this category, in which models were unshaven and typically posed with even lighting and only slight decorative use of props. No narrative theme is suggested other than that of a model holding a pose. Photographs of living models mostly were made in Paris and few artists, with the notable exception of Thomas Eakins, bothered to produce them in the United States.¹⁵

The reluctance of most American photographers to create images of nudes for study purposes stemmed not only from the strict Comstock-inspired obscenity laws, but also from the fact that French photographers like Louis Igout offered voluminous, high-quality catalogue cards of multiple scenes, from which artists could order larger mounted cabinet versions. The enormous variety of subjects in these images derived from both classical and modern artistic sources and also effectively perpetuated them for new generations. In France, this reciprocal effect was nearly seamless, as demonstrated by the close relationship between Jules Lefebvre’s *La Vérité* (fig. 4) and the same stance held by the model in a

photograph by Guglielmo Marconi (fig. 5). This photograph, dating three years after the painting made its celebrated appearance in the 1870 Salon in Paris, illustrates the way models studied and reproduced the poses in famous works as well as serving as inspiration for them.

Despite the obvious intended purpose of photographs of living models, their erotic possibilities were unavoidable and cast them into a fragile legal status nearly everywhere they were distributed and viewed. Even in France, photographers including Igout and Marconi were careful to clear and register their photographs with official French censors in the years before 1881. In many cases, the photographers were compelled to declare their intended audience and purpose in bold letters on the surrounding mounts, as Marconi does in his portrait of a muscular male model (fig. 6). After 1881, more liberal politicians essentially eliminated art censorship in France and photographers rarely were disturbed by the possibility of an obscenity prosecution.¹⁶

Photographs of living models were sold in the United States in large numbers during Haberle’s career, and they appear in several court cases involving well-known artists, with mixed results. In 1885, a judge allowed John La Farge to keep his photographs of nudes when his holdings were liquidated during bankruptcy proceedings, on the basis that they were never meant to be seen by anyone other than the artist. The following year, the New York photographer Frank Hegger was convicted of selling French photographs that had received a stamp of approval in Paris, a crime for which he paid a considerable fine in addition to losing the value of his stock.¹⁷

In Philadelphia, Comstock raided a series of artist’s supply stores that sold photographs of living models, also in 1886. At the trial, the defense attorney noted that the photographs were imported, had passed through the Customs office, and a duty had been paid on them as works of art. He further provided justification for their use, stating: “It was too expensive for artists to obtain living models for their work and photographs were substituted.”¹⁸ Eakins testified as a witness for the defense, less than a year after he had been fired from his position at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for making his own versions of these photographs, many with students (fig. 7). Fortunately for the art dealers, the judge dismissed the cases, informing Comstock that “it seems absurd for New York detectives to come over here and try to demonstrate that recognized works of art are obscene. . . . There may be a higher standard of virtue then in New York which we here do not have.”¹⁹

fig. 8 Kenyon Cox
(American, 1856–1919).
Diana, n.d. Oil on canvas,
30 × 18¼ in. (76.2 ×
46.4 cm). Chazen Museum
of Art, Madison, Wisconsin,
Gift in memory of Harold G.
Laun (1995.45)



fig. 9 Louis Saint-Gaudens
(American, 1854–1913).
Study for World's Columbian
Exposition Commemorative
Presentation Medal
(reverse), 1892–93. Cast
plaster, 8 in. (20.3 cm).
Harvard Art Museums/Fogg
Museum, Gift of Agnes
Mongan (1974.63)



As a result of such incidents, it is no surprise that American artists and photographers routinely condemned and ridiculed Comstock. The Society of American Artists issued a harsh rebuke to his efforts in 1887, and from that point on relations between artists and censors steadily deteriorated. In 1893, at the same time Haberle was at work on *A Bachelor's Drawer*, the subject of art censorship once again flooded newspapers, thanks to the defiant displays of artists and performers at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. While belly dancing was famously shocking audiences on the lowbrow Midway Plaisance, American artists were staging their own rebellion in the loftier spheres of the White City by displaying abundant nudes, from Augustus Saint-Gaudens's *Diana* atop the Agricultural Building,²⁰ to Kenyon Cox's *Diana* (fig. 8) on view indoors.

When the United States Senate Quadro-Centennial Committee rejected Louis Saint-Gaudens's design for a commemorative medal on the basis that it displayed a nude male figure (fig. 9), the sculptor proclaimed to newspapers on behalf of the Society of American Artists that its annual exhibition for 1894 would be filled with nudes so that he would be "triumphantly vindicated."²¹ Saint-Gaudens's prediction was premature by a year; while the 1894 exhibition was fairly demure, the works displayed in 1895 fully lived up to his threat. The catalogue broke with tradition by illustrating three paintings of nudes: Cox's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Joseph De Camp's *Nude with*

a Globe, and Herbert Denman's *Nymphs and Swans* (figs. 10a, b, 11). Other institutions responded with more nudes. In 1894, the conservative National Academy of Design joined the cause, displaying two of Napoleon Sarony's hand-colored photographs of nudes, called "living pictures," in its Annual Exhibition (fig. 12).²²

Given that Haberle studied at the National Academy of Design in 1884 and 1885, visited New York exhibitions regularly in following decades, and attended the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, he undoubtedly knew about many of these trials and increasing displays of nudes, or at the very least was well aware of the questionable legal status of photographs of living models.²³ His inclusion of this controversial type of image, surrounded by other mementos of questionable morality, represents Haberle's personal contribution to the artistic resistance against censorship so prominent in 1894. At the end of his *New Haven Leader* interview that year, Haberle went so far as to promise that he would thenceforth "devote himself entirely to broader work and will make a specialty of figure composition."²⁴ Although he did not carry out that pledge, his comment nevertheless may be read as expressing his defiant interest in continuing to paint nudes at that moment. If *A Bachelor's Drawer* represents the artist's contribution to the resistance against puritanical censorship, it also reveals his very particular ideological vantage point in doing so.

fig. 10a, b Illustrations in Society of American Artists 1895

fig. 11 Illustration in Society of American Artists 1895

fig. 12 Napoleon Sarony. "The Wave, After P. Dupuis," in Sarony 1894, pl. [8]



10a



10b



11



12

GEOLOGIC TIME

One of the more striking aspects of *A Bachelor's Drawer* is its eccentric arrangement, with most of the dramatic elements located on the right side of the canvas. As Edward Nygren perceptively observed, the bawdy items are displayed "like so many poker or black-jack hands on the front of the drawer."²⁵ Alternatively, the unusual compositional choice may be understood as a meditation upon time, rather than an evocation of chance. More specifically, Haberle's configuration suggests an autobiographical reflection upon the concept of geologic time.²⁶

A unifying theme on both sides of *A Bachelor's Drawer* is the seemingly random placement of the

objects, almost all in layered stacks. Against the orderly horizontals and perpendiculars of the drawer's false front, Haberle's subjects are strewn across the canvas as a series of rectangular shapes, set off-kilter, a mass of detritus signifying a man who has neither time nor interest in straightening the piles, or disposing of garbage. There are no tools to correct this crooked situation; the handles once used to open the drawer are gone, leaving just the shadows of their former placement, and the key to the drawer is nowhere in sight. Although the thermometer records a temperature of 74 degrees Fahrenheit, the situation seems far less temperate.

In *Time and Eternity*, painted in 1889, Haberle experimented with a similarly unbalanced composition (fig. 13). On the spare, left side of the picture plane, time is represented as measured and quantified by the mechanical operations of the stopwatch. The cracked glass suggests the damage caused by age and use. A news clipping placed below the stopwatch, as in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, calls attention to censorship, although in a different mode than the more celebrated work he would begin the following year. The clipping reads "TIME AND ETERNITY. / Bob Ingersoll. / PROVIDENCE, July 4. - In the county jail." The terse fictional headline is laden with significance.

Robert Ingersoll, a celebrated attorney, writer, and lecturer, was famously called "The Great Agnostic," for his fierce defense of religious freedom, and especially the freedom of those who did not believe in any organized religion. In 1886, he defended an atheist named C. B. Reynolds, who was charged with the crime of blasphemy under an antiquated New Jersey law. Reynolds was convicted and received a fine of twenty-five dollars; nevertheless it served as a ripe opportunity for Ingersoll to publicize his brilliant oratory on behalf of free expression.²⁷ Haberle's fanciful choice of the site of "Providence" and the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence for Ingersoll's visit to a "county jail" in his fake news clipping calls attention to perennial American conflicts between church and state exacerbated by censorship campaigns.²⁸



fig. 13 John Haberle. *Time and Eternity*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 14 × 10 in. (35.6 × 25.4 cm). New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, Stephen B. Lawrence Fund (1952.01)

The right side of *Time and Eternity* confirms that these were issues about which Haberle deeply cared. Hung up to the right of the watch and clipping are suggestions of the passage of time on earth as seen through a religious lens, as a series of choices of vice or virtue. A cigarette card with a coy photograph of a pensive female model, hair down and possibly unclothed, lies beneath tickets to plays and horse races, money spent and cards played, and finally, keeping all the *memento peccari* ("remember that you will sin") in place is a crucifix hanging from rosary beads, perhaps a symbol of the cycle of sin and repentance in the Catholic faith. The unpainted wood board against which this battle takes place is a symbol of the corporeal reality of the tree's growth over time, complete with knots and veins.

Haberle's subsequent composition, *A Bachelor's Drawer*, extended the theme of time's passage in a more brooding and elliptical meditation on scientific versus religious chronologies. His fascination with epistemological approaches to time had deep roots. In his "Recollections," Haberle mockingly wrote:

It is a pity that the [apple] that caused the fall of Adam did not fall on his old CoCo, as it did on Sr. Isaac Newton's and demonstrate the theory of the central force of gravity of the earth, and then if later on the great master (who is supposed to have possessed a spiritual body which could overcome a certain natural law) had told us something about the shape of the earth, we would now be much further advanced in science.

Later on, he noted: "My best time before I took up the brush was while I was at the Yale Peabody Museum, drawing the old fossils which Professor Marsh was having made for publication. I was there when the great biologist, Huxley, was the guest of Yale and Professor Marsh."²⁹ These disparaging references to the Bible, and glowing references to Marsh and Huxley, demonstrate Haberle's attraction to theories that elevated scientific knowledge over theological narrative. During Haberle's life and career, the nature of time was central to this debate.

At the time Othniel Charles Marsh was the most famous paleontologist in America—a professor at Yale University, president of the National Academy of Sciences, and a leader of the U.S. Geological Survey.³⁰ Marsh was one of the first American converts to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In this belief, he followed his guest at Yale during Haberle's tenure there, Thomas Henry Huxley, renowned as "Darwin's bulldog," and one of his first English adherents. In 1876, Huxley

fig. 14 Bones of scapular arch and sternum of *Hesperornis regalis*, in Marsh 1880, pl. 6.



traveled to New Haven to see the extraordinary collection of fossils that Marsh had amassed in the American West and Midwest. His son and biographer described the visit as “a revelation . . . ‘Professor Marsh would simply turn to his assistant and bid him fetch box number so and so,’ until Huxley finally exclaimed, ‘I believe you are a magician; whatever I want, you just conjure it up.’” Darwin himself wrote to Marsh to praise him for his work on toothed birds, which, he said, “afforded the best support to the theory of Evolution, which has appeared within the last twenty years.”³¹

Haberle’s work at the Peabody Museum of Natural History in the 1870s, at the time of Huxley’s visit, included drafting illustrations for the precise volume Darwin praised: Marsh’s generative work *Odontornithes: A Monograph on the Extinct Toothed Birds of North America*, published in 1880.³² The preface to the impressive tome described the landscape that had yielded the unprecedented collection of fossils: “Along the eastern

slope of the Rocky Mountains, and especially on the adjoining plains in Kansas and Colorado, there is a series of Cretaceous strata remarkably rich in vertebrate fossils. The deposits are all marine, and, away from the mountains, they lie nearly horizontal. . . . here have been found the extinct Birds which form the subject of the present memoir.”³³

By the time of his publication, Marsh no longer needed to specifically explain the concept of geologic time that these remarks relied upon. The observation that rocks and fossils were laid in horizontal strata with older deposits found at deeper levels had been accepted by geologists since the early eighteenth century. Well before the 1870s, the aim of paleontologists and geologists had shifted to refining their chronological periodization of the earth and its inhabitants, rather than considering alternative theories.

In *Odontornithes*, Haberle contributed to illustrations of the excavated fossils in plates such as number VI,

Hesperornis regalis, in which the fragmentary remains of the toothed bird were viewed from above on the surface of the page (fig. 14). In *A Bachelor's Drawer*, Haberle's similar inversion of his surface and inclusion of the "remarkably rich" fossilized remains of his own bachelorhood are evocative of the products dug out of the "Cretaceous strata" Marsh described. Analyzing *A Bachelor's Drawer* in relation to the conceptual architecture of geologic time provides new insight into Haberle's thought process when composing the painting.

Imagining geologic time as an organizing framework within the picture suggests two ways of "reading" the work. Moving from the bottom of the picture plane to the top, the work could be understood as Haberle's personal evolution, from the remains of his life as art student and bachelor, signified by the photograph from life and theater tickets, to his more presentable occupations as a well-groomed and eligible bachelor above. In the topmost "strata," Haberle finally deposits the accoutrements of his life as husband and father, signified by the baby-naming pamphlet. In this sense, *A Bachelor's Drawer* evokes the concept of geologic time, measured in detritus deposited in layers with past below and present above.

Geologic time in *A Bachelor's Drawer* may be read in another way as well. In a visceral sense, the appeal of trompe l'oeil paintings has always relied upon the viewer's awareness of just how much time was required to produce the ruse. For Haberle, as well as his kindred trompe l'oeil painters William Michael Harnett and John Frederick Peto, there were never any rapid gestures or scumbled distant backgrounds. Even judged against the work of these other consummate practitioners, *A Bachelor's Drawer* reveals its extraordinary consumption of the artist's time in a resounding manner.

Haberle worked on *A Bachelor's Drawer* for four years, adding objects on top of objects, so that the viewer may metaphorically excavate sedimentary deposits not only from bottom to top, but also from surface to substrate. The out-of-date currency at left ranges from Reconstruction-era "fractional currency" on the top of the heap, to an early Connecticut twenty-shilling note at bottom.³⁴ On the opposite side, the baby rests atop the dandy, and spades atop the hearts—in short, time outplays all. In this sense, Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer* revisits the themes of several previous works, including *Time and Eternity*, as well as *Changes in Time*, which pairs pictures of long-defunct currency with a paraded "frame" of past Presidents of the United States. These works all remind viewers

that human lives will pass into oblivion on par with the toothed birds of the Cretaceous Era—a position distinctly at odds with the evangelical censors of his day, including Comstock, who proselytized a much different version of the "truth" of human existence and afterlife.

TRUTH

In his epistolary account of "Recollections" addressed to his daughter Vera in 1925, Haberle remarked: "Your father, owing to his religious disbeliefs, might be taken for a bad man, but as bad men smoke, drink, gamble, and dissipate generally, he cannot be classed as one. . . . To enter wedlock he would have neither priest, minister, or rabbi . . . a justice of the peace was good enough for holy matrimony." Haberle continued to include a variety of complaints against religious dogma, including quips such as "The Bible miracles were all possible, but not probable," in addition to several more supportive claims to the power of faith.³⁵ In this short statement, Haberle allied himself with the central argument of the agnosticism of Robert Ingersoll, whom he had referenced in *Time and Eternity*, and of Thomas Huxley, whom Haberle remembered long after his visit to New Haven while the artist was working for Othniel Charles Marsh.

Besides his extraordinary contributions to the fields of biology and paleontology, Huxley also grappled with the philosophical shifts that accompanied the extension of Darwinian ideas to the story of humanity. For his efforts, he was called out as an infidel by creationists, who believed that evolutionary theory challenged the centrality and agency of God.³⁶ Despite the fierce rationality of agnostic thought, or perhaps because of it, backlash from Christian conservatives once again involved censorship at the precise moment Haberle was painting *A Bachelor's Drawer*.

In 1892, Congressman Hilary A. Herbert of Alabama gave a speech on the House floor decrying the expense of government funds on an edition of *Odontornithes* produced by the U.S. Geological Survey. Calling the work "atheistic rubbish," he then organized a cut to the budget of the organization.³⁷ Both Haberle's subject matter and his compositional choices suggest that the debate between these two epistemological stances was on his mind. His own ideological stance is indisputable. Haberle was so proud of his contributions to *Odontornithes* that he always kept one of the plates hanging on the wall of his studio, with his name on an adjacent label.³⁸ Truth, for Haberle, lay in strata, not sermons.

The artist's fascination for debates regarding the determination of truth extended to his engagement

with the concept of *trompe l'oeil* painting, as well as to his numerous, complex depictions of currency. Throughout his career, Haberle, like Harnett and Peto, grappled with disdain from America's fine-art elite. For critics like John Ruskin and his many followers, eye-fooling images bore nothing of the imaginative spirit required for art. Instead, they were termed "mechanical feats" that required audiences only to think about what was real or fake, rather than to ponder loftier ideals. Paul Staiti amply documents the torrent of criticism *trompe l'oeil* paintings received from critics like Clarence Cook and artists like George Inness, all of whom were deeply invested in the project of proving the worth of American painting. *Trompe l'oeil* seemed to these observers devoid of the seriousness, feeling, expression, and interpretation required of true art.³⁹

The prejudice against *trompe l'oeil* had significant ramifications for artists practicing this ancient genre. On the basis that the paintings were not real art, but rather were deceptions, they often were, as Gertrude Grace Sill writes, "exhibited and sold in art supply and frame shops, bars, hotel and theater lobbies, and fairs and exhibition halls. . . . Haberle himself referred to his painting style as 'artistic mechanics.'"⁴⁰ Rather than taking offense, the artist delighted in provocatively playing upon the concepts of deceit and truth. This playful spirit is especially evident in Haberle's depictions of currency.

Money is a common element in nineteenth-century *trompe l'oeil* paintings, as it provided an opportunity to test the artist's skill at depicting counterfeit. Calling attention to this popular play between fake and real,

Haberle scrawled upon the topmost "fractional currency" in *A Bachelor's Drawer* the following suggestion of criminality: "This note with a lot of counterfeit money and detectives from New York . . . claim this to be genuine." With tongue firmly in cheek, Haberle's "detectives" vouched that the artist's forgery was true.⁴¹

Haberle's predilection for teasing audiences to debate the veracity of his painted currency has been noted by other art historians. Sill pointed out that the artist tackled the subject early and often in his career, after seeing Harnett's *Still Life-Five-Dollar Bill* on exhibition at the National Academy of Design in 1885 (fig. 15). Harnett's exquisite depiction of American currency famously had earned him a visit from the United States Secret Service, which investigated the possibility of counterfeiting, and Haberle courted the same profitable controversy as early as 1889.⁴² In a related argument, Michael Leja contends that Harnett's paintings enticed viewers to distinguish real from fake through analysis of the "mechanisms" involved in the artist's visual tricks, which provided a form of comfort in an age of rampant fraud and corruption.⁴³

The matter of fraudulent currency in a more literal sense also was a matter of Comstockian campaigns during the years Haberle painted *A Bachelor's Drawer*. In May 1893, the *New Haven Morning Journal and Courier* reported that Comstock had arrived in nearby Bridgeport "and assumed personal charge of the effects of the 'green goods' men who opened quarters and commenced operations in this city last week."⁴⁴ The "green goods" ruse involved mailing circulars, typically to rural men, who were promised large quantities of



fig. 15 William Michael Harnett (American, 1848–1892). *Still Life-Five-Dollar Bill*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 8 × 12½ in. (20.3 × 30.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Alex Simpson, Jr., Collection, 1943 (1943-74-5)



fig. 16 Herbert F. Denman (American, 1855–1903). *Nymphs and Swans*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 26 × 36 in. (66 × 91.4 cm). Private collection

perfectly forged currency in exchange for a much smaller amount of legal cash. In contrast to Comstock's raids on art, which were widely unpopular, his suppression of these types of schemes involving the postal service garnered broad support, and numerous, sensational stories across the country. A son of New Canaan, Connecticut, Comstock and his adventures were covered with special attention and interest in Haberle's shared home state.⁴⁵

Although Haberle painted nothing in *A Bachelor's Drawer* as obviously illegal as green goods circulars, his inclusion of legally liminal subjects complicates the supposedly simplistic relationship viewers had to the trompe l'oeil canvas as imagined by Ruskin and others. Are viewers supposed to peer closely at the surface of the picture, determining if the nude photograph and actress card are real? If so, then in the context of 1894, they were engaging in not only an immoral act of looking but also potentially in a violation of the law. At the very least, Haberle invites mixed company to scrutinize the underbelly of a bachelor's life, including pictures that were meant to be seen and enjoyed only by men. The artist appears to use his practice of deception to provide a more complete truth than "high art" painters were willing to expose.

In his own manner of rejecting Comstockery, Haberle engages in deceit that is vastly more honest than the concoctions of artists like Herbert F. Denman, whose *Nymphs and Swans* displayed at the Society of American Artists in 1895 was undoubtedly viewed as a form of courageous defiance (fig. 16).

Instead of presenting nudes that are waxed and bathed in bleaching sunlight, Haberle delivers a painting that more deeply questions the difference between falsehood and veracity.⁴⁶

Returning to Haberle's bachelor years, it is worthwhile to point out that they were longer-lasting than most. Census records document the average age of first marriage in 1890 to be twenty-six years old for men; Haberle waited almost an extra decade, to age thirty-five, before marrying a woman more than fourteen years younger.⁴⁷ The detritus of all those bachelor years, strewn across the picture surface of *A Bachelor's Drawer*, offers the portrait of a flourishing subculture of material, visual, and theatrical amusements enjoyed by the nation's single men, typically out of public view.

Like counterfeit currency, cigarette cards, and lottery tickets, the precarious legal status of photographs of living models and actress cards was abundantly clear, yet also absurd given the enormous numbers of these images, which were viewed by men behind closed doors and then buried in bachelors' drawers. Censorship efforts did not diminish their circulation, but only relegated the images to cloistered spaces in which they were viewed in acts of homosocial solidarity and empowerment. In light of this context, Haberle's *A Bachelor's Drawer* may be viewed as an act of honest unveiling of men's hidden visual culture and entertainments, as well as a portrait of a personal transition.

In 1894, as he took on the responsibilities of fatherhood, Haberle shed the privileges of bachelorhood and brazenly exhibited them on canvas. In doing so, he joined a generation of artists and activists, working on the cusp of the Progressive Era, who were devoted to overthrowing the outdated puritanism of past centuries, and embracing a more truthful and egalitarian American culture. Unfortunately for Haberle, however, there was no patron willing to purchase *A Bachelor's Drawer*. Despite numerous efforts to sell his most striking work—in New Haven, Springfield, Detroit, and New York—it languished in his home and studio until Vera (the baby in the picture) sold it in 1960, when she cleared the house in which she had lived continuously since childhood. The Metropolitan Museum acquired the painting a decade later.⁴⁸

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NOTES

- A version of this paper was first presented at the Wyeth Foundation in American Art Conference at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2018.
- 1 Sill 2009, pp. 3, 16. Gertrude Grace Sill's exhibition catalogue is the most comprehensive source of information on the artist.
 - 2 The 1910 Census lists the Haberles' ages as: John (53), Sarah (39), Vera (15), and Gladys (12). The couple is listed as having been married for 18 years. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, "Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population," Connecticut, New Haven Township and City, Ward 15, District 0443, Sheet No. 3A. Accessed at Ancestry.com, November 12, 2018.
 - 3 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3. For the most complete description of each of these objects, see Sill 2009, pp. 37–39.
 - 4 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 5 The history of Anthony Comstock and nineteenth-century censorship in the United States is covered in much greater detail in Werbel 2018. Comstock's empowerment in 1873 is discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 66–76.
 - 6 New York Society for the Suppression of Vice 1894, p. 21. The NYSSV was a private, evangelical moral reform society that nevertheless held authority to order arrests by virtue of powers granted to it at the time of its incorporation in New York State.
 - 7 MMA 94.24.1.
 - 8 Werbel 2018, pp. 128, 190–203; see also Gillers 2007.
 - 9 *New York Herald*, November 15, 1887, p. 4; quoted in Beisel 1998, pp. 170–71.
 - 10 Werbel 2018, pp. 150–59.
 - 11 "Report of Persons Arrested under the Auspices of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice," MSS 34587, vol. 2, pp. 112–13, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Lynn Pritcher, "Emergence of Advertising in America, 1850–1920: More about Tobacco Advertising and the Tobacco Collections," John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, & Marketing History, Duke University, <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/eaa/tobacco.html> (accessed October 10, 2016); "The Art of American Advertising: National Markets," Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, <https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/artadv/national-markets.html> (accessed October 10, 2016). See also Abramovich 2016.
 - 12 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 13 New York Society for the Suppression of Vice 1894, p. 20.
 - 14 For a description of this technique, see Sill 2009, p. 18.
 - 15 For a comprehensive analysis of Eakins's photographs, see Danly and Leibold 1994.
 - 16 Dawkins 2002, pp. 7–85.
 - 17 Werbel 2018, pp. 174–86. The other works Comstock seized in the Hegger raid remained in the original package in which they had arrived, addressed from the firm of Adolphe Braun & Co. in Paris. In 1883, the Braun firm had been designated as the first official photographer of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, with the sole license to photograph and circulate copies of the museum's many treasures. The photographs received from Braun undoubtedly included many paintings and sculptures of the nude as their subjects. "Art Works and Their Photographic Reproduction," Musée d'Orsay, 2006, https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/archives/exhibitions-archives/browse/8/article/oeuvre-dart-et-sa-reproduction-photographique-4241.html?S=1&print=1&no_cache=1&.
 - 18 The sequence and content of the testimony in the Philadelphia cases suggest that Eakins was the customer who had made the initial request to Frederick Weber to order *académies* (academic nudes) from France in 1881. This was the same year Eakins began to create his own versions. In its coverage of the testimony, the *Public Ledger, Philadelphia* (1888, p. 4) recounted: "The defence [*sic*] claimed that it was as necessary to have pictures of this character to study the fine arts as it was to have a dead body for the study of anatomy." This conflation of artistic and medical approaches to the body was precisely Eakins's argument in his own defense two years earlier. McCauley 1994, p. 38; Werbel 2007, pp. 131–32, 186–90.
 - 19 *Public Ledger, Philadelphia*, 1888, p. 4.
 - 20 MMA 1985.353.
 - 21 *Washington Post* 1894, p. 15, quoted in David S. Shields, "Carnal Glory? Nudity and the Fine and Performing Arts, 1890–1917," *Broadway Photographs*, University of South Carolina, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://broadway.cas.sc.edu/content/carnal-glory-nudity-and-fine-and-performing-arts-1890-1917>.
 - 22 Saroni exhibited *Night and Birth of Venus*; Naylor 1973, vol. 2, p. 822.
 - 23 A postcard Haberle sent home from the Exposition is preserved in John Haberle Papers, 1882–1985 (bulk 1882–1931), box 3, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.
 - 24 *New Haven Evening Leader* 1894, p. 3.
 - 25 Nygren continues, "As humorous as the composition is, the juxtaposition implies that money is corrupting, an analogy employed at the time by other artists." For both quotes see Nygren 1988, p. 140.
 - 26 James H. Miller addresses a different aspect of geological time in his excellent article "The Flow Will Return: Geological Time in Winslow Homer's Work" (2019). Miller and other art historians addressed in the article are principally concerned with the depiction of geological elements in landscape paintings, and their evocation of concepts including the age of the earth. My approach to Haberle relies upon similar analysis of the influence of physical sciences on American art, but with a contrasting focus in terms of subject matter and aesthetics. The terms "geologic time" and "geological time" are often used interchangeably, with the former used more consistently in Haberle's era.
 - 27 For a comprehensive study of Ingersoll, see Jacoby 2013.
 - 28 Alfred Frankenstein first suggested in 1965 a connection between Haberle's work at the Peabody Museum of Natural History and his paintings: "He was a member of the technical staff at the paleontological museum of Yale University, and the 19th century controversies of science and religion are hinted at in a number of his paintings, notably the irreverent *Time and Eternity* (No. 65), with its rosary beads, its playing cards, and its reference to Robert Ingersoll, the atheist printer." Introduction to Frankenstein 1965, unpaginated.
 - 29 The full text of Haberle's recollections is published in Sill 2009, pp. 1–5.
 - 30 See Cohen 1980.
 - 31 Conniff 2016.
 - 32 Edelson and Narendra 1987.
 - 33 Marsh 1880, p. 2.
 - 34 Sill 2009, pp. 37–38.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.
 - 36 For a nuanced view of these debates, see Gilley and Loades 1981. See also Huxley 1889, p. 21.
 - 37 Moore, Decker, and Cotner 2010, p. 133.

- 38 Edelson and Narendra 1987, pp. 25–30.
- 39 Staiti 2002, pp. 100–102.
- 40 Sill 2009, p. 7.
- 41 See Nygren 1988. The frequent inclusion of money in nineteenth-century trompe l'oeil paintings also has been interpreted by previous scholars as a nod to corruption and commodification pervasive in the Gilded Age, as well as the “moral temptations and the dangers of being enticed to reach for easy money.” Staiti 2002, p. 95.
- 42 Sill 2009, pp. 15, 25. Edward Nygren proposes that Haberle's inclusion only of “worthless and disintegrating bills” may have been a way of avoiding government scrutiny, and “may have also been intended in part as a commentary on the uncertainty of paper money not backed by specie.” Nygren 1988, p. 140.
- 43 Leja 2006, pp. 145–47.
- 44 *Morning Journal and Courier* 1893, p. 3.
- 45 In New Haven's *Morning Journal and Courier* between 1890 and 1894, Comstock's name appears at least six times. Comstock's raid in Bridgeport in 1893 was extensively and favorably described across the country, as for example in the *Topeka Daily Press* 1893, p. 2.
- 46 Mark Mitchell notes that Haberle's *The Changes of Time* (1888) “is as much about history itself as it is about the American past.” Mitchell also points out that Haberle makes a claim through newspaper clippings included in the work that he “perpetrated” his deceptions “honestly.” Mitchell 2015, p. 204.
- 47 “Historical Marital Status Tables,” November 2019, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html>.
- 48 Object file for MMA 1970.193 in the American Wing. I thank Sylvia Yount, Lawrence A. Fleischman Curator in Charge of the American Wing, and Lillian Paulson for facilitating my visit to examine the file.

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“The Toughest, Meanest Art I Was Making”: Edward Ruscha’s Books

DOUG EKLUND

MAKE IT LOUD

In 1962, Edward Ruscha exhibited for the first time in what would subsequently be recognized as the first group exhibition devoted to Pop Art, the Pasadena Art Museum’s “New Painting of Common Objects.”¹ Shortly before the show’s opening, the exhibition’s curator, Walter Hopps, approached Ruscha to design the exhibition poster.² The artist responded by unknowingly echoing one of modernism’s great, if then subterranean, creation myths—László Moholy-Nagy’s use of a telephone to relay instructions for the production of a painting, a gesture that in the context of the 1920s announced the new integration of aesthetic production as inherently social.³ Ruscha reached for the Yellow Pages and dialed the Majestic Poster Company, and his sole directive to the

fig. 1 Edward Ruscha (American, b. 1937). *Box Smashed Flat*, 1960–61. Oil on canvas, 70 × 48 in. (177.8 × 121.9 cm). Private collection

fig. 2 Edward Ruscha. *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, 1962. Oil, house paint, ink, and graphite pencil on canvas, 66¹⁵/₁₆ × 133³/₈ in. (170 × 338.1 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase, with funds from the Mrs. Percy Urish Purchase Fund (85.41)



typesetter other than size and copy was “Make It Loud.” As Ruscha must have known, the poster came back perfect (“instant design”⁴), looking like a seedy, slightly out-of-date bill for a night of prizefights or a 1956 rock-and-roll concert—a readymade Ruscha.

One of the artist’s new paintings in the Pasadena exhibition, *Box Smashed Flat*, exemplifies his work of the previous year: horizontally divided fields of color that separate meticulously rendered product packaging above and enlarged single words below (fig. 1). In *Box Smashed Flat*, the slashing violence of Willem de Kooning’s gestural style has become the ineffectual spurt of raisin juice from a trompe l’oeil Sun-Maid box splattered like blood across the evocative Civil War-place-name rendered in “old American” letterpress-like typeface. (Vicksburg was one of the artist’s stops on a trip through the South a few years earlier, but in this context may also refer to the violence visited upon Civil Rights protesters at the time.) The bifurcation of the painting between the pictorial and the linguistic, the brushwork that seems to adhere to some blankly rote yet inscrutable system of execution, the self-reflexive enfolding of surface into image and vice versa, are indebted to Jasper Johns, whose work made the greatest impression on the young painter.⁵

Throughout 1962 and into the following year, however, Ruscha’s work shed some of its more overt affinities with that of Johns, as the painted words gain increasingly singularized importance in an image, together with either localizing or removing altogether the presence of the individual brushstroke. In *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* (fig. 2), the artist further



fig. 3 Edward Ruscha. *Annie*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 72 × 67 in. (182.9 × 170.2 cm). Private collection



abstracted the famous 20th-Century Fox logo so that it represented both interior (darkened movie house) and exterior (night sky) through a diagonal projection of light dividing the navy blue background and the perspectival spray of ruled lines culminating in the epically scaled red lettering before yellow floodlights—the opening credits of spectacle culture rendered in art-historically overloaded primary (techni)colors.

Also that year, Ruscha alluded to the modernist chromatic tabula rasa in *Annie* (fig. 3) by combining two visual structures from the same historical moment and opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. With his 1921 suite of monochrome canvases (*Pure Red Color*, *Pure Yellow Color*, and *Pure Blue Color*), Aleksandr Rodchenko heralded the artist's abandonment of painting via works that would serve as the backdrop for the construction of the new collective subject. Ruscha perversely conjoins this Productivist farewell to bourgeois art with the redheaded waif Little Orphan Annie (1924), the first true mass superstar of the funny papers and plucky ingenue (rescued and raised by the benevolent tycoon Daddy Warbucks), who was so famous in her day that even now the Goudy Heavyface typeface used in the strip's logo metonymically stands in for "The Twenties." With his typically bemused, poker-faced wit, Ruscha consigns the seemingly antithetical projects of modernity in their supposedly opposing guises—the Janus face of communism and comics—to the same fate.⁶

TWENTYSIX GASOLINE STATIONS

The first thing Andy [Warhol] said when he saw my book—I gave him *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*—was "How do you get all these pictures without people in them?"⁷

In 1962, Ruscha painted two words in yellow—WAR and SURPLUS—on a navy blue field, the first larger and centered, the second below, squeezed in and smaller, and rendered in a variant of the aggressively instrumentalized "Army-Navy" serif type that the artist also used for the cover of that first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, published in January 1963 in an edition of four hundred copies (figs. 4, 5).⁸ Judging from the cover, Ruscha's book looks more instructional manual than *livre d'artiste*, showing what it says it does in casually composed snapshots taken on the old Route 66 that the artist regularly drove from Los Angeles to his hometown of Oklahoma City.⁹ More than the other fifteen books that followed, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* seems to have often invited critical wrong turns over the last four decades. Perhaps the most persistent of these is its relationship to the tradition of the photographic book, particularly as it had developed since the 1930s. *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* did appear at a particularly significant moment in that history. Walker Evans's seminal *American Photographs* was republished by the Museum of Modern Art in 1960, and an expanded edition of James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* also came out, both of which had enjoyed a semi-underground status since the Depression and were looked upon with renewed interest in the years of Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." A year earlier, Robert Frank had published *The Americans*, which in the subject of its photographs and picture-to-a-page presentation referred back implicitly to *American Photographs*.

David Bourdon was the first to explicitly connect Ruscha's book to 1930s documentary photography, and others have linked *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* to *The Americans* as well.¹⁰ While Ruscha's deliberately spare design of right-hand-page photographs with facing page captions does in fact recall the layout of *American Photographs* (in its 1960 second edition), and Ruscha has expressed his admiration for both Evans and Frank, even a cursory look at Evans's and Frank's images of similar subjects reveals how deliberately composed they are compared to Ruscha's rigorously deskilled pictures of gas stations.¹¹ While Jeff Wall's assertion that "Ruscha's book ruins the genre of 'the book of photographs,' that classical form in which art-photography declares its independence"¹² is certainly true *Twentysix*

fig. 4 Edward Ruscha.
Cover of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963. Black offset printing, $7\frac{1}{16} \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{3}{16}$ in. ($17.9 \times 14 \times .5$ cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Stewart S. MacDermott Fund, 1970 (1970.590.6)

Gasoline Stations and the three others dealing with architecture and public space—*Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), and *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970)—represent far more than a travesty of outmoded genres. Designed deliberately to seem peripheral, marginal, even put-ons, Ruscha's books may have succeeded all too well in this regard. As important as the finest of his paintings, these four books in particular fuse his abiding interests in typography and graphic design, architecture and public space, advertising and publicity into singular expressions of the dwindling potential for artistic communication in a culture driven by commodities.

Ruscha himself commented on the relatively unnoticed status of his books to an interviewer in 1988; when asked if any of his work had been "lost in the shuffle," Ruscha replied: "Well, I think my books are the toughest part of my art. Yet, my notoriety or whatever it is not really based on that. I have misgivings about the fact that people didn't see my books as I wanted them to.

I always felt like that was the dark side of what I was up against and what I stood for—the toughest, meanest art I was making."¹³ The importance of the books lies, in fact, not in any one aspect (photographs, cover, captions) but in the cohesion that Ruscha modestly proposed for them in a 1965 interview with John Coplans ("I merely wanted a cohesive thing"¹⁴), in which each ingredient—type, layout, photograph, and subject—is perfectly blended for maximum effect. A book, of course, implies a different kind of interactivity than a painting, and making a work of art that masquerades as a book includes and implicates the reader, and by extension the broader public sphere. The circulation system (in which both commodities and individuals move as products of that system) is recruited to map a new space reflected in the pictures: the anti-monuments along Route 66 in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, the stop-motion movement along the "store-front plane of a Western town"¹⁵ in *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, the desert stretch strewn with typewriter debris in his "visual caper"¹⁶ *Royal Road Test* (1967).

Twentysix Gasoline Stations appeared on the scene at the intersection of a diverse array of postwar artistic practices, from the emergence of designed linguistic statements as valid visual art in Fluxus to the hegemonic rise of design in a commodity-and-publicity-oriented consumer culture that left its mark on both Minimalism and Pop alike. But the animating spirit behind *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* is undoubtedly Andy Warhol, whose first solo exhibition was held at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in summer 1962 featuring the set of Campbell's Soup Can paintings (fig. 6). At that moment, Warhol was also making his first serially structured photo-silkscreens, which incorporated the most debased (celebrity/tabloid) and insidious (identity card/mug shot) forms of photography into the practice of painting. In his account of Warhol's 1962 Ferus Gallery show, Benjamin Buchloh emphasized how both Warhol's conception for the exhibition (in adhering strictly to the company array of product flavors) and his method of presentation (as store shelf displays), mirrored the logic of commodity production and distribution. The principles of quantification and serial progression that Warhol imported into his art, first with the Campbell's Soup Cans and just after with the silkscreen paintings, would provide the template for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*.¹⁷ Warhol was working at the threshold of (without ever crossing over into) the new modes of production and distribution that Ruscha's book dives right into. Warhol's use of "blanks," for example—the extra monochrome panels that the artist

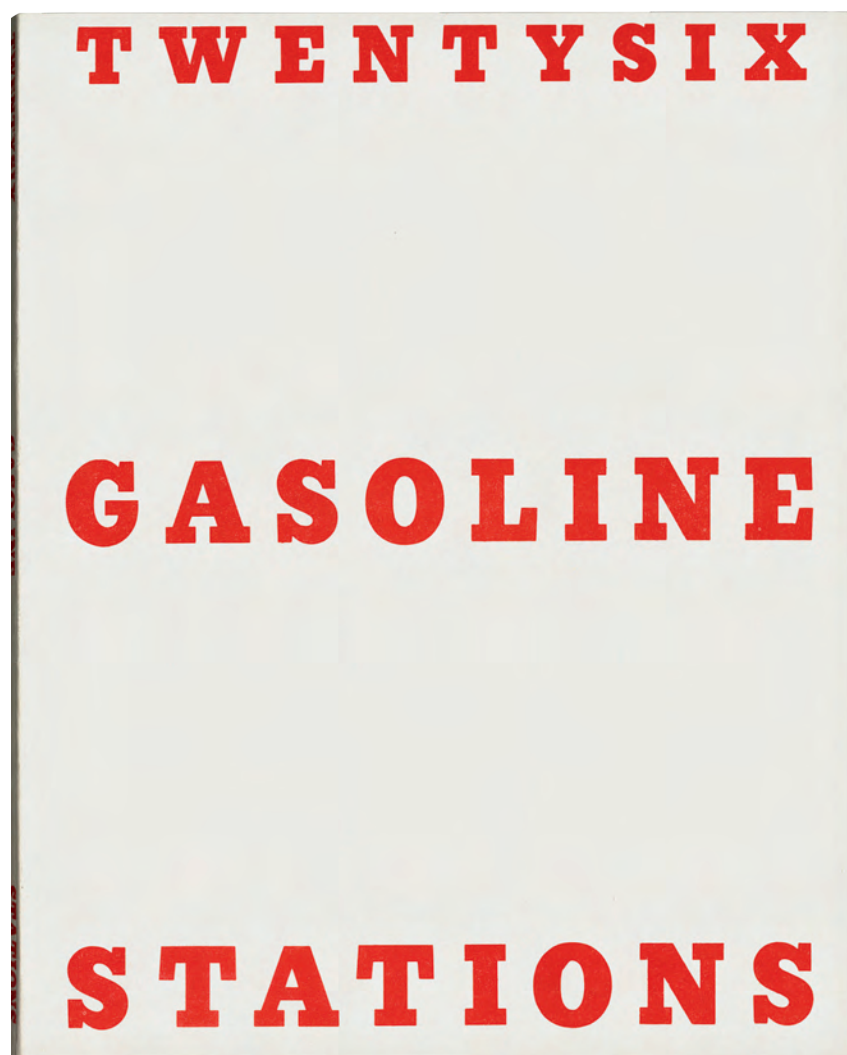


fig. 5 Two spreads from
Twentysix Gasoline Stations
(fig. 4)

STANDARD, AMARILLO, TEXAS



UNION, NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA



fig. 6 Installation view of Andy Warhol exhibition at Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, 1962

fig. 7 George Brecht (American, 1926–2008). Designed and produced by George Maciunas. Published by Fluxus. *Word Event* from *Water Yam*, 1963. Offset card from cardboard box with offset label, containing sixty-nine offset cards, sheet $3\frac{3}{16} \times 2\frac{1}{8}$ in. (8.4 × 6.7 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift (1988.2008.70)

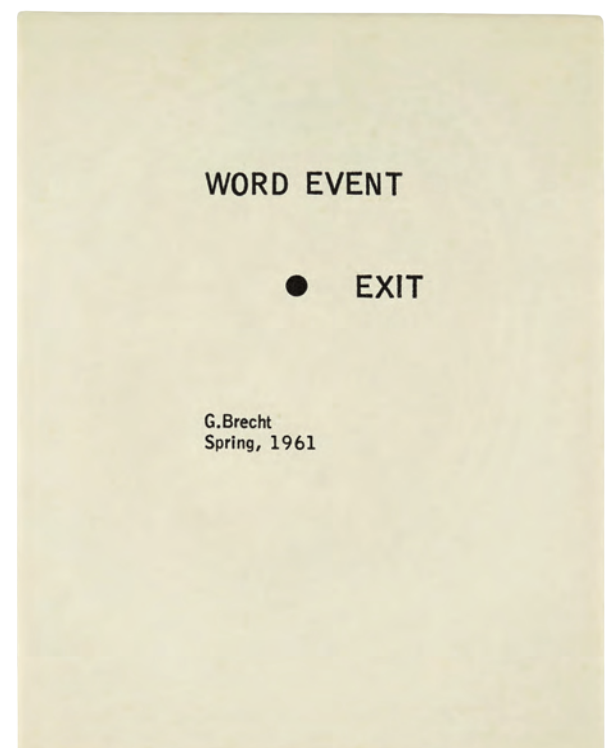
sometimes included to create diptychs out of his photo-silkscreens—finds its logical correlative in the blank pages with which Ruscha fills out his *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (1968) to give it the precise bulk and heft of a “real” book.

In interviews, Ruscha often relished the thought of total strangers picking up his books by accident. The title itself (Why gas stations? Why 26?) functions simultaneously as *a priori* linguistic act and speculative big business “high concept” that in turn generates the marketable content—a precise inversion of the prevailing Beat-era ethos of “finding oneself” and one’s subject on the road. Instead, it was “I saw a book out there full of photographs of gas stations, full of twenty-six gas stations, if you will”¹⁸ or “I had the title . . . even before I took the photographs. . . . then it was a simple matter of just going out and taking the pictures”¹⁹ or “my whole attitude came out in this one phrase that I made up for myself, which was ‘twenty-six gasoline stations.’”²⁰ Like Johns’s famous dream of himself painting an American flag, Ruscha’s description of the genesis of *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* emphasizes the enforced passivity of the translation from idea to object, in which the dirty work of execution has the feel of sleepwalking. What sounds at first like recourse to dream logic, however, can be more accurately described as a state of being guided by language, with the number 26 seemingly both random and enigmatically precise, subliminally registering with the reader as the number of letters in the alphabet. “The first book came out of a play with words.”²¹

To foreground the relationship of *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* to issues of language, design, and new modes of production and distribution that mimic the logic of the commodity is at the same time to downplay the photographs as independent works of art themselves, something that Ruscha did repeatedly in interviews regarding the books. Instead of being portable retrospectives of images made independently of the

publication, Ruscha’s books reverse the equation, with the scattershot images produced not for aesthetic contemplation but rather to reach the quota of the title. By masquerading as the final installment of an imaginary trilogy of canonical “American” photo-books (*American Photographs* . . . *The Americans* . . . *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*), Ruscha’s book leads the reader/viewer into a cul-de-sac or blind alley of aesthetic puzzlement via images that seem to be overtly devoid of any formal or compositional intention, as opposed to the cleaned-up, if blankly uninflected, look of the volume that houses them.²²

In turning to the cover and title as the engine that drives the book, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* shares an aesthetic affinity with Fluxus artist George Brecht’s “event scores” of 1960–61 (fig. 7). In her essay “Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the ‘Event’ Score,” Liz Kotz emphasized the portability of Brecht’s text pieces as one of their hallmarks, arguing that “their oddly condensed and enigmatic form may have facilitated their rapid circulation between performance, publication, and exhibition formats: small, strange, and belonging to no definable genre, they could go anywhere.” For Kotz, the event scores were essentially “linguistically-framed readymade[s],” where the very act of naming performs a barely visible “cut into the evanescent everyday.”²³ This subversive movement through the rigidly maintained hierarchies of the culture industry (signified by George Maciunas’s choice of the then



technologically advanced-looking, excessively instrumentalized IBM typewriter font) is in a sense the same pathway of production and distribution implied for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, what Kotz describes as the cutting into the everyday that the scores effect.

What unites Brecht's event scores and Ruscha's books structurally is that they encapsulate a movement from formalist to linguistic self-reflexivity. Brecht's approach, however, could not be more different in tone; it is precisely the event score's repeatability that extends it to anyone, allowing its successful permeation of the everyday—the readymade extended and filtered through the participatory aesthetic of John Cage. Ruscha's "extension of the readymade in photographic form," however, proposes a more sinister prognosis for the reader, though like Brecht's cards they also reflect that postwar reception of Duchamp's readymade as both industrially produced and a linguistic act.²⁴

The artist described his formulation of the book's title in specifically these terms, as both "a play with words" and, to Coplans: "I like the word 'gasoline' and I like the specific quality of 'twentysix.'" At the end of that interview, Ruscha left the readers with an image: "It is almost worth the money to have the thrill of seeing 400 exactly identical books stacked in front of you."²⁵ In a witty drawing from 1964, the artist depicted his four hundred copies of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* standing on edge, lit by spotlights and receding into the distance as if possessing the glitz and star power of the 20th-Century Fox logo.²⁶ It is the overarching and leveling principle of quantification that holds together the books as a whole, from the internal "subject" of the book (gas station) to its tautological subject, the book as specific object—a cohesive commodity whose machinery (weights, sizes, page layouts, typefaces) is as carefully calibrated as a Donald Judd sculpture—to its final destination, the fate of the individual subject through the figure of the reader. The success of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* lies paradoxically in the brilliance of its custom-built frame of failure. If the metric of success for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* was its pose of incomprehensibility, the book succeeded beyond the artist's wildest dreams. Nothing could fulfill its inability to communicate and circulate more than when the copy that the artist sent to the Library of Congress in 1963 was rejected by the institution (the library still does not have the book in its collection). In March 1964, Ruscha took out an ad in *Artforum* trumpeting this rejection as a selling point: "REJECTED Oct. 2 1963 by the Library of Congress Washington D.C. 25 copies available @ \$3.00."²⁷

Ruscha's lightbulb moment of a book called *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* resembles the creative spark in Duchamp's recipe for the readymade, where the insertion of language detours the serviceable commodity form from its normal route to a new meaning that is only completed in the bemused absorption of the viewer. In the context of a rapidly expanding postwar consumer culture, however, Ruscha's bolt-from-the-blue-turned-homeless-commodity is like a little parable of the Duchampian readymade tangled up in delivery systems and distribution forms run amok—think how highways and gas stations, books and works of art move people, liquid, words, and information from here to there. The result is not the work of art liberated from fixed, reified concepts of "work" or "art" that Marcel Duchamp achieved in his readymades.²⁸ Instead, Ruscha recasts the new work of art as a souped-up, vertically integrated accumulation of design variables and considerations—commercial prerogatives that infect and break down the formerly discrete categories of production, distribution, and reception. Ruscha's books are in their largest sense rest stop-like mirages that conjure the formerly intimate, reflective capacities of the bourgeois reader before they vanish into thin air.

When asked in 1981 what influence Duchamp had on his books, Ruscha answered that "the readymade was more or less a guiding light to me,"²⁹ yet had trouble locating precisely where this element resided in them: "I suppose it's an extension of a readymade in photographic form. Instead of going out and calling a gas station 'art,' I'm calling its photograph art. But the photograph isn't the art—the gas station might be. The photograph is just a surrogate gas station. The photograph by itself doesn't mean anything to me; it's the gas station that's the important thing."³⁰ This hesitation is a testament to the book's brilliantly achieved unity of effect, as an object with a designed surface, containing reproductions of a kind of architecture and space, all of which are inextricably bound to each other. While the photographs themselves exhibit some of the qualities of "amateurist mimesis" that Jeff Wall discerned in them, his conclusion that the sole reason for their existence as a subject is that "only an idiot would take pictures of nothing but the filling stations, and the existence of a book of just those pictures is a kind of proof of the existence of such a person,"³¹ mistakes the symptoms for the cause; in doing so, Wall brackets off Ruscha's photographs from the rest of the object as a whole. Most importantly, the images close the gap between photograph and reproduction—the aestheticized image and how it circulates—so that they become

fig. 8 Edward Ruscha.
6565 Fountain Ave. Detail,
from *Some Los Angeles
Apartments*, 1965. Black
offset printing, $7\frac{1}{8} \times 5\frac{5}{8} \times$
 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (18.1 × 14.3 × .5 cm).
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, Stewart S.
MacDermott Fund, 1970
(1970.590.4)

just another design variable in the overall production of the object.³²

In *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, photography functions as the indexical trace of an expansion of sculpture into the broader field of architecture and public space—a companion to the other postwar transformation of sculptural practice at the phenomenological level of the body as seen in slightly later photo-works by Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman, for instance. In their seemingly total deferral of any aesthetic intention, the photographs become blank recordings, a hollow conduit juxtaposing two levels of articulated design: the forlorn gas stations, primitively decorated with chaotic, haphazard signage, and the tightly coiled, rampant professionalism of the book-object. At the center of the book’s mysteriously specific captions and its lexicon of page layouts are the gas stations themselves—prefab, boxy roadside structures with projecting eaves set alternately in urban forests of “visual noise”³³ or abandoned in the desert.³⁴ As such, each little filling station, adorned with its owner’s bespoke come-ons, represents the book the reader is holding *en abyme*, each one a distorted reflection of the book itself as all exterior, all constructed surface masking the sameness of the commodity beneath it.

In essence, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* reveals the dialectical link between the self-reflexive, tautological quality of, for example, Frank Stella’s Black Paintings (“what you see is what you see”) to the wider regime of commodity production, design, and distribution that dominates postwar cultural practice and the changed capacities of the reader/viewer under a dramatically expanded consumer culture and mass media.

The reader of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* is, of course, the butt of the joke and the final stop in the tour that Ruscha takes us on, and the book’s largest statement is regarding the decimated potential for any communication uncontaminated by the total domination of product design and publicity. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in the same year as Warhol’s Ferus Gallery exhibition and while Ruscha was creating *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, Jürgen Habermas described this new condition in terms remarkably appropriate to the art itself: “for the laws of the market have already penetrated into the substance of the works themselves and have become inherent in them as formative laws. No longer limited to the distribution and selection, the presentation and furnishing of the works, the perspectives of sales strategy have come to guide their very production in the wide fields of a culture of consumers.”³⁵ Both Ruscha and the reader vanish into this evacuated public sphere, which makes Warhol’s faux-naïf question asking how he got so many pictures without people in them seem all the more prescient and vaguely sinister.

In “The Crux of Minimalism,” Hal Foster described the simultaneous emergence of Minimalism and Pop Art as “different responses to the same moment in the dialectic of modernism and mass culture.”³⁶ Whereas *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* predates slightly the interest in architecture and serial progression shared by the Minimalist artists, *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (fig. 8), published in September 1965, appears to make its case directly in relation to the contemporary vertical stacks of boxes by Donald Judd’s and Sol LeWitt’s programmatic presentations of painted wood cubes and open squares.³⁷ *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964), by contrast, is wholly unconcerned with the issues of architecture and public space that characterize most of the 1960s books, instead being an idiosyncratic, hermetically sealed examination of the photographic image best appreciated as an uncanny visual analogue to Roland Barthes’s seminal essays on photography from the early 1960s.³⁸



As Richard Marshall has noted, *Some Los Angeles Apartments* is mostly devoted to the particularly Californian architectural trope known as the “dingbat.” First used (appropriately enough) as a purely nominal typographical symbol designating the beginning of a paragraph, the term came to describe plain cubic residential structures of wood construction with flat, blank planes of stuccoed wall over which was plastered garish signage or ornament to distinguish them from surrounding buildings.³⁹ In *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Reyner Banham observed, “very large areas of Los Angeles are made out of just these kind of elementary cubes—they nestle among the foothills and line the straight avenues of the plains. They are economically, structurally, and—given the sunshine—architecturally, the local norm and vernacular . . . anyone who begins to understand Los Angeles visually has to accept, even celebrate, their normative standing.”⁴⁰ Banham’s tone throughout is deliberately nonjudgmental, if not affirmative, toward his subject as a way of attacking established cultural hierarchies (in keeping with his role as a key theorist in the postwar British “Independent Group” of artists such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi).

Adorned with a loony array of relief elements (located somewhere between painting and sculpture) from anchors and diving dolphins to scales of justice or space-age reflective orbs that dangle over entrances, the Los Angeles apartment building facades are like the gas

station fronts. Each building seems to have had its makeshift identity plucked at random from an out-of-date typeface book by a down-market real estate speculator: the Polynesian-themed TIKI TABU, the IL POMPEII with its frieze of Arthur Murray ballroom dancers and tacked-on column, or the Duchampian FOUNTAIN BLU (fig. 8). In these sorry structures, Ruscha discerns a fundamental pollution and impurity at the heart of Minimalism’s quest to escape what Foster describes as the “historicity, conventionality [and] institutionality” of traditional forms.⁴¹ Unlike the industrial architecture photographed at the same moment by Bernd and Hilla Becher, in which the wildly divergent, unconsciously manifested specifics of each region or nation-state are wrapped around structures of equivalent function, Ruscha’s readymade apartment complexes are distinguished by the seemingly infinite ways in which historicity and conventionality are unsuccessfully, yet hilariously, thwarted and travestied—a kind of architectural slapstick reflecting the United States’ chronic historical amnesia. Minimalism and Pop are, in the end, revealed to be less diametrically opposed than twin engines of the same escape, as reflected in the vacant spaces (note all the vacancies) of the public sphere.

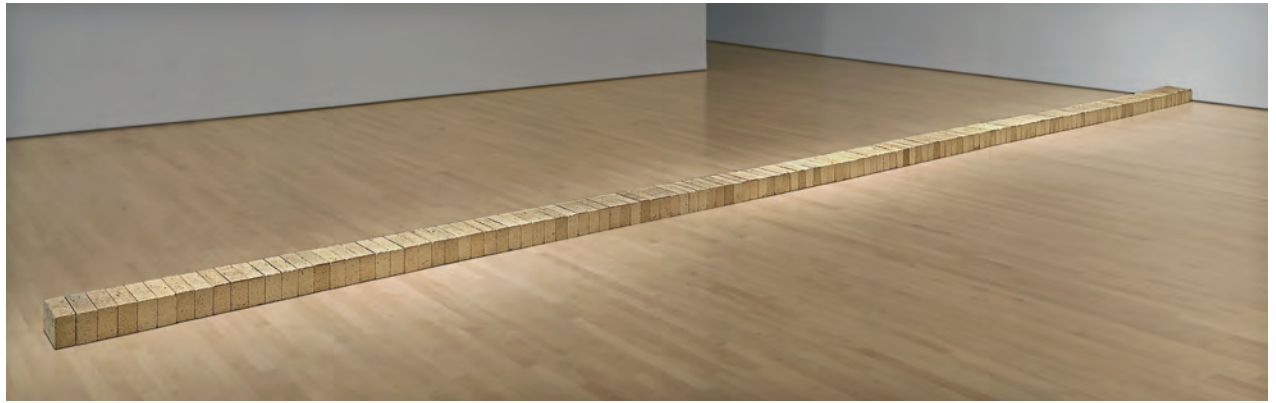
**EVERY BUILDING ON THE SUNSET STRIP OR,
ONE BUILDING AFTER ANOTHER**

When asked about the implication of motion in his books, Ruscha preferred to discuss instead their particular

fig. 9 Edward Ruscha. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966. Black offset printing, open 7 in. × 24 ft. 11½ in. (17.8 × 760.7 cm); closed 7 × 5½ × ¾ in. (17.8 × 14.3 × 1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Stewart S. MacDermott Fund, 1970 (1970.590.7). Installation view from “Between Here and There: Passages in Contemporary Photography,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010–11



fig. 10 Carl Andre
(American, b. 1935). *Lever*,
1966. 137 firebricks, installed
4½ in. × 8¾ in. × 29 feet
(11.4 × 22.5 × 883.9 cm).
National Gallery of Art,
Canada (15898.1-137)



orientation in relation to the reader: “So many of the books are architectural in nature, like the gas stations and the apartments, and a few of the other books. So they all possess a ground line, a landscape line, that is actually horizontal, and so it suggests itself all the way through the book that there is a ground line. You’re standing at person height, looking at these things, and each page is this way, so it continues, it is.”⁴² *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (fig. 9) represents the mapping and overlay of two horizontal surfaces that are inextricably locked to each other, those of mass communication as signified by the book and the public sphere as signified by the Strip, and the effect of this paradigmatic shift on the individual subject, the reader of the book “at person height.”⁴³

While primarily concerned with the bourgeois societies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Habermas’s study of the public sphere is also of course an examination of the book’s own historical moment in the early 1960s, when as Frazer Ward has described it, “the commodification of the *content* of culture is central to the shift from an active, educated or trained culture-debating public to a passive, unenlightened culture-consuming public.”⁴⁴ As John Miller has correctly pointed out, the future of the book as an emblematic object of humanist, Enlightenment culture was already severely in doubt by Walter Benjamin’s time when as Miller says, he saw the book as “an obsolete form of knowledge-production, a cumbersome, even atavistic mediation of the transfer of ‘file cards’ from writer to reader.”⁴⁵ Whereas Benjamin foresaw a teleological, technological improvement in communications that would obliterate reified concepts such as aura, author, and masterpiece, Ruscha’s book depicts that decimated (rather than redeemed) space as the product of an all-encompassing consumer culture.

Just as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* seemed to close a final door on the modernist struggle to subvert instrumentalized language—from Stéphane Mallarmé to what

Kristine Stiles has described as Fluxus’s linguistic/performative attempts to “engage the reader actively”⁴⁶—so Ruscha seems to address the reader to different effect through a critical engagement with Minimalism. The most obvious reflection of this encounter is the book’s ingenious format as a 25-foot “strange foldout,” in a way that demands the viewer’s physical negotiation both more and more awkwardly than another novel use of horizontality from the same year, Carl Andre’s *Lever*. That sculpture, like Ruscha’s book, eschews relational composition for serial ordering and an acknowledgment of phenomenological perception bound to the viewer, the object, and its institutional container (gallery space, foldout, etc.) (fig. 10). As in the sly comment that Warhol makes in his *Dance Diagram* paintings on the participatory aesthetic developed by Allan Kaprow from the implications of Jackson Pollock’s gestural style,⁴⁷ so too does Ruscha’s endless strip reveal an inherent suspicion of the potential for pure perception and a liberated reader/viewer outside of the embrace of mass cultural formations. And whereas *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* collapsed the vast stretch of Route 66 into the inadequate space of the book, *Sunset Strip* expands a single stretch of street to about 25 feet, infinitely beyond the reader’s normal range of legibility, like the pieced-together individual segments of film endlessly recombined over eight hours in Warhol’s durational film *Sleep* (1964).⁴⁸

While Lucy Lippard’s term “the dematerialization of the art object” has been handed down over the decades to describe Ruscha’s books as forerunners of Conceptualism, Tony Smith’s remarks on the New Jersey Turnpike come more readily to mind after spending some time with *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, that “the experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that’s the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.”⁴⁹



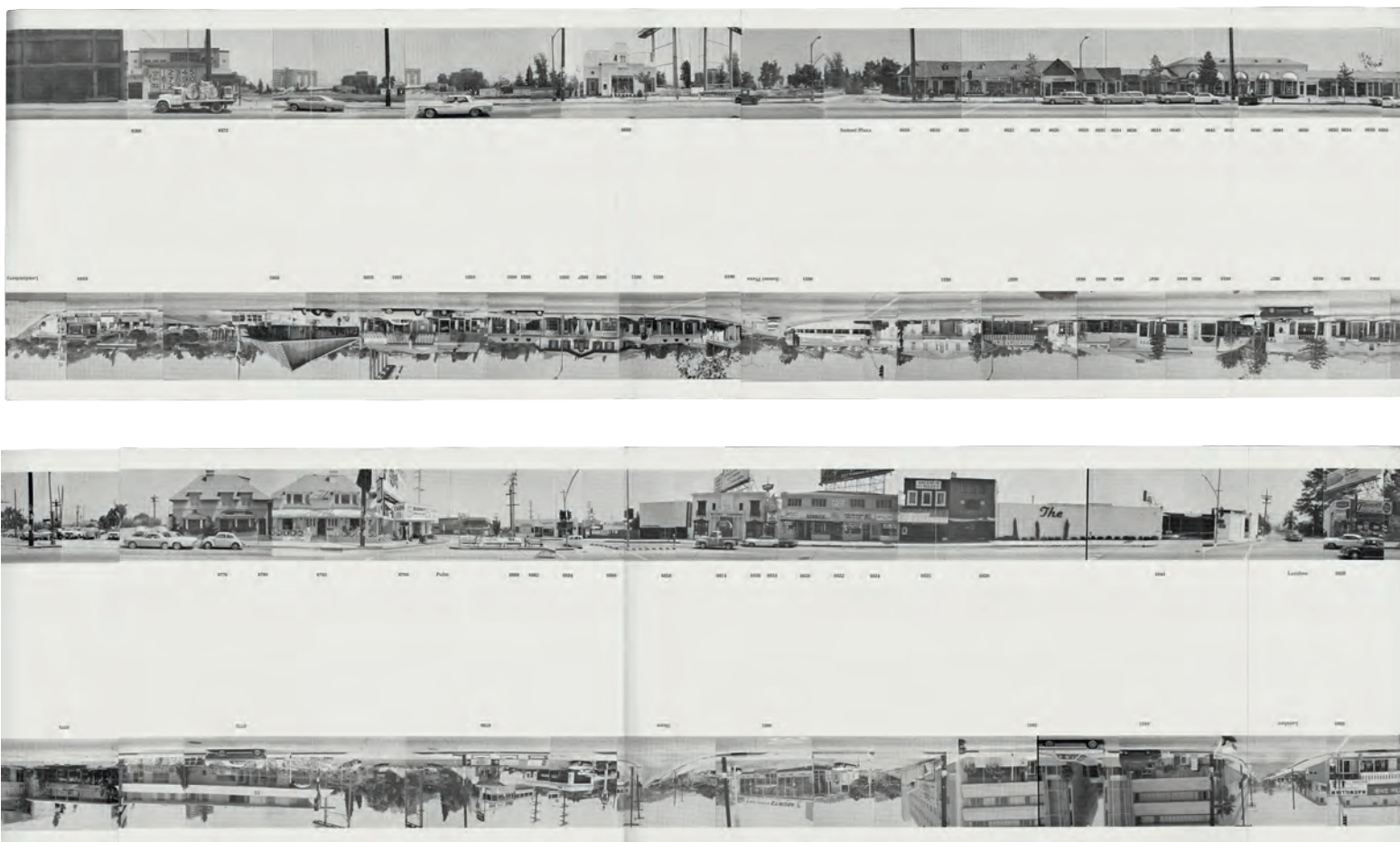
fig. 11 Edward Ruscha.
Details of *Every Building on
the Sunset Strip* (fig. 9)

Ruscha made the photographs by attaching a motorized camera to the flatbed of a pickup truck; only slightly larger than an eye-straining 35 mm contact print, each individual frame was then cut and pasted to form two continuous strips facing each other like opposite sides of the street. Close examination of the finished work in book form requires well over an hour—more like two—pressing one's face up against each tiny fragment, then stepping back to find the rest of the book crawling away across the room. Of all Ruscha's books, *Sunset Strip* is the most dramatically effective example of Ruscha's unique way of disorienting the reader/viewer. For instance, at 8250, there is the Body Shop Burlesque (cars and girls) (fig. 11); at 8524, a row of Becheresque framework houses called "Dean Martin's"; at 8572, a grid of painted numbers (1 2 3 4 5 // 6 7 8 9 10 // 1 2 3 4 5) stripped of the latest chart-toppers TOP 10 USA, TOP 5 ENGLAND; at 8844, the pure Duchampian nominalism of a curlicued "The" on a blank facade.⁵⁰

This journey down and back the Sunset Strip, then, involves both the body of the reader and a stretch of real time. The labor-intensive movement around the book is juxtaposed with two other sequences: the arrhythmic cuts into the continuous image effected by

individual photographic images, and the running list of noncontinuous street addresses that occurs at distances from each other according to where each falls, resulting in an obscure, seemingly infinite numeric string with more holes than numbers. It is the same stuttering tempo that Ruscha would employ a year later in the announcement in the form of a Western Union telegram for his exhibition of *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire*, with its violent reiteration of the word *stop* like the constant click of the camera shutter.

The subject-object relationship described in *Sunset Strip*, however, is quite different from that proposed by the Minimalist work that Ruscha's book engages. As Foster has noted, "the minimalist suppression of the anthropomorphic is . . . a 'death of the author' . . . that is at the same time a birth of the reader."⁵¹ In *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, Ruscha contests both the linguistic (Fluxus) and phenomenological (Minimalist) models of artistic desubjectivization that attempted to forestall the administered culture that the books describe. It is precisely the reader, Habermas's "active, educated or trained culture-debating public,"⁵² that is erased from the sphere that Ruscha depicts, from the intimate space of the book to the outermost reaches of public space.



**CODA: "THE INFORMATION MAN" /
REAL ESTATE OPPORTUNITIES**

In 1971, Ruscha wrote a short piece describing an imaginary encounter with a character that he dubbed "The Information Man." In it, he tallies all the words Ruscha has ever spoken, and recites the previously invisible statistics surrounding every copy of every Ruscha book ever sold—from "most weight upon a single book" to the "3 that have been in continual motion since their purchase over two years ago, all of these being on a boat near Seattle, Washington."⁵³ When they are not thrown away or intentionally destroyed, the Information Man reveals, Ruscha's books have been used as flyswatters, doorstops, and twice in self-defense; 32 out of 5,000 have been used in a "directly functional" manner. The same obsessive design that applies to the books, each one a compendium of product specifications, the artist now imagines governing his entire publishing enterprise, filling in each available space in the grid until knowledge is complete.

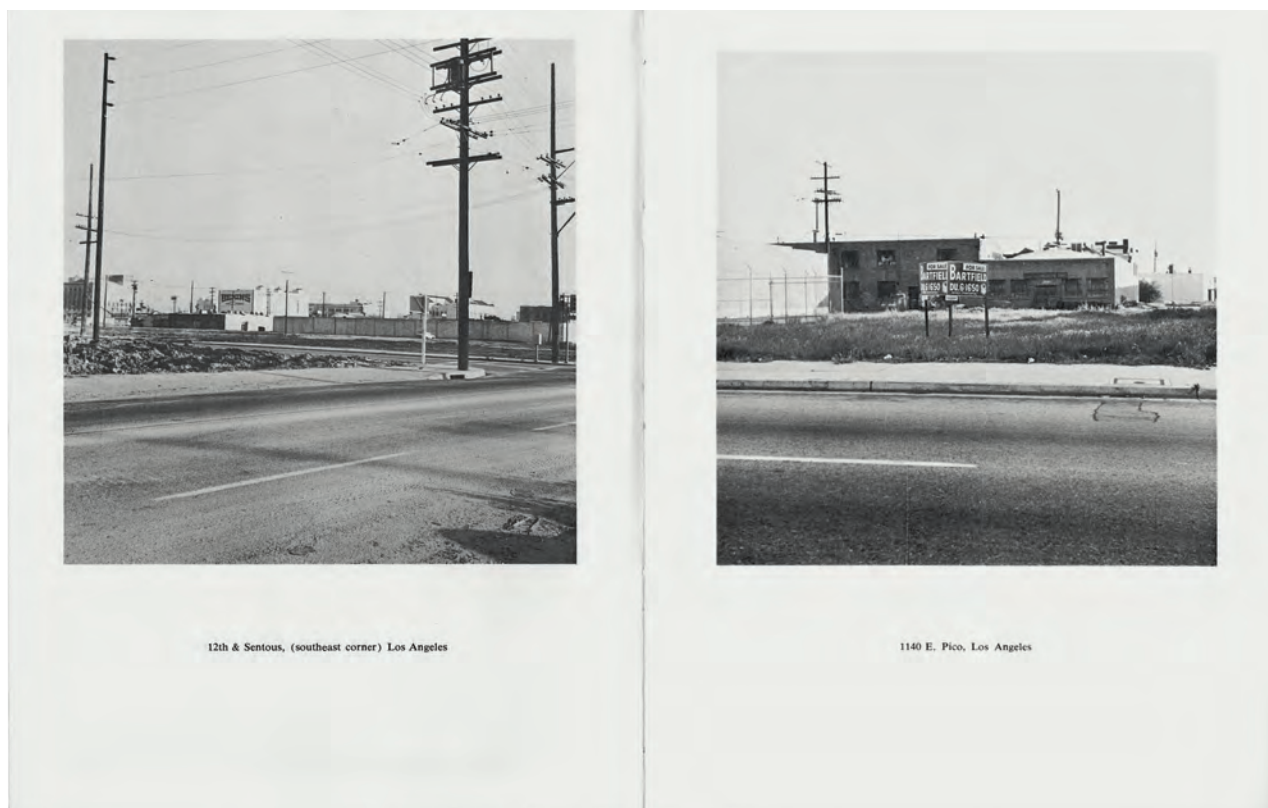
Ruscha's fantasy of a final accounting, scaled and styled like a fairy tale, mirrors the larger meaning of the books as a whole—"that dark side of what [the artist] was up against"⁵⁴—where commodities and their users,

books and their readers, change places. His story could in fact have been titled (not quite as felicitously) "The Rule of Complete Quantification" after Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's description from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

Marked differentiations such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, *thus advancing the rule of complete quantification* [emphasis added]. Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type. Consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green, and blue areas; the technique is that used for any type of propaganda.⁵⁵

A year earlier, Ruscha published a sort of companion to "The Information Man" and coda to his suite of

fig. 12 Edward Ruscha. Two pages from *Real Estate Opportunities*, 1970. Black-and-white offset printing, $7\frac{1}{16} \times 5\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{3}{16}$ in. (17.9 × 14 × .5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Administrative Fund, transferred from the Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library, 2012 (2012.263)



12th & Sentous, (southeast corner) Los Angeles

1140 E. Pico, Los Angeles

books about architecture, public space, and by extension the books themselves and their position in the public sphere, called *Real Estate Opportunities*—twenty-five photographs of various vacant lots in the small down-scale towns surrounding Los Angeles (fig. 12). As Clive Phillpot has noted, it is in this book that Ruscha returned to the format of those earlier ones: three-word title, one to a line, under glassine wraps, and similar pocket-size.⁵⁶ In *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, Ruscha recorded primitive eruptions of signage that appear hours apart in the vast wasteland between Los Angeles and Oklahoma; *Real Estate Opportunities* is its mirror image, the unusable slivers of land remaining after those commercial interests have staked out and subdivided all available space. As such, the individual images highlight the inevitable remainder of quantification as much as Ruscha's books do in the larger realm of commodity production.

Gordon Matta-Clark performed a similar operation on “surplus land” for his 1974 work *Reality Properties: Fake Estates*, in which he purchased five such lots, the official documentation and deed (and the resultant transfer of ownership from artist to collector) of which would constitute the piece.⁵⁷ But while Matta-Clark's

transactional conceit does imbricate the work into the bureaucratic strictures of the everyday, Ruscha's books add layers of complexity that give them larger cultural meanings—in the way that he weaves together issues of commodification (book as salable object), communication (book as container for knowledge and memory), and circulation (book as an object that travels through culture). A book like *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* cannot help but stand in metonymically for all books⁵⁸—the possibilities of communication in toto—and its tragicomic inability to fulfill its place on the shelf of every book ever carries a tinge of sadness as it struggles valiantly against its own disappearance. From our present-day perspective of depopulated space, historical amnesia, communications systems run amok, and what feels at the moment like art's total dissolution into the forces of the market, Ruscha's books gain in pathos as they falter—as perhaps all art does now—against what the artist described as “the dark side of what I was up against.”⁵⁹

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NOTES

- 1 See Coplans 1963, p. 7. It was technically Ruscha's second group exhibition; he appeared in "Four Oklahoma Artists" at the Oklahoma City Art Center two years before. The Pasadena Art Museum became the Norton Simon Museum in 1975. I am grateful to Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Lisa Pasquariello for their thoughtful comments on this article.
- 2 This account is from Walter Hopps's 1992 interview with the artist; see Hopps 1993, p. 98.
- 3 See for example, László Moholy-Nagy, *EM2 (Telephone Picture)*, 1923, in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The online entry for this painting indicates that Moholy-Nagy only later related the telephone anecdote. See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78747>.
- 4 Hopps 1993, p. 99.
- 5 Hickey and Plagens 1982, p. 157. The artist credits seeing Rauschenberg's *Odalisk* and Johns's *Target with Four Faces* in a 1957 issue of *Print* magazine as his reason for becoming an artist. The other work that Ruscha publicly singled out as affecting his development was the black-and-white painting *Keds* by Roy Lichtenstein, shown to him by Ivan Karp sometime during his fall 1961 visit to New York.
- 6 These unconscious echoes in Ruscha's early career of two moments in the careers of Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko are supported by only a passing mention of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde in the literature, where Ruscha says in an interview that he "got introduced early on to Walker Evans's work, Russian Constructivism and, of course, Abstract Expressionism." See Fehlau 1988, p. 70. Benjamin Buchloh has already noted the significance of the 1962 publication of Camilla Gray's *The Russian Experiment: Russian Art, 1863–1922* for a number of Ruscha's contemporaries, although it is not known if Ruscha knew of it. See Buchloh 1989b.
- 7 Sharp 1973, p. 32.
- 8 Plagens 1982, p. 38.
- 9 "To me, they are nothing more than snapshots." Ruscha in Coplans 1965, p. 25.
- 10 Bourdon 1972, p. 35. Phyllis Rosenzweig (2000, p. 180) attempted to relate *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* to *American Photographs* as well as *The Americans*. Rosenzweig is more correct in noting the similarity of format between Ruscha's book and *American Photographs* and *The Americans* than Kerry Brougner's narrow iconographic interpretation (2000, pp. 158–59) of "the road" as primary subject for all three books.
- 11 See interview with the artist conducted by Paul J. Karlstrom (1980–81, MS p. 39).
- 12 Wall 1995, p. 43.
- 13 Fehlau 1988, p. 70.
- 14 Coplans 1965, p. 24.
- 15 Uncited quotation in Bourdon 1972 (2002 ed., p. 43).
- 16 Coleman 1972, p. 35.
- 17 Warhol's early career is discussed in Buchloh 1989a (2000 ed., p. 475). Buchloh also first outlined in 1989 the primary aspects of Ruscha's books, and of Conceptual Art as a whole, including issues of language, the commodity form, architecture, and public space; see Buchloh 1989b (1999 ed., p. 521).
- 18 Karlstrom 1980–81, MS p. 81.
- 19 Bourdon 1972, p. 33 (2002 ed., p. 41).
- 20 Coleman 1972, p. 35.
- 21 Coplans 1965, p. 24.
- 22 It is a testament to Ruscha's paradoxical mastery of deskillling that for most of the book's existence, the individual images in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* remained almost completely unassimilable to the tradition of art photography. Recently, the artist has expressed his affection for his gas station photographs by comparing them to amateur snapshots. This would seem to represent a shift away from his early dismissal of their aesthetic value as independent images, as when in 1981 he told interviewer Henri Barendse that in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, "the photograph isn't the art. . . . The photograph by itself doesn't mean anything to me; it's the gas station that is the important thing"; Barendse 1981, p. 9 (2002 ed., p. 215). Although vernacular photography has had a certain place in the photographic canon since at least 1964, the year of John Szarkowski's Museum of Modern Art exhibition "The Photographer's Eye" (an accompanying book of which was published in 1966), the status of amateur snapshots has risen greatly over the last twenty years. For example, the Metropolitan Museum exhibition "Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection," was held in summer 2000. For Ruscha's recent comments on the gasoline station photographs, see "Ed Ruscha: A Long Way from Oklahoma," video of an interview with Kasper Bech Dyg at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, June 2018, 04:55–05:35; <https://vimeo.com/279209813>.
- 23 Kotz 2001, pp. 60, 81, 87.
- 24 Ibid., p. 85 and n. 74.
- 25 Coplans 1965, p. 25.
- 26 Edward Ruscha, *Photo Riot, 400 Books*, 1963. Pencil, colored pencil, and ink on paper, 27.5 × 20.3 cm; <http://edruscha.com/works/photo-riot-400-books/>.
- 27 Laurence McGilvery noted that the book is still not in the Library of Congress. Ruscha's March 1964 advertisement for *Artforum* is reproduced as item M6 in Engberg and Phillpot 1999. See also Coplan's comments at <https://www.mcgilvery.com/pages/books/69003/john-coplans-edward-ed-ruscha/artforum-march-1964-volume-2-number-9-twentysix-gasoline-stations-with-facsimile-of-library-of>.
- 28 "Can one make works that are not works of 'art'?", Marcel Duchamp, 1913, quoted in Molesworth 1998, p. 57.
- 29 Barendse 1981, p. 9 (2002 ed., p. 215).
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Wall 1995, pp. 265–66.
- 32 Benjamin Buchloh described this conflation in relation to Dan Graham's 1966–67 *Homes for America* as "eliminat[ing] the difference between the artistic construct and its (photographic) reproduction." See Buchloh 1989b (1999 ed., p. 521).
- 33 See Wagner 1999; the phrase is that of the artist.
- 34 A general, if limited, connection can be made between Ruscha's gas stations and the dilapidated industrial behemoths of Bernd and Hilla Becher from the same moment. Both are taxonomies of vernacular structures (many of the gas stations seem to be of 1920s–50s vintage) that share a similar function (massive industrialization in the Bechers' mineheads and cooling towers, or Ruscha's commercial-laden gas stations), but manifest themselves in wildly different formal appearances.
- 35 Habermas 1991, p. 165. For a description of Habermas's conception of the public sphere, see Ward 1995, p. 73.
- 36 Foster 1986, p. 178.
- 37 A year prior to *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, there was an especially apt group exhibition at Dwan Gallery titled "Boxes," February 2–29, 1964, that included not only Larry Bell's mirrored cubes and Richard Artschwager's Formica-and-wood

- assemblages that straddle object and sign, but also prewar examples by Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters.
- 38 See Barthes 1961 and 1964.
- 39 Marshall 1990, p. 11. For a further discussion of the “dingbat” in Los Angeles architecture, and its depiction by Ruscha and later by the photographer Judy Fiskin, see Tumlr 2007, p. 118.
- 40 Banham 1971 (2001 ed., pp. 178–79).
- 41 Foster 1986, p. 171.
- 42 Karlstrom 1980–81, MS p. [66]. See also Mansoor 2005.
- 43 “But, above all I would say, my inspiration comes from mass communication rather than cerebral or historical things.” Blistène 1991, p. 126; also quoted in Gronert 1999, p. 13.
- 44 Ward 1995, p. 77.
- 45 Miller 1988, pp. 66–67.
- 46 Stiles 1993, p. 67.
- 47 Buchloh 1989a (2000 ed., pp. 482–87).
- 48 Christopher Finch (1967) noted a similarity between the book and Warhol’s films, but took a wrong turn when he discerned that they both “pushed to an extreme . . . a primary tendency of American art: the acceptance of the ironic poetry of the world as it is.”
- 49 Quotation from Wagstaff 1966. See also Foster 1986, p. 173.
- 50 In his interview with Ruscha, Walter Hopps describes a drawing of the word *the* as Duchamp’s first work incorporating language; Hopps 1993, p. 108.
- 51 Foster 1986, pp. 172–73. Eleanor Antin’s 1973 article “Reading Ruscha” is the prime example of “reader-response” theory applied to Ruscha’s books.
- 52 Ward 1995, p. 77.
- 53 Ruscha 1975, p. 21 (1999 ed., p. 55).
- 54 Fehlau 1988, p. 70.
- 55 Horkheimer and Adorno 1997, p. 123.
- 56 Phillpot 1999, p. 74.
- 57 See Lee 2000, pp. 98–104.
- 58 Crary 1978.
- 59 Fehlau 1988, p. 70.

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An Ode to James Van Der Zee: Lorna Simpson's *9 Props*

EMILIE BOONE

Fifty years ago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired the largest collection to date in a public institution of works by the African American photographer James Van Der Zee. The acquisition of sixty-six photographs in 1970, and an additional four in 1971, arrived on the heels of the Museum's 1969 exhibition "Harlem on My Mind': Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968," a controversial show considered today by many scholars as a pivotal moment in the exposure of Van Der Zee's oeuvre to the greater public.¹ In the mid-1990s, the artist Lorna Simpson turned to Van Der Zee and his studio portraits as source material for *9 Props*, an edition of which came to the Metropolitan Museum in 1998 (fig. 1). *9 Props* is often interpreted in relation to portraiture, but recent scholarship suggests more nuanced readings of what Simpson

fig. 1 Lorna Simpson (American, b. 1960). *9 Props*, 1995. Waterless lithograph on wool felt panel, 9 panels, each 14 ¼ × 10 ¼ in. (36.2 × 26 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Peter Norton Family Foundation, 1998 (1998.456.5a–j)



Black and white photograph of a small, dark, rounded ceramic vessel, possibly a bowl or a small jar, with a slightly flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a tall, dark, cylindrical ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a slightly flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, pear-shaped ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, rectangular ceramic vessel, possibly a jar or a small box, with a slightly flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, funnel-shaped ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, hourglass-shaped ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, bottle-shaped ceramic vessel, possibly a jar or a small bottle, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, wide-mouthed ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.



Black and white photograph of a dark, multi-lobed ceramic vessel, possibly a vase or a jar, with a narrow neck and a flared rim.

has described as an homage to Van Der Zee.² If *9 Props* is “a close study of Van Der Zee’s photographs at a remove,”³ what kind of interpretative framework is Simpson offering not only for her own work but also for Van Der Zee’s images?

As a genre, portraiture has a clear set of norms: it depicts individuals while suggesting a time, place, and set of character traits through intentional positioning, props, and settings. In the Van Der Zee photographs referenced in *9 Props*, the subject is often in the center of the composition, looking toward the viewer, and the background and other details symbolically imply aspects of the individual’s social standing and character. For the art historian Shawn Michelle Smith, *9 Props* reframes the aspirational politics of early twentieth-century Harlem by offering each subject the possibility of new imaginings, free from historically contingent assumptions about gender, sexuality, and class mobility.⁴ As a departure from gifting the portrait’s subject with new outlets of becoming, this article privileges the viewer.⁵ The importance of Van Der Zee’s photographs lies less with the individuals he captured and more with

the material and aesthetic decisions he made in service to the viewer’s experience of looking. Building off the philosopher Vilém Flusser’s statement that “photographers, it is true, do not work but [...] they create, process and store symbols,” one can begin to unpack how Simpson’s project recasts the symbols that Van Der Zee has stored in his images,⁶ and the prop, as the art historian Sara Blair has suggested, becomes an intriguing point of entry for understanding *9 Props* as an ode to Van Der Zee’s work.⁷

Much of the writing on photographs of African Americans concerns how Black subjects image and imagine themselves, and *9 Props*, in part, depends upon the ways in which a prop, at its most basic level, requires the viewer to construct a scene or story.⁸ Recognizing how Simpson took her cue from Van Der Zee and the narrative woven around his work and life enables the viewer to use the concept of a “prop,” through its various definitions, as a central platform of engagement, one that compels them to find and create meaning in the ordinary through a sense of imagination. Examining Simpson’s motivations and processes for making



**SHE SAW HIM DISAPPEAR BY THE RIVER,
THEY ASKED HER TO TELL WHAT HAPPENED,
ONLY TO DISCOUNT HER MEMORY.**

fig. 2 Lorna Simpson.
Waterbearer, 1986. Gelatin
silver print with vinyl letter-
ing, 59 × 80 × 2¼ in.
(149.9 × 203.2 × 5.7 cm).
Private collection

9 Props opens up a more expansive reading of Van Der Zee's imagery, presenting an interpretative framework not only for deciphering her own work and its evocation of absence and touch, but also for accessing the photographs of Van Der Zee. *9 Props* hinges upon Van Der Zee's portraits in ways that illustrate how parallel readings of the works can bring an intrinsic relationship between imagination and African American photography into view.⁹

AN HOMAGE

Referred to as a photo-text project, Simpson's *9 Props* is a portfolio of nine waterless lithographs printed on wool felt panels that are exhibited in a grid.¹⁰ This type of offset lithography, also known as siligraphy, uses a water-repellent silicone plate.¹¹ Different from traditional lithography, in which moisture resists ink, siligraphy operates on the basic principle that ink does not stick to silicone rubber. Each panel contains a highly saturated black-and-white photographic print that depicts a piece of glassware, positioned on a table in front of a nondescript background. These objects are based on vases, goblets, martini glasses, and other props culled from nine Van Der Zee photographs, the majority of which were taken in the early twentieth century.¹² Centered underneath each image is a text detailing the title and date of the source photograph, followed by Van Der Zee's name and a description of the Van Der Zee photograph to which the panel refers.

The glassware in *9 Props* was created during Simpson's 1994 artist residency at Pilchuck Glass

School in Stanwood, Washington. Simpson had initially intended to use her residency to construct an installation of vibrating glass objects, but that preliminary idea lost its appeal once she understood more about the culture of glass and became captivated by the theatricality of glass-blowing.¹³ While searching for a new direction, Simpson took a trip to Seattle, where she found and purchased a book that she already had at home, the catalogue for the National Portrait Gallery's 1993 Van Der Zee exhibition, which helped to inspire aspects of the larger conceptualization of what would become *9 Props*.¹⁴ To the chagrin of the ambitious gaffers assigned to assist Simpson, she requested that they simply blow replicas of Van Der Zee's props,¹⁵ and in the end, William Morris and Dante Marioni produced a number of large, smooth black-glass vessels.¹⁶ After the residency concluded, Simpson shipped the pieces to her New York studio, where she photographed them. She later sent the images to 21 Steps in Portland, Oregon, where they were handprinted on wool felt, a material with distinct tactile properties resulting from its compressed but visible fibers.¹⁷

From a photograph of Simpson taken during her time at Pilchuck (see fig. 4), it is evident that she requested the creation of glass objects that do not appear in *9 Props*, one of which resembles the pitcher from her 1986 photograph *Waterbearer* (fig. 2). Additionally, the sheets of paper with cutout shapes and sketches tacked on the wall behind the artist provide clues to the intermediary steps involved in the translation of the props from the Van Der Zee photographs reproduced in the catalogue to the blown glassware,



fig. 3 Lorna Simpson.
VanDerZee Props, 1994.
Blown glass and steel shelf,
28½ × 72 in. (72.5 × 183 cm)

fig. 4 Lorna Simpson during artist residency at Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, Washington, 1994

fig. 5 James Van Der Zee (American, 1886–1983). *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, 1982. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Donna Mussenden Van Der Zee



suggesting that Simpson first recreated the vessels as basic linear shapes. Simpson also used some of the glassware from Pilchuck in two visually familiar works that came before *9 Props*. In the first, *VanDerZee Props* (1994), black blown-glass vessels are arranged on a steel shelf with corresponding text above each of the objects (fig. 3). In the second, *Van Der Zee Prop Vase* (1994), a photolithograph print on paper with text, the same vase later employed in the *9 Props* panel “Reclining nude” appears, although shot from a different angle.¹⁸ As forerunners to *9 Props*, the vessels arranged on a shelf and the photolithograph establish a lineage of similar reoccurring forms.

Intriguingly, Simpson’s artistic process for *9 Props* alludes to a kind of repetition with an intentional difference in which she never loses sight of the work’s referential origin and her initial interest in Van Der Zee’s work. As the artist later explained, she “re-photographed these [the glass vessels] as a kind of homage to James Van Der Zee.”¹⁹ By “re-photographing” as opposed to “photographing,” Simpson demonstrates a sustained engagement with the original images as props for her own work.²⁰ As an artist would use a camera obscura, Simpson employs technology to trace all the contours and tones of the vessels in the meticulous settings of



Van Der Zee’s portraits and translates them into a new medium, selecting and changing details along the way. From a staged studio to a photograph to a glass object and back to a photograph, each prop is reworked again and again through time, material, and space. On another level, this reiterative process parallels Van Der Zee’s own expansive engagement with the craft of photography. For example, Van Der Zee would choreograph highly composed portraits, develop a range of prints, and then enhance these images with hand-coloring or superimpose the same image with another. At each stage, he would thus often build upon the previous one to transform the image into a new iteration.

The nine photographs Simpson selected as source material for *9 Props* are a mere fraction of the tens of thousands taken and often printed in multiples by Van Der Zee, whose career began in 1911 when he started as a darkroom technician at Hahne & Company department store in Newark, New Jersey. About five years later, he opened his first photography studio on 135th Street in Harlem within the neighborhood’s liveliest area.²¹ His dynamic output includes studio and on-site portraits, street scenes, mortuary photographs, reprints, enlargements, and prints enhanced by handwork. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s in particular, Van Der Zee

produced a number of skillfully composed portraits that feature props, ranging from domestic items, such as chairs, side tables, and rugs, to scenic painted backdrops and even a paper cutout of a seated dog.²² Although he took a hiatus after closing his last studio in 1969, Van Der Zee later returned to photography during the last years of his life. In these portraits of well-known African Americans, the veteran photographer incorporated many of the very same props that he had used decades previously to craft his aesthetic vision. Retrieved from storage, the old studio props were dusted off, mended up, or in the case of the backdrops, recreated, in order to fulfill a new role within nostalgic compositions.²³

THE PROP

As a noun, “prop” refers to a beam or pole used to keep an object in position or something that serves as a source of assistance or support.²⁴ As a verb, it most commonly means to position something for support, but it can also be used colloquially to recognize influence and convey respect—namely, “to give props.” In the same decade that Simpson made *9 Props*, this colloquial usage was starting to become popular in hip-hop prose when acknowledging the importance of one’s predecessors.²⁵ While Van Der Zee received increasing recognition after his inclusion in “Harlem on My Mind,” with a solo exhibition in 1970 at the Lenox Public Library in Massachusetts, a PBS documentary devoted to his career in 1977 and an appearance on the *Dick Cavett Show* in 1978, and honorary degrees from Seton Hall University in 1976 and Howard University in 1983, the early appreciation of his work was most often confined to its documentary value within the cultural climate of Harlem, separated from other art world discourses.

In part, Simpson attempts to address this exclusion through *9 Props*. As she explains in an interview published in 1996:

To me, *Nine Props* [*sic*] has historical content. For instance, many people within the art world don’t even know who James Van Der Zee is. Not that [*9 Props*] position[s] his work in a way that allows a lot of information to be gleaned, but on a certain level it’s engaging a part of art history that does not seem of interest to the contemporary art world. The academy’s canon has nothing to do with James Van Der Zee.²⁶

Simpson recognizes Van Der Zee through *9 Props*, but more importantly, she moves Van Der Zee into the contemporary art sphere. By using his photographs as a primary source, *9 Props* does the work of a traditional

prop—it supports and sustains. In this case, it does so within a context that transcends the particular time period listed within each panel of *9 Props* and prompts the viewer to consider Van Der Zee’s applicability to contemporary artistic production. A cadre of Black cultural producers, including the author Toni Morrison, the filmmaker Julie Dash, and the artist Isaac Julien, have cited the impact of Van Der Zee on their work, evidence that the photographer has gained a somewhat silent foothold throughout various instances of Black cultural production.²⁷ Such artistic engagements across time and medium often begin with an encounter and result in a nod of recognition, like that of Jean-Michel Basquiat painting a portrait of the aging Van Der Zee after the photographer took a formal studio portrait of the younger artist (fig. 5).²⁸ Each of these instances supports and sustains innovative engagements with Van Der Zee’s photographs that can reframe how his work is considered.

Moreover, Simpson gives “props” to Van Der Zee by privileging the visual details of his images in her descriptive texts. In “A man in his bedroom,” the scene is presented cinematically:

A man stands on the far left of the room with a pipe in his mouth. He is dressed in a smoking jacket with a shirt and tie, with his right elbow resting on a dresser and a ring on his finger. The bed has a satin cover with a small stuffed animal positioned at the center of the pillows. Behind the bed hangs a rug, off of the backboard a fringed lamp, and above hangs a chandelier. In front of a curtained window a standing lamp shines on the portrait of a full figured woman. On the right side of the room is a dresser with an ashtray, small boxes, and a candle and vase.

With few exceptions, the text in each of the nine panels progresses in a way that begins with the person within the portrait and concludes with a mention of the specific prop that Simpson recreated and re-photographed, thus delaying the viewer’s ability to locate that prop within the described scene. Simpson asks the viewer to conjure or imagine Van Der Zee’s compositions first, even though the prop is the sole object depicted within the panel.

In discussing the general role of text, curator Okwui Enwezor articulates its relationship with historiography. He writes:

If history is text and its interpretation is anchored in reading (a debate prevalent in semiotic studies) Simpson’s work seems to recover the patterns of its writing. Her

work seems to insist that it is those who possess the power of speech who not only narrate history but determine its outcome. In her work the hitherto disempowered subject reclaims this primal function of historiography, to tell the story from her own unique experiences, recollections and perspectives, to inscribe and assert her subjectivity, to recover both popular and private memories.²⁹

Although Enwezor puts the onus on the disempowered subject as the one responsible for shifting the possibilities of interpretation, it is more appropriate with *9 Props* to give this august role to the viewer. With Simpson's text leading the way, the viewer is able to imagine a different approach to Van Der Zee's work, thereby contributing to an expanded historiography.

While Van Der Zee and his work have been interpreted within an art historical framework that privileges neat time periods, artistic movements, and a singular talented artist, *9 Props* enables a rethinking of Van Der Zee's impact and therefore presents an amendment to the narrative that illuminates his work. If *9 Props*, as curator Jontyle Theresa Robinson posits, serves as a witness to Van Der Zee's sixty years of history, then this history can be imagined differently.³⁰ Though Simpson notes that *9 Props* has "historical content," her project eschews a chronological presentation of Van Der Zee's oeuvre. In fact, the display of the nine identically sized panels in a neat rectangle visually reinforces a sense of timeless uniformity.³¹ Furthermore, the date of the source photograph is largely irrelevant to the structure of the piece, as a panel with the year 1926 is positioned

next to a panel with the year 1976, a detail discernible only from the descriptive texts. Here, historical readings are discouraged, despite the historical context from which Simpson draws, and the viewer can recreate each portrait personally with little regard to the specificity of each image's time period.³²

Simpson's approach to Van Der Zee's work was also arguably informed by interpretations offered in the exhibition catalogue she bought in Seattle. In her essay "They Knew Their Names," the photography historian Deborah Willis provides an overview of the significance and aesthetic value of Van Der Zee's photographs. Importantly, she discourages a reading of Van Der Zee as "a neutral observer of his times," and as a photographer who produced "a visual record of the emergence in America of the African American middle and upper classes";³³ instead, she frames Van Der Zee as an innovative artist and one of the creators of the Harlem Renaissance's visual culture. Similarly, by omitting the language of respectability and upward mobility in the descriptive texts, Simpson allows Van Der Zee's photographs to be seen as a generative site of meaning as opposed to a reinforcement or confirmation of an accepted historical narrative built on class-based racial progress. Simpson's approach to Van Der Zee's work lingers on the visual elements of his photographs as opposed to being tethered to preconceived understandings of his work that tend to structure their interpretation.

Additionally, in *9 Props* Simpson has made central and beautiful that which is most often marginal or,



fig. 6 Lorna Simpson. Detail of 1957–2009 *Interior*, from *May June July August*, '57/'09, 2009

fig. 7 James Van Der Zee.
Woman with a Goldfish Bowl, 1923. Gelatin silver
 print



within the context of the nineteenth century, invisible and cumbersome. As a creator of ideas that have conceptual weight, Simpson contributes to an enduring conversation on props that has pivoted in various directions.³⁴ When considering the purpose of the headrest, a common prop in nineteenth-century photography studios, the theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* states, “a device was invented, a kind of prosthesis invisible to the lens, which supported and maintained the body in its passage to immobility: this headrest was the pedestal of the statue I would become, the corset of my imaginary essence.”³⁵ For Barthes a prop stills, inhibits, and stifles—it is the antithesis of a support. In his 1931 essay “Little History of Photography,” the philosopher Walter Benjamin writes of props in a similarly charged and exasperated tone; they no longer fade into the background but instead play an uncanny role. He comments on what he calls the “nonsense” of the studio setting, explaining that “[t]his was the period of those studios—with their draperies and palm trees, their tapestries and easels—which occupied so ambiguous a place between execution and representation, between torture chamber and throne room.”³⁶ Whether squeezing one’s “imaginary essence” or occupying an unsettlingly ambiguous place, the prop in studio photography is more than a mere object, it is a player in a staged performance, stilled by the lens shutter.

By moving the prop from a marginal position to center stage, Simpson translates Van Der Zee’s works on two levels. The first shift is from vernacular culture to high culture: photographs once displayed on clients’ home mantels, in store-bought frames or wedding albums, are transformed into contemporary works of art with white frames. The second shift speaks to Barthes’s and Benjamin’s interest in turning the prop into something less ordinary. In Simpson’s hands, the prop is not a stifling and liminal device but an appealing conceptual outlet for the viewer. Simpson gives the viewer permission to imagine the possibilities of Van Der Zee’s photographs by interpreting the mundane as a valuable tool of cultural work and a means for imaginative reflection.

FOUND OBJECTS, ABSENCE, AND TOUCH

Simpson started to incorporate found objects in her work about the time she made *9 Props*. One notable example is her mixed-media sound installation *Hypothetical?*, from 1992, which features instrumental mouthpieces, discovered at a local thrift store, in addition to a newspaper clipping and photographs. The 2011 exhibition “Lorna Simpson: Gathered” at the Brooklyn Museum presented hundreds of original and found vintage photographs of individuals of African descent, sourced by the artist from eBay, flea markets, and thrift stores. Simpson’s practice of collecting and recontextualizing vernacular photographs in particular, many of which share social functions similar to those of Van Der Zee’s work, illustrates an ongoing interest in finding new outlets of meaning through old, everyday photographs.

In the later work *1957–2009 Interior* (2009), which was included in the 2011 exhibition, Simpson juxtaposes found images of a young African American woman with portraits of herself replicating the poses and settings of the original photographs (fig. 6). Her staged response creates a “fictionalized narrative in which the two characters appear to be linked across history in a shared identity or destiny.”³⁷ Here, the side-by-side arrangement invites the viewer to compare and contrast what at first glance appear to be identical images. Yet, upon closer inspection, the images slowly reveal themselves as different. Certain props in the found photograph—like the cigarette in the woman’s hand, or the vases behind the piano in the image on the left in figure 6—are omitted in the recreated scenes featuring Simpson.

Though absence is central to both *1957–2009 Interior* and *9 Props*, the former relies primarily on sight, while the latter withholds visual clues. In “Woman with

a goldfish bowl,” the text invites the viewer to notice the absence of the woman, the butterfly she gazes at, and other details found in Van Der Zee’s photograph (fig. 7). Here, Simpson uses the juxtaposition of text and image to draw attention to incompleteness while bringing into focus the role of imagination. The incompleteness of *9 Props* is even suggested by its title—a prop is an object that enhances or supports another object, but only one object is depicted. She continues this theme of absence in the image, in which the viewer sees a bowl, the table on which it is placed, and an atmospheric background. Although the panels convey a sense of timeless uniformity, each of the vessels has a different position on the table: some are on corners, some appear to be closer to the center. While the actual panels fit into a neat rectangular grid, the table within each of the images does not linearly correspond to the following table. Instead, the discontinuities highlight the fragmentary nature of the project, which encourages the viewer to be transported somewhere else.³⁸

Yet, as much as *9 Props* encourages imaginative leaps divorced from a specific time period, the work itself came about within a very particular historical context. The art world changed dramatically in the 1990s. Often defined by the watershed 1993 Whitney Biennial, the decade is memorialized in art history for pushing

gender, race, sexuality, and other topics relating to identity to the forefront of artistic practices and criticism in ways that still resonate years later. Additionally, the Biennial facilitated a kind of conversation that appealed to both enthusiastic museum visitors and an expanded audience drawn from a wider social sphere.³⁹ Shifts in museum acquisition and exhibition practices also gave women and artists of color opportunities for exposure in the art world.⁴⁰

The 1990s were pivotal years in Simpson’s artistic development. By 1995, she had completely stopped creating three-dimensional installations and had begun to focus almost exclusively on photographic impressions printed on wool felt—her new preferred material.⁴¹ Felt first appears in Simpson’s work in 1994, when, in her own words, she “decided to investigate the surface.”⁴² This “turn to felt,” as the art historian Kellie Jones calls it, is often interpreted as a platform for addressing sensuality and tactility, and these issues are key to *9 Props*.⁴³

In *9 Props* the thickness of the felt gives the panels dimension while the visible fibers suggestively trigger the viewer’s desire to touch the textured surface. Similarly, within Van Der Zee’s oeuvre, photographs function intrinsically through their materiality. Through one’s imagination, to pick up, pin, and notice the oval frames of the four Van Der Zee lapel buttons found within the Metropolitan Museum’s collection is to foreground their tactility (see fig. 8). In parallel ways, Van Der Zee’s photograph *Woman with a Goldfish Bowl* and the corresponding panel in *9 Props* both call attention to touch. Van Der Zee altered the physical surface of the original photograph by hand, meticulously etching or painting the butterfly, enhancing the delicate lines around the woman’s facial features, and hand-coloring the bouquet. The text in the corresponding panel also specifically mentions the “painted” butterfly and notes that the woman’s hand “rests on the rim of the bowl,” prompting the viewer to imagine the artist’s hand as well as the feel of the glass bowl. *9 Props* asks viewers to reframe the tactility of Van Der Zee’s photographs as a driving force of interpretation. Doing so supports a different approach to his work than existing histories have afforded.

THE NUDE

During the 1990s, a second shift occurred in Simpson’s art—the figure disappeared.⁴⁴ Having established her reputation through evocative depictions of the Black female form, Simpson made a marked change with what has come to be known as the “bye, bye black girl” moment.⁴⁵ In her felt works, Simpson often focuses on



fig. 8 James Van Der Zee. *Flapper in Beaded Headdress*, 1925. Gelatin silver print and mirror, 2¾ × 1¾ in. (7 × 4.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the artist, 1971 (1971.533.3)

fig. 9 James Van Der Zee.
Reclining Nude, 1920s–40s.
 Gelatin silver print with
 applied color, 7 × 8¹⁵/₁₆ in.
 (17.8 × 22.7 cm). The
 Metropolitan Museum of
 Art, Gift of James Van Der
 Zee Institute, 1970
 (1970.539.30)



objects that, at first viewing, have no direct correlation to Black life. As the art historian Huey Copeland argues, Simpson's frustration with her artwork being interpreted as analogous to the social or political lives of Black individuals informed her "figurative retreat."⁴⁶ Understanding the reasoning behind Simpson's omissions lends itself to thinking in parallel ways about Van Der Zee's images. Instead of considering the social lives of his subjects, what if the nuances of each photograph's materiality, its relationship to abstract forms, and its haptic qualities took center stage?⁴⁷ Through Simpson's reframing, Van Der Zee's photographs can also be read through an attempt to retreat from the figure and an embrace of imaginative evocations of gesture, touch, and shape.

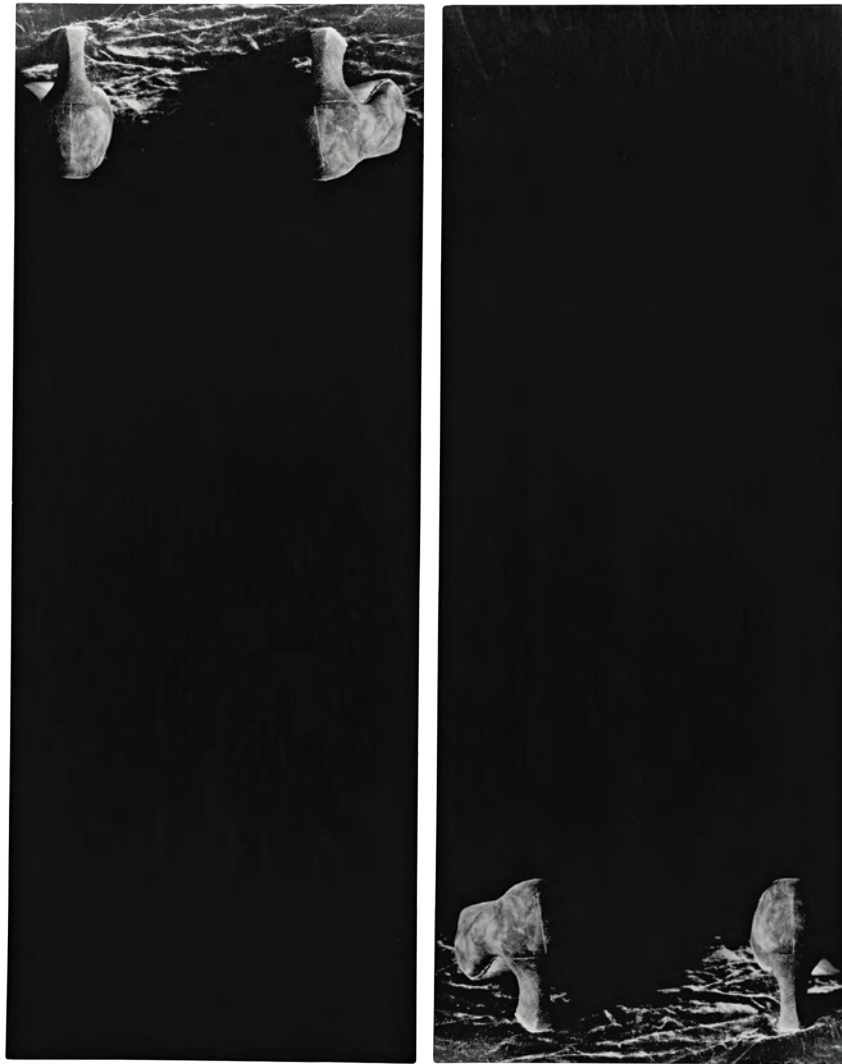
In "Reclining nude," Simpson does something distinct. Though the figure is still physically absent, the title and text connect to the overarching interest in the female body within Simpson's larger oeuvre. As Jones emphasizes in writing about Simpson's turn away from the Black figure, "for decades [African American] artists found it difficult to describe the nude black female

visually. After centuries of rape and abuse under slavery, even the erotics of personal pleasure were hard to imagine."⁴⁸ In its place, Simpson represents the reclining nude through the image of a tall vase with a rounded bottom and an upper section that angles outward like an extended crown. Below it, she offers this description:

A smiling woman rests her face on her right arm as her left arm crosses her breasts. Fabric is draped over the edge of the couch, around her hips and continues to the floor. Her legs are exposed, knees bent, and her left foot is tucked under her right. Flowers are strewn over the edge of the couch and on to the floor. An upside down vase sits on the floor, as if its position and the arrangement of flowers has been disturbed.

From this text the viewer can recreate an intimate scene of a woman comfortably posing with a smile across her face. Importantly, Simpson carefully separates the description of the more chaotically arranged props from that of the serene nude. Given the rarity of early twentieth-century photographs of the Black nude body

fig. 10 Lorna Simpson.
Upside Down, Right Side Up,
 1993. Photo on linen panel,
 2 panels, overall: 52 × 41 in.
 (132.1 × 104.1 cm)



in affirmative representations, Van Der Zee's photograph reveals the unlikely kinds of visuality that existed and thrived before the Black photographer's camera during the Harlem Renaissance era (fig. 9). Moreover, with the body described as resting, bending, and sitting, the photograph becomes more than a historically exceptional example. Instead, through *9 Props*, Simpson seems to suggest that the extraordinary aspects of Van Der Zee's nude photograph are the representational possibilities he offers not to the subject but to the viewer as an occasion to linger on provocations of line, movement, touch, and sight.

Simpson's composition in "Reclining nude" also provides the viewer with an additional alternative vantage point. First, this panel is the only one in *9 Props* that does not feature a near exact replica of one of Van Der Zee's props: the vase is missing the sturdy arms that grace the sides of Van Der Zee's corresponding vase. Second, the vase appears in Van Der Zee's photograph,

and is described, counter to the one in the panel, as an upside-down object, echoing the arrangement of the heeled shoes in Simpson's two-panel work from 1993—*Upside Down, Right Side Up* (fig. 10). As Simpson explains, the significance of this positioning of objects is indebted to the historical depictions of the body: "In Western art the representation of a figure upside down is death. So this is about absence of someone missing—that double absence of death."⁴⁹ While images of Saint Peter crucified head-down support Simpson's statement about Western art and death, this quotation more importantly illustrates the expansive ways Simpson explores themes of absence throughout her larger body of work and brings these relational reflections on Van Der Zee to the fore.

Describing the vase as upside down but featuring it as right side up may also remind the viewer of Simpson's propensity toward the unconventional backward positioning of the Black female body. By depicting Black

fig. 11 James Van Der Zee.
Beau of the Ball, 1926.
 Gelatin silver print.
 Collection of Donna
 Mussenden Van Der Zee



women from behind, Simpson invites the viewer to look at women from a certain vantage point. This compositional device disrupts normalized patterns of viewing and offers another angle or approach. The backward figures serve the same purpose as the upside-down vase described in “Reclining nude.” *9 Props* encourages viewers to approach Van Der Zee by sidestepping his subjects, gestures that make it difficult to engage with the existing historiography surrounding the photographer forever linked to the Harlem Renaissance era. To read Simpson’s *9 Props* as a kind of source material that supports and extends the history of Van Der Zee in a different direction is to offer a powerful interpretative framework supported by one’s imagination. As Simpson references larger themes that thread throughout her oeuvre, she gives the viewer an opportunity to begin to recast Van Der Zee’s work as well.

A DUET

At a lecture given in 2010, Simpson highlighted the importance of her own biography to her creation of *9 Props*. Presenting before a slide of Van Der Zee’s *Beau of the Ball* (fig. 11), she recalled that both her parents had cameras, which she was allowed to hold but not to use. She then explained how she acquired her first camera as a child: “I remember cutting out coupons on the back of the Kleenex boxes to get a Polaroid camera. Since I had a cold I had enough boxes to get a camera

which I later got that spring and I had that camera everywhere.”⁵⁰ This experience has notable parallels with Van Der Zee’s own account of how he obtained his first camera: after coming upon an advertisement that promised a camera as a prize for selling packets of lady’s powder, he successfully sold the required amount and was rewarded with a camera, a few glass plates, and chemicals for developing.⁵¹

Although Van Der Zee’s experience preceded Simpson’s by nearly a century, she seems to have intentionally told this story in order to frame her artwork through her engagement with Van Der Zee’s biography as a photographer. As Simpson writes on her artistic practice more generally, “When presented with the opportunity to provide my own writing on the inner workings or the events behind the scenes of my work, I find that the elements that stand out the most are the anecdotal and coincidental moments that have perforated the plans I had originally envisioned.”⁵² In this case, the coincidental moment pays dividends in terms of putting Simpson and Van Der Zee in conversation across time in ways that cannot be gleaned from just looking at their work. In short, she uses the genre of biography to create a mirrored narrative.

In fact, to address two artists and their extensive engagement with photographs resonates with Simpson’s own description of *9 Props* as an homage. As suggested by the phrase “to give props,” an homage acknowledges the worth and value of another person. To let this concept of a “prop” take the lead reinforces how Simpson’s work can push the boundaries of historical knowledge and specificity while handing the interpretation over to the viewer to follow whatever imagining *9 Props* may elicit.⁵³ With its exchange of forms between Simpson and the gaffers, Simpson and the printers at 21 Steps, and most notably Simpson and Van Der Zee, *9 Props* is built on a duet between collaborators.⁵⁴ The viewer, standing before *9 Props*, becomes an added interlocutor within the work’s lineage. Through a range of textual details, visual forms, and supporting clues, the viewer is forced to labor over the experience of seeing *9 Props* in order to imagine on their own terms. Such an engagement means that the narrative surrounding *9 Props* is always being amended, even when these imaginative musings are absent from art’s published history.

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NOTES

- 1 Schoener 1969; Cooks 2011, pp. 53–86; Cahan 2016, pp. 31–108.
- 2 For example, art historian Huey Copeland (2013, p. 65) uses the term “antiportrait” to define an aesthetic style common to this and other works by Simpson. See also the MMA online catalogue entry for *9 Props*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/490687>; Villaseñor 1996, pp. 73, 74; and Eckrich 2014.
- 3 Smith 2020b, p. 92.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 92, 103. Additionally, Smith argues that *9 Props* “gives props” to Van Der Zee and his visions of Black futurity and the future worlds Van Der Zee and his subjects conjured. Ibid., p. 92.
- 5 “Becoming” is a reference to Stuart Hall’s well-known use of the term. According to Hall, cultural identities are constantly undergoing transformations through instances of “becoming” as well as of “being.” Hall 1990, p. 225.
- 6 Flusser 2005, p. 25. To situate Flusser within the larger discourse on imagination and photography, see Morris-Reich and Olin 2020, p. xix.
- 7 Blair 2007, p. 255.
- 8 See Camp 2012, p. 5.
- 9 Scholarship on photography and imagination includes a range of topics such as spirit photography and other intentionally modified, fictional photographs. In this article, imagination is what one does with one’s eyes closed when one is not seeing. Morris-Reich and Olin 2020, p. xvi. Such a definition aligns with Smith’s use of the term when considering *9 Props*; Smith 2020a, p. 134. My use of the term imagination is also informed by Kara Keeling’s writing on the Black radical imagination as defined as “work(ing) with and through what exists in order to call forth something presently absent: a new relationship between and within matter.” Keeling 2019, p. 34. For a succinct summary on the black radical imagination, see *ibid.*, pp. 34–36.
- 10 Blair 2007, p. 253.
- 11 Ozelle 1994, p. 11.
- 12 The nine Van Der Zee photographs referenced in *9 Props* are (from top left) *Woman with a Goldfish Bowl*, 1923; *Beau of the Ball*, 1926; *Benny Andrews*, 1926; *A Man in His Bedroom*, 1931; *Dinner Party with Boxer Harry Wills*, 1926; *Reclining Nude*, 1920s–40s; *Just Before the Battle*, 1920s; *Max Robinson*, 1981; and, lastly, *Tea Time at Madame C. J. Walker’s Beauty Salon*, 1929. The MMA has prints of *Dinner Party with Boxer Harry Wills*, *Reclining Nude*, and *Tea Time at Madame C. J. Walker’s Beauty Salon*.
- 13 Simpson 2010.
- 14 Willis and Birt 1993.
- 15 Simpson 2010.
- 16 See the 1996 program catalogue of the Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, Washington. Both Morris and Marioni are established glass artists. Three works by Morris are in the Met’s collection (MMA 1994.386a–d; 1995.221.1a, b; 1995.221.2a, b).
- 17 Smith 2020b, p. 94.
- 18 See Jones 2002, p. 63. One of the panels appeared printed as a photolithograph, *Van Der Zee Prop Vase* (1994), as part of a fourteen-piece portfolio of works produced by the Whitney for the 1993 Whitney Biennial in Seoul; Whitney Museum of American Art (96.59.12; <https://whitney.org/collection/works/10398>).
- 19 Simpson 2010.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 The studio on 135th Street was the first of four successive studios that Van Der Zee operated in Harlem.
- 22 Scholars have yet to critically consider the props found in Van Der Zee’s photographs. Other attributes within his photographs’ composition are often privileged. For example, Victoria A.-T. Sancho has written about the tactile surface of his photographs and how his employment of double exposures has carried him beyond the use of props; Sancho 1998, p. 56. See also Birt 1989, p. 39.
- 23 Willis and Birt 1993, p. 69.
- 24 For a definition, see http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/prop (accessed Oct. 1, 2016).
- 25 For example, Charlie Ahearn insists that “Nas’s ‘Genesis’ was like a voice crying out in the desert; almost nobody was giving props to the pioneers back then, and I feel the track helped spark curiosity in the minds of the youth as to the origins of this thing we call hip-hop.” Dyson and Daulatzai 2010, p. 262.
- 26 Villaseñor 1996, p. 75.
- 27 Morrison credits a funerary photograph by Van Der Zee and the photographer’s description of the circumstances surrounding the death as early influences for her novel *Jazz* (1992); Gillespie 2008, p. 78. For the referenced photograph, and its description, see Van Der Zee, Dodson, and Billops 1978, p. 84. In *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Dash employs the cinematic device of a layered dissolve as a conscious tribute to Van Der Zee’s practice of superimposing images in some of his photographs; Pidduck 2004, p. 113. Julien claims that the *mise-en-scène* style in his film *Looking for Langston* (1989) is indebted to Van Der Zee’s photographs; Julien 2013, p. 48.
- 28 Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960–1988). *VNDRZ*, 1982. Acrylic and oil paint stick on canvas, 59% × 30 in. (152 × 76.2 cm). Private collection.
- 29 Enwezor 1996, p. 52.
- 30 Robinson 1996, p. 35.
- 31 Simpson’s intended ordering and display of the nine panels are in the 2019 guidelines in the object file for 1998.456.5a–j, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, MMA.
- 32 As Enwezor writes, “her work pushes the boundaries of historical knowledge and specificity.” Enwezor 1996, p. 51.
- 33 Willis and Birt 1993, p. 8.
- 34 For example, in “Frames of Mind,” Lucy Lippard notes how the ways in which props support a narrative are often dependent upon the deletion or subtraction of information. Along similar lines, she explains that a prop serves to efface or envelop the actual self. Lippard 1997, unpaginated. For an alternate way of thinking about the photographer as prop within a Cameroonian context, see Zeitlyn 2010.
- 35 Barthes 1981, p. 13.
- 36 Benjamin 1999, p. 515.
- 37 “Lorna Simpson: Gathered,” Brooklyn Museum, 2011, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/lorna_simpson/. See also Morris 2011.
- 38 Lippard 1997, unpaginated.
- 39 Schwartz 2014, p. 9.
- 40 Copeland 2014, pp. 26–27.
- 41 Jones 2002, p. 68.
- 42 Belisle 2011, p. 157; Golden 2002, p. 16.
- 43 Jones 2002, p. 68.
- 44 Ibid., p. 63.
- 45 This phrase was first used in a conversation between curator Thelma Golden and Kellie Jones mentioned in Golden 1994, unpaginated. See also Copeland 2005.

- 46 Jones 2002, p. 80. "Figurative retreat" is a term used by Copeland (2005) to describe Simpson's absencing of the Black female figure.
- 47 Campt 2017, p. 9.
- 48 Jones 2002, p. 69. Also see Powell 1997, p. 146.
- 49 Wilkes 1993, p. 20.
- 50 Simpson 2010. Simpson also describes her first camera in a conversation with Joan Simon (2013, p. 183).
- 51 Willis and Birt 1993, p. 30.
- 52 Simpson in Jones, Golden, and Iles 2002, p. 136.
- 53 Enwezor 1996, p. 51.
- 54 I thank Jennifer Farrell and Liz Zanis of the Met's Department of Drawings and Prints for framing the process of printmaking as an active collaboration between an artist and a printer.

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Domesticated Partners: A New Analysis of a Sumerian Vessel

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Representations of animals in ancient Near Eastern art are abundant, and their subjects are diverse. They include everything from domesticated livestock to wild beasts, theriomorphic gods, sacrificial victims, and mythological creatures. In these depictions, visual markers of anatomy, pose, and iconography distinguish docile farm animals from ferocious beasts, and divine or mythological characters from earthly creatures. The significance of minute details, such as the upward turn of a goat's tail versus the downward hang of a sheep's, or the fully coiled horns of an adult ram versus the short, budding horns of a lamb, might not be recognized by many viewers today. The details themselves might even escape notice. However, such particulars would not have been lost on most ancient Mesopotamians, who possessed far greater



fig. 1 Vessel supported by two sheep. Sumerian (Early Dynastic IIIa), ca. 2600–2500 B.C. Alabaster, $2\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{5}{8} \times 1\frac{3}{16}$ in. ($7 \times 11.8 \times 3$ cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 (1989.281.3)

fig. 2 Back view of vessel supported by two sheep (fig. 1)



fig. 3 Statuette of a recumbent calf. Sumerian (Early Dynastic I-II), ca. 2800–2700 B.C., from E-anna Precinct, Uruk. Limestone inlaid with lapis lazuli, 1 × 2 1/8 in. (2.6 × 5.2 cm). Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 14536)



fig. 4 Side view of vessel supported by two sheep (fig. 1)

visual acumen in distinguishing creatures of all kinds. The physical presence of livestock in their daily lives, the frequency and visibility of religious rituals involving animal sacrifice, and the wealth of animal imagery in works of art ranging from tiny private objects to public monuments gave them remarkable knowledge of animals real and represented.

Domesticated animals, and animal husbandry more broadly, featured prominently in ancient Mesopotamian art of the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods (ca. 3400–2334 B.C.). An outstanding work of this type is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The small alabaster votive sculpture displays five animals: four shown in pairs and one in isolation (figs. 1, 2).¹ The main group comprises two recumbent horned sheep—probably rams, although ewes, too, can have horns.² Together, the sheep support on their backs a vessel displaying an image of another pair of interacting animals. An image of a single bull is incised on the back of the vessel. The present study shows that in both form and iconography, the two pairs of conjoined figures convey the potentiality of animal abundance, both productive and reproductive, in a manner that is exemplary among comparable objects from the ancient Near East. Analysis of this carving reveals the manifold ways in which representations of domesticated animals functioned as metaphors for civilization, fertility, abundance, prosperity, and the cyclical passage of time.

Although the object's provenance is unknown, it likely originated in Sumer, in what is now southern Iraq, in the Early Dynastic IIIa period (ca. 2600–2500 B.C.). Less than three inches high, the closed-form sculpture had a practical function, evidenced by the double-welled vessel on the sheep's backs, which probably held cosmetics or unguents.³ Holes on the top, front, and back of the container likely secured metal handles or hinges used for suspension or for operating a lid mechanism along the dividing wall of the vessel's interior.⁴ The sheep are similar in appearance. Their heads,

turned at ninety-degree angles, look steadfastly toward the viewer. The animals lie rump to shoulder, broad-sides touching. Their legs, folded beneath them, remain visible, carved in low relief along their flanks. This manner of rendering the legs of recumbent animals is commonly found in Uruk and Early Dynastic votive objects and amulets, as exemplified by the statuette of a calf from the E-anna Precinct at Uruk (fig. 3).⁵

Votive images were dedicated to gods in sacred spaces, offered alongside donations of live animals, vessels, tithes of various kinds, valuable materials or objects, and representations of the acts of giving and praying. Within the context of gifts befitting the gods, votive images of animals derived their meaning and expressive power not only from their materials and forms but also from their zoological specificity.⁶ For example, in the calf statuette mentioned above, the costly lapis lazuli inlays and superb carving contributed to the preciousness of the object, while the folds of the softly modeled flesh and the nearly budding horns conveyed the potentiality and value of the animal's youth.⁷ Represented at less than one year of age, the calf is shown at a highly valuable stage in its life: it has reached the maximum weight for yielding the tenderest meat and softest skin.⁸

While the vessel-bearing sheep are far from young, as revealed by their curling horns, they, too, bear marks of their potentiality and great value. Horns of such length, possessing more than a full coil, indicate that the animals are adult (fig. 4). Seemingly, these sheep were prized for their ability to produce wool year after year.⁹ The carefully carved, vertical zigzag patterns on the sheep's bodies draw attention to their most





fig. 5 Cylinder seal with bovines and a recumbent ram. Sumerian (Uruk), ca. 3300 B.C. Copper and magnetite, $2\frac{1}{2} \times \text{Diam. } 1\frac{1}{2}$ in. ($6.3 \times \text{Diam. } 3.7$ cm). Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford (AN1964.744)

important asset, their fleece, stylized and starkly contrasted with the animals' smooth, softly modeled foreheads, muzzles, and ears. With such bounteous fleeces, both sheep appear to be ripe for combing.¹⁰ Thus, the sculpture's pairing of the ripe fleeces with the animals' advanced age captures in stone the longevity of the pair's abundant fleece production. Their yields are perhaps alluded to by the thin plinth beneath the sheep, its braided or double-twisted edge resembling the border of a woven textile or mat, possibly made of wool.¹¹

The recumbent sheep are alike not only in pose and anatomy but also in size. It seems the sculptor made no attempt to differentiate them. At first glance, they appear to be mirror images of each other; only their slightly staggered positioning disrupts the compositional symmetry. United in their shared task of bearing the double-welled vessel, the sheep are partners but not a breeding pair. The emphatic sameness of their anatomy suggests that they are both either male or female. In many breeds of sheep, ewes and rams alike can have horns, although horns are more common in males than females. While the inclusion of horns does not guarantee maleness in this case, Mesopotamian works of art in a variety of media commonly distinguish rams from ewes, and bulls from cows, by means of horns and relative size, or through more obvious features such as genitalia and udders, and even by birthing scenes.¹² An indicative example is carved in low relief on one side of an alabaster trough from Uruk. The scene represents two pairs of breeding sheep—the males clearly distinguished by horns—flanking a hut from which two lambs emerge.¹³ Given the lack of explicit female characteristics in the sheep portrayed in the Metropolitan Museum's sculpture and the tendency in this period to represent rams with horns and ewes without, it is likely that the recumbent animals are male. In the unlikely event that ewes are represented, the artist chose not to focus on their distinctly female capacities for producing offspring and milk.

The two sheep contrast with the pair of animals incised on the front of the double-welled vessel. That panel, now weathered and partly broken, depicts in profile a female goat mounted from behind by a male goat. The rearing animal was previously misidentified as a lion that was described, incorrectly, to be attacking a wild goat, or caprid.¹⁴ The small, thin horns of the mounted goat differ from those in typical representations of caprids, undomesticated animals that live in mountainous terrain.¹⁵ In art of the period, caprids are typically distinguished from domesticated goats by their long corkscrew horns and downturned tails.¹⁶ Frequently, images of vegetation such as wild thickets or stylized

fig. 6 Uruk Vase. Sumerian (Uruk), ca. 3300 B.C. Alabaster, 41 $\frac{1}{16}$ × Diam. 14 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (105 × Diam. 36 cm). Iraq Museum, Baghdad (19606)

branches supplement the caprid's anatomical markers to indicate its undomesticated nature. Two sculpted goats from the Great Death Pit at Ur exhibit features typical of caprids. Both animals are portrayed standing on their hind legs, front legs braced against a sculpted tree, as they reach for the leaves and stylized rosette flowers on its branches.¹⁷ The caprids' long corkscrew horns and downturned tails represent a known species of wild goat, the markhor, native to Central Asia.¹⁸

The scene on the front of the vessel includes neither foliage nor the anatomical markers typical of Mesopotamian representations of caprids. Instead, the mounted animal has short, widely spaced horns and a short, upturned tail, suggesting that the creature represents a domesticated goat.¹⁹ Close examination reveals that the rear animal's thin legs, hooves, and beard are similar to those of its partner. These features, combined with the absence of a lion's mane, identify the animal as another goat.²⁰ On the underside of the mounting goat, the sheath of a penis is visible. The buck's mounted mate, a doe, has no such projection from her underside and has a less prominent beard.²¹ Thus, the goats on the vessel's front convey the potentiality of reproductive abundance, while the recumbent sheep, carved in the round, evoke another kind of animal abundance through their ripe fleeces.

Incised on the rear of the vessel is the figure of a solitary, standing bull. Unlike the other animals in the composition, the bull has no partner and does not engage in any apparent task or activity. His isolation may at first seem curious when compared to the pairings of sheep and goats represented on the same object. Stone vessels and cylinder seals from the period commonly show series or pairs of bulls, repeating pairs of bovines attacked by lions, or alternating images of bulls and plants.²² Assortments of domesticated sheep, goats, and bulls are also fairly typical. For example, a Late Uruk-period cylinder seal depicts a series of overlapping bovines in its upper register and four reed huts teeming with calves in its lower register (fig. 5).²³ This image of bovine reproductive plenitude is paired with the image of a single recumbent ram, cast in copper, atop the seal.²⁴ In effect, the solitary animal is a pendant to the animal pairs or herds. In the vessel supported by two sheep, the lone bull may represent the Mesopotamian primogenitor, an expression of male reproductive potency.²⁵ It emphasizes the active, procreative capacity of the male goat on the front of the vessel.²⁶

Together, the domesticated animals on the Metropolitan Museum's sculpture emphasize the potentiality of two types of animal abundance:



the sheep convey the potential for animal productivity through their fleeces, while the mating goats and the bull emblemize fertility and reproduction. Such depictions undoubtedly reflect a dependence on animal husbandry. Yet plant cultivation was equally vital and was often represented in art of the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods as the complement to animal husbandry. For example, a frieze on the circumference of a southern Mesopotamian stone bowl in the Metropolitan Museum features the repeated image of a domesticated bull and a stalk of wheat.²⁷ A similar pairing of plant and animal abundance appears on the Uruk Vase (fig. 6).²⁸ The lowest register on the vase displays a row of alternating

fig. 7 Four-part vessel with animal supports. Sumerian (Early Dynastic I–III), ca. 2900–2350 B.C. Gypsum, $2\frac{1}{8} \times 3\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{7}{16}$ in. (7.3 × 8.5 × 11.2 cm). Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (A7463)



plants—possibly flax and wheat; directly above, a frieze of sheep, alternating male and female, circles the vessel.²⁹ Above the rams and ewes, men processing in single file carry large receptacles that presumably contain byproducts of a successful agricultural season.³⁰ In contrast to the Uruk Vase and the Metropolitan Museum's stone bowl, the vessel supported by two sheep lacks iconographic references to plant production and focuses entirely on animals.

The comparison vessels and cylinder seals discussed above all present friezes of repeated paired images: the cylinder seal features overlapping bovines paired with calves; the Metropolitan Museum's bowl shows alternating images of bulls with wheat stalks; and the Uruk Vase displays processions of rams and ewes. Whether the animals are matched with offspring, mates, partners, or agricultural products, their recurring pairings form a continuous loop around the vessels and cylinder seals, expressing infinite cycles of agricultural production and/or animal husbandry.³¹ This continuous bounty is most clearly witnessed in the top register of the Uruk Vase, where pairs of animals and offerings are seen behind the goddess and the reed gateposts associated with her sanctuary. These items appear to be already donated and stored in Inanna's abode. But as the vase is turned, the items seem to be resting behind the offering bearer, waiting to be given to the goddess. The circular frieze thus perpetually repeats the cycle of carrying, offering, and housing dedications at the temple.³² The same visual strategies could not be employed to convey a sense of endless cyclical abundance on the irregularly shaped vessel supported by two sheep. Instead of circling bands of repeating pairs, the sheep and the vessel on their backs present a compounding of doubles that starts with the two sheep, continues with the pair of goats, and culminates in the double-welled vessel.

Similar Early Dynastic objects, such as a rectangular gypsum container from Nippur at the Metropolitan Museum, indicate an ancient trend for double-welled vessels.³³ Some two-part vessels are enhanced with reliefs depicting a pair of humans or animals, as exemplified by a double-welled container from Nippur with two identical male figures carved on the vessel's front.³⁴ More elaborate examples include vessels with paired animal supports, as in the double vessel with duck-shaped supports at the Metropolitan Museum and a four-part vessel with calf supports at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (fig. 7).³⁵ In both objects, a compounding of doubles is apparent. In the former, each of two identical pairs of ducks supports a vessel; in the latter, each of two identical pairs of calves supports a double-welled vessel. The animals, the pairs of animals, and the vessels are all doubled (the wells of the vessel supported by calves are twice doubled). In both cases, the emphatic sameness of the animals and their symmetrical arrangement allow for two fluctuating pairings: at one moment, the outward-facing animals appear locked in perpetual partnership; at the next, the two animals sharing the weight of the vessels seem the more exclusive pairing. Originally, this effect may have been more pronounced. Contemporaneous viewers, while handling the objects and turning them from side to side, would have been engaged in pairing and re-pairing the animals, effectively enacting the redoublings. Thus, like the endless loops on the vessels and cylinder seals discussed above, the compounding of doubles is a formal strategy for conveying the idea of boundless abundance.

In the vessel supported by two sheep, the most apparent doubling is that of the recumbent sheep. Their close resemblance in pose, shared task, size, and anatomical features suggests that the animals are of the same sex. Although partners in bearing the vessel, they do not generate abundance through reproduction. Rather, each provides bounty in the form of its heavy fleece. Unlike friezes of processing animals, where repeated pairs stride forward in a line, the sheep's bodies are positioned in opposite directions: the animal in front points to the left, the other to the right. Even though the sheep are not perfectly symmetrical, the overall effect is that of a mirror image, a perpetual doubling of each sheep.³⁶ And unlike the looping images on the cylinder seals and circular vessels, which require the viewer to turn the object in order to apprehend the boundlessness of the repeating cycle, the mirror image of recumbent sheep is revealed all at once; the doubling of the sheep is immediately visible and enacted.

Atop the sheep, the double-welled vessel and pair of mating goats incised on its front compound the doubling effect. The procreant goats are not simply juxtaposed as a male-female pair, as is the case in several of the previously discussed objects.³⁷ Instead, like the sheep, the goats are engaged in a shared activity. And, like the sheep's partnership, theirs is conspicuous, physical, and productive. This compounding of doubles has the same effect as the looping friezes of paired animals and plants in that it expresses endless abundance. However, the confluence of multiple and multiplying animal duos and the double-welled vessel present infinite abundance not as a repeating agricultural cycle but rather as compounding multiplication.³⁸

For the Early Dynastic vessel supported by two sheep, the redoublings of animals—one pair ripe for sheering and another pair mating—illustrate the potentiality of animal fruitfulness. The sheeps' wool, like barley, is harvested, and the sheep, like soil, are nurtured in order to regrow their supply. Thus, like the traditional pairings of domesticated animals and plants, the combination of mating goats with thick-coated sheep conveys reproductive and productive abundance. Underscoring the indispensability of successful animal husbandry in this period, the vessel supported by two sheep presents animals, not agriculture, as sources of both production and reproduction.

Analysis of the Metropolitan Museum's small votive carving demonstrates the richness and specificity of animal images in ancient Mesopotamia, particularly those from the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods. The centrality of animal husbandry to individual and community livelihoods meant that plenitude and poverty, life and death, could be affected by animals—a reality that is reflected in art from the period. While it is not surprising that images of domesticated animals functioned as metaphors for abundance, the nuances of these artistic expressions, and especially their capacity to relay ideas of unbound time and infinite bounty, are remarkable.

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NOTES

- 1 The object was included in the 2017 exhibition "Noah's Beasts: Sculpted Animals from Ancient Mesopotamia, ca. 3300–2250 B.C." at the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, under the title *Vessel Supported by Two Rams*. See Babcock 2017.
- 2 The sex of the two sheep is discussed in detail below. Although both animals are probably male, the point cannot be proved with certainty. Therefore, they are referred to by the genderless term "sheep" throughout this article.
- 3 Two comparable double-welled vessels in the Met that likely held cosmetics, oils, or unguents are a double vessel with duck-shaped supports from Nippur, Early Dynastic IIIa, ca. 2600–2500 B.C. (62.70.3); and a rectangular container from Nippur, ca. 2600–2500 B.C. (62.70.5). See Wilkinson 1962, p. 84, and Amiet 1980, p. 306.
- 4 These possibilities are discussed in Muscarella 1992, p. 11. Zoomorphic vessels found in the Sammelfund of the Late Uruk period may have supported attached vessels, judging by slots for tenons atop the animal bases; Searight 2008, pp. 101–3, nos. 621–26.
- 5 Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA14536). See also related objects held by the Vorderasiatisches Museum (VA 14536, VA 10108, and VA 11005), the Metropolitan Museum (62.70.68),

the Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 7021), the Yale Babylonian Collection, New Haven (YBC 02261), and the Cleveland Museum of Art (1970.61).

- 6 The similarities of MMA 1989.281.3 to vessels and animal figurines excavated in the E-anna Precinct at Uruk and other known sanctuary contexts suggest that the vessel supported by two sheep functioned as a votive or sacred object within a temple or sacred precinct.
- 7 For a discussion of votives capturing potentiality, see Bahrani 2017, p. 67.
- 8 In the ancient Near East, the prime age for obtaining soft hides and tender meat from sheep was three to four months; see Helmer, Gourichon, and Vila 2007, especially p. 59. While analysis of the archaeological evidence of the slaughter of cows in the region remains elusive, it seems reasonable to assume that the prime age for bovines was similar.
- 9 In ancient Mesopotamia, adult sheep were valued for their ability to produce offspring, milk, cheese, and fleece. In the Met's sculpture, the sheep's maturity and luxuriant fleeces are evident, but no sign is given of their reproductive capabilities or capacity to produce milk. This subject is addressed more fully below. The economics of wool production in Mesopotamia are discussed in

- Oppenheim 1974, pp. 83–85, and in Zettler 1992, chap. 6. Archaeozoological evidence of culling ages for sheep and goats is used to analyze the consumption of animal products in the ancient Near East in Helmer, Gourichon, and Vila 2007.
- 10 In this period, sheep did not have the woolly fleeces for which most of their modern descendants have been bred; their wool was collected by combing rather than shearing. For the evolution of fleeces, see Ryder 1984 and 1992. According to Emmanuelle Vila and Daniel Helmer (2014), iconographic and bone analyses suggest that two breeds of sheep existed in the Near East during the Bronze Age. One had coiled horns, like the sheep depicted in the sculpture discussed here, and was likely prized for its fleece. In the other breed, which seems eventually to have fallen out of favor, the rams had tight, spiraling horns, and the ewes were hornless (polled).
 - 11 This interpretation is speculative, as woven mats in the ancient Near East were also made from plants and materials derived from animals other than sheep. At the very least, the artist seems intentionally to have juxtaposed the raw material of the fleece with the finished materials in the textile.
 - 12 On the Uruk Vase, dating about 3300 B.C. (fig. 6), male and female sheep represented as procreant pairs are clearly distinguishable by size and the presence or absence of horns and beards. These same distinctions can be seen in the images of six bovines on a cylinder seal from about 3300 B.C. (Yale Babylonian Collection, YPM BC 005552). Female bovines, like female sheep, can have horns similar to their male counterparts'. In ancient Mesopotamian art they are frequently represented without horns when shown as part of a male-female pair. For birthing scenes, representations of udders, and milking scenes, see Delougaz 1968 and Hansen 2003a, p. 28 (especially the scenes from the frieze at Tell al Ubaid, Early Dynastic IIIa, ca. 2550–2400 B.C.).
 - 13 The Uruk Trough, ca. 3300–3000 B.C. (British Museum, London, 120000). Procreant pairs such as these are a recurring motif in the art of this period. Irene Winter (2010, pp. 203–7) has interpreted them as representations of animal abundance.
 - 14 Muscarella 1992, p. 11.
 - 15 Frankfort 1965, p. 17.
 - 16 Sometimes a longer, fuller beard extending down the animal's neck and chest may suggest that a goat is wild, but the inconsistent occurrence of this feature makes it an inconclusive marker.
 - 17 University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum), Philadelphia (30-12-702), and the British Museum (122200). The British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley named both sculptures *Ram Caught in a Thicket* in his 1929 excavation report (p. 322), although the title does not accurately describe the goats' situation. They are feeding on rather than caught in foliage. The Penn Museum now calls its sculpture *Ram in a Thicket*. For a brief discussion of the two works, see Hansen 2003b. The two rams, a seemingly same-sex, mirror-image pair, originally supported a tray, bowl, or stand of some kind. They exemplify the tendency to double an animal's image when it is used as a support for a vessel. This subject is addressed in more detail below.
 - 18 These distinguishing features of caprids in ancient Near Eastern art also appear on cylinder seals. On a marble seal from Uruk, ca. 3200–3000 B.C. (Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, VA 10537), a domesticated sheep or goat depicted within the goddess Inanna's sanctuary is contrasted with large caprids standing outside the sanctuary, on uneven terrain. The caprids are identifiable by their elongated corkscrew horns and long beards; a male figure holding stylized branches with rosette flowers (symbols of Inanna, mistress of animals) attempts to feed and tame the animals. Another cylinder seal, this one of limestone, from the second half of the fourth century B.C. (British Museum, 128864), represents a series of recumbent mouflons with oversized horns amid vegetation.
 - 19 Both goats on the front of the vessel also show short, thin beards dangling from their chins. These beards are unlike the long, thick variety that can, but do not always, characterize wild goats (see note 16 above).
 - 20 If the scene pictured a lion attack, the victim would likely be presented in a compromised position, probably with a large paw clawing its flesh.
 - 21 Both male and female goats can have beards and horns.
 - 22 Examples include an Early Dynastic ewer with sculpted animals, ca. 3350–3250 B.C. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1977.802); and the limestone ewer from Uruk, ca. 3000–2900 B.C. (Iraq Museum, 19169). A series of low-relief images of bulls once encircled the southern Mesopotamian bowl that survives as a fragment in the Met (50.218).
 - 23 Holly Pittman (2003, p. 40), noting the uniqueness of overlapping bovines in Uruk-period images, interpreted the motif as a means to emphasize the vast size of a herd.
 - 24 In this cylinder seal, the bundled-reed poles flanking each hut represent the gateposts to the goddess Inanna's sanctuary. Representations of the sacred herds and flocks are discussed in Frankfort 1965, pp. 17–21, 78, and Winter 2010, p. 204. Examples of their occurrence on cylinder seals include the Yale Babylonian Collection (YPM BC 037566); Morgan Library and Museum (seal no. 5); and Vorderasiatisches Museum (VA 10537). Instances of their occurrence on other types of objects include the Uruk Trough (British Museum, 120000) and a bowl fragment (Louvre, AO 8842).
 - 25 Sidney Babcock, email message to author, March 23, 2019. If it were possible to prove that the sheep are males, the significance of the bull as primogenitor would be even greater, as every aspect of the object would clearly refer to the active male potentialities of reproduction and production. This object and others representing animals in ancient Near Eastern art are discussed in Babcock 2017. For observations on the bull as primogenitor, see Hansen 2003a, pp. 27–28.
 - 26 The fertility of the female goat represented here is not emphasized in the ways commonly seen in works of art from the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods. Female livestock are often depicted being milked, giving birth, or in the company of their offspring; see references in note 12 above. In the vessel supported by two sheep, the artist has chosen to represent the moment in which the male's role is more active than the female's.
 - 27 MMA 41.160.201. Versions of this image commonly occur in relief on vessels and also appear on cylinder seals. Similar iconography is seen on a bowl with bulls and grain from Ur (Iraq Museum, 11989); see Winter 2010, fig. 4. An example of a cylinder seal pairing images of bulls and wheat stalks is in the Louvre (MNB 1906, A25).
 - 28 Iraq Museum, 19606.
 - 29 For identification of the plants, see Bahrani 2002, p. 16, and Winter 2010, p. 207.
 - 30 Winter 2010, especially pp. 205–10.
 - 31 Ibid., pp. 199–212. The ways in which this circularity and the repetition of images expanded time and pointed toward the infinite (in the present cases, of endless abundance) are

- discussed in Bahrani 2014, especially chap. 4 and pp. 131–32. For an analysis of the performative function of the Uruk Vase, see Bahrani 2002, especially pp. 15–21.
- 32 A comparable image depicting the cycles of dedicating and storing offerings is in Frankfort 1965, p. 18 and pl. V, fig. c.
- 33 MMA 62.70.5. Several such vessels with known contexts are in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (A31055, A12408, and A12405).
- 34 Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (A31469).
- 35 MMA 62.70.3. The Oriental Institute's four-part vessel is not well preserved, and it is difficult to say with certainty whether the four supporting animals are calves or adult cows.
- 36 Mirror images and duality are discussed in Bahrani 2014, chap. 4, especially pp. 120–22. Mirror images as known today did not exist in antiquity; ancient mirrors were made of polished metals and produced hazy reflections at best. However, viewers in ancient times would have been able to note the symmetry of the Metropolitan Museum's vessel and sense its effect of constant doubling. Importantly, they would have regarded the sameness and symmetry of precise doubles as the achievements of a skilled stone sculptor. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–38.
- 37 Examples include fig. 6 in this article and the Morgan Library and Museum (cylinder) seal no. 5.
- 38 The Uruk Trough (British Museum, 120000) shows a similar compositional arrangement: two procreant pairs flank their centrally placed offspring. The mirror-image effect produced by this is comparable to the one found in the Metropolitan Museum's vessel supported by two sheep.

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Radiance and the Power of Erasure in an Obsidian Lamaštu Amulet

MIRIAM SAID

Among the various figurines, pendants, and fragments of cuneiform ritual tablets in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of ancient Near Eastern art is a nearly pristine obsidian amulet of the first millennium B.C.¹ This amulet, small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand, provides protection from the Mesopotamian demon Lamaštu. On one side is a representation of the demon surrounded by various ritual paraphernalia (fig. 1), and on the other, a ritual incantation carved in cuneiform script (fig. 2). In its current display—mounted flat against a beige cloth support—the opacity of the obsidian's dark color makes it difficult to see the image and also precludes any observation of the text. When the amulet is examined at close range, however, one is able to see how brilliantly light reflects off the surface and gets a

fig. 1 Amulet with a Lamaštu Demon.
Mesopotamia or Iran,
ca. early 1st millennium B.C.
Obsidian, $2\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{13}{16} \times \frac{3}{8}$ in.
(5.7 × 4.7 × 0.9 cm). The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Purchase, James N.
Spear Gift, 1984 (1984.348)





fig. 2 Back view of Amulet with a Lamaštu Demon (fig. 1), showing the incantation

better sense of the inherently luminescent qualities of this material.

In 1994, Irene Winter published a seminal article identifying radiance as an important aesthetic attribute in Mesopotamian art, one that not only reflects the outer quality of a material form, but also is inherently linked to notions of divine power, and thus capable of engendering positive, affective responses to works of art characterized by this radiance.² Many cuneiform texts describe such an aura, one controlled by the gods and transmitted to the realm of man, as being imbued with vitality and purity and having transformative agency. These texts indicate that both people and objects could be in possession of radiance—kings and princes; physical structures such as temples, processional roads, and palace gateways; and various cultic paraphernalia.³ There are several words in Sumerian and Akkadian that describe radiance and luster, most notably as a divinely bestowed power that emanates, halo-like, from the head of Neo-Assyrian kings. Winter also notes that, despite these rich descriptions from textual sources, radiance is not paired with any direct iconography as we might expect to find in visual culture.⁴

There are, for example, no halos in Neo-Assyrian iconography. Instead, Mesopotamian craftsmen skillfully exploited the natural properties of materials to manifest this radiance in visually arresting art.

To date, the Metropolitan Museum's Lamaštu amulet has been the focus of iconographic study,⁵ but little attention has been given toward articulating how the materiality of the obsidian itself facilitated magical protection on behalf of the amulet's user. This article addresses a fascinating aspect of the object, namely, the transformed appearance of black obsidian into translucent glass, thereby enabling an erasure of the visual image and thus reframing the discussion of this amulet as an *apotropaion*, an object or image that averts evil.⁶ Light, as both material quality and divine power (*melammu*), weaponizes the obsidian against Lamaštu, altering the essential nature of the image and allowing a form of material exorcism to occur.

Although Lamaštu amulets have been examined since the mid-nineteenth century,⁷ a substantive study addressing their ritual function and magical materiality has yet to be made. Asking materially and sensorially situated questions of this amulet, its iconography, and its text—both the content of the inscription and the text *as* image—makes room for a more complex interpretation, one that examines the choices made by artisans or ritual specialists to create an object with potent magical agency.

LAMAŠTU AND THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM AMULET

Among the many beings in the Mesopotamian pantheon of gods, demons, and monsters, Lamaštu occupies a unique position as both a daughter of the sky god, Anu, and, upon her expulsion from heaven, an archetypical force of chaos. The specifics of Lamaštu's crimes are still uncertain, but she is believed to have requested to feed on the flesh of babies. It is possible she was thrown down to earth as punishment for acting outside the normal parameters of divine cosmic order; that is, willfully and without cause attacking mortals. Alternatively, her expulsion may be understood as a divine method of population control in the ancient world.⁸ Unlike other demons of the ancient Near East, Lamaštu has a strikingly clear mythology with an attendant iconography and pattern of destruction, thanks in large part to a series of incantation and ritual texts surviving from the second and first millennia B.C.⁹ These texts describe her primary targets as pregnant women and infants; however, nearly all members of society could fall victim to Lamaštu's destructive ways, as the following excerpt from the canonical first-millennium B.C. incantation series indicates:

When she has seized an old man, they call her
 “The Annihilator.”
 When she has seized a young man, they call her
 “The Scorcher.”

When she has seized a young woman, they call
 her “Lamaštu.”
 When she has seized a baby, they call her “Dimme.”¹⁰

In addition to the literature that provides remedies for victims of Lamaštu is an associated and intertwined tradition of amulet production. An abundant number of these amulets survive from antiquity and have been extensively published, although many more likely exist in public and private collections than are currently accounted for in the scholarship.¹¹ Those that have archaeological contexts indicate that Lamaštu amulets had vast geographic distributions, from sites in northern and southern Mesopotamia, Iran, and Syria, to Kaneš (Kültepe) in modern-day Turkey and as far west as Poggio Civitate in Italy.¹² They range in date from roughly the seventeenth century B.C. through the Hellenistic period.¹³ Known to modern scholars since the mid-nineteenth century, these amulets primarily have been studied for their inscriptions, while art historical and visual investigations have focused on corroborating descriptions found in textual sources.¹⁴

Archaeological studies have analyzed the movement and production locations of the amulets, but such analysis is often fraught, since the portability of the objects

often precludes secure contextualization.¹⁵ Some excavators, however, have been successful in this regard. In 1994, archaeologists discovered an amuletic-shaped tablet at Kaneš (Kültepe), in the home of an Assyrian named Šalim-Aššur, proving that incantation literatures could be found in domestic contexts in the ancient Near East, and also pushing the earliest known reference to Lamaštu back to the nineteenth century B.C.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the vast majority of these amulets remain unexcavated.

Lamaštu amulets are typically square or rectangular and could be either small enough to wear pinned to a garment or threaded onto a necklace, or produced in larger plaque-sized amulets to hang on walls. They were made in various materials, including bronze and copper; black, brown, and green stones, such as steatite and hematite; and other stones such as yellow sandstone and pink limestone, all materials likely chosen for perceived magical, mythical, or folkloric associations.¹⁷ Although prescriptive texts organizing stones for amulet production survive and clearly indicate arrangement into groups according to magical characteristics, it is difficult to match ancient stones by culturally constructed type to the modern mineral designations used in the field today.¹⁸

Iconographically, Lamaštu is always represented as a monstrous composite of various animal parts, usually with the head of a lion or dog, or occasionally a bird of prey. She is often shown with a gaping mouth filled with sharp teeth and stippling on her body to signify a hairy form, one that incorporates bared breasts and feet ending in talons. Often she is depicted suckling a dog and pig, her traditional companions, owing to their associations with the wild and uncleanness, or in combat with ritual priests and the wind demon Pazuzu, her most powerful and primary mythological adversary (fig. 3).¹⁹ Finally, she tends to be surrounded by ritual paraphernalia used to propel her return to her underworld abode, such as a traveler’s cloak, a pair of sandals, and provisions of food and drink—everything one might need on a long journey. She is also bribed with jewelry, a spindle, a flask of oil, and other markers of domesticity, reminding us that she is a demon who longs for a home, always on the margins looking inward.

One of the key markers of divinity in Mesopotamia was the presence of a cult and temple on earth, but as a demon, Lamaštu was no longer privileged to these amenities. Provisioning her with items that would be part of a domestic context, which for a god would be the actual temple (Akkadian, *bitum*, or “house”), provides additional appeasement in the rituals and on apotropaic amulets. In addition to the presence of these



fig. 3 Pendant with the Head of Pazuzu. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 8th–7th century B.C. Bronze, 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (4.3 × 2.7 × 2.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Norbert Schimmel and Robert Haber Gifts, and funds from various donors, 1993 (1993.181)

By the sixth millennium B.C., the manufacture of personal adornment, vessels, and mirrors from obsidian flourished at several Neolithic sites in northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Reserving obsidian for such prestige objects—for example, an elaborate necklace made with double conoid-shaped obsidian pendants and cowrie shells excavated from the Burnt House at Tell Arpachiyah (fig. 4)—capitalized on the material’s luminescence and exoticism, helping individuals to distinguish themselves at a time when leadership roles were developing within a relatively egalitarian culture.²⁷ As with nearly all precious and semiprecious materials found in Mesopotamia, obsidian’s value was magnified because it did not occur naturally in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley and had to be imported across great distances to reach Assyria proper. Likely sources of obsidian are known in Ethiopia, Sudan, southern Yemen, southwest Arabia, the Red Sea islands, and Lake Van in Anatolia.²⁸ Recent analysis with portable X-ray fluorescence reveals that the obsidian used for the Museum’s amulet was sourced from the Kömürcü outcrops of the Göllü Dağ volcano complex in Anatolia.²⁹

The advent of metalworking technologies at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. meant that obsidian was in large part phased out of use for tools and reserved almost exclusively for prestige goods, such as cups and vessels, amulets, pendants, and beads.³⁰ Various textual references record the use of obsidian in elaborate jewelry assemblages, alongside other precious materials such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. By the end of the third millennium B.C., material evidence of obsidian becomes sparse, likely due to its fragility, but texts suggest its continued use for jewelry production, and that it retained a material value similar to lapis lazuli.³¹ The material record is even sparser for the first millennium B.C., making the Museum’s amulet a rarity.³²



fig. 4 Necklace. Halaf, Tell Arpachiyah, Iraq, 6th millennium B.C. Obsidian, cowrie shell, limestone, clay, and traces of pigment, L. 10 1/8 in. (25.8 cm), W. of largest obsidian bead 1 1/2 in. (3.8 cm). British Museum, London (1934.0210.547; AN432112001)

While the Akkadian term for obsidian, *šurru*, may refer to the stones themselves, analysis of the word from various contexts shows that it could also act as a qualifier for specific colors of certain stones.³³ Stones referred to as *šurru* could be black, green, or white, and *šurru* could be applied adjectivally to describe the appearance of these colors in other media (for example, “bricks enameled in lapis lazuli and *šurru*-color”).³⁴ Obsidian is recorded in inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (r. 1114–1076 B.C.), in which he is described as bringing *šurru* stone down from the mountains of Na’iri, probably Lake Van, and then dedicating them in a temple to the storm god, Adad.³⁵ Similarly, administrators to the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 722–705 B.C.) recorded obsidian in a list of precious stones dedicated to the god Marduk.³⁶

Although the Museum’s obsidian Lamaštu amulet is broken at the top, based on comparanda, it almost certainly originally had a flange for suspension where this break occurs. No ancient literature survives on the production and subsequent use of Lamaštu amulets, but textual evidence on the various uses of obsidian allows us to infer that it could have been worn on a necklace or pinned to the body, both in ritual contexts and possibly as part of a daily ensemble.³⁷ One passage from a Neo-Assyrian anti-witchcraft text includes ritual instructions for the fabrication and consecration of a protective necklace. Following a poetic prayer to Marduk and his consort Zarpanītu, the text instructs that the necklace should incorporate a pendant of an *urdimmu*, a dog-man figurine, and that it must be adorned with obsidian:

DÙ.DÙ.BI urdimmu ša erēni teppuš ina ṭurri ḥurāši
tašakkak
ṭurri kitī (var.: kaspi) ina kippat ḥurāši talammi ḥulāla
šurra šalma (var.: kunuk
ḥulāli; kunuk šubī) tašakkak [ina mu]ḥḥišu tašakkan

Its ritual: You make the figurine of a dog-man of cedar wood, you string it on a cord of gold, you wrap a cord of flax (var.: silver) with a golden loop, you string *hulalu*-stone (and) “dark obsidian” (var.: a seal of *hulalu*-stone; a seal of *shubu*-stone) (on it); you put it [o]n it (i.e., the figurine)³⁸

The above description confirms the presence of obsidian in prophylactic jewelry and, by extension, provides one explanation for its use in Lamaštu amulets. Several other texts provide additional descriptions of obsidian being made into beads to be worn on a necklace, occasionally to touch one’s forehead, or to be carried in a leather bag.³⁹

If figurines embodying ritual change, like the *urdimmu* pendant described above, were adorned with obsidian to facilitate appeals to the gods, it is not unreasonable to imagine that amulets made of the same material were similarly conceived. Such an inference, however, still leaves a lacuna in the discussion—namely, how the material itself, situated within a framework of ritual and mythological associations, constituted the apotropaic effect ascribed to it. By its very nature, obsidian’s materiality facilitated a type of human–object intimacy: while large blocks of the stone were cultivated for use in architecture or statuary, it was generally traded in small blocks meant for jewelry or amulets.⁴⁰ The body itself thus became an essential component of the formula. Indeed, it has been argued that amulets, or at least amuletic texts inscribed on clay, stone, or metal tablets, required proximity to the spaces they were intended to protect in order to function properly.⁴¹ By extension, amulets such as the Museum’s Lamaštu amulet are necessarily dependent on their proximity to the body and on the body’s sensory responses to be effective.

Careful observation of the Museum’s amulet reveals a highly luminous refraction of light at the break in the upper right corner. Its smooth, polished surface yields varying degrees of luster, depending on how the amulet is held or moved. From a frontal position, the amulet appears opaque. The density of the obsidian’s darkness from this position makes it challenging to see Lamaštu and the surrounding items, since they are carved in the negative. It becomes necessary to handle the amulet to see each with more clarity. Both the luster and the darkness of the obsidian thus contribute critically to the variable occlusion and revelation of text and image.

What is more significant for its use as a magical ornament is its transformed appearance from a nearly opaque black stone to a translucent one when held to

the light (fig. 5). Doing so reveals several inclusions in its material fabric, which, along with its now diffused translucence, nearly obscure the figure of Lamaštu and the incantation text. One can imagine ancient artisans deliberately exploiting the natural properties of the stone, both its brightness and its murky striations, to enhance the very nature of the fearsome demon being kept at bay.⁴² As the incantation literature expressively describes, “The small of her back is speckled like a leopard, her cheek is yellowish and pale like ochre.”⁴³

This phenomenon is not unique to the Museum’s amulet: recently published scholarship from the Yale Babylonian Collection at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (YBC) includes photographic evidence of a similar effect occurring in one of its own obsidian Lamaštu amulets (fig. 6).⁴⁴ Only two centimeters wide and about twice that in height, the YBC amulet depicts a more schematically executed Lamaštu—accompanied by many of her standard accoutrements, composed from a series of geometric shapes. On the reverse is a five-line inscription, although its quality is worse than that of the Metropolitan Museum amulet, and not all the sign forms are legible.⁴⁵ When the YBC amulet is exposed to light, the sign forms and figural imagery lose their clarity and articulation. Flow bands cut across the image and text at thirty-eight degrees from the horizontal axis of the amulet, rendering both unclear.⁴⁶ In addition to these natural bands, the object’s thinness allows the guidelines organizing the inscription to become visible and to cut across the image of Lamaštu on the opposite side. The bright illumination, appearance of inclusions, and coalescence of incised details on both sides of these obsidian amulets facilitate a fundamental shift in the character of the carved images.

LAMAŠTU AS ŠALMU, AND TEXT AS VISUAL IMAGE
Representation in Assyria of the first millennium B.C. was concerned less with mimetic veracity to nature—a construct in art historical scholarship resulting from a long history of prioritizing Western theories of image production and aesthetics—than with an overriding interest in the power and efficacy vested in representational forms. The Akkadian term *šalmu* is generally understood as “image” by modern art historians without referencing specific types of monuments.⁴⁷ However, its application to nonfigural forms complicates the meaning of *šalmu*, which may be better understood as “manifestation.” Visual representations were linked intrinsically to their referent in reality, and the term *šalmu* “maintains the connotation of a physical rendering of unique and essential identity.”⁴⁸ Thus, images of



fig. 5 Amulet with a Lamaštu Demon (fig. 1) illuminated by a light source

fig. 6 Amulet with a Lamaštu Demon. Neo-Assyrian(?), early 1st millennium B.C. Obsidian, approx. H. 1¾ in. (4.5 cm), W. 1½ in. (2.8 cm). Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, New Haven (YPM BC 011147)



Lamaštu on amulets were not merely representational, and did not function simply to identify from whom or what the amulet protected a wearer. The inclusion of Lamaštu sought to effect change on the demon goddess herself. Indeed, images in Mesopotamia do not simply represent, they make things happen.

Looking at its components and how they interact with the *šalmu* of Lamaštu, it is possible to produce a plausible interpretation of how the Museum's obsidian amulet functioned. The content of the Sumerian incantation both placates Lamaštu and invokes the names and powers of beneficent gods to mitigate her activities. The content of the text, however, is not the only significant aspect of the inscription in operation here. The bold and precise lapidary style underscores the apotropaic purpose of the amulet, as the clarity of the signs makes the incantation vividly present, both in terms of legibility and in materializing the text on the obsidian.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the amulet's overall form constitutes a recognizable field of importance. According to Nils Heessel, square-shaped tablets with a protruding flange act as a formal signal that draws one's attention to the locus of the text.⁵⁰ The space within the "square and flange" orientation signals that magically efficacious words "lie here." This visual-spatial technique sidesteps the need to read the inscription if one lacked the ability to do so, and it emphasizes the material manifestation of the text and its inherent power.⁵¹



Ritual instructions in several passages of the incantation series describe making a clay figurine of Lamaštu, binding her, and enclosing her within a "magic circle." She remains captive until the figurine is buried or otherwise destroyed, indicating that bounding or binding was a critical aspect of Lamaštu's expulsion process.⁵² Given this information, the orientation of the text on the front of the amulet, framing the image of Lamaštu, can be regarded as a deliberate, not arbitrary, strategy. The inscription begins on the back and is read from top to bottom, left to right. To move to the next "side" of the text, as is typical when reading cuneiform tablets, one turns the tablet on its horizontal axis (as opposed to its vertical axis, in the way we turn the pages of modern books). Thus flipped, the text is properly oriented for reading, with the image inverted. The inscription continues onto the left side of the amulet, which necessitates turning it ninety degrees to the right. The final two lines of the inscription appear in parallel, one above Lamaštu and one below. To then orient the image properly, with Lamaštu standing upright, one must turn the amulet once more, ninety degrees to the right. This clever arrangement of text and image not only acts as a frame that situates and binds Lamaštu to the visual plane, but it effectively forces the bearer of the amulet to turn the object in a manner that mimics the ritual binding practices described in the text. The arrangement produces a magical square that surrounds the

demon and operates as an equivalent to the “magical circle” mentioned in rituals.

MELAMMU AND THE POWER OF RADIANCE

Within a constellation of Mesopotamian aesthetic phenomena, radiance was by no means just an attractive quality of specific valuable materials. Certainly, it enhanced the value and status of objects and of the people associated with them. However, a deeper understanding of radiance is possible when considering the selection of obsidian as the material support onto which an image of Lamaštu was incised. Once the powerful demon was confined to this magically charged plane through representation and incantation, her image could be erased through the luminescent qualities inherent in the obsidian, a burst of radiance that would have been recognized as the manifestation of divine power—the *melammu*.

As mentioned above, references to methods of production are not available in the cuneiform record. A connection between radiance, obsidian, and amuletic power, derived from visual analysis, is, however, plausible within broader scholarly contexts of Mesopotamian art and literature. *Melammu* was understood in antiquity as a radiance of divine origin, sometimes conceived of as a dazzling nimbus or crown, and it was often paired with the Akkadian term *puluhtu*, “terror.”⁵³ *Melammu* is described as emanating from everything touched by divine power, so weapons, symbols, temples, and other sanctified spaces were also believed to be in possession of *melammu*. A critical aspect of *melammu* lies in its ability to be manipulated: it was a power that could be given as well as taken away. Textual evidence reveals that the gods bestowed this radiance upon the king as one of the many markers of his rule.⁵⁴ Monsters and demons could, and did, possess *melammu*, and the presence or absence of this power played an important role in bolstering or impeding their strength. In the Babylonian creation myth *Enûma Eliš*, Tiamat, the primordial goddess of chaos and mother of creation, bestows divine radiance upon her monstrous children and essentially turns them into gods.⁵⁵ In early versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Humbaba, the monstrous, divinely appointed guardian of the cedar forest, has seven terrifying auras that he uses as weapons to impede the hero Gilgamesh from cutting down a tree. It is only after Gilgamesh and his companion, Enkidu, trick Humbaba into giving up these auras that the monster becomes vulnerable to death.⁵⁶

Mythological narratives and royal inscriptions make clear that the presence of *melammu* is correlated

with more power, and its absence or usurpation, with less. The resulting vulnerability facilitates the vanquishing of monsters, rebellious deities, and enemies.⁵⁷ Lamaštu is similarly susceptible to the effects of *melammu*. Her place in the heavens as a daughter of Anu was taken from her, along with many of its attendant rights and capabilities. As an entity that has been subject to limitations on her power, she is more closely positioned, cosmically, to the class of monsters in Mesopotamian literature most directly affected by the usurpation or gifting of *melammu*. It is thus plausible that radiance as it appears in concrete form could be used as a weapon against her, especially when Mesopotamian image theory and notions of *šalmu* are brought to bear on the results of exposing the visual image to light. Apprehending the material form is no longer just about deciphering the image; rather, the light changes its fundamental state of being.

It is not unreasonable to imagine that, in the ancient imagination, obsidian’s capacity for transmitting light and inducing visual erasure resulted from a quality bestowed upon the material by divine powers at work. In the case of the Museum’s Lamaštu amulet, radiance can be present in certain conditions, but it should be noted that these conditions are within the control of the wearer of the amulet, not the creature represented therein. In this case, Lamaštu lacks the agency to claim the radiance for herself. She will always be subjugated by the phenomenal power of radiance, the *melammu*, inherent in the obsidian itself. The anchoring principle of the framing incantation, meanwhile, ensures the continuance of this state of perpetual exorcism. The intersection of representational strategies that physically locate Lamaštu within the visual plane; the entrapping texts; the materiality, luminosity, and erasing properties of obsidian; and an understanding of radiance as a divine endowment that can transform the capabilities of demons and monsters all coalesce in a reading of this amulet, specifically, the *how* of its efficacy. It is an extraordinary amount of information to glean from a single object.

Scholars of Mesopotamian magic often look to such objects as a means of analyzing information contained in the cuneiform literature. Even within a museum context, these pieces are displayed in glass cases, engendering a practice of seeing magical items at a remove from their intended use and outside their cultural networks, making it difficult to conceptualize how they functioned. Although there is an unbridgeable gap between modern and ancient engagement with the material world, heuristic analysis led to several of the insights discussed

above. Although Lamaštu amulets have always been spoken of as a coherent group, differences in material, scale, depth of carving, and weight, among other properties, variably and significantly influence an object's agency and possible interpretations of its ancient functionality. This study highlights the need for focused, individual object study. The Museum's Lamaštu amulet embodies a form of Mesopotamian magical technology only partially accessible while on display, and reveals the deliberate choices made by Near Eastern artisans in their efforts to produce highly concentrated objects of magical power.

NOTES

- 1 Farber 2014, p. 258, fig. 21; Harper 1985.
- 2 Winter 1994.
- 3 Ibid., p. 124.
- 4 Winter 2012, p. 160.
- 5 Farber 1983.
- 6 The term *apotropaion* has its roots in the Greek verb *αποτρέπειν*, "to turn away from," or "to avert." See Faraone 1992, p. 4.
- 7 Farber 2014, p. 39.
- 8 Assyriologists infer this latter interpretation from tablet II of the Atra-hasis myth, in which the god Enlil regularly decimates the human population through famine, drought, and other calamities. One of the destructive forces is referred to as the Pāšittu, "The Exterminator," an epithet ascribed to Lamaštu in first-millennium B.C. incantations. For further discussion, see Lambert and Millard 1969.
- 9 See Farber 2014, pp. 67–342, for most recent text editions.
- 10 Ibid., p. 153.
- 11 To date, ninety-seven amulets are catalogued in various publications. See Klengel 1960; Klengel 1961; Farber 1983; Farber 1989; Wiggermann 1992; Farber 1997; Green 1997; Farber 1998; Wiggermann 2000; Götting 2011; Farber 2014; and Iasenovskaia 2019.
- 12 Graff 2014, p. 265.
- 13 Wiggermann 2000, p. 219.
- 14 Ibid., p. 241.
- 15 Götting 2011, pp. 442–46.
- 16 Barjamovic 2015, p. 68.
- 17 Horowitz 1992, p. 114. See also Van Dijk 1983.
- 18 Yalvaç 1965, p. 330.
- 19 For an overview of Pazuzu, see Heessel 2002.
- 20 Translation and transliteration by Wilfred Lambert, as noted in the curatorial file for this object, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, MMA. This transliteration sometimes deviates from that provided in Farber 2014, pp. 114–16. The difficulties with the text, as noted in Farber's commentary on pp. 243–44, may account for these differences in reading.
- 21 Farber 1995, pp. 1901–7.
- 22 Mirelman 2018, p. 356.
- 23 Rapp 2009, p. 85.

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- 24 Moorey 1994, pp. 63–64.
- 25 Healey 2013, p. 251.
- 26 Cassin 1968, pp. 3–4.
- 27 Healey 2013, p. 252. For the Tell Arpachiyah necklace, see Mallowan and Rose 1935, p. 97.
- 28 Moorey 1994, p. 64.
- 29 Frahm, Lassen, and Wagensonner 2019, p. 984.
- 30 Woolley 1934, pp. 73–91.
- 31 *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD), vol. 16, § (Chicago, 1962), pp. 257ff.
- 32 Moorey 1994, p. 71. In commenting on the rarity of worked obsidian objects from the first millennium B.C., Moorey cites the Museum's Lamaštu amulet as an exceptional survivor from antiquity. There are two additional examples in the British Museum, London (BM 127371, BM 132520), one in the Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, New Haven (NBC 08151), and one in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 8184). One amulet previously in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago is now in a private collection, and another was last photographed in 1982 in Tehran, but its current location is unknown; see Farber 2014, p. 338, fig. 22, and pls. 91 (Lam. Amulet no. 95) and 90 (Lam. amulet no. 94).
- 33 In addition to its designation of obsidian, the word *šurru* could also refer to flint.
- 34 *Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), vol. 16, §, p. 259.
- 35 Grayson 1991, p. 29.
- 36 Winckler 1889, pp. 125–26.
- 37 Reiner 1995, p. 128.
- 38 Abusch and Schwemer 2016, p. 226.
- 39 *Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), vol. 16, §, p. 258.
- 40 Sparks 2001, p. 96.
- 41 Heessel 2014, pp. 70–71.
- 42 Patrick Crowley proposes a similar and compelling description of the so-called Getty Aphrodite (formerly J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 88.AA.76), wherein the materiality of rock crystal signified the goddess's liquid origins, and operated to further enhance a notion and experience of her that had been formed from the crystal. Crowley notes the presence of cloudy striations on her thighs, what gemologists call "fluid inclusions,"

- and argues that these trapped bands of tiny bubbles may in fact have been a *prized* asset to the sculpture, acting like small birthmarks that “dramatized the titular epiphany of the goddess in her imagistic form.” See Crowley 2016, pp. 238–39.
- 43 Farber 2014, p. 169. Lam. II, Inc. 7: “*kima nimri tukkupā kalātūša / kima kale lēssa arqat.*”
- 44 Frahm, Lassen, and Wagensohn 2019, p. 982. This effect appears limited to amulets made from obsidian. It should be noted that Lamaštu amulets were made from a variety of materials, but it is this author’s position that art historical interpretation should be conditional upon the specific parameters of objects as individual case studies. Analysis of metals and other stones through phenomenological frameworks could potentially yield different and fruitful results.
- 45 Farber 1989, pp. 96–97.
- 46 Frahm, Lassen, and Wagensohn 2019, p. 982.
- 47 Winter 1997, pp. 364–69.
- 48 Feldman 2009, p. 46.
- 49 The topic of literacy in ancient Mesopotamia is expansive in contemporary scholarship, and beyond the scope of this article. For an overview, see Wilcke 2000; Charpin 2004; and Veldhuis 2011.
- 50 Heessel 2014, p. 73.
- 51 Although touched upon briefly in this article, the complexities of magical writing in antiquity—including but not limited to audience literacy, visibility and access, and pseudo-scripts—are vast and numerous, as is the attendant scholarship. For an overview of magical texts and writing in both antique and medieval contexts, see contributions in Abusch and van der Toorn 1999; Boschung and Bremmer 2015; and Frankfurter 2019. See also Skemer 2006.
- 52 Farber 2014, p. 151: Rit. 3, line 56: “You bind her to a *baltu* (and/or) an *ašāgu* thorn bush. You surround her three times with a magic circle.” *Circle* in these instances simply means “enclosing ring (of any shape),” rather than being geometrically defined.
- 53 Oppenheim 1943, p. 31. See also *puluḫtu* in the *Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), vol. 12, P (2005), pp. 505ff.
- 54 Oppenheim 1943, p. 31: “they (the gods) give him sceptre, throne and the *palū*-symbol and they adorn him with the royal *melammu* (*ú-za-a’-nu-šu-ma me-lam šarru-u-ti*).”
- 55 Lambert 2013, pp. 58–59.
- 56 George 1999, pp. 149–66.
- 57 Ataç 2007, pp. 306–8.

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Ernst Herzfeld, Joseph Upton, and the Artaxerxes *Phialai*

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In 1935 Ernst Herzfeld (1879–1948), a pioneering—and controversial—archaeologist and philologist of ancient Iran, published four silver vessels bearing Old Persian inscriptions naming Artaxerxes I, ruler of the Achaemenid Persian Empire from 465 to 424 B.C.¹ The authenticity of the inscriptions and of the vessels themselves (one of which is now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art [fig. 1]) was challenged immediately on philological grounds by Hans Heinrich Schaeder and W. B. Henning.² Since then scholars have continued to question the inscriptions and, given his checkered career, usually imply that Herzfeld himself was the forger. A 1932 letter preserved in the archives of the Museum’s Persian (later Iranian) Expedition written by Joseph M. Upton (1900–1981), at the time assistant curator of



fig. 1 Lobed bowl (*phiale*) with a royal inscription. Achaemenid, ca. 465–424 B.C. Silver, H. $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. (4.6 cm); diam. $11\frac{1}{2}$ in. (29.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1947 (47.100.84)

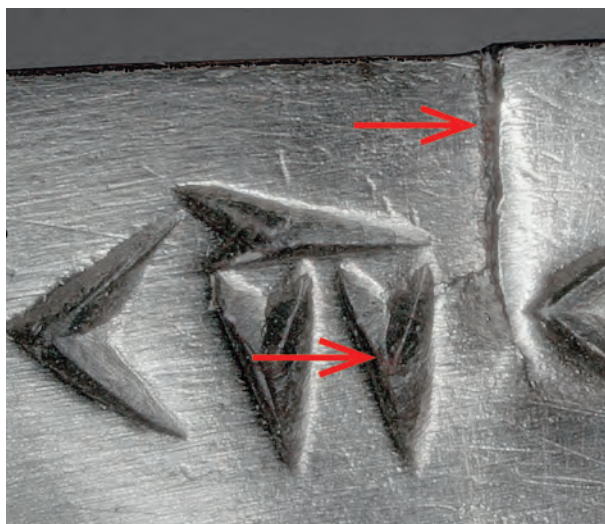
Near Eastern Art and a member of the expedition, casts new light on the authenticity of the inscriptions, the vessels themselves, and Herzfeld's role in their history.

The vessels published by Herzfeld are conventionally called *phialai* (singular *phiale*), using an ancient Greek term for any wide, shallow bowl. In addition to the example housed in the Metropolitan Museum, the three other *phialai* from the group are now in the British Museum, London; the Smithsonian Institution's Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and the Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran.³ Although the four vessels vary slightly in size and weight, they are identical in form and inscription. Each has a carinated, or ridged, shoulder and a turned-out rim. In the center of each bowl is a raised boss, usually referred to by the Greek term *omphalos*, surrounded by fourteen tongue-shaped depressions. Between the depressions are deep, rounded lobes, or gadroons, and between these gadroons are smaller rounded lobes. The cuneiform inscription in Old Persian that runs around the interior of the rim reads "Artaxerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of lands, son of Xerxes the king, Xerxes son of Darius the king, the Achaemenid: in his house this silver bowl was made."⁴ Herzfeld argued that the word translated here as "bowl" (*bātugara*) incorporates an Old Persian root (*batu-*) from which the modern Persian

word for wine derives. According to this reasoning, the inscriptions designate the *phialai* as drinking vessels.⁵ The *omphalos* in the base of each vessel would have facilitated its use for drinking by making it easier to hold with one hand, with the middle finger hooked inside the indentation and the thumb stretched out to grip the vessel at or near the rim.

Recent technical research indicates that the *phialai* themselves are most probably ancient.⁶ The vessels were made by raising and sinking a single sheet of metal and then adding chased details, a method that was employed for most extant Achaemenid metalware of secure authenticity. Both X-ray fluorescence (XRF) and neutron activation analysis (NAA) have also shown that, like other examples of genuine Achaemenid silver, the metallic composition of each bowl is an alloy of silver and copper with traces of gold and lead. With a combined weight equal to 600 *sigloi*—the *siglos* being a silver coin minted by the Achaemenid kings—the four bowls were probably made as a set from a predetermined quantity of silver measured according to an ancient Persian standard.⁷ Visual examination of the inscriptions, including a recent inspection of the inscription on the *phiale* under consideration here, likewise suggests that the engraved marks were made prior to the vessels' burial (fig. 2).⁸ None of these lines of

fig. 2 (a) Detail of inscription on *phiale* (fig. 1) with copper-oxide deposits indicated by arrows, original magnification, x40; (b) 3D scan of inscription detail highlighting engraving tool marks, original magnification, x40



evidence independently constitutes proof of the vessels' authenticity, but taken together they are compelling. Yet in recent years the linguistic challenges to the authenticity of the inscriptions have been renewed by Nicholas Sims-Williams and Rüdiger Schmitt, once again insinuating that Herzfeld was the forger.⁹

Until the rediscovery of Upton's 1932 letter in the Museum's Persian Expedition archives, the earliest documented reference to the *phialai* appeared in one of Herzfeld's notebooks, now in the archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. During his travels and excavations in Iran, Herzfeld filled multiple notebooks, sketchbooks, and journals with records of the objects, monuments, sites, and inscriptions he encountered.¹⁰ In the notebook labeled "Cuneiform" (Keilschriften) he copied and transliterated the inscription on the *phialai*, with the caption "silver bowls Hamadan, Oct. 1932" (Silberschüsseln Hamadan, Okt. 1932).¹¹ He annotated a sketchbook drawing of one of the *phialai*, dated July 7, 1934, with the following:

14 complete petals!
inscription 69.5 cm long
4 mm gap span
7 July 1934, Persepolis. Artaxerxes I silver dish

On the following page is a copy of the inscription.¹² The annotations indicate that the drawing was made at Persepolis, where Herzfeld directed excavations on behalf of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago from 1931 to 1934. While the drawing and notes seem to be part of Herzfeld's work toward his publication of the vessels the following year, they might alternatively be interpreted as preparations for adding forged inscriptions to the ancient vessels, a project that would have been under way by October 1932 and

culminated in the 1935 publication and presumably the subsequent sale of the vessels. Herzfeld was one of the few people in the 1930s who had the philological expertise necessary to forge an Old Persian inscription. He was also known to have sold antiquities that he had collected, as did many of his contemporaries. In this respect his legacy as an archaeologist is nothing if not complicated, though new archival research may indicate that many of the allegations of smuggling leveled against him are unfounded.¹³

Upton's letter provides new evidence regarding Herzfeld's relationship to the inscriptions on these vessels. Upton was a member of the Metropolitan Museum's Persian Expedition from 1932 to 1946.¹⁴ He first traveled to Iran in 1928 on a Carnegie Fellowship to study with Herzfeld and to participate in his fieldwork at Kuh-i Khwaja in Sistan the following spring.¹⁵ In 1932 he returned to carry out excavations on behalf of the Museum at Qasr-i Abu Nasr, a Sasanian and Islamic site near Shiraz, and he stayed with Herzfeld at Persepolis while making arrangements for the first field season. During this time Upton remained in regular contact with Maurice Dimand, curator of Near Eastern Art at the Metropolitan Museum, to report on his progress. In one of his letters to Dimand, dated October 24, 1932, he refers explicitly to the Artaxerxes *phialai*: "A dealer has for sale six silver plates which are graduated [*sic*] in size to fit into one another. The four smaller ones bear identical inscriptions in cuneiform stating that they were made for the palace of Artaxerxes I."¹⁶ This reference is confirmed by a photograph (fig. 3) of one of the *phialai* (it is impossible to determine which from the picture) that Upton included with his letter to Dimand. The description of the vessels as "graduated in size to fit into one another" also accords with the dimensions of the four inscribed Artaxerxes *phialai*,

which have diameters of 29.5 (Freer), 29.2 (Metropolitan Museum), 29.0 (British Museum) and 26.2 (Reza Abbasi Museum) centimeters, respectively. The fate of the two largest, uninscribed bowls mentioned by Upton remains uncertain.¹⁷

This letter clarifies several questions surrounding Herzfeld's acquaintance with the Artaxerxes *phialai*. First, it confirms Herzfeld's claim, made in 1935 in a letter to Ernst Kühnel, director of the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin, that he first encountered the *phialai* with Upton.¹⁸ Upton's letter provides a likely date for that encounter in October 1932, which is also when Herzfeld first recorded the inscription in his notebook. Indeed, Upton must have been with Herzfeld when he saw the *phialai*, because he could not have read the inscriptions himself. More importantly, Upton's letter attests that the *phialai* were already inscribed, meaning that Herzfeld could not have forged them.

The letter also may help to explain the Hamadan provenance for the *phialai* given in Herzfeld's Keilschriften notebook. Upton wrote that he met Herzfeld and Herzfeld's sister and nephew in Baghdad and drove with them to Persepolis. It also states that Upton had met with André Godard, director of the Iranian Archaeological Service, in Isfahan. Herzfeld's diary similarly indicates that he was in Isfahan on October 17 and 18, suggesting that he and Upton drove from Baghdad to Isfahan, and then on to Persepolis, an itinerary that would likely have taken them via Hamadan.¹⁹ Relatively few roads were suitable for car travel in Iran in the 1920s and 1930s, and all radiated from Tehran. The main route across the Zagros Mountains from Baghdad into Iran went by way of Kermanshah, Hamadan, Malayer, Arak, and Qom, where it met the major north-south road connecting Tehran to Isfahan and Shiraz.²⁰ While the letter does not explicitly say that the party stopped at Hamadan, neither does it provide many details of the journey. Upton and Herzfeld might have seen the bowls in Isfahan, or

indeed anywhere along their route. It was common practice for antiquities dealers to attribute objects to Hamadan (ancient Ecbatana) without basis, since the site was associated with the Achaemenid kings in Greek texts but had not been formally excavated.²¹ Herzfeld may then have recorded this alleged provenance in his notebook along with the inscription. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Herzfeld discovered the vessels himself at Hamadan sometime in October 1932 (the date given in his notebook), or that he forged the inscriptions, since he was clearly traveling with his family and Upton immediately prior to encountering them.

Upton's letter thus permits a new reconstruction of Herzfeld's involvement with the *phialai*. Herzfeld first saw the vessels with Upton in October 1932 en route from Baghdad to Persepolis. While the annotated drawing in his notebook, dated July 1934, might indicate that he purchased them himself or that he came across them a second time, it is more likely that this drawing was only part of his preparations for publication, as it clearly served as the basis for one of the figures in his 1935 article.²² In fact, there is no evidence that Herzfeld ever owned or sold these vessels. The earliest attested owner is Arthur Upham Pope, a scholar and dealer in Persian art, who was in possession of at least one of the *phialai* by 1940, when he sold it to the dealer Joseph Brummer; this vessel was subsequently purchased from Brummer's estate by the Metropolitan Museum in 1947.²³ If anyone would have benefited from adding a forged inscription to these vessels in order to increase their commercial value it would have been Pope, not Herzfeld. Yet Pope lacked the philological expertise necessary to forge such inscriptions, and, as Lindsay Allen notes, "one would have to imagine a collaboration in which the fake inscription were perhaps commissioned from Herzfeld by Pope and added to the bowls for the purpose of enriching their sellers."²⁴ Given the well-documented rivalry between Pope and Herzfeld this is highly improbable. Thus, while Upton's letter does not prove that the inscriptions on the Artaxerxes *phialai* are authentic, it does present a significant challenge to the claim that Herzfeld forged them.

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fig. 3 Photograph of an inscribed silver bowl (*phiale*) attached to Joseph Upton's letter to Maurice Dimand, dated October 24, 1932. Persian Expedition Archives, Box 1, Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, MMA

NOTES

- 1 Herzfeld 1935. For wide-ranging studies of Herzfeld's career, see Gunter and Hauser 2005.
- 2 Schaefer 1935, pp. 489–94; Henning 1940, p. 501. Herzfeld (1937, pp. 5–17; 1938, pp. 113–15, 296–9) defended the authenticity of the inscriptions, and many scholars of Iranian philology have tacitly accepted them as genuine (Curtis, Cowell, and Walker 1995, pp. 150–51).
- 3 MMA 47.100.84; British Museum (1994,0127.1); Freer (F1974.30); the vessel now in the Reza Abbasi Museum was catalogued in Ghirshman 1961, no. 680.
- 4 Translation from Kuhrt 2007, p. 316.
- 5 Herzfeld 1935, p. 2. The term *bātugara* is not attested in any other Old Persian text, however, and is one of the bases on which the authenticity of the inscriptions has been challenged, though other scholars have accepted it as genuine (e.g., Lecoq 1997, p. 266).
- 6 Gunter and Jett 1992, pp. 70–72; Curtis, Cowell, and Walker 1995, pp. 149–50; Gunter and Root 1998, pp. 8–12, 13–15.
- 7 Vickers 2002, pp. 333–36.
- 8 I thank Jean-François de Lapérouse, conservator, Department of Objects Conservation, MMA, for providing the following observations:

Although the interior of this bowl has been completely cleaned of corrosion, remnants of reddish brown copper-oxide corrosion that formed on the surface during burial are still retained in a small crack in the rim and in the depths of several characters of the cuneiform inscription [fig. 2a]. Other characters retain dark gray deposits similar in appearance to the thick silver-chloride corrosion preserved on the reverse, and non-destructive X-ray diffractive spectroscopy scans of these deposits confirmed the presence of chloride not found on adjacent clean surfaces. Although not conclusive, these observations are consistent with the inscription having been made before the *phiale* was buried and significant oxidation began. Magnification also revealed tool marks, indicating that the inscription was made by engraving—a process of cutting and removing metal that was also used to make the inscriptions on the *phialai* in the British Museum and the Freer Gallery [Gunter and Jett 1992, p. 71; Curtis, Cowell, and Walker 1995, p. 150]. While the displacement of metal by chasing is more typically found in ancient metalwork, the technique used here involved cutting down into the metal using a chisel in a slanted motion rather than pushing a V-shaped graver across the surface, as is usually found in modern engraving. In addition, the wear evident around the top edges of the characters is consistent with age predating the modern era [fig. 2b].
- 9 Sims-Williams 2001, pp. 189–92; Schmitt 2007, pp. 82–93.
- 10 This material is now divided between the Metropolitan Museum and the Freer and Sackler Galleries. For overviews, see Root 1976 and Hennessey 1992.
- 11 Gunter and Root 1998, p. 7.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 6, 12–13. The German original reads:

14 fertige rosette!
 inschrift 69.5 cm lang
 4 mm bruchstabshöhe
 7 Juli 1934, Persepolis. Artaxerxes I. silver dish
Bruchstabshöhe, translated loosely above as “gap span,” may refer to the distance between the lobes. Based on the measurements given in Herzfeld's drawing, the sketch probably depicts the *phiale* now in the Reza Abbasi Museum, which is the smallest of the four.
- 13 Hauser n.d. (forthcoming). I am grateful to Stefan Hauser for sharing his paper with me prior to its publication. See also the papers in Gunter and Hauser 2005 for assessments of Herzfeld's legacy.
- 14 During the 1940s this role was a cover for Upton's work as an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agent, codenamed “TIGER,” in Iran; see Wilber 1986, pp. 132–34, and O'Sullivan 2015, pp. 214–15.
- 15 Upton 1970, pp. 13–37.
- 16 The letter is in the expedition archives in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, MMA.
- 17 Arguably any uninscribed silver Achaemenid *phiale* with a diameter greater than 29.5 centimeters could be one of the vessels mentioned by Upton. For example, *phialai* in the British Museum (1998,0117.1; Simpson, Cowell, and La Niece 2010) and Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (57.1816; Hill 1949, p. 2) have diameters of 30.7 and 29.8 centimeters, respectively—large enough for the Freer *phiale* to fit inside either. The Walters *phiale* was in the possession of Arthur Upham Pope by 1939, when Pope sold it to Joseph Brummer (Brummer Gallery Records, New York, inventory card number N4491); as noted elsewhere, Pope was also the earliest documented owner of any of the Artaxerxes *phialai* (by 1940). The uninscribed British Museum *phiale* was purchased by T. L. Jacks in 1934, a fact reported by Pope in a letter (Allen 2016, p. 161); it was subsequently purchased by Brummer in 1938 (Brummer Gallery Records, inventory card number P15010). Jacks, an employee of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, not only knew Pope but facilitated his removal of antiquities from Iran (Allen 2016, p. 152).
- 18 Gunter and Hauser 2005, pp. 29–30.
- 19 Gunter and Root 1998, p. 7.
- 20 Government of Iraq 1929, pp. 32–34; see further Clawson 1993. There was also a southern route to Isfahan via Ahvaz, but Percy Sykes described it in 1921 as “a caravan route just passable by laden mules,” suggesting it was an unlikely route for a car journey; see Sykes 1930, p. 528.
- 21 Oscar Muscarella (1980, pp. 31–35) discusses the popularity of Hamadan as a fabricated provenance for Achaemenid art.
- 22 Herzfeld 1935, pl. 3 bottom. I am grateful to Stefan Hauser for suggesting this interpretation.
- 23 Brummer Gallery Records, inventory card number N4513; Allen 2016, p. 159.
- 24 Allen 2016, p. 160n127.

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New Insights into an Old Collection: Ptolemaic Pottery from Hibis (Kharga Oasis)

JAMES C. R. GILL

In the early twentieth century The Metropolitan Museum of Art was granted a concession in the north-central part of Kharga Oasis, an area located approximately 125 miles west of Thebes in the Egyptian Western Desert (see fig. 2).¹ Archaeological investigation was begun there in 1908 under the direction of Herbert E. Winlock (1884–1950) on behalf of the Museum.² Several nearby sites were documented, including the cemetery of Bagawat, the temples of Hibis and Nadura, Ain et-Turba, and Gebel Teir.³ The report on the work carried out at Hibis was published by Winlock in 1941. It included details about the architecture of the temple and the surrounding buildings as well as descriptions of the inscriptional evidence, statuary, bronze figures, and coins; however, the pottery discovered during the excavations was described only briefly in his account.⁴

The work in Kharga was interrupted by World War I, and it seems that during this hiatus the pottery from the excavations at Hibis was disturbed. Winlock described the situation in his report on the excavations: “During the war years—1914 to 1918—the Oasis was threatened by Western Desert tribes, and the Expedition house was occupied as an outpost of the British Army. Extraordinary care was taken of our property, and little was mislaid except the pottery which had still to be mended and drawn and for which the preliminary field notes were very scanty.”⁵ The situation likely explains why detailed information about the pottery was omitted from Winlock’s publication. In his account of a journey made to Dakhleh in 1908, Winlock described the pottery he found at each of the sites he visited and also published drawings and photographs of this material.⁶ Presumably, if he had had access to the Hibis pottery and the associated notes and drawings, he would have described this likewise in his 1941 report.

In 1925, the material stored in the expedition house, which evidently included a mixed array of pottery—some of it from Hibis—was shipped to the Museum, and the house was subsequently demolished.⁷ It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the pottery was

accessioned and, owing to the presence of recognizably Coptic pieces, the entire collection was eventually moved to the Department of Medieval Art.⁸

REDISCOVERING POTTERY FROM HIBIS

The pottery discussed here came to my attention a few years ago when I was searching for material from the Metropolitan Museum’s excavations at Hibis. My research at the time was concerned with the Ptolemaic pottery from Dakhleh Oasis as well as Ptolemaic activity in the Western Oases more broadly.⁹ It was already established that the Hibis temple had been operational during the Ptolemaic Period (ca. 332–30 B.C.), as evidenced by the additions made by Ptolemaic rulers and by the discovery of Ptolemaic coins and ostraka at the site.¹⁰ There, Winlock reported that he had found Greek pottery, such as a black-and-white lekythos and a black polished ware bowl, as well as local globular cooking pots and bottles with pointed bases.¹¹ None of the pottery was ever published in detail, and so I was interested to learn whether any of it had survived and, if so, whether or not it was now held in the Museum.

A search of the Met’s online catalogue brought up a collection of “Coptic” pottery from Kharga, in

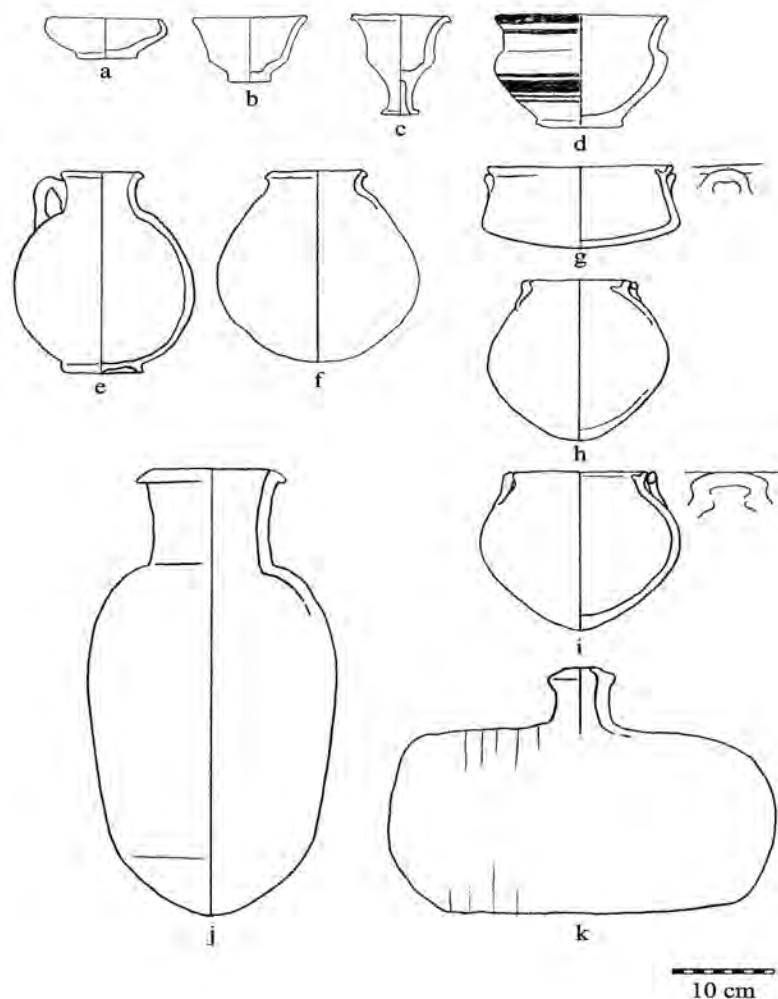


fig. 1 Keg. South Kom, upper level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Early Ptolemaic, late 4th to 3rd century B.C. Earthenware, $9\frac{7}{16} \times 14\frac{15}{16} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ in. (23.9 × 38 × 19.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.20.266)



fig. 2 Map of Egypt showing the locations of sites mentioned in the text

fig. 3 Renderings of Ptolemaic pottery vessels from Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Adapted from "Temple of Hibis: Pottery (Sketches)," ca. 1909–12. (a) sheet 4, bottom right; (b) sheet 17, top center; (c) sheet 16, second from top; (d) sheet 3, bottom right; (e) sheet 5, center; (f) sheet 7, second from top; (g) sheet 1, top left; (h) sheet 7, third from top; (i) sheet 16, bottom; (j) sheet 24, top; (k) sheet 8, center



which it was possible to recognize numerous vessels of Ptolemaic date. It was evident that this pottery was the product of the Metropolitan Museum's twentieth-century excavations in Kharga, yet because of the lack of documentation, there was no way to determine whether the pottery had come from Hibis, Ain et-Turba, Bagawat, or elsewhere.

In a happy coincidence, the field notes and records of the Museum's expedition to Kharga had begun to be digitized and made available online about this time, and I was pleased to discover that the archive included a folder of pottery sketches from Hibis.¹² This folder contains 28 pages of sketches, with 144 drawings of vessels that were unearthed during excavation of the South Kom (mound), encompassing Southern Building II and the area to the east, and clearance of the area northeast of the temple. In this material, forms ranging in date from the Late Period (ca. 664–332 B.C.) to the Coptic Period (ca. A.D. 395–668) can be recognized, including a number of Ptolemaic forms. This revelation alone is

important, as illustrations of the pottery excavated at Hibis by Winlock were never published; however, it is made even more significant by the fact that some of the individual drawings can be matched with specific vessels in the Museum's collection.¹³ Thus, some of the vessels in the Met can now be identified as finds from the early twentieth-century excavations at Hibis.¹⁴

THE PTOLEMAIC VESSELS

The works presented below represent all the Ptolemaic pottery vessels in the Metropolitan Museum's collection that can be shown to have come from the site of Hibis. Other Ptolemaic forms can be recognized among the original Hibis pottery sketches, and although it has not been possible to match these with vessels in the Museum's collection, a few of them are included here in order to demonstrate the range of Ptolemaic forms encountered at Hibis. Furthermore, there are additional vessels from Kharga in the Museum's collection that can be ascribed a Ptolemaic date; however, it has

fig. 4 Carinated bowl. South Kom, lower level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Earthenware, $2\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{9}{16}$ in. (6.4 × 11 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.20.303)

fig. 5 Incurved bowl. South Kom, upper level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Earthenware, $1\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{9}{16}$ in. (4.2 × 11.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.20.318)

not been possible to match these with any of the pottery sketches, so it is unclear whether they derive from the excavations at Hibis or one of the neighboring sites.¹⁵

According to the notations on the pottery sketches, this collection of Ptolemaic pottery from Hibis comes specifically from the excavations in the South Kom, with one additional example from the clearance of the area northeast of the temple. The South Kom appears to equate to the mound containing Southern Building II, as well as the area to the east of this, which, according to Winlock, was a Ptolemaic rubbish dump.¹⁶ The vessels presented here represent common Ptolemaic forms encountered at sites throughout Egypt. In particular, these vessels find close parallels in the Ptolemaic pottery from neighboring Dakhleh Oasis, which has recently been published in detail.¹⁷

The keg, or *sigā*, with asymmetrical body and short neck (25.10.20.266) (figs. 1, 3k) is a form that appears to have originated in the Southern Oasis (Kharga and Dakhleh) during the Late Period. It continued to be produced through the Ptolemaic and Roman periods and is still made today.¹⁸ The Late Period kegs exhibit a very tall neck and elongated body, whereas the Roman examples have a short neck and very large, barrel-shaped body. The Ptolemaic kegs tend to have a medium-to-short neck and a body that is somewhere between the Late Period and Roman forms. This example should be dated to the Early Ptolemaic Period (late fourth to third century B.C.), as it is comparable to Dakhleh Form 96;¹⁹ however, a slightly earlier date is possible.²⁰

The small carinated bowl (25.10.20.303) (figs. 3b, 4) can be equated to Dakhleh Form 38, which is regularly encountered within Ptolemaic assemblages in that oasis. Likewise, the small incurved bowl with a ring base (25.10.20.318) (figs. 3a, 5) is a common feature of

Ptolemaic assemblages in both Dakhleh and the Nile Valley, and can be equated to Dakhleh Form 11. Such vessels could have been used as bowls, lids, or even lamps. The footed cup (25.10.23.110) (figs. 3c, 6) is similar in form to a kantharos found at Mut al-Kharab (Dakhleh Form 42), albeit without the handles.

The single-handled jar (25.10.23.116) (figs. 3e, 7) can be equated with Dakhleh Forms 71–73, as well as Form 74, which has a very similar shape, although with two handles. These forms are usually cream-slipped, like MMA 25.10.23.116. The globular jar (25.10.20.154) (figs. 3f, 8) is an example of Dakhleh Form 69, which is common in Dakhleh Oasis and is also encountered elsewhere in Kharga.²¹ Jars with this form were often used as cooking vessels, as evidenced by the fact that they are regularly soot-blackened. It appears that MMA 25.10.20.154 is made from a shale-rich fabric equivalent to Dakhleh Fabric B3, which was commonly used for vessels of this form in Dakhleh.²² Another common cooking vessel form in Dakhleh is the two-handled pot (25.10.23.119) (figs. 3h, 9), which can be equated to Dakhleh Form 48. These bowls have an internal ledge at the rim, designed to receive a lid. They occur with and without handles throughout Ptolemaic and Roman-Period contexts in Dakhleh; however, in Dakhleh, those vessels with two horizontal loop-handles are a hallmark of the Ptolemaic Period. By the Roman Period, such vessels have either small vertical handles or none at all.

Lastly, the large jar with the modeled rim (25.10.20.105) (figs. 3j, 10) was found in an area that was cleared northeast of the temple. This is a common Ptolemaic form, comparable to Dakhleh Form 64b, which is often decorated with painted designs comprising linear, geometric, and floral elements. Indeed, the Museum's jar bears faint traces of black-painted decoration on a cream-slipped background. Although the



fig. 6 Footed cup. South Kom, lower level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Cream-slipped earthenware, $4 \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ in. (10.1 × 9.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.23.110)



6

fig. 7 Single-handed jug. South Kom, upper level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Cream-slipped earthenware, $7\frac{5}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ in. (19.4 × 16.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.23.116)



7

fig. 8 Globular jar. South Kom, upper level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Red-slipped earthenware, $7\frac{15}{16} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ in. (20.2 × 18.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.20.154)



9

fig. 9 Two-handed cooking pot. South Kom, upper level, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Earthenware, $6\frac{5}{16} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ in. (16 × 19.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.23.119)



8

original design is difficult to make out, it is evident that there were originally floral motifs on the neck and shoulder, narrow and wide bands on the middle body, and a possible floral motif on the lower body. There also seems to have been some kind of geometric pattern on the upper body, perhaps a checkerboard pattern, which may have framed a vertical floral motif. Despite the difficulties in determining the exact original design, it is clear that this is an example of the painted style common in Dakhleh and Kharga during the Ptolemaic Period, and indeed also in the Nile Valley.²³

Several other Ptolemaic forms can be identified among the Hibis pottery sketches, although it has not been possible to match these to objects in the Museum's catalogue. It is likely that the original vessels were lost when the expedition house was occupied during the war. Some of the drawings are included here (figs. 3d, g, i), as they represent good examples of forms that are encountered in Dakhleh and serve to further illustrate the diversity of Ptolemaic forms encountered at Hibis. The carinated bowl (fig. 3d) is equivalent to Dakhleh Forms 40–41, and examples are frequently decorated



fig. 10 Necked jar. Area northeast of temple, Hibis (Kharga Oasis), Egypt. Ptolemaic, ca. 332–30 B.C. Cream-slipped earthenware and paint, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (42.9 × 23.2 cm), Diam. of rim 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (12.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.10.20.105)

with linear designs, as is the case here. The two cooking pots (figs. 3g [cf. Dakhleh Form 49], i [cf. Dakhleh Form 47]) represent additional variants on the cooking pot described above (figs. 3h, 9). There are other drawings in the folder that are not presented here that could arguably be ascribed a Ptolemaic date as well.

CONCLUSION

The (re)discovery of Ptolemaic pottery from Hibis demonstrates that new information can be gained by revisiting old excavations and researching long-held museum collections.²⁴ Furthermore, the current study highlights the usefulness of digitization projects that make museum archives available online so that new connections and discoveries may be made.

It is interesting to note the close similarities between the Ptolemaic pottery from Hibis and that from other sites in both Kharga and Dakhleh. The likenesses point to a shared pottery tradition for the two oases, in which the same range of forms was produced in similar local clays. Yet despite these resemblances, there is evidence of decorative styles associated with either Dakhleh or Kharga, but not common to both.²⁵ Certain specific pottery motifs found elsewhere in Kharga are not found in Dakhleh, and the decorated vessel in figure 10 provides a further example.²⁶ Granted, the decoration is poorly preserved, but from the visible traces it is clear that the design is one not encountered so far in Dakhleh. It perhaps bears greater resemblance to the painted pottery from the Theban region, and thus it is entirely possible that the vessel is an import from the Nile Valley; however, this cannot be determined without closer examination.²⁷ Altogether, the identification of the pottery at the Metropolitan Museum complements the study of other Ptolemaic material from Hibis, such as the coins, ostraka, and temple inscriptions, and helps to complete our understanding of the Ptolemaic phase of occupation at the site.

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NOTES

- 1 The Met's excavations in Kharga Oasis were the subject of "Art and Peoples of the Kharga Oasis," an exhibition held at the Museum from October 11, 2017, to June 7, 2020.
- 2 Winlock subsequently served as director of the Met, from 1932 to 1939.
- 3 For a summary of this work, see Ratliff and Schimke 2015, pp. 4–6.
- 4 Winlock 1941, p. 42.
- 5 Ibid., p. vi.
- 6 See, for example, Winlock 1936, pp. 15, 18, 21, and pls. VI, VII.
- 7 Ratliff and Schimke 2015, p. 6. Members of the Met's expedition continued to document the Hibis Temple throughout the early 1920s and into the 1930s, with the final work completed in 1937. For a summary, see *ibid.*
- 8 Marsha Hill, personal communication, September 2014.
- 9 Gill 2016.
- 10 Winlock 1941, pp. 33–39. Earlier, Winlock had observed, "The whole site seems to have flourished throughout the Ptolemaic period." Winlock 1910, p. 226. For the ostraka, see Kaplony-Heckel 2000.
- 11 Winlock 1941, p. 42.
- 12 "Temple of Hibis: Pottery (Sketches)," ca. 1909–12.
- 13 This has been achieved by comparing the form and measurements of each vessel with its respective drawing.
- 14 The Met's collection of pottery from Kharga is currently being prepared for publication by Andrea Achi and Gillian Pyke.
- 15 Examples include MMA 25.10.23.111, 25.10.20.341, 25.10.23.113, and 25.10.20.118.
- 16 Winlock 1941, p. 42.
- 17 Gill 2016. The Dakhleh Forms referred to in this article are outlined in *ibid.*, chap. 3.7. Dakhleh Oasis is located approximately 50 miles west of Kharga Oasis.
- 18 See Hope 2000 and Gill n.d./a (forthcoming).
- 19 See Gill n.d./a (forthcoming). MMA 25.10.20.266 can be equated with Gill's Type B1 or B2 kegs.
- 20 In Dakhleh, this rim shape is encountered in Ptolemaic contexts. However, similar forms have been found in southern Kharga and are dated to the fifth to fourth century B.C.; see Marchand 2007, figs. 10–13, 17.
- 21 Ibid., fig. 37; Dunand, Ibrahim, and Lichtenberg 2012, fig. 176.
- 22 Gill 2016, p. 50.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 52–57; Schreiber 2003.
- 24 This has also been demonstrated by the recent (re)discovery of ostraka from Hibis. See Bagnall and Tallet 2015.
- 25 For the Dakhleh style, see Gill n.d./b (forthcoming).
- 26 For examples of motifs found in Kharga but not in Dakhleh, see Marchand 2007, figs. 38, 40, 41. The last is encountered on at least three vessels and so far appears to be unique to Kharga.
- 27 For example, Schreiber 2003, pl. 11, no. 135.

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A Bat and Two Ears and Jusepe de Ribera's Triumphant Virtue

VIVIANA FARINA

The study *A Bat and Two Ears* in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, a drawing executed in red chalk and brush with red wash on paper (fig. 1), is one of the most intriguing in the corpus of Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652). It shows a bat with its wings splayed and suspended above two human ears. The Latin motto *Fulget Semper Virtus* (*Virtue always shines*) is inscribed beneath.

The drawing, whose attribution to Ribera has never been questioned on account of its stylistic correspondence with other sheets that are undoubtedly by the artist, was first identified and catalogued by Jonathan Brown as a work by Lo Spagnoletto (“the little Spaniard”) on the occasion of the 1973 monographic exhibition dedicated to the master.¹ In this instance, Brown did not focus on a stylistic analysis of the drawing. Instead, he examined the



fig. 1 Jusepe de Ribera (Spanish, 1591–1652). *A Bat and Two Ears*, ca. 1622/1626. Red chalk and brush with red wash on paper, 6¼ × 11 in. (15.9 × 27.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1972 (1972.77)

relationship between this sheet and Ribera's *Studies of Nine Ears*—an etching of an anatomical subject monogrammed by the artist and dated 1622 (fig. 2)²—which he considered the chronological reference for dating the drawing. Brown also attempted to decipher the complex meaning of the image, eventually discovering, upon the suggestions of art historians Priscilla Muller and Clara Louisa Penney, a connection between the bat and the artist. According to a legend, this nocturnal mammal lay on the helmet of King Jaime I of Aragon during the battle to retake Valencia from the Moors in 1238. Since 1503, the bat became the emblem of the city and part of its coat of arms. Xàtiva, the town where Ribera was born, was in the province controlled by Valencia (the reason why the artist signed his works as “valencianus” or “valentinus” more than once). Brown concluded that the bat might have been either the artist's symbol or, alternatively, an indication of a patron from Valencia. Although he stopped there, Brown provided the foundation for further studies; it is this autobiographical lens that guides a new reading of the drawing.

First, however, it is important to revisit the relationship between the Museum's drawing and the 1622 print. This issue was raised by Gabriele Finaldi, who argued that it is not entirely correct to consider the

drawing a preparatory study for the print given the work's “particularly symmetrical and finished” graphic composition, in which red chalk and watercolor are combined with great delicacy in a skillful sfumato.³ More precisely, the ear on the right side in Ribera's drawing can be compared with two versions of the same ear at bottom right in the etching, both of which appear in reverse, and one of which is sketched only in its main lines while the other is perfectly defined. Moreover, the ear at left in Ribera's drawing can be matched with the first two ears on the top left of the etching, which are shown in the same orientation as in the drawing. This does not necessarily mean that the drawing should be considered as a preliminary work for the print, however. Ribera in fact had at his disposal repertory models from which to draw; the sheet with the bat and the 1622 etching therefore do not need to be understood as a *unicum*, or indivisibly related.

The practice of drawing ears was part of a pattern-book tradition familiar to Ribera well before 1622. In particular, it was probably from a 1619 publication by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called *il Guercino*, that the artist was inspired to begin his anatomical prints. It is also likely that Ribera made other drawings, today lost, on the same theme before he arrived at the printing

stage. It is therefore more accurate to interpret the etching and the drawing as only seemingly related, since in the drawing the ear assumes a precise meaning beyond the anatomical, as will be discussed below. This also leads to further reflections useful for a new framing of the Museum's sheet: if the execution of the print is considered independently from that of the drawing, would the date of the latter still be about 1622? If the two works were indeed made for different purposes, how do we determine the meaning of the drawing in the context of Ribera's biography at the beginning of the 1620s?

Before turning to an analysis of the drawing, however, the origin of the etching should be discussed. A didactic purpose has traditionally been considered the most persuasive explanation for the existence of the three anatomical plates by Ribera known today. In addition to *Studies of Nine Ears*, the artist also completed *Studies of Thirteen Eyes* and *Studies of Noses and Mouths*, the latter two signed in full by Lo Spagnoletto but not dated.⁴ However, it remains unclear whether Ribera was successful enough at this date to have an organized school where these anatomical studies would have been used for educational purposes. All that is known of him at the time is that he had arrived in Naples in 1616, at the age of twenty-five, but his first public success was not until about 1626. Scholars also know little about his audience and patrons.⁵ Undoubtedly, his two expertly

handled copper etchings made in 1621, *Saint Jerome and the Angel* and *The Penitence of Saint Peter*,⁶ indicate that Ribera was seeking true success in Naples and elsewhere. If he had begun teaching students in the same period, however, there is still no way to prove it, and we certainly do not know the names of any artists who might have worked with him as early as 1621.

In any case, the literature on the artist has underestimated a connection between Ribera's *Studies of Nine Ears* and the instruction manuals for apprentice painters that were inspired by Annibale Carracci and made after drawings (*inventione*) by his brother, Agostino. Beginning with Elizabeth Du Gué Trapier, scholars have pointed out similarities between the work of Ribera and some of these prints. This affinity is strengthened by the number 4 inscribed on the plate (in reverse) at the bottom right of Ribera's *Studies of Nine Ears*—the same number can also be found in some of the prints engraved after Carracci by Luca Ciamberlano.⁷

It was once thought that Ribera planned to produce a teaching manual for use in his workshop but that the project remained unfinished. Some scholars later questioned whether he knew the *inventione* attributed to Agostino Carracci, considering that the date of publication of the prints after Carracci probably followed that of Ribera's etchings.⁸ Subsequent experts noted that the vividly expressed body parts in Ribera's plates seemed

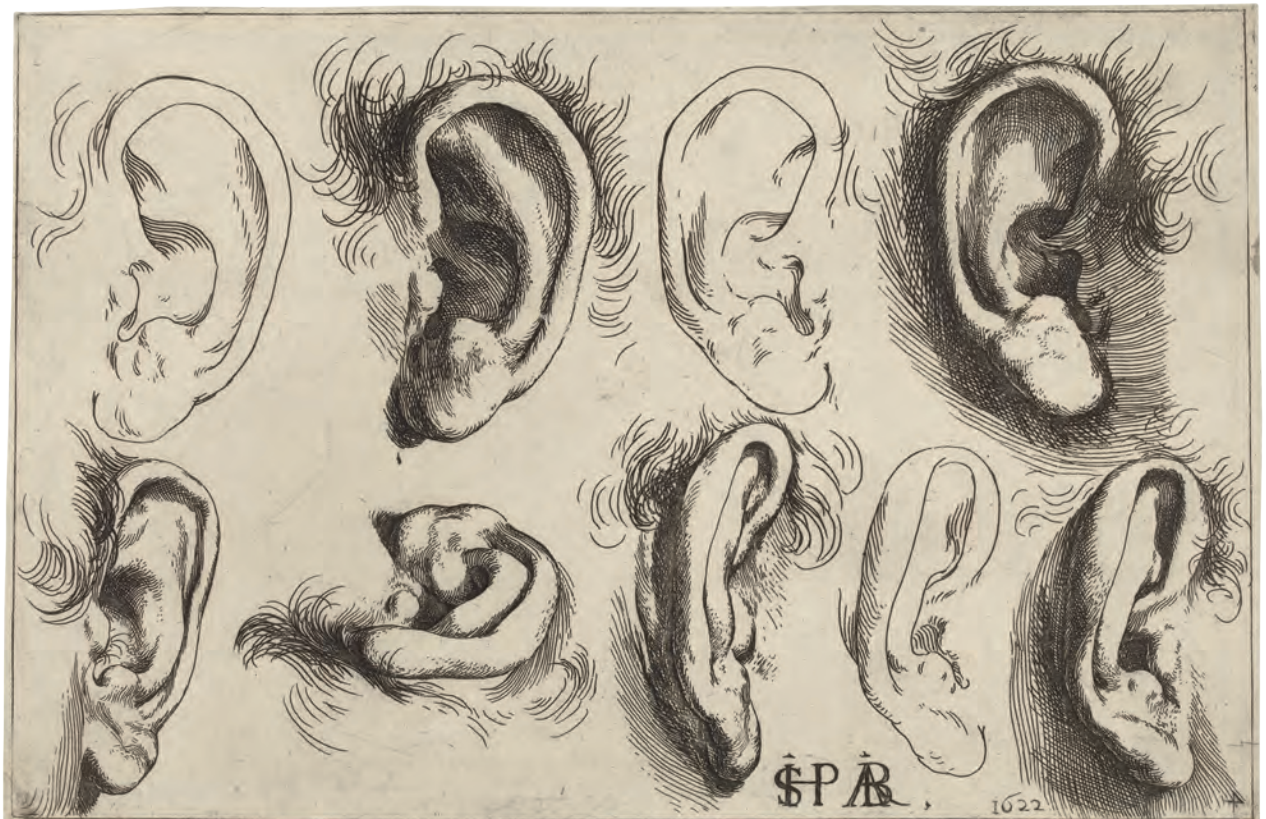


fig. 2 Jusepe de Ribera. *Studies of Nine Ears*, 1622. Etching; first state, 5½ × 8½ in. (14 × 21.6 cm). Signed, dated, and numbered on plate, lower right: 1622 and 4 (in reverse). The British Museum, London (1874,0808.749)

distinct from the tradition of the pattern book. This tradition had originated in the sixteenth century for didactic purposes and was revived at the beginning of the seventeenth century with a treatise by Odoardo Fialetti, a student of Agostino Carracci and the draftsman and etcher of *Il vero modo et ordine per disegnar tutte le parti et membra del corpo humano* (Venice: Justus Sadeler, 1608), which was based on Agostino's *inventione* and to which three plates by Palma il Giovane were added at a later date.⁹

The historiography, beginning with Carlo Cesare Malvasia in 1678, has maintained that Annibale Carracci entrusted Luca Ciamberlano to make prints from his brother Agostino's *inventione* for the volume titled *Scuola perfetta*. This volume was begun about 1609 and was printed in 1614 by Pietro Stefanoni; only in later editions would its title become *Scuola perfetta: Per imparare a bene disegnare tutto il corpo humano parte per parte; Cavatta dalli disegni di Caracci*.¹⁰ Another series of eighty-one prints by Ciamberlano (some of which were initialed "LC") and Francesco Brizio, merged into a study volume, was presumably also produced by Stefanoni (these were catalogued by Adam Bartsch, who was unable to reconstruct their exact order).¹¹ This tradition would have been familiar to a

master such as the young Ribera, who had become aware of these *inventione* by Carracci prior to 1611, when he was living in Parma at the service of Mario Farnese and where he became interested in studying the art of Emilia Romagna. Moreover, he must have encountered this tradition during his Roman sojourn and in particular as a member of the Accademia di San Luca (1613–16), around which several Bolognese artists gravitated.¹² Even though Ribera's interpretation of this well-known theme is exceptional, it is nonetheless important to emphasize its clear connections with the plates after the Carracci.¹³

A reconsideration of *Il vero modo et ordine per disegnar* (published as early as 1608) is likewise essential to this argument. There are clear links between certain ears in Fialetti's plate number 3, *Studies of Ten Ears* (fig. 3),¹⁴ and those in Ribera's 1622 etching. Ribera placed the ear framed by part of a face at bottom left, while Fialetti placed the same on the outer margins of his plate but repeated it twice, on the right and on the left. Ribera took inspiration from the ear seen in bird's-eye view. Finally, while all the ears in the top row of each print bear a resemblance, in particular Ribera's two ears at upper left copy the two engraved by Fialetti at upper right.



fig. 3 Odoardo Fialetti (Italian, 1573–1626/7). *Studies of Ten Ears* from *Il vero modo et ordine per disegnar*, 1608. Etching, 4 × 5½ in. (10 × 14.4 cm). Numbered on plate, upper right: 3. Private collection, Germany

fig. 4 Odoardo Fialetti.
Studies of Eight Ears from
*Il vero modo et ordine per
dissegnar*, 1608. Etching,
4 × 5½ in. (10 × 14.4 cm).
Numbered on plate, upper
right: 4. Private collection,
Germany



Despite these correspondences between the prints, however, no one has yet taken into account the similarities between *Studies of Ten Ears* and the Museum's drawing *A Bat and Two Ears* (fig. 1). The ear to the left of the bat in Ribera's drawing is identical to the ear at top right in the Fialetti print. There is also an example of the same ear in the top right corner of another etching from Fialetti's book—*Studies of Eight Ears* (fig. 4)¹⁵—which is numbered 4 at top right. Crucially, this is the same plate number that Ribera inscribed, in reverse, in the lower right corner of his 1622 etching. Moreover, Fialetti's print is also the source for the ear seen slightly from behind and to the right of the bat in the Museum's drawing. This ear on the right in Ribera's drawing is an exact replica of, and represented from the same perspective as, the example in the opposite corner of Fialetti's engraving, next to the ear decorated with a pearl.

According to Malvasia, by 1618, Father Antonio Mirandola had asked Guercino to produce model sheets for students based on the volumes inspired by Annibale Carracci and by Fialetti, which were engraved in 1619 by Oliviero Gatti.¹⁶ The similarities between Gatti's *Studies of Six Ears* (fig. 5)¹⁷ and Ribera's 1622 etching are indisputable, both for the typologies they present and for their vivid interpretation of the anatomical parts. This text must also have inspired Ribera in his spatial

arrangement of the various elements. Unsurprisingly, Gatti's print is numbered 4 in the treatise, a crucial testimony that proves that Ribera did not randomly attribute this same number to his *Studies of Nine Ears*. The previous hypothesis, that "the presence of this number [4] implies that a fourth study sheet may have existed at one time"¹⁸ and which was based on the fact that we know of only three anatomical engravings by Lo Spagnoletto, is therefore less convincing. On the contrary, Ribera simply respected the academic tradition preceding him, according to which the "lesson" on this topic was the fourth one.¹⁹

As mentioned above, it is important to emphasize that it is highly probable that Guercino's publication, created not long before Ribera's works, prompted the Spanish artist to execute studies of anatomical subjects. Some affinities between the two artists' grotesque and caricatural drawings attest that Ribera and Guercino were mutually aware of each other's creations. This harmony of artistic results is easily explained when one considers Ribera's admiration, developed in his youth spent between Rome and the Emilia, for the Carracci and their followers, foremost among them Guido Reni.²⁰ We now turn to the meaning of the drawing.

Scholars unanimously agree that the juxtaposition of the bat and ears, although highly unusual, was

fig. 5 Oliviero Gatti (Italian, 1568–1651) after Giovanni Francesco Barbieri il Guercino (Italian, 1591–1666). *Studies of Six Ears*, 1619. Engraving, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ \times 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (14.8 \times 20.9 cm). Numbered on plate, lower right: 4. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Mass., William M. Prichard Fund (S1.87.3)



deliberate. This idea is supported by the fact that the finely elaborated drawing includes the Latin motto *FULGET SEMPER VIRTUS*, indicating that the artist created the work with a specific purpose. Ribera's care not only in his drawing technique but also in his naturalistic depiction of the bat—studied from life and represented at lifesize—further supports this argument.

Finaldi has argued that the ordered juxtaposition of bat and ears, completed by the Latin motto, makes the image a rebus, in which the bat symbolizes the artist's hometown, the motto alludes to eternal virtue, and the two ears possibly refer to fame or calumny or both.²¹ Hence, there could be a connection to an individual in Valencia who commissioned the work, as Brown argued, or the drawing could have been conceived as the personal emblem of Jusepe de Ribera. In his detailed analysis of the iconography, Finaldi draws attention specifically to the *Emblemas Morales* by Sebastián de Covarrubias (Madrid, 1610), a book that was well known in Spain and that includes an image of two ears encircled by a crown of thorns protecting them from winds of lies, false doctrine, and adulation. The Latin inscription above Covarrubias's image, taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes, is an explicit appeal for the protection of one's ears from gossipmongers. The Latin motto of Ribera's drawing, which exalts the constancy of

virtue that cares little for the fickle and ephemeral opinions of others, could have been guided by a court intellectual and only loosely based on one of Horace's *Odes* (3.2.17–20). Consequently, what is the precise meaning of the bat in this instance? Although Ribera's pairing of human ears with a bat might seem to represent the acute sense of hearing that guides the animal's nocturnal flight, this fact about bats was not known until the late eighteenth century. The most common meaning attributed to the bat in the artist's lifetime was the evocation of night and its attributes, including metaphors of blindness, ignorance, and witchcraft.²²

Therefore, in the scholarship on Ribera the solution to the drawing's obscure iconography has already been outlined correctly in its principal parts. A literary source contemporary to the drawing, which has never been associated with it and that will be described below, confirms the work's association with the artist and facilitates an understanding of the drawing's proper meaning without the need for Ribera's having a patron from Valencia.

First, however, it should be noted that a recent Spanish translation of Ribera's motto, *La virtud refulge siempre* (*Virtue always shines*),²³ presents a more accurate interpretation of the Latin verse than the generally accepted English version, *Virtue shines forever*.²⁴

The new translation illustrates that the Latin clearly alludes to virtue exercised with constancy. Moral quality (*virtus*) does not shine (*fulget*) “forever” but rather reaffirms itself each time that it is practiced (*semper*). In ancient Rome there was absolute trust in the righteous and virtuous man who exercises moral integrity with perseverance—a pagan concept embraced by Christianity in its faith that Good would conquer Evil. According to this analysis, there is no reason to draw upon Horace’s second ode of the third book of *Odes* to understand Ribera’s use of the Latin motto. To put it simply, the motto means that whoever is righteous and has encountered misfortune due to other people’s malice will see his virtue restored, sooner or later.

The Museum’s drawing might thus be read as the artist’s sophisticated testimony to his contemporaries of a now unknown injustice he suffered. We may infer that he created the drawing after his honor was entirely rehabilitated. Consequently, the bat is not a symbol of Valencia but of the “valencianus,” Ribera. The artist portrayed himself, metaphorically, as the emblem of his hometown, surrounded by enemy ears all too eager to listen to gossip and lies. At the same time, the bat can be interpreted as the emblem of blindness in the face of “virtue,” as indicated by the motto. Moreover, the ears may represent the master’s own, attentive to traps laid by others and alert to the general vicissitudes of life. Ribera furthermore treated the objects as one would in a rebus, isolating and positioning the ears and the bat in sequence. Yet unlike a rebus, Ribera does not use the names of the objects to form a distinct phrase, and instead employs their metaphorical meanings. The objects “speak,” and it is the meaning of the motto that completes their symbolic value. The drawing therefore belongs principally in the category of emblem and only partly in the category of rebus.²⁵

The above reading is strongly reinforced by one of the bizarre tales written by Gianbattista Basile (b. 1566?/before 1575–d. 1632),²⁶ a Neapolitan author and contemporary of Ribera’s whose *Tale of Tales* (*Lo Cunto delli Cunti*) was famous throughout Europe. The two men undoubtedly knew each other. By 1609 Basile had already dedicated poetic verses to Giovan Bernardino Azzolino, Ribera’s father-in-law, mentor, and the head of the workshop that the artist joined during his first years in Naples.²⁷ The two would have been in contact also when Basile was serving Antonio Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba (viceroy from 1622 to 1629), while Ribera was also a member of the court. This last connection was documented by Jusepe Martínez, a painter from Zaragoza who visited Naples

in 1625 and who explicitly described his encounters with his compatriot Ribera at the viceroy’s palace and the smaller Neapolitan courts.²⁸

Whatever the relationship between Basile and Ribera, the tale entitled “Corvetto,” in the *Seventh Entertainment* (*Settimo Passatempo*) of the *Third Day of Lo Cunto*, is highly relevant.²⁹ The popular vernacular book by Basile was published posthumously in Naples between 1634 and 1636, but the poet started working on it in the mid-1620s.³⁰ The tale of Corvetto, which invokes the Duke of Alba, is one of the few chapters that contains an explicit hint of the period in which *Lo Cunto* was written.³¹ This is not to say that the Museum’s drawing literally translates the content of the tale. Rather, an accurate reading of the text helps to uncover the meanings associated, especially in Naples, with the attributes of the bat and ears as well as the concept of virtue named in the motto. The indications offered by this source are pivotal for understanding the complex symbolism of the drawing.

The tale tells of the travails of Corvetto, a young man who was “envied by the king’s courtiers because of his virtuous qualities.”³² In an extraordinarily vitriolic preamble, Basile describes the environment at court (presumably in Naples, where both he and Ribera were courtiers) as a customary place of pretense, trickery, slander, and betrayal.³³ He then introduces the protagonist as the king’s favorite, who “for this reason . . . inspired hate and nausea in all of the king’s courtiers, who were bats of ignorance and thus incapable of beholding the shining virtue of Corvetto.”³⁴ Given the phrase “bats of ignorance,” there cannot be a clearer source for the seventeenth-century meaning of the blindness of the bat, which was commonly used as a metaphor for moral obtuseness, incapacity of understanding, and the inability to respect the virtue of a good man. While in one reading of the Museum’s drawing the bat represents Ribera the Valencian, the story of Corvetto suggests that the animal is also a specific allusion to an ignorant individual unprepared to recognize virtue (*virtus*) which, in the end, triumphs (*semper fulget*). Not by chance, in the drawing, the Latin motto starts and ends in the area between the feet of the terrible winged animal, as if held aloft by the victorious artist himself.

Basile’s text also helps explicate the seventeenth-century meaning of the two ears: as argued above, in one interpretation the ears represent those who are disturbed by slander, which corrodes virtue. At the same time, following “Corvetto,” they can also be read as the alert ears of those who must defend their own virtue:

the breezes of favor that the king blew on him were siroccos [hot winds] to the hernias of those envy-bitten souls, who did nothing . . . but murmur, gossip, whisper, gripe and cut the poor man to pieces. . . . // Oh hapless is he who is condemned to live in that hell that goes by the name of court, where flattery is sold by the basket, malice and bad services measured by the quintal, and deceit and betrayal weighed by the bushell! . . . Who can describe the soap of falsehood used to lubricate the steps to the king's ears so that Corvetto would tumble down and break his neck? . . . // But Corvetto was enchanted, and he took notice of the traps and uncovered the treachery. . . . He always kept his ears pricked up and his eyes wide open so as not to lose his thread, for he knew that the courtier's fortune is made of glass.³⁵

Although we cannot be sure that the Museum's drawing alludes to a court misadventure, it appears to have had something to do with the artist's temporary fall from favor, perhaps due to the "gossip" of "envy-bitten souls." Undoubtedly the fortune that he first enjoyed when he arrived in Naples in late 1616 and entered into the good graces of Pedro Téllez-Girón, Duke of Osuna (viceroy from 1616 to 1620), and his wife, Catalina Enríquez de Ribera, would have brought him advantages but also envy in a competitive local artistic environment. He did not receive other such prestigious commissions until much later, while working for the

Franciscan community of the Trinità delle Monache, culminating in his painting *Saint Jerome and the Angel* in 1626, a pivotal year in the artist's biography.³⁶

This article has demonstrated how the Museum's drawing, modeled after some of the *inventioni* of Agostino Carracci that were first engraved in 1608, does not necessarily fit the time frame for the 1622 etching *Studies of Nine Ears*. Differences between these two works of Ribera's preclude the assumption that the print derives from the drawing. In his analysis of the theme of the defamed artist, Finaldi intelligently drew attention to Ribera's *Drunken Silenus* from 1626, an extraordinary painting in which in the lower left corner a snake—classic symbol of envy—bites a cartouche bearing the artist's signature.³⁷ Should Ribera's two declarations of a sullied reputation be understood as references to the same episode in his life or at least as allusions to the same period of difficulty that he experienced? Should the drawing perhaps be postdated slightly, to later in the 1620s? Unfortunately, there is not enough information available about the artist's movements during much of the 1620s to be certain, but further documentary discoveries may yet bring more to light.

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NOTES

Translated from the Italian by Sarah Morgan

1 Brown 1973, pp. 164, 181, no. 3.

2 Ibid., pp. 69–71, no. 7.

3 Finaldi 2005, p. 27.

4 Brown 1973, p. 71, no. 8, pp. 71–72, no. 9; and, most recently, Matilla in Cuenca, Hernández Pugh and Matilla 2019, pp. 262–67, no. 26.

5 Ribera carried out commissions between 1616 and 1619 for Pedro Téllez-Girón, Duke of Osuna (then viceroy of Naples) and his wife, Catalina Enríquez de Ribera, which remained privately held (see Finaldi 2018 and Farina 2018, pp. 57–73). However, he did not manage to make a public name for himself again until the paintings he made for the Franciscan church of the Trinità delle Monache: *Saint Jerome and the Angel* (signed and dated 1626) and *Trinitas Terrestris* (1626–1628/1629), both of which are now held at the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples (Q 1930, n. 312 and Q 1930, n. 1793).

6 Brown 1973, pp. 66–67, 68, nos. 4, 6.

7 Du Gué Trapier 1952, p. 29; Brown 1973, p. 70, no. 7.

8 Brown 1973, pp. 16–17, 70.

9 On the subject of the pattern book, see the still valuable overview in Gombrich 1960, pp. 134–44, and the recent volume by Cuenca, Hernández Pugh, and Matilla 2019. For Fialetti's text, see Hernández Pugh in *ibid.*, pp. 122–31, no. 6.

10 In fact, not all the drawings can be attributed to Agostino alone; neither are all the etchings by Ciamberlano only. See Matilla in Cuenca, Hernández Pugh, and Matilla 2019, pp. 143–52, no. 8.

11 Bartsch XVIII.159–70.

12 See Farina 2014, pp. 68–69.

13 For instance, *Studies of Six Eyes*, which is initialed "LC," is numbered 2 in the series, and is the first of the eighty-one plates by Ciamberlano catalogued by Bartsch (XVIII.159.1). The first three female eyes drawn from the top may be compared with the one at the center of the second column from the left in Ribera's *Studies of Thirteen Eyes* (Brown 1973, no. 8). Moreover, the latter example may also be considered in relation to *Studies of Eight Eyes*, an unnumbered engraving that lacks Ciamberlano's initials but is part of the same series catalogued by Bartsch (XVIII.159.2). This comparison is presented in Farina 2014, p. 59, figs. 54–56.

14 Bartsch XVII.299.214.

- 15 Bartsch XVII.299.215.
- 16 The frontispiece has a dedication to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. The original book did not survive in the modern era (Bagni 1988, pp. 6–7, 174–77; Matilla in Cuenca, Hernández Pugh, and Matilla 2019, pp. 159–65, no. 10).
- 17 Bartsch XIX.30.121.
- 18 Brown 1973, p. 70, no. 7.
- 19 The first detailed analysis of the relationship between the print designed by Guercino and that by Ribera is in Farina 2014, pp. 58, figs. 51–53, 69. Payne summarizes these conclusions in Payne and Bray 2018, p. 81, nos. 10–12. Following the hypothesis of Andrew Robinson first mentioned by Jonathan Brown, Payne says that Ribera's popular etching *Large Grotesque Head* (ca. 1622; Brown 1973, no. 11), whose dimensions correspond to those of two of his three anatomical plates, is part of the same didactic project that was never completed. However, it should not be underestimated that the whole group of etchings that Ribera completed between 1621 and 1622 represents the clearest sign of the artist's quick, observant eye. It was created at the precise moment in which he was trying to attract notice in the Neapolitan scene (and which he succeeded in doing not long after). As stated above, it is not certain whether these anatomical exercises were created for didactic purposes. Ribera's Neapolitan pupils started, in fact, to work with him at the end of the 1620s, if not much later, from 1630 or 1635 on. At the moment, we do not have any evidence indicating that the artist had students born in the first decade of the seventeenth century.
- 20 For a reconstruction of the connection between the Carracci and the influence of Guido Reni on Ribera (and vice versa), see Farina 2014, paragraphs 1.4–1.5 and the *Prefazione* to the text by Daniele Benati (ibid., pp. 7–9). Subsequently, Farina 2017 (pp. 61–63) was the first to highlight the possible parallel between Ribera's and Guercino's drawings.
- 21 Finaldi 2016, pp. 71–73, no. 8.
- 22 Ibid., p. 71.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Brown 1973, p. 154, no. 3; Payne in Payne and Bray 2018, pp. 86–87, no. 13.
- 25 The Museum's drawing lacks the list-like nature of a traditional rebus (consider, for example, the well-known etchings *Ogni cosa vince l'oro* by Agostino Carracci [1590/1595; Bartsch XVIII.102.114] and those dedicated to Love and Fortune by Stefano Della Bella [ca. 1639; De Vesme and Massar 1971, p. 111, nos. 688 and 689]). It can be more easily read as following the tradition of the illustrated *impresa*—an emblem, or device with a motto. Although well known in the Renaissance, even to Leonardo, the emblem did not have a theoretical basis until 1555, when Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell'impresie militari e amorose* was published posthumously. Two emblems in particular seem to most resemble Ribera's in compositional spirit and imaginative ability. Designed by the eclectic Francesco Salviati, these emblems possibly allude to the concepts of vigilance or prudence (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 12085; and the Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 1979.58; see Alessandro Nova in Monbeig Goguel 1998, pp. 200–201, nos. 69, 70). Salviati was, after all, one of the Italian masters of the sixteenth century to whom Ribera appears to have looked on more than one occasion and with great interest.
- 26 There are various hypotheses about the place and the precise year of Basile's birth: in Naples in 1575, or in Giugliano di Campania in 1566 or between 1570 and 1572; see Michele Rak in Basile 2013, p. vii.
- 27 See Farina 2020, pp. 248–49.
- 28 Martínez 1988, pp. 33–35.
- 29 See Basile 2007, pp. 261–66, and Basile 2013, pp. 570–83.
- 30 Rak in Basile 2013, pp. x–xi.
- 31 The duke, whose name, Alba, means “dawn,” was referenced in “Corvetto” as follows: “there was . . . a rooster singing to the breaking dawn [Alba], accompanied by a motto in Tuscan that read ‘I am the sole one to gaze upon you’ as well as a wilted heliotrope with the Tuscan motto ‘As the sun sets.’” Basile 2007, p. 263 (English trans.); Basile 2013, p. 579: “c’era un gallo mentre cantava per l’Alba che vedeva sorgere, con un motto in toscano, ‘Sol ch’io ti miri,’ e inoltre anche un fiore elitropio afflosciato con un motto toscano, ‘Al calar del sole.’” Rak (in Basile 2013, p. 583n12) reminds us that Basile's *Odes* of 1627 were also dedicated to the Duke of Alba, and that the wilted heliotrope flower is a reference to either the advanced age of the author or the imminent departure of the duke from Naples.
- 32 Basile 2007, p. 261 (English trans.); Basile 2013, p. 571: “invidiato dai cortigiani di un re per le sue virtuose abilità.”
- 33 Basile 2007, p. 261 (English trans.): “if I were asked where one could really find feigning and fraud, I could indicate no better place than the court, where everyone dons a mask, and where Trastullo's gossip, Graziano's backbiting, Zanni's betrayals, and Pulcinella's roguery thrive.” Basile 2013, p. 571: “se qualcuno mi chiedesse dove davvero si possono trovare la finzione e la frode io non saprei indicargli altro luogo che a corte, dove si sta sempre in maschera e c’è il pettegolezzo da Trastullo, la maldicenza da Graziano, il tradimento da Zanni e la furfanteria da Pulcinella.”
- 34 Basile 2007, p. 261 (English trans.); Basile 2013, p. 571: “che proprio per questa ragione era odiato e tenuto sullo stomaco da tutti i cortigiani, che erano pipistrelli di ignoranza e non potevano vedere il luccichio delle virtù di Corvetto.”
- 35 Basile 2007, pp. 261–62 (English trans.); Basile 2013, p. 573: “i venti dei favori che il re gli [a Corvetto] concedeva, erano sciocchi per l’ernia di quei crepati d’invidia, tanto che non facevano altro . . . che mormorare, borbottare, bisbigliare, brontolare e spettegolare sul conto di quel pover’uomo . . . // Oh disgraziato chi è condannato a quell’inferno che è la corte, dove le lusinghe si vendono in cestini, le malignità e i cattivi servizi si misurano a quintali, gli inganni e i tradimenti si pesano a tonnellate! . . . chi può rivelare il sapone delle menzogne con cui spalmarono la scala delle orecchie del re per farlo cadere e rompersi l’osso del collo? . . . // Ma Corvetto che era fatato e vedeva le trappole e scopriva gli inganni . . . stava sempre con le orecchie dritte e gli occhi aperti per non spezzare il filo, ben sapendo che la fortuna dei cortigiani è di vetro.”
- 36 See note 5 above.
- 37 Finaldi 2016, p. 72, no. 8 (Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, T Q 1930, n. 298).

ABBREVIATION

Bartsch Bartsch, Adam. *The Illustrated Bartsch*. Edited by Walter L. Strauss. New York: Abaris Books, 1978– .

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Carmontelle's Telltale Marks and Materials

MARGOT BERNSTEIN

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Drawings and Prints boasts three exemplary portraits by the French amateur draftsman Louis Carrogis, called Carmontelle (1717–1806), one of which depicts Jean-Pierre de Bougainville (1722–1763) (fig. 1). Bougainville joined the ranks of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1745 and was appointed *secrétaire perpétuel* in 1754, the same year that he was elected to the Académie Française, with the support of Madame de Pompadour.¹ A brimming bookcase, a lectern on which an open book is propped, and a *bureau plat* topped with an inkstand and a feather pen signal the sitter's erudition.

Carmontelle drew at least 750 likenesses on paper about the time of his 1759–85 tenure at the Orléans

fig. 1 Louis Carrogis, called Carmontelle (French, 1717–1806). *Jean-Pierre de Bougainville*, ca. 1760. Red and black chalk, watercolor, and graphite on laid paper, 11 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (30 × 19 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 2004 (2004.475.6)

court, where his talents as a *lecteur* to young Louis-Philippe-Joseph d'Orléans (then the Duc de Chartres), as an author of proverbs and plays, and a coordinator of entertainments rendered him an invaluable fixture.² Like the Bougainville portrait, Carmontelle's compositions are, with few exceptions, full-length and in profile. Most of these works are traditionally described as having been included in the artist's posthumous sale, but the short pamphlet that accompanied the sale notes that the drawings were actually withheld in the hope that they could be added to the Bibliothèque Impériale's robust and already renowned collection of 25,000 to 35,000 engraved portraits.³ When this transfer proved unsuccessful, Carmontelle's friend Richard

de Lédans borrowed funds to buy the portraits and attempted to find the entire group an alternative home. When this plan also failed, Lédans began to sell off the works as friends and relatives of the sitters came to claim them. In 1807, after dispensing with numerous sheets, Lédans made a manuscript list of the portraits still in his possession.⁴

When Lédans died in 1816, Pierre de La Mésangère bought the remaining portraits.⁵ He also acquired Lédans's 1807 manuscript list and used it to inscribe sitters' names on the portraits' paper mounts.⁶ La Mésangère's handwriting was later authenticated by François-Anatole Gruyer, a former curator at the Musée Condé at the Château de Chantilly, which still houses nearly five hundred Carmontelle sheets. In his 1902 book, *Chantilly: Les portraits de Carmontelle*, Gruyer enthusiastically affirmed that "with the help of Lédans's manuscript, [La Mésangère] handwrote the names of the people represented at the bottom of these portraits. We are assured of this through comparison of these inscriptions with diverse autograph documents by La Mésangère."⁷ Gruyer's pride in La Mésangère's previous ownership of most of the Musée Condé's Carmontelle drawings can be attributed to the high esteem in which the latter was held.⁸ Clear visual parallels between the single-figure, full-length fashion plates that illustrate the *Journal des dames et des modes* (the publication for which La Mésangère is perhaps best known) and Carmontelle's portraits help to explain La Mésangère's interest in, and purchase of, Carmontelle's drawings of eighteenth-century society's celebrities and elites.

Significantly, an inscription on the verso of the Metropolitan Museum's Bougainville portrait matches the handwriting in Lédans's entry for this sitter in his 1807 manuscript—a fact that has heretofore gone unnoticed.⁹ Thanks to this new discovery, the inscription may now be used to affirm the drawing's authenticity and its early provenance. In addition, the inscription on the bottom part of the green border that surrounds the Bougainville portrait accords precisely with La Mésangère's inscriptions on the mounts found on hundreds of Carmontelle sheets at the Musée Condé, thus securing the Met portrait's provenance at least through Lédans's death in 1816.

The techniques used in the Bougainville portrait are also consistent with those routinely employed by Carmontelle. In fact, all the authentic portraits by Carmontelle at the Musée Condé share certain artistic practices.¹⁰ Executed in red and black chalk, graphite, and watercolor on laid paper, Carmontelle's portrait of Bougainville is typical of the artist's 1760s work.





fig. 2 Carmontelle. *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon*, ca. 1764–70 or later. Red, black, and white chalk and watercolor on laid paper, 12¼ × 7½ in. (31 × 19 cm). Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly (CAR 231)



fig. 3 After Carmontelle. *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon*, late 18th–early 19th century. Pencil(?), black and red chalk, and watercolor with white chalk(?) highlights on wove paper, 12¾ × 8¾ in. (31 × 21.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.580)

By that time, he no longer worked exclusively in *trois-crayons* (a technique using three colored chalks) and had begun to incorporate watercolor. At first, the artist carefully applied color within his preliminary chalk outlines. By the 1780s, however, Carmontelle used watercolor freely and abundantly, so much so that his chalk lines became increasingly overpowered (and often overpainted).¹¹

Without fail, Carmontelle began his portraits with red chalk (also known as “sanguine” because it resembles *sang*—French for “blood”), which he used to convey the color of Caucasian flesh.¹² Appropriately, the contours of sitters’ faces, arms, and hands are executed exclusively in this medium. Carmontelle also routinely outlined the objects and architectural elements that were part of his initial conception of a composition in red chalk before going over these preliminary contours with black chalk or watercolor (depending upon the

color of the object in question). Horizontally oriented red chalk lines, now barely visible beneath the gilded molding on the rightmost corner of Bougainville’s *bureau plat*, indicate an early, discarded idea for that part of the drawing, while the desk, outlined in black chalk, seems to be something of an afterthought.

Carmontelle consistently used materials well suited to describing the physical qualities of objects he portrayed, and his application varied to accord with the play of light on different surfaces. The artist’s meticulous rendering of characteristic details in his surroundings demonstrates an Enlightenment respect for empirical knowledge. To describe objects made of brown wood, for example, Carmontelle invariably used red chalk outlines. Bougainville’s armchair and lectern, which have red chalk outlines that remain visible, demonstrate this practice. The artist took a similar approach when drawing the contours of the likely

fig. 4 Carmontelle. *Madame de Boufflers and Thérèse*, ca. 1768. Red, black, and white chalk and watercolor on laid paper, 11¼ × 6⅞ in. (30 × 17.5 cm). Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly (CAR 221)

fig. 5 After Carmontelle. *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse*, late 18th–early 19th century. Pencil(?), black and red chalk, and watercolor with white chalk(?) highlights on wove paper, 12 × 8 in. (30.5 × 20.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.579)

limestone buildings that are often found in the backgrounds of his portraits. The quoined edges of the structure at right in Carmontelle's portrait of *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* (Musée Condé, Chantilly; fig. 2) is a case in point.¹³ Carmontelle also systematically used red chalk outlines to describe gilding, with the chalk's tonality echoing both the surface glow of gold and hints of red bole beneath. The gilded picture and mirror frames and the firedogs in the Bougainville portrait are fine examples. Indeed, Carmontelle's attentiveness to the color and reflectivity of materials ranging from gold to wood to flesh to stone is as much a hallmark of his portraits as is the profile format for which he is perhaps best known.

Stéphanie-Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis, an intimate friend of the Orléans family who also knew Carmontelle, wrote that the artist retained all his original portraits, but occasionally made

replica copies for sitters who requested them.¹⁴ This practice would seem to explain how the Metropolitan Museum's versions (both part of the Robert Lehman Collection) of *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* (fig. 3) and *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse* (fig. 5) came to be made. Both of these sheets replicate drawings with La Mésangère-inscribed mounts at the Musée Condé in Chantilly (figs. 2, 4). But Madame de Genlis's brief account of Carmontelle's autograph replicas does not account for the unsettling differences between the Robert Lehman Collection and Musée Condé sheets, particularly given the consistent choice of materials and established practices evident in Carmontelle's autograph copies in the Musée Condé and a handful of other collections.¹⁵ A standard for comparing original versions and copies made by the artist is offered by *Le Comte de Scey, Colonel du Régiment du Roi-dragon* (Musée Condé, Chantilly; fig. 6) and an autograph replica previously



fig. 6 Carmontelle. *Le Comte de Scey, Colonel du Régiment du Roi-dragon*, ca. 1759. Red and black chalk and watercolor on laid paper, 10½ × 6 in. (26.5 × 15.5 cm). Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly (CAR 194)

fig. 7 Carmontelle. *Le Comte de Scey, Colonel du Régiment du Roi-dragon* (previously referred to as *A Standing Gentleman with a Dog*), ca. 1759 or later. Red and black chalk and watercolor with white heightening on laid paper, 11¼ × 7¼ in. (28.5 × 18 cm). Private collection. Identified here as an autograph replica of fig. 6.

unrecognized as such (fig. 7).¹⁶ The materials and handling in these two drawings are essentially the same.

The most striking difference between the versions of *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse* in the Musée Condé and the Robert Lehman Collection is the color of the upholstery on the chair that supports the sitter at left. In the Chantilly drawing (fig. 4), it is rendered in two shades of blue, whereas the drawing in the Robert Lehman Collection (fig. 5) uses two shades of pink. This discrepancy is not in itself unusual, since Carmontelle routinely changed fabric colors and patterns on clothing and upholstery, as well as background details in his autograph replicas (figs. 6, 7). Carmontelle could have adopted this practice in the Robert Lehman Collection version to reflect changing fashions or seasonal adjustments that people of means made to their upholstery.¹⁷ More plausibly, he may have made these changes to express the individuality of his autograph replicas.

Other differences between the Musée Condé and Robert Lehman Collection *Boufflers and Thérèse* sheets are more difficult to rationalize. Recall that Carmontelle consistently used red chalk to outline sitters' faces as a means of conveying the color of flesh. This technique is seen in the faces of Boufflers and Thérèse in the Musée Condé drawing (figs. 8, 10), but the contours of Boufflers's face in the Robert Lehman Collection version (fig. 9) are considerably thicker and broken. Uncharacteristically, light gray lines have been added where red chalk is absent (on Boufflers's nose, for example). Additionally, the curve of Boufflers's chin in the Robert Lehman Collection version (fig. 9) has been described with red chalk applied over strokes of gray (visible to the left of the red) that were applied clumsily.¹⁸ It is as if the artist recognized that the chin drawn in gray was the wrong shape and then corrected it in red. Also striking are diagonal red lines across



fig. 8 Detail of Carmontelle. *Madame de Boufflers and Thérèse*, ca. 1768 (fig. 4), showing the delicate red chalk contours of Madame de Boufflers's face and a lack of heavy red chalk lines like those that traverse the same sitter's cheek (and are unsuccessful in expressing volumetric form) in fig. 9.

fig. 9 Detail of After Carmontelle. *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse*, late 18th–early 19th century (fig. 5), showing gray lines along the contours of Boufflers's face, red water-based media applied under the sitter's chin, around and in her ear, and above her upper eyelid, and red chalk lines that traverse her cheek and flatten her face's volumetric form.

fig. 10 Detail of Carmontelle. *Madame de Boufflers and Thérèse*, ca. 1768 (fig. 4), showing the characteristically delicate red chalk contours of Thérèse's face and chest, as well as reserved paper used to convey passages of flesh.

fig. 11 Detail of After Carmontelle. *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse*, late 18th–early 19th century (fig. 5), showing gray lines along the contours of Thérèse's face and chest, a lack of red chalk underdrawing in Thérèse's hair ornament, and heavy white heightening on her face, neck, and chest, as well as in her hair.



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the right cheek (fig. 9) that ignore the natural contours of the face; these are unusual for Carmontelle, whose lines are normally more sensitive to the curves of facial features.

The most atypical aspects of Boufflers's face on the Robert Lehman Collection sheet (fig. 9), however, are the touches of red watercolor (or red chalk wash) applied under the sitter's chin, around and in her ear, and above her upper eyelid. The same material appears on the right nostril and the contour that demarcates the front of the right cheek. Carmontelle certainly varied his red chalk technique when drawing faces, using both light, continuous lines and broken ones, sometimes leaving areas in reserve to represent highlights, and at other times applying more pressure, or breaking an initial outline or strengthening it with a second application. But the liberal use of red, water-based media (and the heavy-handed manipulation of red chalk) evident in the Robert Lehman Collection version of Boufflers's portrait (fig. 9) has no parallel in Carmontelle's oeuvre.

Similar issues are evident in the Robert Lehman Collection's young Thérèse (fig. 11). The contours of the

girl's face, neck, and exposed upper chest were first outlined in gray, with red chalk lines later used to fill in missing areas and to suggest the play of light and shadow across the subject's face. During this process, the draftsman's hand seems to have strayed, as the red outline of the upper chest deviates noticeably from the gray underdrawing. It is also possible that the artist used red and black chalk (or graphite) to imitate thin red chalk lines in the Musée Condé version (fig. 10) that describe shadows cast across the girl's pale skin by her light-colored dress. Furthermore, red chalk underdrawing visible in Thérèse's hair in the Musée Condé version (fig. 10) is completely absent from the corresponding passage in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing (fig. 11). Additional problems in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing include a heavy-handed application of white chalk or gouache on Thérèse's face, neck, and chest, suggesting the artist's reluctance to use reserved paper to describe skin. Also troubling is the clunky description of a hair ornament that sits atop Thérèse's head in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing (fig. 11), but is delicately woven into her hair on the Musée Condé sheet (fig. 10). Cumulatively, these deviations raise serious questions.

Comparison of the background elements in the Boufflers and Thérèse drawings in the Robert Lehman Collection and the Musée Condé illustrates that the trees in the Robert Lehman Collection version (fig. 5) are summarily drawn with uniform black chalk hatching that fails to describe the effects of light and shadow on leaves and branches that are far more delicately articulated in the Musée Condé version (fig. 4). The shadow falling across the upper part of Boufflers's skirt in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing (fig. 5) likewise lacks subtlety, whereas the corresponding element in the Musée Condé portrait is described with graded black chalk shading that accurately expresses the appearance of light falling on rippled fabric (fig. 4). The black chalk hatching that traverses Boufflers's white scarf and cuffs in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing (figs. 5, 9) is similarly inept and does not convey any sense of the fabric's material quality. Furthermore, red chalk underdrawing evident in these passages on the Musée Condé sheet (figs. 4, 8) is absent in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing—a clear deviation from Carmontelle's normal practice. In fact, black chalk hatching of the kind just described in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing is altogether missing, both from the Musée Condé sheet (fig. 4) and from all of Carmontelle's authentic portraits and autograph replicas (for example, figs. 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7).

fig. 12 Detail of Carmontelle. *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon*, ca. 1764–70 or later (fig. 2), showing delicate red chalk contour lines, as well as a pink hair ribbon that traverses the sitter's tower of hair and appears again both above and below her topmost curl.



fig. 13 Detail of After Carmontelle. *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon*, late 18th–early 19th century (fig. 3), showing heavy white heightening and a gray hair ribbon that only replicates part of the same (pink) feature in fig. 12.



Physiognomic differences compound the issues raised by technical disparities. A cursory comparison of the Musée Condé and Robert Lehman Collection sheets reveals striking differences in the handling of facial features. Delicate contour lines in the Musée Condé portrait convey individuals' distinctive bone structure, a quality lacking in the Robert Lehman Collection version. Indeed, close inspection reveals two purported pairs of sitters who look instead like four unique individuals. Renowned in his own time for his ability to capture a likeness with astonishing accuracy, Carmontelle is unlikely to have executed the Metropolitan Museum's awkward copy of the Chantilly original.¹⁹

The Robert Lehman Collection portrait of Madame de Coëtlogon (fig. 3) exhibits similar weaknesses. The Musée Condé version (fig. 2) is an outstanding example of Carmontelle's late style, with thin red chalk lines used to establish the contours of the sitter's face, and small, carefully articulated black chalk marks applied to describe leaves on the trees and bushes close to the foreground. Carmontelle also added a substantial amount of watercolor with controlled confidence. The Robert Lehman Collection version of *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* (fig. 3), by contrast, includes black chalk hatching that traverses various surfaces, irrespective of objects' positions and degrees of illumination. These somewhat haphazardly drawn marks match those described above in the Robert Lehman Collection version of *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse* (fig. 5). And like the faces in the latter, the contours of Madame de Coëtlogon's profile in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing were first executed in black chalk or graphite, then selectively (and heavily-handedly) retraced with red chalk. In fact, the consistent artistic techniques used in both Robert Lehman Collection drawings suggest that these two sheets were made by the same artist—but not by Carmontelle. The significant stylistic differences between the Musée

Condé sheets, which bear witness to Carmontelle's signature light touch, and the Robert Lehman Collection drawings, where heavy lines and weighty forms predominate, likewise signal a discrepancy in authorship.

Madame de Coëtlogon's accessories support this conclusion. In the Musée Condé version (fig. 12), the ribbon tied around the sitter's tower of hair is painted with pink watercolor. It reappears just above a large curl near the top of her hair, then falls behind and below this curl in response to the pull of gravity. In the Robert Lehman Collection version (fig. 13), the ribbon is reduced to a single band, which is outlined with two horizontal black lines that blend into those used to describe strands of hair. The abbreviated treatment of the ribbon in the Robert Lehman Collection drawing indicates either a misunderstanding of, or an inability to accurately copy, the original. This tiny, telling detail underscores the disparity between the Musée Condé and Robert Lehman Collection versions, and points to the hand of a copyist who could not match Carmontelle's ability to respond to and represent the material world. Physiognomic differences in the faces of the two versions (figs. 12, 13) and the heavy-handed application of chalk and watercolor in the Robert Lehman Collection Coëtlogon portrait confirm that only the Musée Condé sheet can safely be ascribed to Carmontelle.

Pieces of paper affixed to works in the Robert Lehman Collection here identified as likely copies after Carmontelle further help to distinguish these *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse* and *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* drawings from the Musée Condé's authentic versions (and, for that matter, from the Metropolitan Museum's authentic portrait of Jean-Pierre de Bougainville). Examining the Robert Lehman Collection drawings and paper mounts with a fiberoptic light sheet reveals a single set of laid lines, which extends beyond each drawing's edges to include its borders. These laid lines—the tightly packed, linear indentations that are parallel to one another and result from pressing paper against the metal wires of a mold during the paper-making process—suggest that the larger sheets to which both drawings are affixed are made of laid paper. The lack of any additional or overlapping laid lines, either parallel or perpendicular, indicates that the drawings themselves were executed on wove paper, which has no lines, was developed in the mid-eighteenth century, and only became widely available in the early nineteenth century.²⁰ Authentic Carmontelle portraits, including hundreds at Chantilly and fifteen at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, are made on laid paper.²¹ The discrepancy in the Robert Lehman

Collection drawings can thus be taken as further evidence that they were made by an artist working at a later moment, when wove paper was easier to obtain.²² Because the provenance of the Robert Lehman Collection drawings can be traced back only as far as 1953, when Robert Lehman purchased them, it is difficult to say more of their author.²³

Just as inauthentic copies after Carmontelle drawings have been accepted as Carmontelle originals, so, too, have all the handwritten names that appear on the paper borders surrounding Carmontelle's portraits been attributed to Pierre de La Mésangère. But a revealing comparison may be made between the genuine La Mésangère inscription on the bottom of the Bougainville portrait's border (fig. 1) and the authentic inscriptions on the mounts attached to the Musée Condé versions of *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* and *Madame de Boufflers and Thérèse* (figs. 2, 4), with the inscriptions on the borders surrounding the Robert Lehman Collection drawings (figs. 3, 5). In the latter, the forward-slanted handwriting is an obvious sign that something is amiss. As for individual letters, the shapes of the capital "M" and lowercase "d" are similar on the two Robert Lehman Collection mounts (figs. 3, 5), but different from the same letters on the comparable Musée Condé mounts (figs. 2, 4). Additionally, the crossbar of the lower case "t" in the word *et* on the mount of the Musée Condé *Madame de Boufflers and Thérèse* (fig. 4) extends well beyond this letter, suggesting authorial confidence. On the corresponding Robert Lehman Collection mount, the "t" of *et* has a short crossbar (fig. 5), is less exuberant, and displays a carefulness that accords with the writing on the mount of the Robert Lehman Collection *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* (fig. 3). Furthermore, the capital letter "C" that begins Madame de Coëtlogon's name on the Musée Condé mount (fig. 2) is typical of La Mésangère's cursive; the "C" on the Robert Lehman Collection Coëtlogon sheet (fig. 3), however, is more rounded and lacks a loop seen in the Musée Condé Coëtlogon inscription, as well as on many other La Mésangère-inscribed mounts in Chantilly. The Robert Lehman Collection mounts' inscriptions diverge enough from the inscriptions on the Musée Condé mounts to suggest that two different people wrote them. They are similar enough, though, to suggest that the author of the

inscriptions on the mounts surrounding the Robert Lehman Collection drawings deliberately imitated La Mésangère's handwriting, as well as his tendency to place titles in the center of a lower border.

The discoveries outlined here have enabled the present author to identify additional inauthentic Carmontelle portraits in public and private collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.²⁴ In fact, the majority of purported autograph replicas of Carmontelle portraits in international collections are not authentic. Most of these problematic works display technical issues that are consistent with those found in the Robert Lehman Collection drawings, together with suspicious inscriptions attributable to the same hand as the one responsible for the inscriptions on the mounts surrounding the Robert Lehman Collection drawings. We do not know who created the deceptive mounts inscribed with handwriting that mimics La Mésangère's own and affixed them to drawings based on Carmontelle originals. Whoever the nineteenth-century (or later) author of these false inscriptions was, he or she evidently recognized and capitalized on the authority and authenticity that a La Mésangère inscription guaranteed, and presumably banked on continued prioritization of Carmontelle's subjects and familiar, full-length format over his materials and techniques. Whether the maker of these inscribed mounts is also the rather inept artist who drew and colored the Carmontelle portrait copies on wove paper also remains a mystery. What is clear is the fact that the combination successfully deceived many seasoned connoisseurs.

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NOTES

- 1 Stein 2005, p. 236. Two other chalk, graphite, and watercolor portraits in the Metropolitan Museum are firmly attributed to Carmontelle: *Woman Playing the Violin, Seen from the Front* (2019.138.2) and *Woman Playing the Violin, Seen from the Back* (2019.138.3).
- 2 The number 750 may be an approximation; it originates in Carmontelle sale 1807, pp. [2–3] (unpaginated). My use of the word “likenesses” is deliberate, as there is some confusion as to what the word *portrait* means in the context of Carmontelle’s oeuvre. In eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French documents surrounding Carmontelle’s portraits, the term *portrait* seems to refer to a person whom Carmontelle depicted (as opposed to a drawing, which can include depictions of more than one person). See Whiteley 2000, pp. 653–54. For a general overview of Carmontelle’s life and work, see Chatel de Brancion 2003.
- 3 Carmontelle sale 1807, pp. [2–3] (unpaginated).
- 4 Lédans 1807, pp. 2r, 2v, and 3. In the context of Lédans’s manuscript, the word *portrait* refers to each person whom Carmontelle depicted. For instance, a single sheet that includes depictions of three people is assigned three Lédans numbers.
- 5 On the unresolved discrepancy between the number of *portraits* in Lédans’s 1816 posthumous sale (152 mentioned under lot 531) and La Mésangère’s 1831 posthumous sale (520 mentioned under lot 304), see Stein 2005, p. 236n2, and Whiteley 2000, pp. 653–54.
- 6 François-Anatole Gruyer (1902, p. ix) presumed that the Lédans manuscript was sold to La Mésangère as part of Lédans’s posthumous sale, but the 1807 manuscript is not explicitly mentioned along with Carmontelle’s portraits in Lédans’s sale catalogue. Annotations in La Mésangère’s hand in Lédans’s manuscript list, however, indicate that Lédans’s 1807 manuscript was definitely in the former’s possession at some point in time. See Lédans sale 1816, p. 77, lot 531, and Lédans 1807, pp. 2r and 2v.
- 7 Gruyer 1902, p. ix: “Ce fut lui aussi qui, en s’aidant du manuscrit de Lédans, écrivit de sa main au bas de ces portraits les noms des personnages représentés. Nous nous en sommes assuré en comparant ces inscriptions à divers autographes de La Mésangère.” Contrary to Gruyer’s statement, most, but not all, of La Mésangère’s inscriptions appear on the bottom part of the paper borders that surround the Musée Condé’s Carmontelle portraits; some instead appear on the mounts’ versos.
- 8 See Baudelaire 1976, p. 684, and Parke 1986, p. 248.
- 9 Lédans 1807, p. 19v. Jean-Pierre de Bougainville is listed as no. 171.
- 10 Most, but not all, of the portraits at the Musée Condé are authentic Carmontelle drawings. For the Musée Condé drawings for which the attributions to Carmontelle are erroneous, see Bernstein 2020, pp. 299–311 and 406–12.
- 11 According to Gruyer (1902, p. ix), the dates on the paper frames surrounding many of Carmontelle’s portraits are estimations that La Mésangère assigned to the sheets, using sitters’ clothing and hairstyles, as well as Lédans’s 1807 manuscript (which only sometimes gives dates for Carmontelle’s portraits) as his guides. As such, they should be regarded with some caution. This explains why the dates provided for figs. 1, 4, and 6 are preceded by “ca.,” even though La Mésangère inscribed a year on each of these drawings’ mounts.
- 12 Carmontelle also used red chalk outlines when describing the faces of individuals from the African diaspora, the latter of whom he drew very infrequently. These red chalk lines are often barely perceptible under the black chalk lines and shading that Carmontelle also used to convey dark skin. This is true of the four Carmontelle portraits of individuals from the African diaspora that I have examined in person; three are at the Musée Condé in Chantilly and one is in the collection of the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. I am aware of two additional Carmontelle portraits that feature Black subjects, but neither has, to my knowledge, been reproduced in color, nor have I been able to examine either of these drawings in person as yet.
- 13 This Musée Condé sheet exhibits a La Mésangère inscription, making its provenance as secure as that of the Metropolitan Museum’s Bougainville drawing. Whether this portrait actually depicts a woman whose name was Coëtlogon, however, is less certain, as Lédans crossed out “Coëtlogon” in his manuscript and replaced it with another name, which is also crossed out and replaced with yet another name (this one written in graphite in another hand). See Lédans 1807, p. 45r, no. 492.
- 14 Genlis 1825, p. vi, and Clark 2017, p. 181. Stéphanie-Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis (1746–1830), was a lady-in-waiting and secretary to the duchesse de Chartres, as well as a governess to the duc and duchesse de Chartres’s children. She was also the duc de Chartres’s mistress in the early 1770s.
- 15 The terms “autograph replicas” and “autograph copies” refer to Carmontelle’s own copies of his portraits; these are drawings that, like the originals on which they are based, are in Carmontelle’s own hand.
- 16 *L’Élegance intemporelle, Paris, Rive-Gauche*, sale cat., Sotheby’s, Paris, September 14, 2017, lot 14, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/elegance-intemporelle-pf1751/lot.14.html>. Digital superimposition of high-resolution photographs of these drawings, as well as close visual examination of each, reveals how little these sheets deviate from one another in terms of handling. For more on this and other rare autograph replicas by Carmontelle, see Bernstein 2020, pp. 212–41.
- 17 Hellman 2007, p. 132.
- 18 For another instance in which underdrawing is used as evidence of a copyist’s hand, see Stein 2009, pp. 124–25, and Shelley 2009, pp. 131–33.
- 19 On May 1, 1763, Baron Melchior Grimm wrote, “Every day, I find that I recognize people in the street who I have only ever seen in his [Carmontelle’s] volumes.” See Grimm 1829, p. 225: “Il m’arrive tous les jours de reconnaître dans le monde des gens que je n’ai jamais vus que dans ses [Carmontelle’s] recueils.”
- 20 Balston 1998, pp. 2–3, 175, and 178. I am grateful to Marjorie Shelley, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge of Works on Paper at the Met, for placing the Robert Lehman Collection drawings on a fiberoptic light sheet and pointing out the single set of laid lines that became visible. These lines confirmed that the Robert Lehman Collection drawings were executed on wove paper, while their mounts are made of paper with laid lines. Placement of the Bougainville portrait on the same fiberoptic light sheet, by contrast, revealed two distinct, overlapping sets of lines, indicating that this portrait was executed on laid paper.
- 21 Two possible exceptions to this general rule were sold at Sotheby’s, Paris, in September 2017, but technical examination of the paper on which these two drawings in Carmontelle’s hand were executed would have to be undertaken before the type of paper used in these two highly unusual instances can be confirmed. See *L’Élegance intemporelle*, sale cat., Sotheby’s, Paris,

- Rive-Gauche, September 14, 2017, lots 77, 78 (<https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/elegance-intemporelle-pf1751/lot.77.html>; and, . . . /lot.78.html).
- 22 Beginning about 1783, Carmontelle used wove paper to make moving landscape transparencies. His selection of this type of paper for his transparencies (to which the passage of light is integral) was probably prompted by its lack of distracting laid lines. See Chatel de Brancion 2008, pp. 23–25. One could argue that Carmontelle could just as easily have used wove paper to make his autograph replicas, years after having created the original portraits (on laid paper) on which these replicas were based, when wove paper was both more widely available and among the materials that Carmontelle used to make his moving landscape transparencies. But the stylistic and technical disparities discernible in the Musée Condé and Robert Lehman Collection drawings, taken with the regularity with which Carmontelle used laid paper for his portraits and genuine autograph replicas, confirm the Robert Lehman Collection drawings' inauthenticity beyond reasonable doubt.
- 23 The Metropolitan Museum's Robert Lehman Collection object files for *Madame la Comtesse de Boufflers and Thérèse* (fig. 5; 1975.1.579) and *Madame la Marquise de Coëtlogon* (fig. 3; 1975.1.580) do not contain documentation pertaining to these portraits' pre-1953 provenance.
- 24 *The Contesse* [sic] *de Cossé in a Salon* (Art Institute of Chicago, 1956.58) and *Madame La Duchesse de Mortemart* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1992.87.5) are inauthentic copies after genuine Carmontelle portraits in the Musée Condé. The drawings themselves and the handwritten inscriptions on their paper mounts appear to have been undertaken by the same individual(s) responsible for the Robert Lehman Collection sheets. The larger group of purported Carmontelle pictures to which the four inauthentic portraits discussed here belong is addressed in Bernstein 2020, pp. 312–50.
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The Met's German Keyed Guitar

DANIEL WHEELDON

The keyed guitar at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, made in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, was part of the collection of musical instruments originally established by Mary Elizabeth Adams Brown in 1889. This guitar has long been worthy of greater attention, despite its being neither the most ornate example of nineteenth-century guitar making nor an object that fits into a clear tradition of guitar playing. The ingenuity of its design has been overshadowed by the instrument's peculiarity, current state of deterioration, and plainness, and consequently it has entirely avoided academic coverage. As the only such instrument in a public collection, and one that bears two labels inside—"Matteo Sprenger / fece à Carlsruhe¹ 1843," and "F. Fiala"—the Museum's keyed guitar is essential to identifying and contextualizing the



sparse body of nineteenth-century literature on the topic. This article examines the history of the nineteenth-century keyed guitar using the Metropolitan Museum's instrument as the basis for understanding the provenance of other instruments and establishing them within an historical narrative.

In many respects the instrument is typical for an early Romantic German guitar: it is fretted, with six strings of the usual scale-length, and the *plantilla* (body profile) is in *Wappenform* (fig. 1).² It is exceptional for the removable piano hammer mechanism housed within the guitar body, which can be used to strike the strings through a hole in the soundboard. Only two other keyed guitars from the period have been identified: one was made in 1810 in Mittenwald, Germany, by Mathias Neüner, and is now in the collection of Rainer Krause. The other has no clear provenance, but was likely made toward the middle of the nineteenth century and eventually entered the Museum of Musical Instruments, University of Leipzig, prior to being lost during the Second World War. Despite this scarcity of extant instruments and the confusion about their history in the nineteenth-century literature, there is evidence that various forms of keyed guitars achieved moderate success in the period.

By the time these instruments were made in the nineteenth century, the concept of adding keys to a guitar was not new, having arisen in 1780s London in response to that century's piano-mania. The piano, invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori at the turn of the eighteenth century, had grown steadily in popularity, and by the 1760s the affordability and novelty of the square piano in particular made it a highly successful domestic instrument in London.³ At this time, London was a lively cosmopolitan port city where the precious materials necessary for musical instrument manufacture were readily available, as was a skilled workforce from across Europe. As a result, many London-based makers of pianos and citternlike English "guitars" were first-generation German immigrants.⁴ Most prominent among them was Johannes Zumpe who, in addition to being a guittar maker, is credited with inventing the square piano.⁵

In the eighteenth century the guittar was in vogue throughout the United Kingdom, and was the first instrument of the guitar family to be fitted with piano hammers. The German instrument maker Christian Claus was granted a patent in London in 1783 for a keyed instrument that he advertised as a "pianoforte guittar" (fig. 2a). He spent years fighting to support his claim as the first, and therefore only, lawful maker of

pianoforte guittars, and attempted to sue another manufacturer, the large firm Longman & Broderip, for intellectual property theft. Longman & Broderip, however, had advertised pianoforte guittars for sale before Claus's 1783 patent, which makes Claus's claim to the instrument's invention disputable.⁶ Another system in use at the time, known as Smith's Patent Box, involved the addition of an external piano hammer action to the instrument body (fig. 2b).⁷ Pianoforte guittars were common enough in the eighteenth century that they can be found today in most prominent collections of musical instruments around the world.

Like the guittar without keys, these keyed examples would have been used almost exclusively in the home and were popular among both men and women, despite being advertised chiefly for young women to use as an accompaniment for the voice. Those wanting to appear comfortable in London's fashionable society could use the pianoforte guittar to perform the latest songs from the pleasure gardens and to entertain and sing with their guests. Compared to other domestic instruments such as the square piano, the pianoforte guittar was almost exclusively an amateur instrument; with the tuning set to an open chord of C major, it was relatively easy for a beginner to make a pleasant sound. What is more, its piano-like sound, produced by striking wire strings with a hammer as opposed to plucking them with the fingers, was considered fashionable. Guittar makers also often added a third string to the two highest-pitched courses, increasing the similarity to the piano in tone and structure.⁸

It is important to emphasize the contrast between the simple repertoire and utility of the pianoforte guittar with the marvelous sophistication of its hammer mechanism. The type of piano hammer mechanism used on Longman & Broderip's guittars, for example, was breathtakingly complex, and entirely new in design in relation to contemporary piano actions.⁹ There were two distinct types of internal mechanism for the pianoforte guittar: that used exclusively by Christian Claus, and another predominantly sold by Longman & Broderip that was made in the workshops of Charles Pinto and Culliford & Co (fig. 2c).¹⁰ Although these instruments appear similar from the exterior, their mechanisms are entirely distinct in design, probably as a result of multiple lawsuits that forced their makers to differentiate their work. The pianoforte element of the guittar must be seen in this context, as a fashionable curiosity more impressive for the intricacy of its design than for the music that would have been played on it.

fig. 1 Keyed guitar.

Karlsruhe, Germany, 1843. Made by Matteo Sprenger (German, b. 1815, act. mid-19th century) and Franz Fiala (German, act. early-mid-19th century). Figured maple back and sides, spruce or pine soundboard, ebony fingerboard and bridge, and black-stained pearwood neck, L. 37¼ in. (94.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.3145)

fig. 2 (a) Pianoforte guittar. London, 1780s. Made by Christian Claus (German, act. ca. 1783–93). Maple back and sides, spruce or pine soundboard, and brass frets, L. 28 in. (71 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.1013); (b) Unmarked guittar with Smith's Patent Box. London, 1780s. Maple back and sides, spruce or pine soundboard, and brass frets, L. 26 in. (66 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, 1889 (89.4.1014); (c) Unmarked pianoforte guittar. London, 1780s. Attributed to Culliford & Co. (act. ca. 1784–89). Maple back and sides, spruce or pine soundboard, and brass frets, L. 27½ in. (70 cm). University of Edinburgh (MIMEd 308)



a



b



c

The pianoforte guittar was only in production in London during the 1780s—by 1789, Christian Claus had fled from his creditors to New York, and the firm Longman & Broderip was eventually bankrupted in 1795.¹¹ Claus continued to make instruments, however, notably in partnership with Thomas Dodds, and a square piano at the Metropolitan Museum, marked “Dodds and Claus,” is thought to be the earliest extant piano made in New York, about 1791 (fig. 3).¹² It was also about the turn of the nineteenth century that the Spanish guitar was starting to take precedence over the English guittar in popularity. The amateur status of the guitar continued for a short period while music sellers arranged the same kinds of popular music for it, but musicians such as Fernando Sor, Niccolò Paganini, and Hector Berlioz helped to make it an instrument of virtuosity.

In the nineteenth century, keyed guitars were produced in fewer numbers by makers who were more geographically dispersed than their London-based counterparts of the 1780s. Consequently, there is comparatively little primary source information, and few instruments from the period survive. However, early sources indicate that keyed guitars other than the

examples discussed here might have been made. French piano maker Juan Puyol, who moved from London to Madrid in the 1790s, advertised himself as a maker of both pianoforte guittars and keyed Spanish-style guitars,¹³ while Adolphe Le d'Huy was granted a French patent in 1806 for his organized lyre (*Lyre-Organisée*) (fig. 4). In 1812 a certain Mr. Pertosa, from Naples, gave a poorly reviewed performance in Königsberg (present-day Kaliningrad, Russia) on a keyed guitar he claimed to have invented.¹⁴ Later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors attribute a different kind of keyed guitar to the Bachmann workshop in Berlin.¹⁵ Georg Kinsky, writing in 1912, attributes the now-lost keyed guitar from the University of Leipzig to Carl Ludwig Bachmann (fig. 5), although since this attribution was never explained and the object itself cannot be consulted, this detail remains in question.¹⁶ Unless clear evidence can be found to support Kinsky's attribution, it seems more likely that Bachmann acted solely as a dealer of London-made pianoforte guittars and that the lost Leipzig instrument was by another maker.

Many nineteenth-century texts on the keyed guitar do not clearly distinguish between the pianoforte guittar and keyed guitars in the Spanish form. Authors sometimes relied on secondhand information, and often conflated the two types of instrument. In 1812, Ernst Ludwig Gerber writes of having visited Bachmann in 1793 and been shown the "newly invented guitar with piano keys," but subsequently uses the word "cither" to

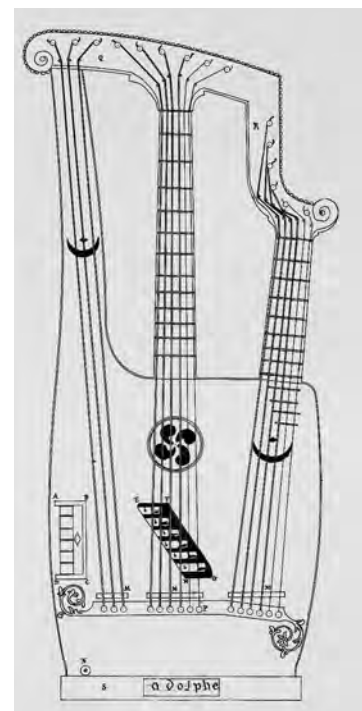
refer to the instrument and gives a description similar to the London-made works of the 1780s.¹⁷ Gustav Adolph Wettengel, in an 1828 account, provides a cumbersome description of a keyed guitar in the Spanish form and even includes diagrams, but the mechanism he discusses is on the right side of the body, and he attributes the invention to "a German artisan in London," likely the patent holder Christian Claus.¹⁸ Nevertheless, these various sources demonstrate that keyed guitars were known in the nineteenth century, if not properly understood.

Considering the significant presence of German makers of guittars, pianofortes, and pianoforte guittars in London, it is not surprising that keyed guitars gained a foothold in Germany in the nineteenth century. The main focus of activity was in the central and southern parts of the country, in Karlsruhe, Leipzig, and Mittenwald. Matteo Sprenger and Franz Fiala, whose labels appear inside the Metropolitan Museum's guitar, were based in Karlsruhe, home of the Baden court. Franz Fiala, one of the instrument's greatest publicists, appears in the Baden state archives, primarily as a court musician, in entries spanning from 1812 to 1843.¹⁹ In 1819, he received a permit from the Grand Duke granting him the sole right to manufacture and sell "Tastengitarren," or keyed guitars, for four years, beginning on January 1, 1820. The ducal permit describes him as the inventor of the keyed guitar, distinguishing him as an important character in the instrument's history despite the fact that the design probably did not

fig. 3 Square piano. New York, ca. 1791. Made by Dodds & Claus. Mahogany, iron, stained hardwood, ivory, bone, and various materials, L. 62½ in. (157.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments, by exchange, 1978 (1978.379)



fig. 4 Drawing after an 1806 patent document by Adolphe Le d'Huy (possibly French, act. early 19th century). Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle, Paris (Patent 1BA373)



originate with him. Mathias Neüner's keyed guitar, discussed below (see fig. 8), was made ten years before Fiala's permit was issued, and its pianoforte element is clearly the same design as that used in the Met's keyed guitar in 1843. As historical sources, patents do not provide proof of the origins of an invention; often the publicity they generated was more important to instrument makers than legal security. It is therefore feasible that in his prestigious role as court musician, Fiala acted as the promoter of instruments that in actuality were designed and made by others.

In 1820, Fiala published an article celebrating his recent endorsement from the Grand Duke and addressing the merits of the keyed guitar for the German nobility.²⁰ Fiala's status as court musician would have given him credibility in this social sphere, and his article, which mentions several members of the German nobility by name, was intended to create a high-end market for the keyed guitar. There are notable differences in

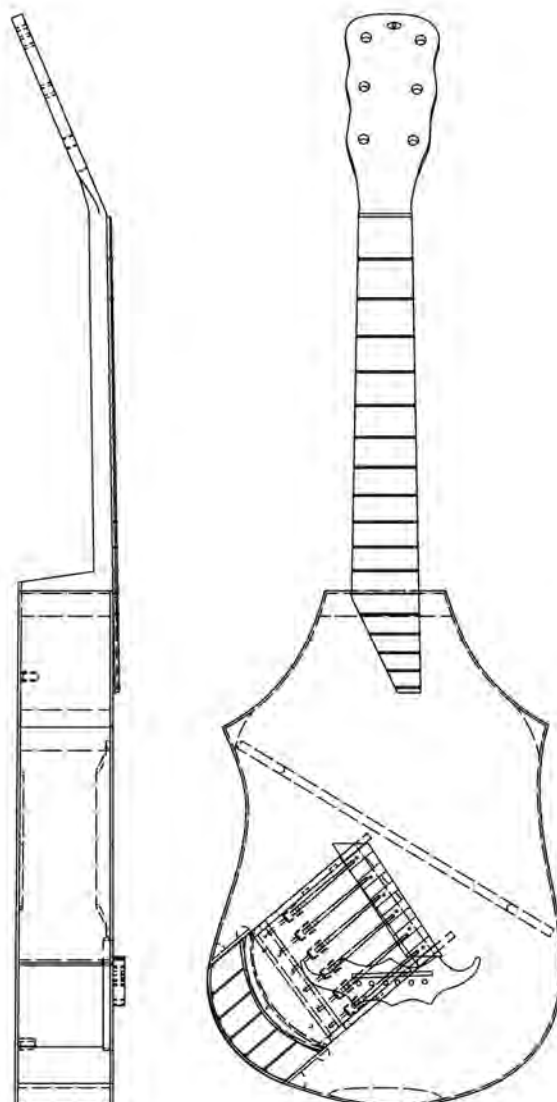
Fiala's approach from that of his London-based predecessors, who marketed the pianoforte guitar for a wider range of society, in particular the middle class and women. Although in describing the player Fiala confines himself to male pronouns, he also mentions his female patrons, implying that he anticipated the instrument's appeal to both genders. Similar to the pianoforte guitar, however, Fiala envisioned the keyed guitar for amateurs, albeit primarily among the nobility. He states that "every guitar player, as long as he is familiar with the piano, can play this instrument without much practice so comfortably that he will be in a position to play arpeggios much faster than normal."²¹ Fiala describes that the left hand uses the ordinary chord positions and compares the use of the keyboard mechanism to strumming. As a highly esteemed musician his demonstration of this instrument would have been more spectacular, but in his article he appeals to his audience's desire for speedy learning and modest ambition.

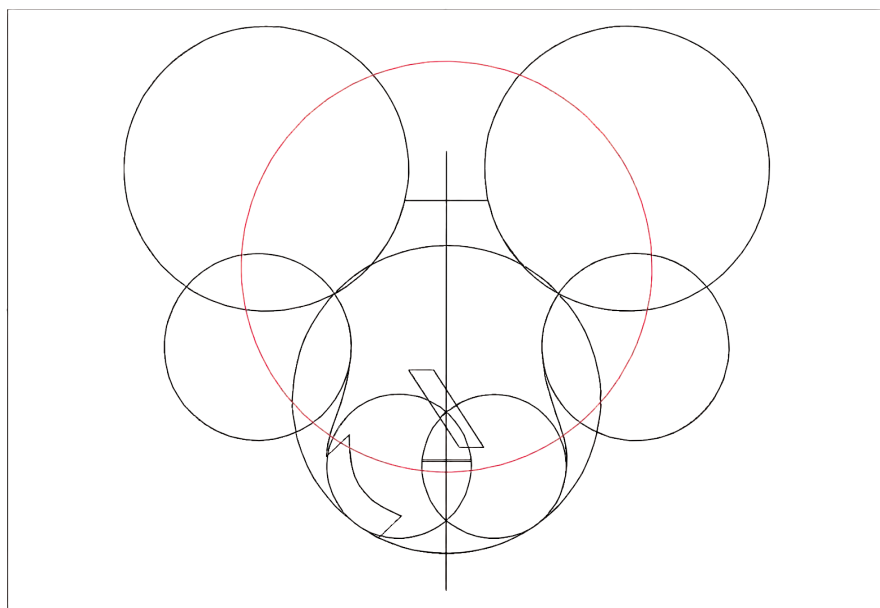


fig. 5 Keyed guitar.

Germany, ca. mid-19th century. Maple body, front decorated with embossed leather rings centered with mother-of-pearl, L. 36 3/4 in. (92 cm). Location unknown; formerly in the Museum of Musical Instruments, University of Leipzig

fig. 6 Side and plan views of the keyed guitar made by Matteo Sprenger and Franz Fiala (fig. 1)





Unusually, given Fiala's promotion of the keyed guitar among the German nobility, the Met's instrument in its current state does not appear to have been created for an affluent clientele. Many of its eccentricities can be explained through examination, which reveals that it was built first as a guitar without keys and only later underwent an invasive and comprehensive conversion into a keyed guitar. The *plantilla* of the instrument is strikingly asymmetrical—the left side of the body has a more pronounced curve as compared to the right (fig. 6). The reinforcement bracing on the back, typical for guitars, has been cut to allow space for the mechanism, and traces of the original bracing footprint can still be seen on the back. The raised and curved fingerboard is also a later addition, and has been glued on top of an earlier flat fingerboard that was level with the soundboard. The soundboard itself is a replacement and currently has a trapezoidal sound hole positioned to allow the piano hammers to strike the strings.

For this conversion the instrument would have been almost entirely disassembled. It is likely that the original body shape was more symmetrical than its current form, as the left-side profile, if mirrored, as shown in the diagram in figure 7, follows the theoretical proportions of design that are typical for workshops suited to the use of dividers.²² This pre-conversion body profile can be reconstructed almost entirely from circles arrayed on the perimeter of a common circle, seen in the diagram in red. The curve of the bottom of the guitar is a perfect arc which, if continued, would intersect precisely with the corners of the upper bout.²³ The mechanism itself is made with precision and suits the

instrument well, although in its current state it is held in place by small brass screws entering through the back of the guitar.

The reasons for, and shortcomings of, the conversion—namely the object's asymmetry and its crudely carved bridge—are difficult to account for, given the credentials of Franz Fiala and also Matteo Sprenger, both of whose labels appear inside the guitar. Finding the labels together indicates that the two were likely in some sort of partnership, but this does not mean that both participated in the conversion. Rather, the work was probably undertaken by Sprenger, a master violin maker who apprenticed in Mittenwald and worked for Mathias Neüner before moving to Karlsruhe.²⁴ He is also known to have been a highly regarded craftsman after he emigrated to New York in 1846 where he won awards for his instruments.²⁵ At the time this particular guitar was converted in 1843, twenty-three years had passed since the Grand Duke of Baden issued Fiala a permit to make and sell keyed guitars; demand had probably diminished and the instrument had become less associated with the high-ranking nobility.²⁶ It is likely, too, that, subsequent to its conversion, the Met's guitar was poorly repaired. Its mechanism might even have been salvaged together with its makers' labels and added to this guitar by an unscrupulous dealer, a surprisingly common practice, and one that might explain the instrument's poor condition and craftsmanship, including the brass screws that hold the hammer mechanism in place. Yet regardless of the quality of workmanship in the Met's guitar, its piano hammer element bears an indisputable connection to an earlier, more ornate keyed guitar by Mathias Neüner, made in Mittenwald in 1810.

Unlike the Met's guitar, from the beginning Neüner's instrument was designed and made to be a keyed guitar, and has survived largely unaltered since its construction (fig. 8). Inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ebony, it is built from high-quality woods traditional to the construction of fine guitars and, other than its keyboard mechanism, it is typical for an early Romantic guitar.²⁷ Whereas the hammer actions of the pianoforte guitar were built according to an entirely new principle in relation to contemporary piano actions, the mechanisms in the keyed guitars by both Neüner and Sprenger have a piano hammer action essentially identical in design to early English grand pianofortes.²⁸ Only two small differences exist between the two guitars' mechanisms: Neüner's has no check (a component that stops the hammer from striking the string multiple times when pushed with force) and features wood hinges to pivot the hammer arms (fig. 9b) instead of the brass

fig. 7 Probable proportions of the original design of the keyed guitar made by Matteo Sprenger and Franz Fiala (fig. 1)



kapseln, typical in Viennese actions, that are found on the Met's guitar (fig. 9a).

This similarity between the two piano hammer mechanisms suggests that Sprenger had hands-on knowledge of Neuner's keyed guitar. Both men were from Mittenwald, an international center for stringed instrument making where Neuner, a skillful violin maker and canny businessman, was active from about 1800. By the time Sprenger is thought to have been active there, Neuner had transformed his business into a large and high-functioning factory that employed

other Mittenwald violin makers. A further link can be traced from the Met's keyed guitar through Sprenger's roots in Mittenwald and the Neuner workshop to the pianoforte guittar as well. Before 1800, Neuner had traveled to, and built connections in, England, which he continued to foster throughout his career. During these visits he would have become familiar with instrument makers and sellers in London, and consequently would have seen pianoforte guittars firsthand during his trips.²⁹ While Neuner's keyed guitar does not share any obvious design elements with the pianoforte

fig. 8 Keyed guitar.
Mittenwald, Germany, 1810.
Made by Mathias Neuner
(German, act. ca. 1800–
1830). Maple back and
sides, spruce soundboard,
mother-of-pearl frets, and
ebony-veneered spruce
neck, L. 37 in. (94 cm).
Collection of Rainer Krause

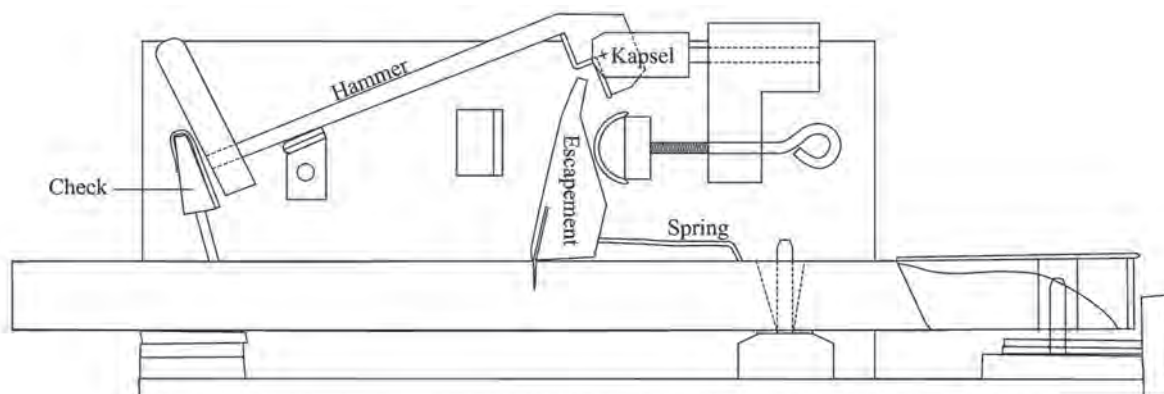
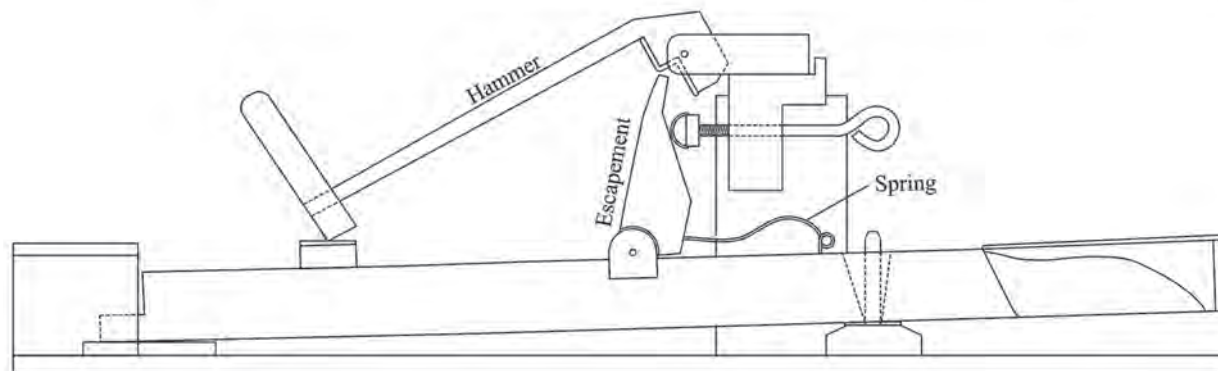


fig. 9 Comparison of piano
hammer mechanisms.
(a) Keyed guitar made by
Matteo Sprenger and Franz
Fiala (fig. 1); (b) Keyed gui-
tar made by Mathias Neuner
(fig. 8)



guitar, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the likely connection between their makers, which informs both our understanding of the Met's keyed guitar and, consequently, the historiographic sources that mention Fiala.³⁰

The third known example of a nineteenth-century keyed guitar, once in the collection of the University of Leipzig and now lost, bears important differences from the two instruments discussed above. First, the keys were located at soundboard level, diagonally opposite the position of the keys on the surviving instruments (fig. 5). Second, the mechanism itself was accessed by a door in the side of the guitar that was either attached to the front of the mechanism or could be removed separately. Kinsky's description of the hammer action itself, however, hints at a connection to the Met's guitar. He refers to the mechanism as an "'English' action, or 'Stössermechanik' [push mechanism]," indicating that the hammers, mounted on a rail, were pushed by the escapement mounted on the key levers, similar to the diagrams in figure 9a, b. Given that the guitars by Neüner and Sprenger share a mechanism design despite their differences in appearance, it is possible that the lost Leipzig instrument is also connected to this lineage.³¹

Kinsky's short description of the English hammer action is currently the best indicator of the instrument's provenance. His attribution, however, is doubtful—he proposed a date of manufacture of about 1805, but probably did so to fit his attribution to Carl Ludwig

Bachmann, who died in 1809. Various features of the instrument, including the raised fingerboard and the bridge pins, suggest that it was made later in the nineteenth century.³² Unless this instrument is recovered it will not be possible to establish its provenance, but the keyed guitar at the Met provides the context to test any evidence that might surface.

The production of keyed guitars in Germany during the nineteenth century was far less substantial than that of the pianoforte guitar in London during the 1780s. Its considerably long period of manufacture, spanning the first half of the century, combined with the instrument's relatively small presence in music history, suggests that its popularity was sporadic at best.³³ Like the pianoforte guitar before it, the keyed guitar was designed to impress by its nature more than by the music that could be played on it. Its novelty value and promotion by Franz Fiala were central to its success in the period but were no foundation for a lasting legacy, accounting for why it is nearly unheard-of today. The keyed guitar at the Metropolitan Museum, with its ties to Franz Fiala, Matteo Sprenger, and Mathias Neüner, gives a tangible connection to the otherwise vague documentary accounts of these instruments and provides vital insight into an obscure part of music history. Other instruments that might emerge can be set against this object and located within the limited source material.

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NOTES

1 Today spelled "Karlsruhe."

2 *Wappenform* (or *wappengitarre*) describes an instrument in the shape of an escutcheon, or coat of arms. This form was popularized in Southern Bavaria and Austria, including Mittenwald.

3 A piano by Bartolomeo Cristofori is also in the Met (MMA 89.4.1219).

4 The spelling *guitar* is retained here to differentiate between the citternlike English guitar and the later Spanish guitar, which became ubiquitous.

5 Pouloupoulos 2011a.

6 Claus in fact could not establish his ownership even in the 1780s; in his 1783 patent (N° 1394) he makes allowances for the pianoforte guitars that existed before the patent. See Wheeldon 2017.

7 This invention comes from the 1784 patent by William Jackson (N° 1449) for his British lyre. It was possibly made by guitar maker and music seller John Preston, and could be fitted to

any existing guitar, hence why this key mechanism is found on instruments by various makers. See Wheeldon 2017, p. 99.

8 With respect to stringed instruments, a course refers to a playable unit of strings (commonly two) either of the same pitch or an octave apart. A typical pianoforte guitar, with three strings in each of the two highest-pitched courses, is a six-course instrument with twelve strings and has the following tuning: c – e – g g – c' c' – e' e' e' – g' g' g'.

9 The pianoforte guitar was sometimes marketed as a "portable piano." In this sense there are parallels with the orphica, which was a small, portable piano with a Viennese hammer action that was invented in 1795 by Carl Leopold Röllig. Orphicas were often fitted with shoulder straps for ease of transportation. Early illustrations show players standing, holding the instrument like a guitar, and using only the right hand to operate the keyboard.

10 Wheeldon 2017, p. 104.

11 For more on Longman & Broderip and Claus, see Nex 2013.

- 12 A pianoforte guittar marked "Dodds & Claus / New York" is located at the Luigi Cherubini Collection, Florence (1988/76), as listed in Pouloupoulos 2011b, p. 467.
- 13 On Puyol, see Kenyon de Pascual 1983, p. 216.
- 14 The review is critical of both the performance and the instrument itself: "The invention of Mr. P., to give his guitar six keys, which when pressed the strings would sound, . . . is by the way not new . . . and is without the slightest benefit." See Forkel 1812, col. 479: "Die Erfindung des Hrn. P., seiner Guitarre 6 Tasten zu geben, durch deren Niederdrücken die Saiten zum Klingen gebracht werden . . . ist übrigens nicht neu . . . und ohne den mindesten Nutzen."
- 15 Fétis 1835, p. 26; Schilling 1835, p. 309; Gassner 1849, p. 89; Kinsky 1912, p. 170. This has puzzled more recent authors, too, including Martin Elste in Droysen-Reber, Elste, and Haase 1987, p. 12; Pouloupoulos 2011b, p. 442; and Wheeldon 2017, p. 98.
- 16 It is highly likely that Kinsky's attribution was informed by the confusion in the nineteenth-century German texts mentioned here. Paul de Wit also catalogued this keyed guitar (de Wit 1903, p. 81) and gave neither a specific date nor an attribution, indicating that the instrument had no obvious maker's mark. Recently, Andreas Michel and Philipp Neumann suggested that the instrument was by Franz Fiala, although this attribution was made without reference to the instrument in the Met. Michel and Neumann 2016, pp. 260–62.
- 17 Gerber admitted that his account of Bachmann might have needed some correction. It is probably from Gerber that Carl Ludwig Bachmann gained the reputation for inventing the German keyed guitar, but this would have been based on a misreading of the original text, which does not identify the inventor: "Another new invention, that he showed me at that time [1793], consisted of various new guitars with piano keys. These keys were located on the right side of the belly of the cither, and by pressing down on them with the right hand, little hammers caused the strings to make a sound." See Gerber 1812, p. 225: "Eine andere neue Erfindung, welche er damals vorzeigte, bestand in verschiedenen neuen Guitarren mit Klaviaturen. Diese Tasten befanden sich an der rechten Seite des Bauchs der Cither, durch deren Niederdruck mit der rechten Hand kleine Hämmerchen die Saiten zum Erklingen brachten."
- 18 Wettengel describes how to make a keyed guitar, along with other guitars and violins. A bow maker by trade, he used observations from others to compile his book on instrument making. His description matches the pianoforte guittar mechanisms by Claus. Either he confused the two schools of making (probable, since he implies Claus was the inventor), or there were in fact keyed guitar makers who copied Claus's mechanism on Spanish-form instruments. Wettengel 1828, pp. 460–66.
- 19 "Hofmusikus Franz Fiala," Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Archive No. 4-798450.
- 20 *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 1820, p. 144. The article describes Franz Fiala in the third person, but the detail and subject matter of the piece strongly suggest he was the author.
- 21 Ibid., p. 144: "jeder Guitarrespieler, zumal wenn er mit dem Klavier bekannt ist, kann solche ohne große Uebung in kurzer Zeit so bequem spielen, das er im Stande ist, die Harpeggios weit schneller als gewöhnlich hervorzubringen."
- 22 In the study of objects from traditional workshops, it is often useful to consider dimensions in terms of proportion rather than individual measurements recorded in a given unit (e.g., inches or millimeters). Dividers have been an essential tool for artisanal crafts since antiquity, when proportionality and scaling were more highly regarded and more immediately practical than the assignment of a unit value to each element of design. In the nineteenth century, dividers were still an important tool for instrument makers who had a strong tradition in theorizing and using the proportions of art.
- 23 *Bout* refers to the curvature of the guitar body, which typically has an upper bout (near the neck) and a lower bout (containing the bridge).
- 24 I am grateful to Anton Sprenger, a descendant of Matteo Sprenger's brother Andreas who continues the family tradition of violin making (and lives and works in the same house in Mittenwald), for providing me with local records for Matteo and informing me of his work in Neüner's factory.
- 25 Groce 1991, p. 147.
- 26 It is not clear how Franz Fiala began his association with keyed guitars, but he certainly did so before he partnered with Sprenger (who was only five years old at the time the ducal permit was issued), and most likely after Neüner's guitar was made in 1810.
- 27 Judging from the head joint, the head seems to be a later adaptation—most likely it originally had wood friction tuning pegs instead of the brass mechanical tuners present today. Furthermore, "Winkler, München 1827" is inscribed in pencil on the base of the piano hammer mechanism. Winkler was a piano maker in Munich, and probably repaired the mechanism at this date. The pianoforte element is so well incorporated into this instrument that it is unlikely to have been Winkler's addition. By 1827 Neüner was focused much more on the business side of his firm, and it was most likely the subsequent owner of the instrument who commissioned the repairs from Winkler.
- 28 It is nearly identical to the grand pianoforte action by Americus Backers (1772), on loan to the Wellington Collection, Apsley House, London.
- 29 Lütgendorff 1904, p. 450.
- 30 This topic will be further explored along with detailed technical information in my forthcoming PhD dissertation, "Reconstructing German Keyed Guitars from the Romantic Period."
- 31 Even with the keys raised to soundboard level the instrument's design could have accommodated this type of hammer action—the orphica, for example, was sometimes made with raised keys that operated the hammer mechanism beneath by means of rods. An example of an orphica with a raised keyboard is in the Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg (MIR1179).
- 32 Helm and Elste 2001, p. 436.
- 33 For example, Wettengel, a bow maker based in Markneukirchen, Saxony, Germany, was unaware of Fiala's permit and promotion of these instruments in 1828, despite the fact that we know from Fiala's 1820 article (see note 20 above) that they were displayed at the Leipziger Messe (Leipzig Fair) in Saxony eight years before. See *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* 1820, p. 144, and Wettengel 1828, pp. 460–66.

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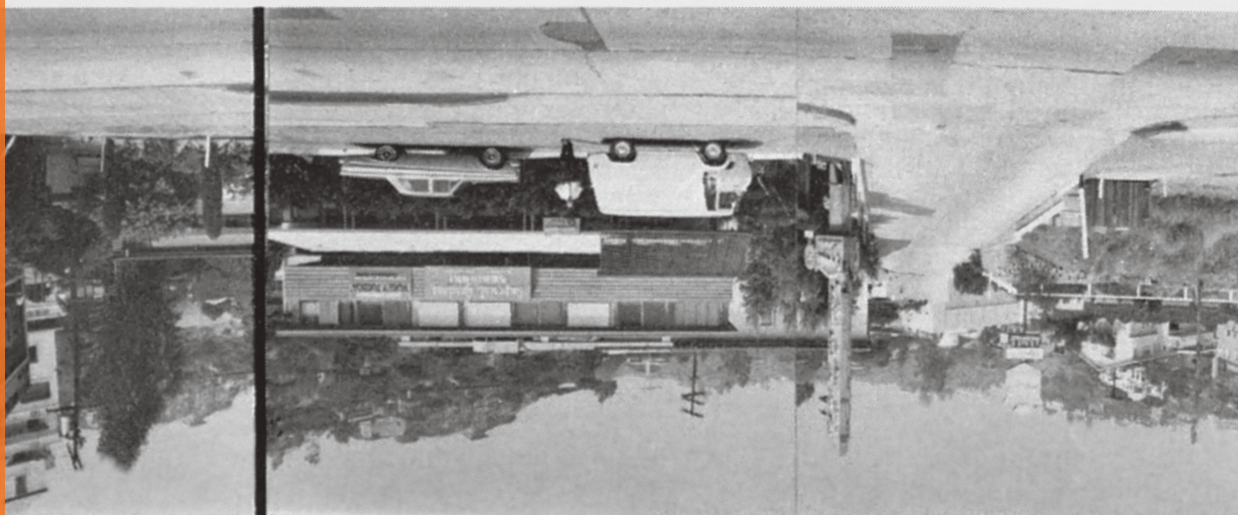
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