Issue No. 2 Autumn 2009

Research Journal

Edited by Angela McShane

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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Contents

Editorial

Angela McShane, Tutor in Graduate Studies, RCA/V&A MA in History of Design, Victoria and Albert Museum

Angela McShane

Welcome to the second edition of the V&A Online journal complete with a new editorial team. The journal continues in its aim to provide a forum for research papers from scholars inside and outside the V&A that will open up new ways of interrogating material culture, current design practice, histories of design and all other museum related fields. The V&A has always been at the

forefront of creating new knowledge and understanding in these fields, and we hope that the V&A Online Journal will provide one more vehicle through which this knowledge can be disseminated and refined through scholarly dialogue.

This year's edition brings together articles on topics as divergent as James II coronation bells, Manchu Shoes and the Computer Art holdings at the V&A. Together, they all demonstrate how new acquisitions and museum projects have served to inspire primary research, new methodological approaches and rethinking about the broader issues in histories of design and museum practice.

Since its foundation, the V&A's remit has been to expand awareness of the histories of design, to educate and inspire new designers and the design industry in general. For the past 25 years, the joint V&A/RCA MA in History of Design has been responsible for training many of the design professionals now working in locations that vary from university departments, collections and research departments in museums, magazine and journal offices and design studios. The course has recently expanded to include a new specialism on 'Asian Design History: 1400 to the present', enabling students to study the incredible riches of the V&A's Asian

collections. We are delighted to be able to highlight in this edition just one example of the new research this has encouraged.

The benefits of an online format mean that we can incorporate feedback on individual pieces and suggestions for further articles and sections in a proactive and open manner. Inclusion is not restricted to V&A staff and, provided that submissions meet the standards set by our Editorial team and peer reviewers, we welcome articles for future issues on the history of art, architecture and design relating to the V&A's collections, public programme or institutional history; features focusing on new acquisitions or objects linked to V&A exhibitions; reflections on the educational or creative industries role of the Museum, and reviews and previews of V&A publications, conferences or displays. Further details on submission are available at www.vam.ac.uk/vandajournal and we can be contacted at vandajournal@vam.ac.uk.

I would very much like to thank all who have contributed to the successful production of this issue, the authors of individual articles and the following staff:

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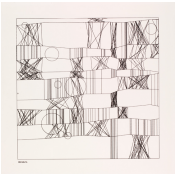
Computer art at the V&A

Honor Beddard, Curator, Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

Abstract

The Victoria and Albert Museum has been collecting computer art since the 1960s. In recent times, it has acquired two significant collections of computer-generated art and design, which form the basis of the UK's national collection. This article considers the collection within the context of the V&A, as well as its wider cultural and ideological context.

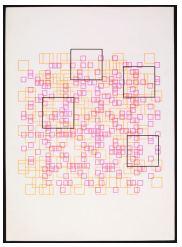
Paul Klee, Highroads and Byroads



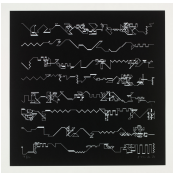
Frieder Nake, *Hommage à Paul Klee, 13/9/65 Nr.2*, 1965. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no. E.951-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

Harold Cohen, *Untitled*, 1969. Computer print-out with coloured pen and ink. Museum no. E.319-2009. Given by Harold Cohen

Copy after A. Michael Noll, Computer Composition with Lines



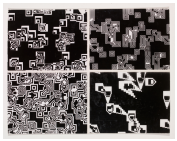
Herbert W. Franke, *Quadrate (Squares)*, 1969/70. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no. E.113-2008. Given by the Computer Arts Society, supported by System Simulation Ltd, London



Manfred Mohr, *P-021*, 1970, Edition 51/80, from the portfolio *Scratch Code: 1970-1975*, published by Editions Média, Manfred Mohr, 1976. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no.E.977:6-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

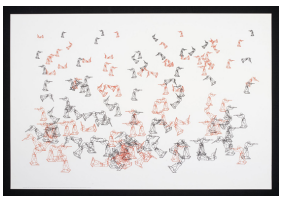
Vera Molnar, *Letters from my Mother*, 1988. Screenprint after a plotter drawing, Artists Proof. Museum no. E.1079-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

Leon Harmon and Ken Knowlton, *Studies in Perception I*, 1997. Screenprint after a computer-generated print. Museum no. E.963-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

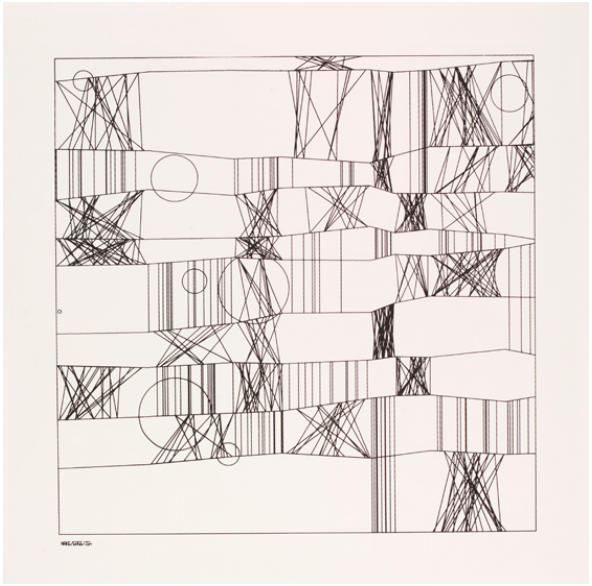


Lillian Schwartz and Ken Knowlton, Photographic stills from the computer animation *Pixillation*, 1970. Museum no. E.184-2008. Given by the Computer Arts Society, supported by System Simulation Ltd, London

Figure, 1968. Lithograph. Museum no. Circ.773-1969. From the Cybernetic Serendipity collectors' set, published by Motif Editions, 1968



Charles Csuri, *Random War*, 1967. Lithograph. Museum no. Circ.773-1969. From the Cybernetic Serendipity collectors' set, published by Motif Editions, 1968



Frieder Nake, *Hommage à Paul Klee, 13/9/65 Nr.2*, 1965. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no. E.951-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

The arrival of the computer into both the creative process and the creative industries is perhaps one of the most culturally significant developments of the last century. Yet until recently, few, if any, UK museums have collected material that comprehensively illustrates and charts this change. The donation of two substantial collections of computer-generated art and design to the Word and Image Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum offers the opportunity to redress this. The donations have considerably strengthened our holdings in this area and the museum

is now home to the national collection of computer-generated art and design. These acquisitions will allow the museum to re-assess the impact of the computer's arrival and to attempt to position these works within an art historical context for the first time.

The importance of such an endeavour has been recognised by the awarding of a substantial Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant to the V&A and Birkbeck College, University of London. Since 2007, research has focused on investigating the origins of computer-generated art from the 1950s, and its development through subsequent decades. As well as full documentation and cataloguing of the collections, the V&A is organising a temporary display entitled *Digital Pioneers*, opening in December 2009, which will draw almost entirely from the newly acquired collections and recent acquisitions. This will coincide with a larger V&A exhibition, *Decode: Digital Design Sensations*, which will include important international loans of contemporary digital art and design, alongside new commissions.[1] *Digital Pioneers* will present a historical counterpart to the contemporary exhibition, encouraging comparisons that, until now, have been drawn far less frequently. A conference covering the subject matter of both exhibitions will take place in early spring 2010 and will create an academic forum in which these comparisons can be examined more fully. We hope it will also allow for an opportunity to further the process of documenting and recording the history of this field.

The intention of this article is to give a broad introduction to the area of computer-generated art and design within the V&A, as well as considering its wider art historical context, both in Britain and abroad. Intended as a starting point for those who find themselves interested in the topic, more

information is available on the V&A website.

The Word and Image Department and the new computer art collections

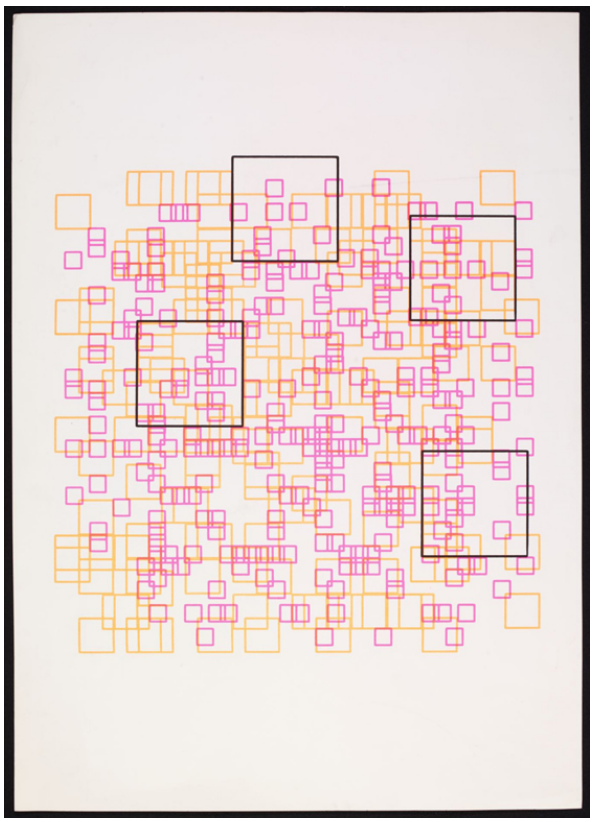
The Word and Image Department of the V&A encompasses prints, drawings, paintings, photographs, designs and the National Art Library. It holds approximately two million objects ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day. The V&A has always relied on the generosity of donations to continue to expand and strengthen its holdings. The new acquisitions from the Computer Arts Society, London, and American art historian and collector, Patric Prince, provide an extraordinarily broad range of computer-generated art and design that complements many other areas of collecting within the department, such as graphic design.[2] The Department was particularly well placed to accept this material, embracing in its collecting policy those works or creative endeavours that fall between fine art and design, such as early computer-generated work, including animation and graphics. The Department also places significant emphasis on process and technique alongside the finished product, actively collecting objects such as printing tools and equipment, for example, as well as documentary material that demonstrates work in progress.

At present, the V&A's computer art collections consist predominately of works on paper, including early plotter drawings by important pioneers such as Manfred Mohr, and examples of early animation stills and negatives. Holdings range from screenprints, lithographs and

photographs of early analogue computer-generated images from the mid 1950s, to digital images from the 1960s onwards. Together, the two founding collections contain around 350 art works. In addition, the V&A has made significant acquisitions since the beginning of the research project, which include works by key computer art pioneers such as Paul Brown, Harold Cohen, James Faure Walker, Desmond Paul Henry, Roman Verostko and Mark Wilson.[3]

The Patric Prince collection was accompanied by a substantial archive of material charting the development of computer-generated art. Prince's husband, Robert Holzman, worked at the NASA Jet Propulsion Lab in America and encouraged artists to use the Lab's powerful equipment out of hours. As a result, she had access to early practitioners as and when they were experimenting with this equipment for the first time. Gaining a reputation as an important curator and collector of computer art, artists corresponded regularly with Prince and the archive includes this correspondence, as well as exhibition cards and literature for computer related exhibitions in the US, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, from the 1980s onwards. Press cuttings from mainstream newspapers provide illuminating evidence about prevailing attitudes to the use of computers in art during this time. A substantial library of books now listed on the National Art Library's catalogue offers a virtually unparalleled reading list for this field, and includes important early and rare texts.[4]

Defining computer art

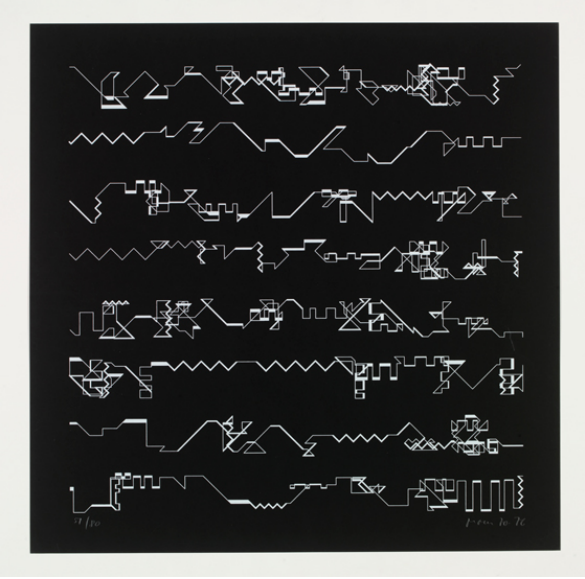


Herbert W. Franke, *Quadrate (Squares)*, 1969/70. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no. E.113-2008. Given by the Computer Arts Society, supported by System Simulation Ltd, London

The arrival of a complex field of art and design into a national museum has intensified a need to further define and record the history of this area. Computer art's development across the fields of mathematics, engineering, computer science and industry, as well as the fine and applied arts, means that its history is a shared one, with the term 'computer art' meaning different things to different people at different times. Within the context of the V&A's collection, computer art can be understood as a historical term that relates to artists using the computer as a tool or a medium from around the 1960s until the early 1980s. At this point, the appearance of off-the-shelf software and the widespread adoption of personal computers meant that more people were able to use the computer as a graphical tool without needing a background in programming. Simultaneously, the nature of computer-generated art changed irretrievably. As the sector widened, more artists began to work with digital technologies in increasingly open and interchangeable ways. The intense focus of early practitioners on basic hardware and the very building blocks of the computer - something which stills drives them

today, even in the face of more sophisticated technology - is particular to that first generation of computer artists.

Early beginnings



Manfred Mohr, *P-021*, 1970, Edition 51/80, from the portfolio *Scratch Code: 1970-1975*, published by Editions Média, Manfred Mohr, 1976. Screenprint after a plotter drawing. Museum no.E.977:6-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

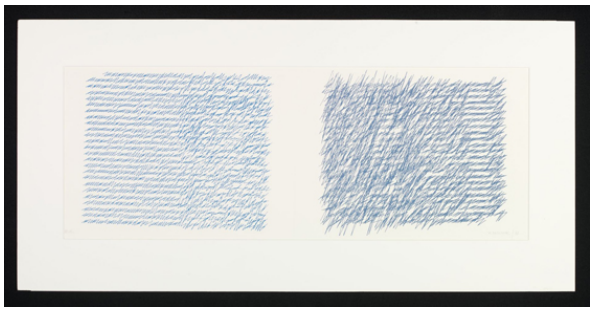
Some of the earliest practitioners were scientists and mathematicians, since mainframe computers could only be found in large industrial or university laboratories. Equally, a scientific or mathematical training offered the expertise necessary toprogramme the cumbersome and complicated early computers that offered no visual interface - something that would have been virtually impossible for the 'lay person'. The involvement of scientists and mathematicians, some of whom went on to adopt the role of 'artist', is one reason why many in the mainstream art world had difficulty in accepting computer-generated art, both at the time and for years to come. Until recently it was extremely rare to find any mention of computer-generated art in accounts of modern and contemporary art history from the 1960s onwards. Yet an analysis of this type of work reveals many similarities with other better known movements of the same era, some of which are touched on below.[5]

Conversely, at the time of its production, computer art was

widely written about and documented - more so, in fact, than other movements from a similar period, such as Conceptual Art.[6] Early computer art shared its origins with scientific visualisation techniques and much of its development continued to be charted through science or mathematics journals, with the imagery produced being regarded as merely a by-product of the more serious scientific pursuits. This situation, and computer art's inextricable relationship with the technology on which it relied, has meant that until recently, most texts on computer art have tended to be structured around a techno-centric narrative. Other technology-focused art forms that emerged alongside computer art, such as kinetic art and video art, have fared better and kept their place in the history books. The constantly changing technology on which computer art relied, and the speed at which it developed, meant that recording it was difficult and accounts were frequently out of date. Computer art did find fame, however, in the more mainstream press of its day. The mechanical drawings of Desmond Paul Henry, of which the V&A hold three early examples, were created using an

analogue bombsight computer adapted by the artist into a drawing machine. They were reported in *The Guardian*, the BBC's *North at Six* series, and, had it not been for the assassination of John F. Kennedy, *Time Magazine*. *The Guardian* article of 1962 described Henry's images as, 'quite out of this world' and, 'almost impossible to produce by human hands'.[7] The sensationalist tone sets it apart from more scholarly art criticism and suggests the novelty of this new type of art, as well as a sense of the utopianism surrounding the new technology that was still felt by many at this time.[8]

Influences and interests

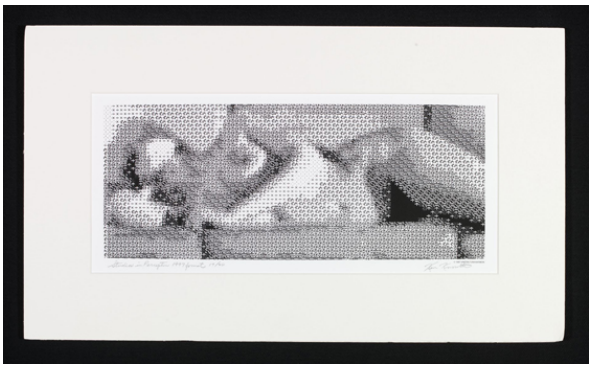


Vera Molnar, *Letters from my Mother*, 1988. Screenprint after a plotter drawing, Artists Proof. Museum no. E.1079-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

The influences on early computer artists are varied, but the increasing interest in and application of cybernetic theories, which followed heavy military investment in computing during World War II, encouraged a new way of thinking and working that permeated the arts as well as other elements of culture and society. C. P. Snow's influential Cambridge Rede lecture of 1959, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*,[9] in which he argued for the uniting of the humanities and the natural sciences, did much to

foster a supportive atmosphere for such work.[10] The application of cybernetic theories in the field of aesthetics was developed by a number of theorists working at this time, amongst them Max Bense. Bense's influence has been acknowledged by several early pioneers in the field of computer art and design, most particularly, within the context of the V&A's collection, the Germany-based practitioners Frieder Nake and Georg Nees.[11]

Max Bense and information aesthetics



Leon Harmon and Ken Knowlton, *Studies in Perception I*, 1997. Screenprint after a computer-generated print. Museum no. E.963-2008. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Patric Prince

Between the years 1954 and 1965, Bense developed his theories of information aesthetics, through which he attempted to establish a scientific model for creating, or understanding, successful aesthetics. Bense argued for an objective, rational approach that included 'breaking down' images into their mathematical values and using theories examining the relationship between order and chaos in the composition. Bense was a key figure of the Stuttgart school, an intellectual movement that

incorporated theories of information aesthetics into its thinking. He was also professor of the philosophy of technology, scientific theory, and mathematical logic at the Technical University of Stuttgart, from 1949 to 1976. Computer art pioneer Frieder Nake was studying mathematics at the Technical University during this time and has acknowledged the influence of Bense's lectures. From 1961 to 1964, Nake worked as an assistant in the University's computer centre. Whilst there, he wrote software that enabled him to use the centre's ZUSE Z64 'Graphomat' - an early computer-driven drawing machine - as an output device for the centre's computer (an SEL ER65).

Dating from 1965, Nake's *Hommage à Paul Klee, 13/9/65 Nr.2*, of which the V&A holds a screenprint after the original plotter drawing, is an excellent example of Nake's early exploration of Bense's theories (fig. 1). The plotter drawing is a literal analysis of an oil painting by Paul Klee, entitled *Highroads and Byroads*, from 1929 (fig. 2). Klee's painting consists predominantly of a series of horizontal and vertical lines which Nake used as the basis for writing a computerprogramme, or algorithm. Creating set parameters for the drawing, such as the square frame, Nake deliberately wrote random variables into the programme to explore different visual effects, based on Klee's 'repertoire' of imagery. Nake allowed the computer to make choices from a limited bank of options based on the outcome of the previous decision, thus introducing an element of

chance, albeit a controlled one. Theprogramme itself was written in machine code and input directly into the computer, which would have had no interface or operating system at this time. The process of creating the drawing involved a series of formulae developed away from the computer. Nake has written that, 'I was thinking the drawing. But thinking the drawing never meant to think one particular drawing. It meant a class of drawings, an infinite set, described by many parameters that would usually be selected at runtime by series of random numbers'.[12] There was no screen or monitor available on which to preview the drawing, and the final result would only have been apparent when the machine had finished. The final image we see here was just one of many possible variations from a wider series, the most successful of which was determined by the artist.

This literal analysis of aesthetic objects was very much a part of Bense's theories, and can also be found in the work of other early practitioners of computer art. A. Michael Noll used the computer to simulate Piet Mondrian's *Composition in Line*, 1916–1917 Like Klee's *Highroads and Byroads*, Mondrian's painting is an exploration of the relationship between vertical and horizontal lines. Noll analysed the painting and deduced three main determining factors regarding the outline of the design and the length and width of the painted lines, or bars, particularly with relation to

their position within the overall composition. Each line provided Noll with two points (the beginning and end of the line) that could be plotted on x and y axes as numerical values.
Like Nake, Noll introduced random variables into the computer programme he wrote to emulate the painting, so that the placement of each line and its size and orientation were randomly determined within a set number of options. Noll produced his version in 1964, using a microfilm plotter that controlled a 35mm camera. He called it *Computer Composition with Lines*, and a photographic reproduction now sits in the V&A's collection (fig. 3). Noll displayed his version alongside images of the original in order to conduct a series of experiments using questionnaires, the results of which he hoped would,'determine what aesthetic factors are involved in abstract art'.[13]

Noll's attempt to underpin the creative process with a logical procedure is typical of the work of early computer art practitioners. His search for objective rationality was the very antithesis of much of the subjective, gestural, expressionist art that had preceded it, and which art movements, such as Neue Sachlichkeit that had arisen in Germany in the 1920s, had also done much to oppose. Reading Noll's description of his experiment in an article written in 1966, it is not difficult to see why many in the mainstream art world resented this new art. Noll wrote that, 'the

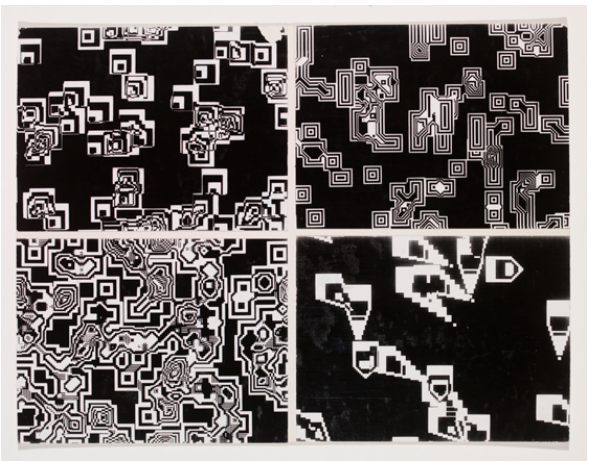
experiment compared the results of an intellectual, non-emotional endeavour involving a computer with the pattern produced by a painter whose work has been characterised as expressing the emotions and mysticism of its author. The results of this experiment would seem to raise doubts about the importance of the artist's milieu and emotional behaviour in communicating through the art object'.[14]

Noll's choice of Mondrian painting was, unsurprisingly, one that lent itself well to his particular argument, rather than perhaps being truly representative of Mondrian's larger body of work. The use of a decorative scheme by a fine artist at this time can be seen as part of a wider move away from subjective, emotional content, but its adoption by Noll reminds us that any useful consideration of computer art should also include the wider context of the applied arts and crafts, rather than the fine arts alone. Computer art's emphasis on form and pattern as opposed to content, the notion of art as applied to a practical end (or at least the possibility of), the application of a mechanical skill, and the importance of materials and tools make an interesting case for considering the computer artist as artisan. Rather than continuous recourse to inspiration, once a computer artist had decided upon their decorative scheme and written their algorithm, the objects could be 'run out' mechanically with little involvement of the artist, short of adjusting malfunctioning equipment. The workshop type origination and collaborative nature of much computer-generated art also suggests similarities with craft based arts. Whilst it would be simplistic to imply that the expression of an idea was not important for computer artists, although it was rarely, if ever, of a

subjective nature, certainly the sheer creation and crafting of an object - something which was not a natural outcome for the computer - seems to have been at the forefront of many practitioners intentions, at least in the early years.

Noll's experiments were arguably as much about showcasing the capabilities of this new technology, but there is a clear affinity with the earlier work of the Bauhaus, as reflected in the careful crafting of design, and the belief in a refined beauty as a natural outcome of precise engineering. Max Bense had taught at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (School of Design) in Ulm, Germany, alongside Max Bill, and it was there that he had developed some of his early theories. Equally, Gyorgy Kepes moved from the New Bauhaus in Chicago to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, an institution that, alongside others such as Harvard, had begun adopting Snow's theories regarding the humanities-sciences divide into its education policies. Josef Albers, whose rigorous colour studies and interest in perception proved to be highly influential on early computer art and systems art, moved in 1933 from the Bauhaus to teach at Black Mountain College, where he joined Merce Cunningham and John Cage, both of whom also exerted a strong influence on the emerging scene.

Computer art's modernist tendencies

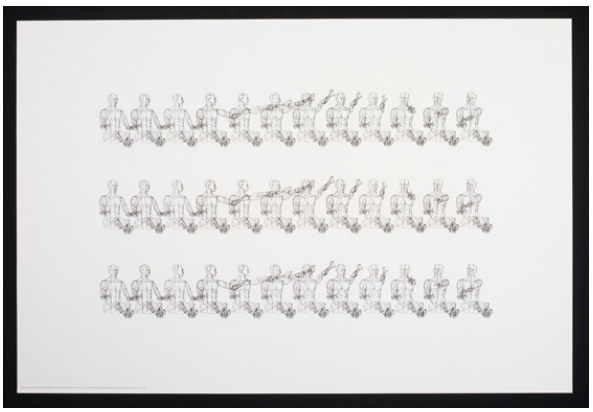


Lillian Schwartz and Ken Knowlton, Photographic stills from the computer animation *Pixillation*, 1970. Museum no. E.184-2008. Given by the Computer Arts Society, supported by System Simulation Ltd, London

In appearance, early computer art tended to be linear, geometric and abstract, and although, in part, this was a direct result of the limited output devices of the period, it is also possible to see it as part of the Modernist culture out of which it arose. Shared concerns with formalism, lack of ornamentation, rationality and aesthetic autonomy demonstrate that computer art was very much an art of its time. It is perhaps ambitious to draw parallels with Modernism's belief in the power of the machine and the potential of mass production, but computer art certainly presented a similar interdisciplinary approach that took little notice of traditional boundaries and hierarchies. Instead, it seemed to offer a more democratic approach to art making (at least in later years), that appealed to many budding computer artists. Herbert W. Franke's *Quadrate (Squares)*, dating from 1969/70, is a good example of computer art's reductionist approach to visual content (fig. 4). Early works frequently consisted of lines or geometric shapes that were positioned, repeated, rotated and rescaled by the computer, in a manner that echoed the Constructivist principles of several decades earlier.

Early practitioners of computer art tended to avoid content in order to focus on the effects of their visual experiments. The collaborative relationship between the artist and the computer, or the artist and computer programmer, and the shared environment of the laboratory as opposed to the solitary artist's studio, rejected Romantic notions of the 'artist-genius'. Equally, in its generative nature, the new computer art threatened the idea of the unique, singular masterpiece, a move in line with Conceptual art's de-emphasis on the importance of the art object and increased emphasis on process.

Artists as programmers



Figure, 1968. Lithograph. Museum no. Circ.773-1969. From the Cybernetic Serendipity collectors' set, published by Motif Editions, 1968

Many of the practitioners who began working with the computer in the late 1960s and 70s were, by this time, artists with traditional fine art training. What unites many of them is that they were already working in a systematic manner that anticipated the arrival of the new technology. Rules-based creative processes or practice and the setting of constraints or parameters were not new concepts in the arts, even if some of the previous examples had focused more on a personal logic than on the scientific approach of computer artists. By

the 1960s and 1970s, many artists were applying a computational methodology to their work whether or not they worked with computers directly, for example Bridget Riley and other exponents of Op-Art.

Manfred Mohr, a German artist who began his artistic career as an action painter and jazz musician, moved to Paris in 1963 and a year later began restricting his palette to black and white. Influenced by the hard-edged painting that he found in geometric abstraction and Op-Art, and which presented an alternative to abstract expressionism, Mohr began experimenting with geometric imagery. He was drawn to the computer because of its ability to process large quantities of information very quickly, but also because of the notion of a repertoire that was at the core of its construction. In a method not unlike that of jazz improvisation, Mohr took the signs and symbols from his earlier paintings and used them as the basis of a graphical vocabulary for his computer-generated drawings. Using programmes that he wrote himself, Mohr produced works that explored the relationships of these signs and symbols, mostly linear constructions, to one another, in a style that demonstrated a strong link to Constructivist exploration of spatial relations. The title for Mohr's screenprint, *P-021*, taken from a portfolio of screenprints, *Scratch Code: 1970-1975*, refers to the programme used to create this work, which was capable of generating a large number of related, yet unique, drawings (fig. 5).

Vera Molnar was living in Paris around the same time as Mohr and was also working in a systematic fashion, using repeating geometric forms and employing small step-by-step changes to explore their visual effects. In 1968, she began working with the computer, also realising its potential for faster information processing and a more

objective approach. *Letters from my Mother*, a series of works from which the V&A holds a 1988 screenprint after two plotter drawings, attempts to simulate her mother's handwriting and to chart its degeneration as her mother aged and her health declined (fig. 6). The computer programme used by Molnar created a method for accurately simulating the glyphs whilst not formally depicting actual letters or words. The imagery echoes Bense's theories on the relationship of order to chaos, but with distinctly human overtones. The work is also a compositional study in which Molnar sets the increasingly chaotic nature of the 'writing' against classic compositional strategies such as symmetry and counter composition. This piece illustrates well the relationship between artistic intuition and a more objective control, which Molnar felt made an equal contribution to the process of creating art using the computer.

Computer art in America

Charles Csuri, *Random War*, 1967. Lithograph. Museum no. Circ.773-1969. From the Cybernetic Serendipity collectors' set, published by Motif Editions, 1968

A. Michael Noll had exhibited his computer art in New York in 1965, the same year as Nake and Nees were, independently of one other, also exhibiting their own work in Germany. It is believed that Noll was not aware of the European developments. In fact, communication between computer artists in North America and Europe was not strong in the early years and the two scenes appear to have developed relatively independently of one another. America was particularly strong in the field of computing technology, following heavy military investment during WWII. Bell Labs (originally Bell Telephone Laboratories) was founded in 1925 and was home to many of the key American computer art pioneers. These included A. Michael Noll, whose first computer art experiments were carried out under its roof, as well as others such as Ken Knowlton, Leon Harmon and Edward Zajac, all of whom were particularly instrumental in developing early programming languages and computer animation. The Patric Prince and Computer Arts Society collections both hold excellent examples of many of these early developments.

Leon Harmon and Ken Knowlton were responsible for developing automatic methods for producing digital images. Whilst at the labs, they created a twelve foot long digital print of a female nude by scanning a photograph and converting the grey scale values into

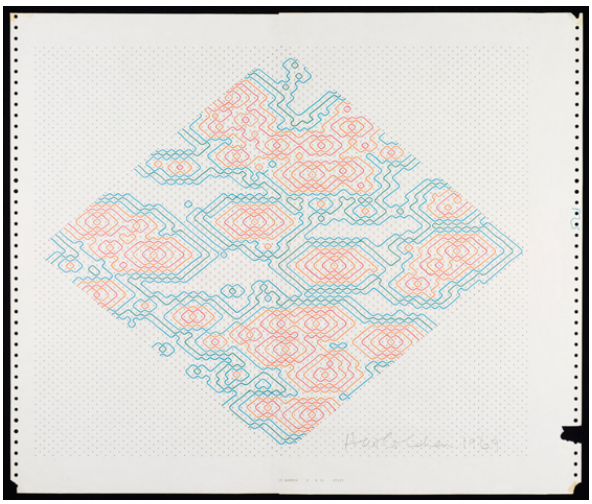
computer symbols.[15] The image, entitled *Studies in Perception I* (1967), was so large that its subject matter was only apparent at a distance. What began life as a work prank to be hung in the office of a senior colleague found fame when it featured in the background of a press conference held in the loft of Robert Rauschenberg. As a direct result, the piece was reproduced in *The New York Times*. The legacy of the work led to the creation of a much smaller, limited edition print produced in 1997 and collected by Patric Prince (fig. 7). A rare example of the commercial potential of early computer art, its late reproduction is also indicative of the renewed interest in this field in more recent times.

Knowlton was also responsible for developing some of the earliest computer animation languages, such as BEFLIX (from Bell Flicks) created in 1963. He collaborated with artists such as Stan Vanderbeek and Lillian Schwartz, for whom he adapted his programming languages. The Computer Arts Society collection holds a number of examples of Knowlton's collaborations with Schwartz, including stills which were taken from their computer animation, *Pixillation*, produced in 1970 (fig. 8).

Bell Labs was also home to Billy Klüver who collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg to form EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology) following a series of performances that took place in New York in 1966. The events were entitled 9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering, and engineers from Bell Labs collaborated with 10 artists to help

them realise the technical aspects of their performances. Klüver encouraged artists and musicians to use the facilities at Bell Labs out of hours. EAT did much to increase interest in the relationship between art and technology in the mainstream art world. In 1966 Maurice Tuchman introduced the Art and Technology programme into the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which saw him emulate the collaborative approach of EAT by placing artists in US corporations to realise artistic projects. For example, Richard Serra worked with Kaiser Steel, R. B Kitaj joined the American aerospace company, Lockheed, and Claes Oldenburg went to Disney. Exhibitions such as *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, at MOMA, New York, followed shortly afterwards, in 1968.

‘Cybernetic Serendipity’ and the role of the British art education system



Harold Cohen, *Untitled*, 1969. Computer print-out with coloured pen and ink. Museum no. E.319-2009. Given by Harold Cohen

In Britain, 1968 had already seen the opening of *Cybernetic Serendipity* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and, just months later, the founding of the Computer Arts Society. *Cybernetic Serendipity* was a showcase for the use of technology in the arts - the first of its kind in Britain - and incorporated both computer-aided and computer-inspired art. The exhibition covered many different art forms, including music, film, kinetic art, robotics, dance, poetry and sculpture. It featured the work of both artists and scientists, as well as displays by corporations such as IBM. There were 325 contributors in total. Interest in the show was high, with visitor numbers between 45,000 and 60,000.[16] The exhibition also had a profound impact on many artists who went on to use computers or technology in their work.

The success of *Cybernetic Serendipity* implies that there was still some sense of the previously felt utopianism and optimism surrounding computers and technology. This, it seems, was to be

short lived and the emerging dystopian vision of computing technology that followed soon after contributed much to computer art's retreat and relative obscurity in the following decades. Gustav Metzger, who went on to edit the Computer Arts Society's journal *PAGE*, criticised the exhibition, writing that there was, 'no hint that computers dominate modern war; that they are becoming the most totalitarian tools ever used on society'.[17] A collector's set of prints published by Motif Editions as part of the exhibition, and acquired by the V&A in 1969, seems to offer examples of both viewpoints.

William Fetter's *Human Figure* (1968), depicts a line drawing of a male figure repeated twelve times, in which, step by step, he extends his left arm out to the side and back across himself (fig. 9). The computer drawing was an ergonomic study conducted for Boeing, where Fetter worked as Art Director, to test the movement of an aeroplane pilot in a cockpit. The original version of this image was produced in the early 1960s and is said to be the first drawing of a human made using a computer. It contributed directly towards designs for the Boeing 747. Although the figure is known as the

‘Boeing Man’, Fetter apparently referred to him as the ‘First Man’, an indication perhaps of the scientific potential of the new computer graphics.[18]

In contrast to this, Charles Csuri’s *Random War* examines the use of systems as an organisational metaphor for society (fig. 10). Csuri used a random number generator to distribute and position images of toy soldiers. The print is derived from a much larger work in which the computer programme designated each soldier a status of killed, wounded, missing, awarded a medal or survived. Each soldier was named, and they included, amongst others, Charles Csuri himself, but also Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford. Csuri had witnessed the effects of war first hand, serving with the US army in Europe during World War II. The work is undoubtedly a comment on the Vietnam War and was made in 1967–68, when anti-Vietnam War sentiment was at its height.

Cybernetic Serendipity revealed the extent of the impact that cybernetic thinking had had across a broad range of disciplines, and the exhibition did much to cement these ideas into the British Arts scene. Art historian Catherine Mason has argued that it encouraged the adoption of creative computing into the art curriculum, particularly in Britain’s polytechnics, where computing equipment was more common because of their emphasis on vocational training.[19] For example, in 1971, Lanchester Polytechnic (now part of Coventry University), was one of the earliest institutions formally to introduce computer drawing into its graphic design course. Middlesex University was another key institution, becoming in 1984 the UK’s National Centre for Computer Aided Art and Design. In the early 1970s, the Slade School of Art, University of London, founded what came to be known as the Experimental and Computing Department, which actively encouraged the use of computers in art.

The Slade's adoption of technology at a time when this was rare amongst other, more traditional, art schools can be explained via the influence of a number of key students and staff, not least several members of the Independent Group, such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. They had been quick to adopt ideas around cybernetics and demonstrated an early fascination with technology as subject matter. William Coldstream was Slade Professor from 1950 to 1975, and his active support of the establishment of the Experimental and Computing Department has been attibuted, in part, to his having worked at the General Post Office Film Unit in the mid-1930s, which was an important European centre for the production of experimental film. Teaching staff also included Harold Cohen, who was a successful painter before he turned to the computer in the late 1960s. Although Cohen began teaching in 1962, several years before he started working with the computer, his early artworks demonstrate an interest in systems and information, as applied through logical processes. In a computer print-out with hand drawn coloured

pen and ink, dating from 1969, now in the V&A's collection, Cohen used a coloured pen to identify and group computer printed numbers to form a type of contour map (fig. 11). It antipates Cohen's later work in developing a computer programme, AARON, that aims to draw independently and which is yet another example of early computer artists' attempts to rationalise, and here codify, the creative process. The instigator of the new Slade department was Malcolm Hughes, who had been a co-founder of the Systems Group in 1969 and whose work reflected Constructivist concerns with structural relationships, rhythm and order. Alumni of the department include, amongst others, Paul Brown, a British artist whose work is held in the V&A's collection, and who, like many of his peers, demonstrated an early interest in cellular automata and artificial life.

In the UK, increased access to computers and their integration into art education did much to advance the field of computer art. Towards the end of the 1970s, however, government investment in educational institutions was reduced. This coincided with a recognition in the worlds of advertising and television that the polytechnics held the skills needed to take on the demand for commercial work in this area.[20] It was the beginning of computer graphics as a commercial enterprise

that was to expand rapidly in the 1980s and which signalled the end of an era for computer art. The impact that the work of the last two decades would have on generations of artists and designers to come could not have been truly predicted at the time. The collection of computer art at the V&A and the allocation of AHRC funding allows for a long overdue reappraisal of this field of art and design and an opportunity finally to place it on the art historical map.

Acknowledgements

This article has been produced as part of the AHRC funded research project, *Computer Art and Technocultures*, at the V&A and Birkbeck College, University of London. I am particularly grateful to Douglas Dodds, Senior Curator, Word and Image Department, V&A, and Nick Lambert, Researcher in Digital Media Arts, Birkbeck College, University of London, for their assistance.

Endnotes

This journal article was updated in October 2016.

1. *Decode: Digital Design Sensations* is co-curated with digital arts organisation onedotzero. More information on the exhibition can be found here (accessed 19 October 2009).

2. The Computer Arts Society was founded in 1969 to promote the creative use of computers in the arts. More information can be found here (site accessed 19 October 2009).

3. Patric Prince is an American art historian and collector of computer art. She taught at the Pratt Institute in

Brooklyn, New York, California State University, Los Angeles, and West Coast University, Los Angeles. In addition, she curated many significant exhibitions of new media art since the early 1980s, including several for SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group for Computer Graphics), and was co-director and founder of CyberSpace Gallery in West Hollywood.

4. Further information on these artists can be found in the following publications and online resources: Harold Cohen: Exhibition catalogue, Michael Compton, ed. (London, 1983); James Faure Walker: *Painting the Digital River: How an Artist Learned to Love the Computer* (New Jersey and London, 2006); Desmond Paul Henry; Roman Verostko; Mark Wilson

5. See http://catalogue.nal.vam.ac.uk (site accessed 20 October 2009). The entire collection of bibliographic material can be found by searching under 'Patric Prince Archive'.

6. It is interesting to note that a selection of computer-generated art featured in the Venice Biennale in 1970. These included works by Herbert W. Franke, Frieder Nake, Georg Nees and the Computer Technique Group (CTG), all of whom are represented in the V&A's collections. Although this offers some indication of the extent to which computer art had begun to enter the more mainstream art world, art historian Francesca Franco has argued that the exhibition can be considered to be something of an 'anomaly' and its presence partly explained by an increased pressure on the Biennale 'for the democratisation of art' that led to a more experimental approach to its curation. Franco, Francesca. *The First Computer Art Show at the 1970 Venice Biennale. An Experiment or Product of the Bourgeois Culture?* Unpublished conference paper presented at Re:live, Third International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology, Melbourne, 26–29 November 2009. (Forthcoming publication in Leonardo).

7. Taylor, Grant. *The Machine that Made Science Art: The troubled history of computer art 1963–1989*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2004: 4. Available online http://theses.library.uwa.edu.au/adt-WU2005.0114 (site accessed 20 October 2009).

8. 'Computer Does Drawings: Thousands of lines in each'. *The Guardian*, 17 September, 1962. Article reproduced in O'Hanrahan, Elaine. *Drawing Machines: The machine-produced drawings of Dr D. P. Henry in relation to Conceptual and Technological developments in machine-generated art, UK, 1960–1968*: appendix 13 -

copies of newspaper reviews relating to Henry's artwork. Unpublished, 2005: 217.

9. Although the social consequences of technology would have been highlighted through the use of computers in the Cold War and again in the Vietnam War, theorist Charlie Gere has suggested that artists and musicians from this period, such as John Cage, 'offered a framework in which the technologies of Cold War paranoia could be translated into tools for realizing utopian ideals of interconnectivity and self-realization. (Gere, Charlie. *Digital Culture*. 2nd. ed., London, 2008: 116). Gere suggests that from the late 1960s until the mid 1970s, the use of computers by artists was part of a larger realisation that technology offered a push towards a 'post-industrial society' that would bring with it "new forms of social organization'. (Gere, Charlie. *Digital Culture*. 2nd. ed., London, 2008: 116). This meant less focus on the service sectors and greater emphasis on information and knowledge exchange - something which was felt to be a positive, natural development. (Gere, Charlie. *Digital Culture*. 2nd. ed., London, 2008: 116). Technology was recognised as a positive force in the work of theorist Marshall McLuhan and the architect Buckminster Fuller both working at this time. Gere goes on to note that similar views were also to be found within the avant garde. (Gere, Charlie. *Digital Culture*. 2nd. ed., London, 2008: 118).

10. Snow, C. P. *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution, The Rede Lecture 1959*. London and New York, 1959.

11. Guy Ortolano examines what he describes as 'the runaway success of the two cultures', as well as the resulting conflict that arose between Snow and F. R. Leavis, in his article Leavis, F. R. 'Science, and the Abiding Crisis of Modern Civilisation'. *History of Science* vol.43, 2005: 161–185. He notes that the success of the lecture was in part explained by 'enabl[ing] commentators to pursue an extraordinary range of concerns' from 'the importance of education to Britain's future, and the industrialization of the developing world' through to such substantial issues as the space race. Leavis, F. R. 'Science, and the Abiding Crisis of Modern Civilisation'. *History of Science* vol.43, 2005: 164–5.

12. The relationship between aesthetic theory and artistic practice with relation to the Stuttgart School and Max Bense has been covered extensively by Christoph Klütsch in his PhD thesis, *Computergrafik - Aesthetische Experimente zwischen*

zwei Kulturen (Computer Graphics - Aesthetic Experiments between Two Cultures). University of Bremen, 2006.

13. Nake, Frieder. 'Without a Screen: A remark on technical conditions of digital art in 1965'. A statement sent in an email to the author, 6 July 2009.

14. Noll, A. Michael. 'Human or Machine: A subjective comparison of Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Lines*(1917) and a computer-generated picture'. *The Psychological Record* 16 (1966): 1–10. Available online: http://noll.uscannenberg.org/Art Papers/Mondrian.pdf (site accessed 20 October 2009).

15. Noll, A. Michael. 'Human or Machine: A subjective comparison of Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Lines*(1917) and a computer-generated picture'. *The Psychological Record* 16 (1966): 9–10. Available online: http://noll.uscannenberg.org/Art Papers/Mondrian.pdf (site accessed 20 October 2009).

16. The subject of the photograph was Deborah Hay, an important experimental choreographer of the time whose influences include both John Cage and Merce Cunningham.

17. Mason, Catherine. *A Computer in the Art Room: the origins of British computer arts, 1950–1980*. Norfolk, 2008: 101. Mason draws comparison with the exhibition of Matisse paintings that opened at the Hayward Gallery in July of the same year which attracted 114,214 visitors.

18. Metzger, Gustav. 'Automata in History'. *Studio International*. New York, 1969: 107–9.

19. Carlson, Wayne. *A Critical History of Computer Graphics and Animation, Section 2: The emergence of computer graphics technology*. http://design.osu.edu/carlson/history/lessons.html (site accessed 20 October 2009).

20. Mason, Catherine. *A Computer in the Art Room: the origins of British computer arts, 1950–1980*. Norfolk, 2008.

21. Mason, Catherine. *A Computer in the Art Room: the origins of British computer arts, 1950–1980*. Norfolk, 2008. 169.

News from the past: Oral history at the V&A

Linda Sandino, Camberwell College of Arts/V&A Research Fellow, Victoria and Albert Museum

Abstract

Barbara Morris in her home, Photograph, February, 2009. Photograph by Linda Sandino

Drawing on a recording undertaken as part of the V&A Oral History project with former Deputy Keeper Barbara Morris, this paper explores oral history as a research methodology that contributes to the meaning and understanding of the V&A through the personal stories of its curators.[1] The paper draws on Morris' account of the discovery, in 1954, of the thefts of Museum Assistant John Nevin. Rather than seeing oral history as a simply a window on the past,[2] the paper suggests how narratives function on several levels: as content, as biography and as thematically-oriented testimony.

Introduction

At the beginning of January 2009, a number of previously embargoed records of the Metropolitan Police were released under the Freedom of Information Act by the National Archives. Among the papers were those relating to the 'Multiple thefts of properties from the Victoria & Albert Museum by an employee, John Andrew Nevin, between 1930 and 1954'.[3] Both *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph* picked up the release of the papers to report on this astounding theft that had also figured prominently in newspapers of July 1954. Having stolen over two thousand objects

over a period of twenty years, the news media focused on the magnitude of Nevin's crimes and the incongruity of a council house almost completely 'embellished' with museums objects.[4] At the time of the discovery of the theft *The Daily Sketch* headline, 'Museum Swords Smuggled Out in Trouser Leg', gives a flavour of how the newspapers perceived the bizarre audacity of Nevin's outrage, who was described as either, correctly, a Museum Assistant, or as a 'Museum servant' in the Circulation department. In 'Vision & Accident', Anthony Burton briefly refers to the Nevin affair, calling it 'one of the biggest scandals in [the Museum's] history'.[5]

How can oral history contribute to an understanding of the meanings of past events such as these, apart from simply documenting the role and perspective of witnesses to the events? Drawing specifically on a life history interview with former Deputy Keeper, Barbara Morris (b. 1918–2009) (fig. 1) for the V&A Oral History project, this essay will examine the creation of meaning in stories told within the context of the interview.[6] What does this story represent when told by a museum curator in an oral history recording? Given its status as a V&A story, a part of its history, as well as its representation in public trial documents, in newspapers, what is the point of eliciting the story from a curator?

Recordings undertaken for the V&A Archive are based on life history personal narratives, or 'experience-centred narrative research'. This approach sees narratives as: sequential and meaningful; definitively human; as 're-presenting'

experience (reconstituting it as well as expressing it) and as displaying transformation or change.[7] It is not suggested that interpretations given by participants or researchers are ever conclusive, or that oral history 'data' can yield incontrovertible proofs. Just as every time the story is told, it will be subject to reconfigurations, in the same way every reading will also produce new interpretations. Oral history produces complicated research texts that shift 'between performance-oriented narrative and content-oriented document, between subject-oriented life story and theme-oriented testimony', and cannot be confined to a single genre.[8]

Subject-oriented life stories

The historian Alessandro Portelli summarised the complexity of oral histories, proposing four categories as a means to grasp the unique quality of open-endedness of oral history as a method. At its core is a 'combination of the prevalence of narrative form… and the search for a connection between biography and history, between individual experience and the transformations of society'.[9] Curators' biographies are, therefore, the most appropriate methodological approach not just for documenting museum practice

and its changes, but also for understanding the meaning of events. Stories recounted by curators, provide access to the symbolic meanings of the V&A, demonstrating how such meanings are constructed within the narrative as part of the life. Despite being a story that circulated in newspapers, Barbara Morris' oral history of the Nevin affair encapsulates how subjects make meanings out of historical facts.[10]

Excerpt from audio interview with Barbara Morris part 1

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> *Linda Sandino: One of the things that I know that you were involved with was the Nevin theft case.*
>
> *Barbara Morris: Yes.*
>
> *Linda Sandino: And I wondered if you could tell that story.*
>
> *Barbara Morris: Yes. Well... one of the things that triggered it off was that there was a dealer who was a perfectly straight forward dealer, came to see Charles Oman, the keeper of metalwork, bringing back a candlestick that he wasn't sure if it was genuine 16th or 17th century one or whether it was a 19th century reproduction, and Charles Oman looked at it and noticed there*

had been a number on the bottom of it, which he recognised as being a V&A number, because although the number had been cleaned off, it had been just put on with paint. It had left a mark, a sort of residue that could be seen on the metal base... and there was various things that came together at the same time. I went along with Peter Flood, to a bank vault, where the Marquis of Ormond's silver was being stored, and the Marquis decided that he was fed up with paying the insurance on it, and he had the idea of lending it to the Circulation department who would distribute it to various museums with the right security, and that way he wouldn't have to insurance any more. It would be covered by government indemnity, so all this silver came in boxes to the museum, and I was given the job of unpacking it... and they put in boxes with lists of the silver, but stupidly, they hadn't put it in according to the list. I mean, there was no correspondence between the contents of the box and the list. It took a very long time. I can't remember what time it arrived, but anyway definitely time to pack up and one hadn't finished it. So security was give the job, though it was stored in the packing area and Peter Floud decided for extra security that the boxes would be tied up and sealed so that nobody could tamper with them overnight. The warders would patrol the packers the same as the whole museum at night. And the person given to do the job was Nevin, one of the museum assistants, and when it came to the last box I found that a number of items were missing; they just weren't there.

Immediately we phoned the bank, and they said: "oh, it must have been our mistake, you know, because obviously you've taken all the necessary appointments." Well then, they realised that not only was it Nevin that had taped up these boxes, but it was Nevin that had cleaned off all the numbers from the objects that were going to a

board of survey. That was where objects that were duplicate to collections or considered not worthy of keeping, being fakes, or badly damaged were either disposed of, if they were rubbish or too badly damaged to repair or quite often transferred to more appropriate collections. I remember on one board quite a number of ethnographic objects were transferred to the Horniman Museum. In the same way quite an amount... it was always sort of down, down with the Circulation department, but not with the staff. It had to be other staff or people who were not involved, so objectively they could see what was going, and always things were put up for sale, and the money went direct into Treasury funds actually. I mean the Museum didn't benefit financially by doing it so there wasn't any incentive to get rid of things just so we had more money to spend because went straight to the Treasury and it was sold anonymously, of course it was realised...

I don't know what went on behind the scenes but I got a call one morning from Peter Floud saying: "will you meet me at this house in Chiswick", which I duly did... and I mean it was quite incredible. It was just a little house on the council estate, and even the curtains were farbrics from the Museum collection. They were Duncan Grant fabrics that had been cut up, and they were eating off a Spode tea service, which had been stored in the basement. There was a big basement which was called Clinche's Hole, where there was just purely storage for things for which there wasn't room. For instance I mean, the Ceramics department would have an enormous Spode service. Obviously no way could they display the whole service, so the surplus went down there. Lots of surplus went down so some of the things were stolen from there, but the real problem was that every year in the Museum there was a quinquennial, that means every five years there was quinquennial where every object

in the Museum had to be found and located to make sure it was supposed to be. I mean record cards were kept everywhere, so we didn't get round to doing it because there was so much other things to do getting the departments back to normal after the war, because as I say everything had been, you know, dispersed - the most valuable objects to caves in the Mendips. Other things were out on loan from Ceramics, from Circulation department though both to art schools to museums, where they just got stuck there, or to embassies abroad, because we used to lend porcelain and various decorative objects to embassies abroad. And so generally speaking the department was, it wasn't until '53 that they got round to doing the quinquennial. And then we discovered that a lot of objects were missing. They just weren't, you know, where they were.

Nobody knew what had happened, and it then turned out that he joined the Museum in 1933 and had been gradually removing objects from the Museum over that time. There were quite a few things that had gone missing from the library or the Print Room, you know, various places, and when we realised, it was just incredible. I mean the house was just crammed with Museum objects. The most awful thing was most of the things were damaged. He had a wonderful cabinet. I think it was a renaissance cabinet, small one, out in his garage used for tools and things. He'd prised statues off their bases...

Excerpt from audio interview with Barbara

Morris part 2

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> *Barbara Morris:* You know, he broke bronzes off their bases. He took coins out of the tops of Scandinavian tankards. And, of course, but the difficulty was that they all... we collect and the... Mrs Nevin, who turned out to be slightly sub-mental: I mean she wasn't certified, but she was a bit borderline. She was washing up in an embroidered 18th century apron, which when the police said: "Where did you get that", she said: "Oh, I bought it at Marks and Spencers in the Chiswick High Road" (laughs). Later his son was actually convicted for theft, but not connected with the Museum. And, so all the whole - the only - thing the packers, because the packers came down to remove everything. And, we found the Ormond Silver in the coal hole, in the coal shed. He'd tried to remove the crest, which of course, had made a terrible mess of them, so that it wasn't identified. That was the idea. There was obviously in the moments between... because I think the police interviewed him before we went down to... he put a whole lot of watches in the lavatory cistern at the top.
>
> And, of course, the whole lot was removed to Chelsea police station, where it took the whole of their billiard table and trestle tables all around the room. That was their recreation room, so the police weren't very pleased. And we had to... I spent six weeks in Chelsea police station, patiently identifying all the objects, because not only, in a lot of cases there weren't photographs. We had to go back. You know, it was very difficult with things like, a Meissen teapot and cover because, you know, there's more than one. They are not unique objects. And the police wouldn't let us have anything back, unless we'd formally identified it. And the

trouble with Nevin as, as far as the Circ (Circulation) was concerned, and also other departments, he knew exactly what he was doing. He removed the record cards as well, so there was no record, so one had to try all sorts of devious means. And I remember a trouble with the, for instance, a number of things were acquired during the first world war. I remember a whole collection of Japanese netsuke and inro acquired in 1916, and the registers merely said: "netsuke and inro... netsuke and inro" but no description whatsoever. And, it was extremely, extremely difficult to do it. And then, of course, what he'd done was is, again there was little bits of lace, because very often, particularly in Circ. A long lace had been cut up in small pieces, and he'd taken the number off, you know the little number, so we had to go through boxes and boxes of lace trying to find which one it had come from. And the Treasury instructions were that we were to, so that it didn't look too bad, to keep the values as low as possible, not put the full value.

But then afterwards, we realised that there were al sorts of pointers that one never, never thought about at the time. The fact that Nevin was of all the assistants, always the last one to leave the department, apart from the higher staff, and we, I mean didn't take much notice of him leaving. He always went out with a briefcase of music. You know these music satchels, or his Macintosh, over his arm, obviously in which he concealed textiles, jewellery, and the staff were never searched. I mean they were just trusted. The other thing was that nobody had ever been to his house. One of his mates, a museum assistant called Alf Thatcham, when Nevin was off sick. He phoned him up and said: "would you like me to collect your wages. I'll collect them and bring them to you." I mean, because they were paid in cash weekly those days. And he said: "Oh, no, no, no, that's alright, I'll get it when I come in."

And I remember some one of the Museum assistants, afterwards saying that they were always a bit surprised that he was boasting about a new radio or something he'd bought, and they rather wondered how he could afford it on his salary, but of course he'd been systematically selling things off before that, but he was saving most of it for his retirement, when he thought he'd need the income.

If he went to a dealer with a Meissen coffee cup or saucer or something, nobody would think it came from the Museum, because anything that was mass produced, might have come from anywhere, so that they were not recognised as being Museum objects. We had also came in just before the end of the war, something called the - that was in Prints and Drawings, that was called the Harod bequest... a lot of that went missing before it had ever even been catalogued. There was all these pointers, but then the extraordinary thing was the only thing that the packers brought back were a few doilies, you know, linen doilies, with crocheted edges like my grandmother used to have, but they were not Museum objects... but then, when he had got to age of 60, he came back bearing a few Georgian spoons that somehow we missed, and he said, you know: "Look what a good boy I am. I've brought these back, can I have my pension?

He didn't. Of course he only got three years with remission. Somewhere there was a report, I think in the Evening Standard *or one of the more popular news papers saying how it was this man so loved beautiful things, that he couldn't resist them, you know.*

And that's the story of Nevin.

Linda Sandino: And was that something that was known? Was it known throughout the Museum that this had happened?

Barbara Morris: Well, once it got to the trial, I mean it wasn't only in the Museum, but one had to

keep very secretive about it, I mean I wasn't, you know, one had to sign the Official Secrets Act, when one left in those days. Now it's been public knowledge, one can sort of talk about it.

Linda Sandino: But why would it have been? Why would it have come under the Official Secrets Act, like that, do you think?

Barbara Morris: Well anything you learnt during the course of your Museum, well you know, one shouldn't have divulged the details apparently, but... I did tell friends something about it, but it was so funny. Because, I'd been so closely involved in it, the number of some of the staff in the Museum that I was not particularly friendly with, like Ralph Edwards, Furniture and Woodwork department, would have made a real point of cultivating me because they wanted to know all the inner details. I became excessively popular (laughs) because they all wanted to know what had really gone on and what it was like, and I say I found it terrible, because I came home late and filthy dirty, and that time my husband, first husband, who was president of the National Union of Teachers, we were going to a rather important dinner, and he was absolutely furious, because he said: "We've got to leave in so and so, and you've got to get dressed and changed". He said: "why are you so late?" And I said: " Oh, you know, I just had to work late, you know", and I was sitting there at this dinner, making polite conversation to my next door neighbour, and all I could think of was you know, this awful thing that had happened. I couldn't say a word to anyone. You know it was absolutely dead secrecy, until the trial, and people knew it had happened...

Although broadly chronological, life history narratives are not necessarily linear. Participants make comparisons or connections that disrupt linearity. The life history becomes rather a sequential account, as one thing leads to another. Morris, for instance,

establishes her authority, as we shall see below, by interspersing her account with details of Museum procedures and its general history. Although the life history is that of one individual, s/he speaks as 'social subject'. Located as part of a community, individual life histories produce a record of the ways in which certain myths become embedded and sustained, how they circulate, and how they are challenged. Individual oral testimonies, therefore, can be located within an institution's historical discourse while maintaining the integrity of the individual's perspective. Although a personal history, Morris' interview contributes to the V&A's life history and identity, 'by taking up narratives that become... its actual history'.[11]

Performance-oriented narrative

Writing in 1936, Walter Benjamin lamented the decline of story telling, which he believed was initiated by the rise of the novel: 'The storyteller takes what he tells from experience - his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale'.[12] Benjamin makes an important distinction between embodied, collective listening to stories, contrasting them with the isolation of writing. Oral history, despite the injunction to interviewers to remain unobtrusive,

is nevertheless a dialogue. The resulting document is a co-constructed narrative of answers to questions, so that the researcher may understand the participant's world-view. A compelling characteristic of the dialogic encounter is a combination of the pace of reflective conversation with the physicality of voices. When we listen to interviews, they seem to be transmitting from some liminal, undefined space. In fact, radio, television, and the internet are still the dominant technological metaphors for our apprehension of the metaphysics of 'presence'.[13]

Oral histories are situated dialogues and the contexts of their production need to be understood in order to explore their meanings: 'who is saying what, to whom, for what purpose, and under what circumstances?'[14] Consequently, they are always in a sense 'performed' narratives, by both interviewee and interviewer. Since participants in the V&A project know that their interviews will be deposited in the Museum's Archive, this knowledge is integral to the formation of the interview. It influences both the kinds of questions that are asked and how they are answered. They might be an occasion to 'set the record straight', but more often they provide the opportunity to reflect in detail on the past. Interviewees' awareness of their accounts as historical records is further enhanced if they are themselves historians, or work in an institution such as a museum. Another factor is that Museum personnel are public servants; when Barbara Morris worked for the V&A, the museum's employees were part of the Civil Service. Taking part in the oral history project, therefore,

becomes in effect an aspect of museum ‘work’, an engagement with and contribution to its ‘heritage’.

In a previous, unpublished interview with former V&A colleague, Anthony Burton, Barbara Morris had given an account of the Nevin affair, but since both Burton and Morris already knew what had happened and how it had come about, there was no need to dwell on the details. When the case came to trial, it was no doubt much discussed within the Museum. It was, therefore, a story that had been told before but that does not mean it was always the same story, told in the same way. Each telling will have been specific to its context. Oral history elicits a specific form of story telling, or what Portelli has coined as history-telling, ‘a form of verbal art generated by the cultural and personal encounter in the context of fieldwork’.[15] Morris’ version presented in the life history is self-consciously as complete and detailed as possible. It contrasts with her account to Burton because it is not a set of reminiscences between colleagues. For the oral history project, the account functions as an archival document in which the participant performs their storytelling authority as ‘curator at the V&A’ to a researcher to whom events and actions must be explained.

Content-oriented document

In his own version of the Nevin affair, published before the release of the papers in 2009, Burton draws on the newspaper articles of the time, quoting examples of the extent and variety of objects found in the culprit’s home as well as the audacious comedy of Nevin allegedly having hidden swords inside his trousers pretending his stiff walk was due to Army training injuries.[16] Barbara Morris’ version therefore

provided the details of a story that might otherwise never have been told in full. Morris' version is remarkable for its length of twenty-three minutes out of a total recording of approximately seven and half hours. Why does this event play such a major role? It appears in the middle of our second session on 16 February 2009. A previous reference to it had appeared at the end of our first session on 26 January in response to a question about the requirement that museum civil servants sign the Official Secrets Act.[17] Material already in the public domain was not subject to the Act, which Morris explains by stating that, 'At the time of the Nevin thing, of course it was in the papers because he was prosecuted by the police'. At this point, I do not take up the reference to Nevin because Morris is explaining the role of the Board of Survey which was to oversee the disposal (or transfer) of Museum objects.[18] So my next question returns to the workings of the Board of Survey but Morris is unable to tell me more.

> *Barbara Morris: I don't know. I can't remember quite how... but I know it had to get Parliamentary or Treasury permission... It was left to the Museum to decide what would happen to it.*
>
> *Linda Sandino: And would the Director look at the list?*

> *Barbara Morris: I can't honestly remember. All I know is it all got gathered together in the Circulation department. [laughs] [Track 04 -06:27, Date 26.01.09]*

Could the Nevin story have emerged at this point rather than later? My quest was fixed on the Board of Survey and Morris' reply, 'I honestly can't remember', is my cue to move on. There is no story to make. We then go on to talk about the Circulation department's 1961–2 'Finlandia' exhibition on which Morris worked, alongside Keeper Hugh Wakefield. Mindful of the significance of the Nevin business, I take it up half way through the second session. It follows Morris' account of the final closure of the Circulation department (briefly re-named Regional Services) in 1978, following cuts imposed by the government on the Civil Service.[19] Morris is at pains to emphasize the significance of 'Circ' as embodying the founding principles of the Museum, 'which was really instituted in us by Peter Floud, that our job was to serve the public'.[20]

> *Barbara Morris: I mean, that's what museums were for: to inform, educate, and generally improve public taste, I mean, going back to what the Museum was founded for in the first instance,... although obviously doing research and scholarship was extremely important, the other side was also of equal importance. [Track 07 - 08:58, Date 16.02.09]*

So, following on from this summing up statement, I turn to the Nevin case, deliberately eliciting a story: 'I just wondered whether you could tell that story?' Nevin is also on our minds due to the release of the embargoed papers the month before in January 2009. The papers re-reported Nevin's defence that he couldn't help himself because he 'was attracted by the beauty', an excuse that particularly angered Morris because it brought to the fore the memory of seeing Nevin's destruction of the precious objects when she accompanied Peter Floud to the 'little house on the council estate [in which] even the curtains were fabric from the Museum

collection; they were Duncan Grant fabric that had been cut up'.

The twenty-three minutes of Morris' Nevin story is made up of elements of the plot, or sequence of the theft and contextual information about Museum procedures in the post-war period. So for instance, we learn in more detail about the disposal of objects put on the Board of Survey since it was Nevin's job to remove their V&A numbers; it was by discerning the residue of a V&A number that the Keeper of Metalwork, Charles Oman, recognized the origin of the candlestick brought to him by a dealer anxious to verify its provenance. We also learn that it was the wartime disruption to the quinquennial review, 'where every object in the Museum had to be found and located to make sure it was where it was supposed to be', that enabled Nevin to continue his thefts until 1953, in fact until his 'house was crammed with Museum objects'. Morris provides a heartfelt description of the objects in the house, noting especially their damaged state: 'He broke bronzes off their bases. He took coins out of the tops of Scandinavian tankards.'

Once everything was removed to the Chelsea Police Station, the haul took up the station's entire recreation room where Morris spent six weeks identifying the objects as belonging to the V&A. This was an arduous task because Nevin had strategically removed the records pertaining to the stolen objects. With hindsight, Morris confirms that Nevin's behaviour was indeed suspicious. For instance, his colleagues commented on his 'boasting about a new radio or something he'd bought and they wondered how he could afford it on his salary' [Track 08 - 06:27]. At the time of the discovery of the theft, the incident was covered by the Official Secrets Act and Morris relates how she was unable to tell even her husband, Max Morris, why she was late for a dinner engagement: 'It was absolute secrecy until of course the trial and then people knew that it had happened.'[21] Nor made public at the time were Treasury instructions

‘that we were to, so it didn’t look too bad, keep the values as low as possible’ [Track 08-04:57, Date 16.02.09].

In terms of content, the Nevin account can function as a Museum story, a story about public service, a story about social class, or even, as here, a story about oral history interviewing.[22] The multiplicity of possible interpretations and meanings is what makes oral history documents, especially life histories, so rich and rewarding for research purposes. The stories we collect are never fixed in their interpretations: ‘subsequent readings of material we, or others, have gathered invariably bring with them a new layer of understanding. But no interpretation is ever final; our current framework is itself one which will change over time’.[23] For the oral history project, Morris gives an expansive narrative because of her key role in the affair as a first-hand witness. Nevertheless, despite its status as a content-oriented document as I have shown, her narrative is also a testimony to loss. Why, at this point, though, do I hear this as a story of loss?

Theme-oriented testimony

Figure 2 – Staff of the Circulation Department c.1953-55

The Nevin story forms an important function beyond the testimony of Morris’ central role in the events. It enables her to signify the theme of loss which marks her recording, dominated by the Circulation department’s rescue of the nineteenth century as an area of expertise, and its subsequent

closure in 1978: 'It was the sense of loss of something very historic' [Track 07 - 07:37, Date 16.02.09]. A department that 'had been nothing more than a sort of vehicle for sending out loans', was transformed by Floud and his staff (fig. 2).[24]

> *Barbara Morris: Peter Floud was determined to turn Circulation into a scholarly department that would have a real, scholarly reputation. So he decided that if we became specialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we could be on a level with the other curatorial departments. And we weren't treading on anyone else's toes because they weren't interested. And then he conceived this idea of doing this exhibition of Victorian and Edwardian Art which is now very much regarded as a seminal exhibition which started, you know, the revival of serious interest in Victorian and Edwardian design. I mean it had a great influence not only on collectors like Charles and Lavinia Handley-Read but also on dealers who started, dealing in that subject. We inspired a whole lot, a whole generation of people to do it. Most people now acknowledge that that was sort of the main beginning of the serious interest in the period. I mean, Gibbs-Smith did do, Charles Gibbs-Smith did do an exhibition to commemorate the anniversary of the 1851 exhibition but it was more, it was more sort of a fun thing to do.*[25] *[Track 07 - 30:15, Date 16.02.09]*

Reviewing the aforementioned 1952 exhibition, no less a critic than Reyner Banham praised its 'imposing seriousness' in contrast to the 'tawdriness of the interior decorator's XIX Century fantasy'.[26]

In recollecting the significance of the exhibition, however, Morris' account inevitably includes the other actors especially the key figure of Peter

Floud. In her recording Morris praises his inspirational leadership: 'he had this extraordinary ability of bringing out the best in people and encouraging them and... the consensus of opinion was that Peter Floud would have been director - apart from his premature death' [Track 06- 15:33, Date 16.02.09]. Floud, therefore, like others in Morris' life history, are 'lost' figures brought to life by her recollections.

Objects, however, are also important figures of loss in the interview. In her description of the Nevin incident, Morris gives examples of how he could not have been 'seduced' by the beauty of objects since so many pieces had been damaged, as noted above.[27] So in addition to Nevin's thefts, Morris describes how during her research in the Registers for the 'Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts' exhibition, she discovered examples of official disposals: 'it was amazing the number of things that we found had gone'.

> *Barbara Morris: I remember now being absolutely horrified that put on a Board of Survey were a whole lot of nineteenth century copies of early Limoges enamels which were just smashed up because they were fakes. And also... one rather important table by Henry Eyles of Bath which had been illustrated in God knows how many books of furniture; that was disposed of because it was Victorian... The Gamble piano was only sort of saved, was officially broken up but because of the war somehow it never happened, so you know it was rescued but it was put on a Board of Survey. [Track 04 - 02:46, Date 24.01.09]*

It was Peter Floud's determination to rescue the Victorian and Edwardian decorative arts, to secure for

Circulation its own area of expertise, which launched the curatorial careers not only of Barbara Morris and others. Among his other inspired appointments were Elizabeth Aslin who became an expert in late-nineteenth century furniture, and Shirley Bury, the nineteenth and twentieth century metalwork and jewellery scholar. From their initial appointments as Museums Assistants in the late forties, they ascended to the keeper grades: Aslin as Assistant Director (Works) in 1968, Bury becoming Keeper of Metalwork in 1982, and Morris herself was appointed Deputy Keeper of Ceramics and Glass in 1976. As the sole survivor of that era, loss is inevitably the trope under which Morris' narrative operates, and it is noticeably absent in the account documenting her time at Sotheby's (and on the BBC Antiques Roadshow programme).

> *Barbara Morris: I was so pleased to be approached by Sotheby's to work for them because it meant I had no real break in career, and it was a new challenge to take up, to do something different, though I had lectured before and had this brief teaching experience. I mean it was an entirely different thing to do, to start something from scratch and design a whole course. [Track 13 - 01:46, Date 4.03.09]*

So Sotheby's must be seen in the context of Morris' reluctant acceptance of the retirement regulations: 'obviously I didn't want to [retire] but realized that there

was no possible alternative. I mean that was rule and it didn't matter what grade you were, what department you were in, whether you were male or female, that was the rigid Civil Service rule' [Track 13 - 00:38, Date 4.03.09]. Ejection from the V&A might also figure here as 'loss'.

Content/Theme/Subject-oriented

Portelli's categories provide a means to unpack the 'in-betweeness' of oral history as a genre. As I hope the above has demonstrated, oral history can provide access to different registers of meaning; it can be mined for information, for an understanding of broader pictures of past events, as well enabling tales of experience. It enables to ask questions about being a curator as an activity and as a form of office. It enables us to ask how do her reflections and stories connect her life to her times, as a woman, as a collector, a writer, a teacher, an historian? While it can be argued that I have selected extracts to emphasize the theme of loss, the last story I now turn to, demonstrates the intersection of Portelli's categories, and how 'oral history is less about events than about meaning'.[28]

In a story that might be titled 'Plastics: Lost and Regained', Morris explains how Circulation department objects were stored by material in accordance with the V&A's departmental divisions. Some objects, however, did not fit the established Museum categories but were rather 'miscellaneous things'.

> *Barbara Morris: One of the rather sad things, one of the last exhibitions I'd hoped to do in the Museum was one of objects which were souvenirs of the*

Great Exhibition of 1851. And through Charles Gibbs-Smith who was the Public Relations Officer, a very good collection [of 1851 souvenirs] was given to the Museum but because again at that time it was all Victorian objects, the main departments didn't want them and we accepted them for Circulation and were going to probably buy some more things so that it would have made a very interesting commemorative exhibition along with framed... images of the Great Exhibition too, illustrations of it. But the [Circulation] department closed and that was it. And unfortunately all the objects in it just sort of were dispersed... so a ceramic went to ceramics and so on. So I don't know what's happened to it. I mean they must be somewhere in the Museum. I mean the whole interest in it was that it was a collection devoted to one subject which as a whole made sense. And the same problem happened when the Museum at last decided to collect plastics because, you know, one began to realize that plastics was (I mean this wasn't really until I joined Sotheby's after I'd left the Museum), I realized that plastics was an up and coming subject. The auction houses were already beginning to sell them. And when I started the course at Sotheby's I decided it was a subject I ought to include. [Track 10 - 20:27, Date 4.03.09]

Morris continues by paying tribute to John Jesse, 'probably one of the first people to make a serious collection of plastics', who offered his collection to the V&A sometime in the 1980s, but 'the Museum refused to buy it and instead he sold it to the Science Museum'. By the time the Museum decided to collect plastics, they 'were becoming more and more expensive and difficult to get' but the main problem, as Morris points out, was the constraint of the V&A's material specific departmental classifications.

Barbara Morris: [T]here was no central collection of plastics. If, if they reckoned it was something

like a melamine cup and saucer that would have normally have been made of ceramics, it went to the ceramics department. If it was something that was imitating ivory, it went to Architecture and Sculpture because ivory came under Architecture and Sculpture. And then if it was something that would normally have been made of metalwork like gutta percha baskets and things which were made copying the design of silver-plated baskets and things, it went to Metalwork. The same with plastic jewellery: went to Metalwork... Later the Museum did do a big collection of historic plastics... And of course they did start buying Italian plastic furniture particularly people like Ettore Sottsass... of course a lot of the best of the plastics is now in the modern gallery, the twentieth century Gallery. But you know, it was late in the day that it happened at the V&A. [Track 10 - 24:02, Date 4.03.09]

News from the Present

Barbara Morris died on the 15th July, 2009. How much has her death contributed to my hearing the theme of loss in her recording? Were she still alive would I have interpreted her stories differently? In the future, no doubt, I will hear other themes emerging from the recording. Just as the opening up of the Nevin papers precipitated Morris' account and its meaning for her, my paper is situated at a particular moment too. I am not interpreting the past, but the past represented in the present. The unique, special situation of the oral history interview allows a participant to make sense of their life and experiences; it is a qualitative research method that 'seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future'.[29] The

philosopher Søren Kierkegaard put it succinctly in his journal:

> *Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backwards. But then one forgets the other clause - that it must be lived forwards. The more one thinks through this clause, the more one concludes that life in temporality never becomes properly understandable, simply because never at any time does one get perfect repose to take a stance: Backwards.*[30]

The V&A oral history project is the occasion for such 'perfect repose' allowing its participants to make sense of their life, times, and so contribute to the history and meaning of the Museum, and what it means to be a V&A curator.

Endnotes

1. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Barbara Morris (1918–2009), former Deputy Keeper of Ceramics and Glass, who joined the V&A Circulation department in 1947. On retirement from the Museum in 1978 she was invited to set up Sotheby's Decorative Arts course. Among her publications are *English Embroidery* (1961); *Victorian Table Glass and Ornaments* (1978); *Inspiration for Design: The Influence of the Victoria & Albert Museum* (1986); *William Morris and the South Kensington Museum* (1987); and *Liberty Design, 1874–1914* (1989).

2. See further Portelli, A. *Oral History as Genre, The Battle of the Valle Guilia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison WI, 1997.

3. National Archives: MEPO 2/9640 - NA 230/54/128

4. 'Stealing Beauty - The curator who took priceless piece after priceless piece'. *The Independent*, March 3, 2009; 'How a modest council house was furnished with thousands of items from the V&A'. *The Daily Telegraph*, March, 3, 2009. Contemporary accounts, see cuttings in Burton, A. *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999: 210; the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Sketch*, and the Darlington's *Northern Echo* ('His flat was a 'museum annexe'). *The Independent* provides the most comprehensive coverage of the case,

quoting the police record: 'Practically everything in Nevin's small three-bedroom house with the exception of the bed linen and items of clothing, was found to be property stolen from the museum, so that at the end of the search the rooms were practically bare'.

5. Burton, A. *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999: 210.

6. The audio recordings with their content summaries, as well as any related documentation will be deposited with the V&A Archive in accordance with participants Consent and Deposit Instructions. Barbara Morris was interviewed over four sessions between January and March 2009. The recording consists of eighteen tracks [Track 01-18] totalling approximately seven and a half hours.

7. Squire, C. 'Experience-centred and Culturally-oriented Approaches to Narrative'. In *Doing Narrative Research*, edited by M. Andrews, C. Squire, and M. Tamboukou. London and Thousand Oaks: CA, 2008: 42.

8. Portelli, A... *Oral History as Genre, The Battle of the Valle Guilia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison WI, 1997: 6

9. Portelli, A... *Oral History as Genre, The Battle of the Valle Guilia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison WI, 1997: 6

10. Barbara Morris' recording took place over four sessions in 2009: 26 January, 16 February, 4 March, and 25 March. Once Consent and Deposit Instructions have been cleared, all recordings undertaken for the V&A oral history project will be deposited in the V&A Archive.

11. My perspective on oral history narratives is indebted to the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur, especially *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols, Chicago: 1984, 1985, 1988; *Oneself As Another*. Chicago, 1992; *Memory and Forgetting*. Chicago, 2004.

12. Benjamin, W. 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov'. In *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, edited by H. Arendt. London, 1992: 84.

13. See Peters, J. D. *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago IL, 1991; Sterne, J. *The Audible Past: the Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham NC, 2002; Sandino, L. "'Listen to Yourself!" Technology, Voice and the Self'. *Hearing Voice in Oral History, 2009, Oral History Society conference*, 3–4 July 2009.

14. Scholes, L. '"What is Oral History?". *Making Sense of Evidence', History Matters: the US Survey*. http://historymatters.gmu.edu

15. Portelli, A. *There's Gonna Always Be a Line: History-Telling as a Multivocal Art*. Madison WI, 1997: 24.

16. Burton, A. *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999: 210

17. The Act had been drawn up in 1911, amended in 1920. Until its devolvement from the Civil Service in 1984 when the Museum became a Trustee museum, staff continued to sign the Official Secrets Act Declaration.

18. The Board of Survey was appointed by the Director and would typically include senior Museum staff. Recommendations for disposal would be submitted to the Department of Education and forwarded to the Treasury.

19. For a full review of the Circulation (Regional Services) Department at its closure, see *V&A Museum Review, 1974–1978*. London, 1981: 39–44, 123–126. See also Wilk, C. 'Collecting the Twentieth Century'. In *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria & Albert Museum*, edited by M. Baker and B. Richardson. New York and Baltimore, 1999; *The V&A Museum Circulation Department. Its History and Scope*. London, 1950.

20. Peter Floud was Keeper of the Circulation Department from 1947 until his untimely death in 1960. His obituary can be read at https://www.vam.ac.uk/content/people-pages/obituary-peter-floud/

21. Max Morris went on to become an influential left-wing President of the National Union of Teachers. Dave Bowman, President of the National Union of Railwaymen, was Barbara's second husband.

22. For an overview of the debates about story as what-is-told and discourse as how-it-is -told, see McQuillan M., ed. *The Narrative Reader*. London and New York, 2000: 4–10.

23. Andrews, M. 'Never the Last Word: Revisiting Data'. *Doing Narrative Research*, edited by M. Andrews et al. London and Thousand Oaks, CA, 2008: 90.

24. Floud's Deputy Keeper, Hugh Wakefield, pioneered interest in contemporary studio pottery. Examples of other curators who began their careers in this pioneering department include Betty Elzea (formerly O'Looney), Mark Haworth-Booth, Carol Hogben, Charles Newton, Jennifer Hawkins Opie, and

Nathalie Rothstein, though not all were contemporaries.

25. Charles Gibbs-Smith was the Museum's Public Relations Officer during the directorship of Leigh Ashton. For a brief but colourful portrait of 'Gibbo', see Burton, A. *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999: 202.

26. Quoted in Burton, A. *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999: 207.

27. See Morris' inventory 'List of objects found at 9 Nightingale Close, W4', MA/15/1 Parts 2 - 3, V&A Archive, Blythe House. The type and number of objects are listed in detail and include:

    – Metalwork, Ceramics and Woodwork etc. 1–1231

    – Historic Textiles 1–193

    – Prints and Drawings 1–318

    – Books 1–192

    – Contemporary Textiles 1–90, of which only 26 were undamaged

28. Portelli, A. 'On Methodology'. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. New York, 1991: 50.

29. Roberts, B. *Biographical Research*. Buckingham and Philadelphia, 2002: 6.

30. Quoted in Conway D., K. E. Gover, Søren Kierkegaard. *Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*. London and New York, 2002: 21.

Tales from the ‘Coilte’

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Abstract

Production of white quilted furnishings existed in the Middle Ages throughout most of Europe and certainly in France. Refined work with story-telling motifs is associated principally with southern Italy, renowned examples being the fourteenth-century Tristan quilts, which will be exhibited by the V&A in November, 2009, and at the major Quilts exhibition from 20 March to 4 July 1010. This paper looks at the cultural environment of the Tristan quilts, their precursors and the white motif-laden confections that followed them.

Figure 1 – Bayeux Tapestry (Battle of Hastings, Scene 6) Showing the Death of Harold. Victorian Replica Embroidery woolen yarns on linen. Copyright Reading Museum Service (Reading Borough Council). Harold is first seen plucking an arrow from his eye, then being slain by a Norman knight (Bayeux Tapestry (Battle of Hastings, Scene 6) Showing the Death of Harold) Copyright Reading Museum Service (Reading Borough Council).

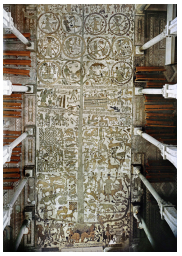

Figure 2 – The Tree of Life, Cathedral of Otranto, Southern Italy, 1163. Pavement mosaic Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

Figure 3 – King Arthur Rides to Seek the Grail, Otranto Cathedral Southern Italy, 1163. Pavement mosaic Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

Figure 4 – ‘Mermaid’ From the Ortranto Cathedral Presbytery Southern Italy, 1163. Pavement mosaic Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

Figure 5 – The Tristan Quilt, Sicily, Italy, about 1360–1400. Linen quilted and padded with wadding. Museum no. 1391-1904

Figure 6 – ‘How Tristainu Smote the Amoroldo in the Head’ Detail from the Tristan Quilt Sicily, Italy, about 1360-1400. Linen quilted and padded with wadding. Museum no. 1391-1904

Figure 12 – A tile showing a hunter blowing an Oliphant and holding his dog on leash Abbey of Saint Remi 14th Century Museum of Saint Remi, Reims, France The tile was excavated and made at the Lorans tile works in nearby Hautvillier

Figure 7 – ‘How Tristainu Gives the Glove of Battle to the Amoroldo’ The Tristan Quilt detail Sicily, Italy about 1360-1400. Linen quilted and padded with wadding. Museum no. 1391-1904

Figure 8 – Charles V receiving a Bible from the hands of Jean de Vaudetar, Petrus Comestor; Paris. Raoulet d’Orléans (scribe), Jean Bondol, First Master of the Bible of Jean de Sy, and others, 1372 MMW, 10 B 23, folio 2, Museum Meermanno, The Hague, the Netherlands

Figure 9 – Rene of Anjou and Jeanne de Laval Chateau of King Rene 15th century Stone Kathryn Berenson

Figure 10 – Drawing of ‘Courte-pointe du XIIIe siècle’ embroidery From Les Toiles Brodées, Anciennes Mantes ou Courte-pointes conservées a l’Hôtel-Dieu de Reims by Charles-Prosper Givelet, 1883. Note the mermaid and the harpies (figures with the head of a man and the body of a bird) in the body; the hunter blowing a horn, his dog on a leash in the right border.

Figure 11 – Harpy detail from the drawing of ‘Courte-pointe du XIIIe siècle’ embroidery from Les Toiles Brodées Anciennes Mantes ou Courte-pointes conservées a l’Hôtel-Dieu de Reims Charles-Prosper Givelet 1883 Amid other fantastic creatures portrayed in the embroidery is a harpy, a human head atop the body of a bird, a medieval symbol for the souls of the redeemed.

Figure 13 – Cover Possibly Germany 1500s Quilted Linen Museum No. 1568-1902. Width 111cm x Length 198cm approc excluding fringe Cover lit from behind.

Figure 15 – Sketch of a fantastic beast Worked in the coverlet demonstrates a form analogous to those depicted in other medieval textiles and manuscripts Kathryn Berenson

Figure 14 – Cover, possibly German, 1500s. Quilted Linen Width 111cm x Length 198cm approc excluding fringe Museum No. 1568-1902 This early linen coverlet of European origin depicts an orderly arrangement of fabulous birds and beasts brought into relief by corded quilting.

The young couple, newly smitten and alone in a castle, approached her bed, 'with its coilte or quilt, finely-made of two layers of rich cloth worked in a checkered pattern.'[1] This seduction scene, in a twelfth-century French poem, illustrates the story with handsome textile furnishings. The reverse was also true during the Middle Ages - handsome furnishings held imagery from popular stories. Surviving decorative objects made for churches, halls and residences reflect the aspirations, beliefs, educational levels, and loyalties of the medieval elite.

Prime examples are the two Tristan quilts in the V&A, London, and in the National Museum of Bargello, Florence. They are both white corded and quilted works, showing episodes from the Norman legend of Tristan, and attributed to a Sicilian atelier in the late fourteenth century. Although these two pieces are mentioned frequently in recitals of quilt history, a review of medieval art, history, materials, patronage and values lends insight into their making, and into the continuing tradition of all white corded and quilted textiles.

The Norman Conquest: Bayeux Tapestry

Figure 1 – Bayeux Tapestry (Battle of Hastings, Scene 6) Showing the Death of Harold. Victorian Replica Embroidery woolen yarns on linen. Copyright Reading Museum Service (Reading Borough Council). Harold is first seen plucking an arrow from his eye, then being slain by a Norman knight (Bayeux Tapestry (Battle of Hastings, Scene 6) Showing the Death of Harold) Copyright Reading Museum Service (Reading Borough Council).

An early story-telling textile, the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry (fig. 1) depicts the Norman conquest of England by William in 1066.[2] Embroidery in chain, stem, and couching stitches, using polychrome wool on linen, portray events leading to and including the Battle of Hastings. An illustrated account of oaths of fealty, sea-crossings, feasts, violent battle, heroic acts, and the gore of hand-to-hand combat appears over its grand length (230 feet by 20 inches in height). Latin text in the vignettes identifies the heroes, villains, and action of the scene. Borders at top and bottom portray beasts, birds, fables, ornaments, and figures engaged in farming, hunting and erotic behavior. Battle scenes surmount images of fallen soldiers, crippled horses, soldiers stripping the dead of their armour and not a few decapitated bodies.

The identities of who ordered the work, who made it and where, and even its original destination, are unknown. The earliest documentation of the Tapestry, in 1476, reveals it was mounted annually in Bayeux Cathedral at the feast of Corpus Christi. The rest of the year it was rolled on a drum, possibly to allow easy transport for display in other venues. The

embroidery's portability may have been purposeful, to bring the powerful story of the Norman Conquest to as many people as possible.[3]

R. Howard Bloch writes, 'Part of the enduring effect of the Tapestry…has to do with the power to integrate so much and so fully the various strands of imagery and meaning available at the time of its creation'. Bloch calls the Battle of Hastings a critical moment that determines the future of medieval Europe and the beginning of the era of the knight.[4]

Norman Sicily: the Otranto Cathedral pavement

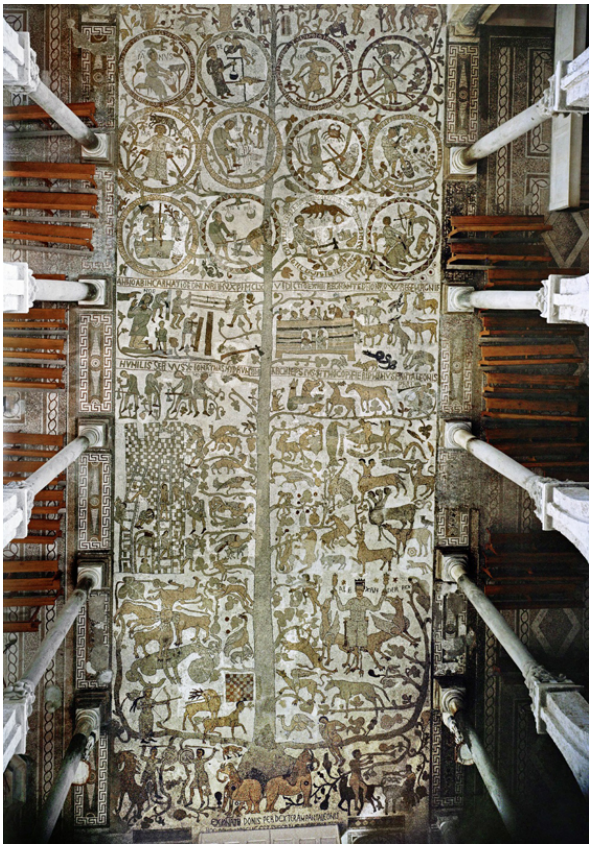

Figure 2 – The Tree of Life, Cathedral of Otranto, Southern Italy, 1163. Pavement mosaic Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

The era of the knight was also the era of the Crusades, and Normans were major participants. A political consequence of the Crusades was access to valuable lands in the Mediterranean region. By 1130 Roger II had carved a Norman kingdom in southern Italy and Sicily, where he inherited a rich artistic legacy. Prior centuries of Greek, Byzantine, and Arab rule in southern Italy were marked by the production of luxurious material goods.

Patronized by European nobles, deft Palermo artisans had crafted magnificent textiles, jewels, coinage and decorative objects, with imagery drawn from the mix of cultures. Norman rule contributed legends, myths and adventure tales culled from lands they had conquered, all of which entered into the design repertoire of the artisans of Sicily and Naples.

The mosaic floor in the Cathedral of Otranto, Italy, is an encyclopedia of these conjoined legends and beliefs, all laid out for public witness (fig. 2).[5] The composition, designed in 1163 by a monk named Pantaleon, blends moral instruction from the Koran and the Old Testament with tales of Celtic, Greek, Norman, Persian, Roman, Scandinavian, and Welsh origin, in confirmation of the wide dispersion of these stories and the images associated with them. The pavement scenes show familiar figures in action. A serpent hisses his offer to Eve, Cain slays Abel, the Queen of Sheba romances Solomon, the goddess Diana tracks a deer, Alexander the Great ascends to heaven, King Arthur (fig. 3) salutes from atop a beast and, in a nod to ordinary folk, a calendar shows labourers engaged in appropriate monthly toil, overseen by the appropriate zodiac sign. Fantastic animals and birds mingle with more realistic counterparts - fish, goats, horses and owls - throughout the pavement. Just below the altar, a two-tailed mermaid spreads her tails to each side in salacious invitation (fig. 4) . The identities of key characters are picked out in tiles, for example, ‘Rex Arturus,’ ‘Abel’, and ‘infernus Satan’, to ensure no confusion. The prominence of King Arthur and Alexander the Great in the mosaic bears witness to Norman claims of ancestral ties to these legendary figures.

Norman legend in textile furnishings: the Tristan quilts

Figure 5 – The Tristan Quilt, Sicily, Italy, about 1360–1400. Linen quilted and padded with wadding. Museum no. 1391-1904

Although Sir Tristan appears in neither the Bayeux Tapestry nor the Otranto mosaic, his hour was nigh. A Norman narrative of the Tristan legend surfaced around 1150, to be quickly embellished and dispersed. This riveting tale of irresistible love constrained by knightly loyalty, and leading to doom, pervaded medieval culture.[6] Sicilian needleworkers were under Norman House of Anjou rule between 1360 and 1400, when the order for the Tristan quilts was given. Their needle skills were already highly developed. The Tristan quilts are exemplars of successful manipulation of a flat textile with needle, thread and filling to create a three-dimensional surface with significant, legible patterns. The imagery stitched in the quilts relates episodes from Tristan legend in vivid, masterful detail, bringing domestic intimacy to one of the most popular tales that captivated medieval Europe (fig. 5).

Between them, the two V&A and Bargello Tristan quilts depict episodes in which the young knight addresses and resolves a major conflict between Mark, King of

England, and Languis, King of Ireland. Bargello quilt borders portray Tristan leaving the court of his foster father for that of his uncle, Mark, King of Cornwall. V&A quilt borders portray Mark conferring knighthood on Tristan, the demand of tribute from Mark by King Languis of Ireland, Tristan's defiance of the demand, declaration of war, and Tristan's challenge to the Morold, Languis's champion. Panels in the middle of both quilts depict the two knights as they arrive for combat (Bargello), Tristan thrusting away his own means of escape (V&A), the two men battling on horseback (Bargello), Tristan as he smites the Morold on the head, and the villain's cowardly sneak attack on Tristan (both V&A) (fig. 6).[7]

Text, in Sicilian dialect, spells out who's who, for example, 'How Tristainu smote the Amorolldo in the head'. Top and backing of both Tristan quilts are linen of excellent quality, proven by their survival for over six centuries. Motifs are worked in running and backstitch using dark brown, light brown, and white linen thread. Cotton batting fills both quilts (fig. 7).[8] Medieval aristocrats were drawn to Tristan's persona: high-born, then orphaned and kidnapped as a youth, intrepid and skilled as a soldier, loyal to God and king, ardent yet discreet as a lover. In 1250 Queen Margaret, wife of Louis IX, captive in Damiette, Egypt, while her husband led a Crusade east of the Nile, invoked Tristan's ability to overcome obstacles by naming her newborn son Jean Tristan, 'because he was [also] born in sadness and poverty'.[9]

The knight's fine qualities were similarly invoked in the order given to the Sicilian needlework atelier. Both Tristan quilts and a third piece attributed to the same atelier, show the arms of the Guicciardini family: three horns imaged on the knight's shield.[10] Thus, the hero's valiant deeds and sterling character reflect on the noble patron who ordered this image-laden work.

Figure 8 – Charles V receiving a Bible from the hands of Jean de Vaudetar, Petrus Comestor; Paris. Raoulet d'Orléans (scribe), Jean Bondol, First Master of the Bible of Jean de Sy, and others, 1372 MMW, 10 B 23, folio 2, Museum Meermanno, The Hague, the Netherlands

White tabula rosa: luxury cottons

Modern consumers might not consider cotton or linen an appropriate textile for an aristocrat's special order. But witness the regard these textiles attract from medieval writers. 'Whitest of white' is Giovanni Boccaccio's description in 'Decameron' (1349–52) of a bedcover made of 'bucharame' from Cyprus.[11] 'Bouqueran', 'bougran', and 'bucherame' are varied spellings for

this fine medieval textile woven of cotton or linen, and sometimes both of these fibres. In 1271 Marco Polo called the 'bougran' from Arzinga, now in modern Turkey, 'the best in the world'. Ibn Battuta agreed by calling Arzinga bougran 'fine stuffs' (1334).[12] 'Futaine' or fustian, a textile woven with linen warp and cotton weft, was also valued. A woman in Eustache Deschamps's fourteenth-century poem, 'Le Miroir de Mariage', emphasises her status by saying, 'I still wear a camisole of fustaine, my lord'.[13]

Sicily's port of Palermo was a major entrepot for textile trade, exporting its own domestic raw cotton (a legacy of Muslim rule), and importing and re-exporting high quality woven cottons produced as near as northern Italy and as far as Syria.[14] Sicilian merchants traded in textiles at annual fairs in Champagne and Paris, France, events that served all of Europe. These fairs were the likely source of raw cotton to plump the mattresses of French kings (1316 and 1342) and for the 32 'livres' of cotton, tapestry merchant Jacques Dourdin (Paris, 1403) supplied to Margaret of Flanders, some of it used to fashion two 'courtepointes' or quilts for the birth of a grandchild (fig. 8).[15]

Medieval bed quilts

Textile historian Sarah Randles presents a forceful case that the two Tristan quilts were originally joined in one large quilt. Randles's work reorganizes the sections into a quilted diorama (with significant sections missing), reading counterclockwise in the border, the

central images paired and reading from bottom to top. Dimensions of the Randles plan are monumental, up to 6 metres high by 4 metres wide. Randles argues that a large quilt is appropriate for large fourteenth-century Italian beds, but allows the possibility of a different original purpose.[16]

Early documents reveal that members of French society with money, title, or simple direct access to luxury goods, owned bed quilts. The 1297 estate of Marseilles ship captain Guillaume Ferrenc lists a 'courtepointe' among other bed furnishings.[17] The 1317 bills of Philippe le Long, list a 'coustepointes des pieds', or a small throw. The estates of two members of Provencal nobility register quilted bedcovers in 1360 and in 1397.[18] At her death in 1328, Clemence of Hungary, widow of Louis X, left bed furnishings made in white 'bougran' (the fine cotton Boccaccio wrote about), a 'courtepointe', tester, valances, and curtains.[19] Clemence was the daughter of the king of Hungary, her aunt was Marguerite of Anjou and Sicily. Perhaps her bed chamber furnishings came through Sicilian cousins. Jeanne de Laval, wife of Rene of Anjou, King of Provence, Sicily and Naples, had twenty-nine 'lodiers' (heavy quilted bedcovers) and a 'coe[r]tepointe' in her chateau in northern France in 1471.[20]

Documents that describe both textiles and motifs in a single object help us form a mental picture of medieval quilts. Three 'courtepointes' made of 'bougran', one stitched with images of a horse bearing arms, appear in the 1334 inventory of the Hotel of Quatremares, Marseilles, owned by a member of the House of Anjou. Angevin Charles V's 1380 estate lists four white cotton or linen 'courtepointes', one with compass and rosette motifs 'worked in small stitches', the second stitched with

wave motifs, a third made of 'white cotton with white silk bands, and the fourth ‘skillfully worked’ in animal figures.[21] The 1432 estate of Guillaume Renguis, Avignon, records two large white quilted bedcovers, one ‘of fine [cotton or linen] worked in waves similar from one side to the other’.[22] Pieces worked with all-over patterns, such as compasses and rosettes, diamonds and waves, were likely to have been bedcovers. The Marseilles piece with heraldic images and the Avignon quilt showing animal figures could have been made for another purpose. Note all of the owners mentioned are either members of the House of Anjou or residents of Provence.

Medieval quilted hangings

Some textiles do not make good bedfellows. For example, ‘boucassin’ is defined as hemp cloth in a 1723 commercial dictionary.[23] Two finely stitched white ‘courtepointes’ in Charles V’s 1380 estate were fashioned from ‘boucassin’. Doubtless the king did not tuck in under woven hemp. Quilted works made of unrelenting ‘boucassin’ and showing large-scale motifs make better wall hangings than bedcovers. Quilted hangings, like woven tapestries, were decorative insulation for castle interiors. The imagery worked within them reinforced social identity. Throughout the Middle Ages writes art historian Henry Havard, ‘the

halls of French lords were hung with magnificent hangings of wool and silk… and stuffed, or to use the term used then, Contrepointés'.[24]

Recent research conducted on the Bargello Tristan quilt indicates that it may have served as a hanging. Ultra-violet light tests of the back of the quilt reveal traces of calcium that could have resulted from its placement on a wall. [25] A fourteenth-century Italian citation specifically identifies a quilted hanging. Bartolomeo Boscoli (Florence, 1386) owned 'une coltre ciciliana di drappo cum armi' or a quilted Sicilian hanging showing heraldic arms.[26] Decorative arts historian Peter Thornton confirms the use of textile hangings in medieval Italy, citing Bocaccio, 'when he wants to describe a beautifully decked out dining room he speaks of how delightful it is to see the capoletti hanging around the room'. Thornton states many hangings were made from linen woven in Reims and Cambray, others were made of cotton.[27]

Quilted hangings were draped in the streets on ceremonial and saint's days in fourteenth-century France. A contemporary poet, Robert le Diable, writes, 'On the streets before him hung | Pailes, tapis et keutespointes, | All of them stretched as if joining hands'. 'Kieute' and 'kieutepointe' are variations of 'courtepointe', 'serving both to cover beds and to decorate walls', according to Havard.[28]

Makers, origins and imagery

Figure 9 – Rene of Anjou and Jeanne de Laval Chateau of King Rene 15th century Stone Kathryn Berenson

Professional quilters confected high quality bedcovers and hangings used by the medieval elite. Paris guild registries in 1292 note eight 'courtepointiers' and twenty-four 'tapissiers', all engaged in the commerce of quilting. As a rule, 'courtepointiers' made bedcovers and 'tapissiers' made hangings, but the rule was often bent. Jehannot, Gautier de Poullegni, and Denise were 'tapissiers du roi' to Philippe le Long, but Havard states they were 'nothing else but courtepointiers'. Other kings also had their own quilters, for example, Thomas de Challons served King John (1352), Martin Didélé served Charles VI (1387), and King Rene had three (1480).[29]

There were international sources as well for quilted works. An Indian sultan presented traveler Ibn Battuta with two silk 'courtepointes' when he arrived in Delhi in 1334.[30] Charles V's reception chambers held quilted hangings and bedcovers described as from 'outremer', or overseas, and 'sarrazin', from the Near East. Bernart Belenati, an Italian merchant who operated in Paris, supplied this same king with lengths of velvet for a 'coulte pointe' (1369). A 1519 inventory from the Chateau de Pau, owned by the House of Navarre, lists two quilted bedcovers in 'olbre morique' or work of the Moors, and two quilted testers made of white 'boucassin', 'the work of Italy'.[31] While it is

tempting to assign the origin of the testers to Italy, the description may indicate the origin of the quilting technique used to make them and not where they were made.

Similar prudence is required when considering inventory references to Naples and Sicily, unless the origin is precisely stated as they are in the following two cases. In 1413 King Robert of Naples sent two 'coute-pointes' from Italy to Catherine de Bourgogne in France.[32] Nicolas Fagot transported 'tapisseries', books, and paintings from Naples to Charles VIII's chateau in Amboise in 1495, the year Charles claimed Naples as part of his realm.[33] However, three 'courtepointes' belonging to Elipde, Countess d'Avelin, one with the story of Solomon, a 'better' one with the story of Alexander, and the third 'beautiful, large, and good' covered with fleur de lys, and all identified as 'the work of Naples' (Provence, 1426), may be imitations of the Neapolitan technique stitched by domestic artisans or even the countess herself (fig. 9).[34]

Rene of Anjou filled his Provencal chateaux with all the arts, including figurative textiles. Scenes of a dozen knights, gentlemen, and ladies appear on two large textiles, with matching scenes worked on two 'contrepointes' according to a 1488 inventory of the king's manor in Perignan.[35] Rene could have brought them back from one of his voyages to Naples, ordered them made by his 'tapissiers', or had a more intimate source. His widow, Jeanne, still Queen of Sicily at his death in 1480, ordered a large frame for working with textiles from court carpenter Jean Guillebert.[36] Did the Queen console herself by working a 'courtepointe' on this frame? She is said to have stitched a white piece showing the story of Alexander, in similar style to the Tristan quilts, witnessed on display at Chateau Falque in Marseilles as recently as the early 1900's.[37]

Medieval motif repertoire: the Toiles Brodées of Reims

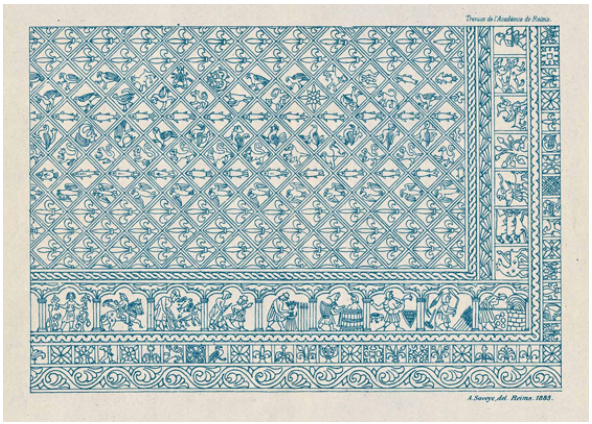

Figure 10 – Drawing of 'Courte-pointe du XIIIe siècle' embroidery From Les Toiles Brodées, Anciennes Mantes ou Courte-pointes conservées a l'Hôtel-Dieu de Reims by Charles-Prosper Givelet, 1883. Note the mermaid and the harpies (figures with the head of a man and the body of a bird) in the body; the hunter blowing a horn, his dog on a leash in the right border.

The scarcity of surviving medieval quilts confounds our understanding of what they looked like. Only the two Tristan quilts survive as examples. Inventories that cite motifs of animal figures, heraldic arms, or the legends of Alexander and Solomon provide scant information as to pattern composition or how figures were depicted - full frontal, in profile, in action or formal repose. Opportunely, an embroidered white textile filled with figurative motifs recently re-surfaced in Reims, France, that may add to our understanding of medieval quilt characteristics (fig.10). In 1882, three amateur archeologists stumbled upon a cache of decorative textiles in storage in a convent hospital, located in the former Abbey of Saint Remi. In their published descriptions and drawings of the find, they improbably attributed one piece to the thirteenth century.[38] The textiles slipped back into convent storage until mid-2009 when two sisters of the order delivered seven embroidered covers to the Museum

of Saint Remi, fittingly located in the same former abbey.

The alleged medieval work is a large cover (100 × 69 inches), fashioned of two layers of white linen, embroidered with blue linen thread in laid and couching stitches. Running stitches in white linen thread fill background areas in the borders. Two side borders are missing. Although the imagery stitched in the presumed early piece is consistent with a medieval origin, the textiles from which it is made belie a later date. The embroidery's top linen loom width measures about 40 inches from selvage to selvage, an unlikely span for that time. Linen loom width in the later Tristan quilts measures no more than 30 inches. Despite this, and the fact the piece is not technically a quilt because there is no filling between the layers, the piece is worthy of study.

Imagery in the embroidery hearkens to figures and ornamentation witnessed in other medieval decorative arts such as architectural elements, manuscript illustrations, tile pavements, and textile furnishings. A wide border on the long side depicts vignettes set within trefoil arcades and showing figures engaged in agricultural activities similar to the calendar images seen in the Otranto cathedral pavement. Figures engaged in similar work within similar arcades appear on thirteenth-century church exteriors in nearby Rampillon and Amiens. The falconer image on the long border is depicted in identical position on two thirteenth-century seals.[39] The short border portrays a hunt in cartoon-like sequence: a wounded doe pursued by three dogs and a hunter, imagery analogous to that in thirteenth-century French mold (fig. 11).[40]

Motifs under the vignettes and in the body of the quilt show other images comparable to those in the Otranto pavement - a goat, an owl, and that naughty two-tailed mermaid, who appears in close proximity to a startling creature with a head, two legs and a pendulous penis. Fantastic creatures, similar to those depicted

on English tiles of the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-centuries, appear as well - a bearded head on legs, the head of a man on the body of a bird, and a double-headed eagle.[41] A hunter holding a dog on leash while blowing his horn, fabulous birds, fleurs de lys, and small geometric motifs echo images on contemporary tiles (fig. 12) excavated from the former abbey and traced to a tile factory less than fifteen miles away.

The imagery in the work, drawn from biblical stories, fables and myths, is an affirmation of the medieval ethos. The cock, fish, eagles, harpies, and lions avow Christian faith and redemption. The labourers represent those among the redeemed. The fleur de lys verify the royal patronage of the Reims bishopric. Even the erotic motifs, the mermaid and the creature with exposed genitalia, are of religious significance. Medieval manuscript expert Alixe Bovey writes, 'viewers might have laughed at grotesques, but far from promoting the kinds of sexualized and corporeal monstrosity they portray, these... images might well have served to condemn it with ridicule'.[42]

Although this image study supports a medieval origin of the embroidery, it far from proves it. In fact, the Reims Sisters of Augustine seem to have been adept copiers. The date '1623' appears in an embroidered work that was illustrated in the 1882 account. The principal image in this piece is identical to an altar painting present at the coronation of Louis XIII at Reims Cathedral in 1610.[43] Other donated embroideries hold similar dates, but the materials they are made from were manufactured at least a century later. They are more likely copies of earlier pieces. Moreover, there is an explanation of why this would be so. Sixteenth-century documents reveal that convent nuns attracted visitors to

their cloister by festooning it with imitations of medieval textiles during the annual feast of Corpus Christi.[44] To maintain this tradition they were required to replace pieces that became tattered. One can imagine the convent hospital sisters, after nursing their patients, busying themselves with embroideries to hang in the cloister, copying images from their surroundings and recreating older, worn pieces.

Thus, the alleged oldest embroidery could be a copy of a medieval work which conceivably could have been a quilt. It may well be a facsimile of what medieval quilts looked like, showing beasts, compasses and rosettes, just as described in Charles V's fourteenth-century inventory. The format of the piece, showing orderly organization of repeated motifs in the centre, framed by a sequence of borders, is consistent with those found in bedcovers. It is pleasant to consider the possibility of it being commissioned for the 1364 coronation of Charles in Reims Cathedral, perhaps to decorate royal lodgings. The profusion of fleur de lys in the embroidery suggests the original piece predated the king's 1376 decree limiting ornamentation to only three lilies, in honor of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, Charles V's 1380 estate lists six white 'courtepointes'.

Animals and octagons

Figure 15 – Sketch of a fantastic beast Worked in the coverlet demonstrates a form analogous to those depicted in other medieval textiles and manuscripts Kathryn Berenson

One more surviving piece may provide insight into the look of medieval quilts. A white quilted and corded work coverlet in the V&A shows an overall mosaic pattern of octagons and diamonds, each holding a fantastic bird or beast. Lamentably, these figures are difficult to make out. Apparently, the original filling was removed at some point leaving only remnants of twisted cotton in corners.

Consequently, figures that were once raised in legible relief are now flat, most of them decipherable only in sketches (fig. 13).This quilt is made of two layers of linen, the bottom layer loosely woven, worked in back and running stitches with white linen thread. The geometrical figures are delineated by two rows of two-ply cotton cording. Figures within octagons are also enclosed by eight-point stars with four-lobed leaf forms outside the angles of each star point. The piece has been cut down from its original size to 198.1 cm × 111.8 cm.

The origins of this quilted coverlet are elusive. Despite museum catalogue notes that identify the piece as being sixteenth century, German, the only traceable connection to Germany is its purchase from a Strasburg dealer, while the date of production could be earlier according to two textile historians.[45] A late 1300s manuscript from Genoa shows comparable composition and imagery. In the manuscript orderly roundels enclose standing eagles, their wings wide-spread, and lions

standing in profile, tails high and claws flared, analogous to the creatures depicted in the bedcover.[46] These fantastic creatures also relate to heraldic and religious imagery of eagles and lions seen in thirteenth- to fourteenth-century tiles and a variety of woven and embroidered European textiles that date from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. In particular, the birds and beasts echo those seen in ‘intarsia’ or inlaid patchwork church textiles found in Finland, Germany and Sweden (fig. 14) (fig. 15).[47] The motifs depicted in the quilt were used over too wide a geographical range and too long a time to anchor its origin. The all over pattern suggests the piece was made as a bedcover. But the imagery may have been problematic. If it was heraldic or religious in intent, perhaps the filling was removed to lessen its importance in a time of political or religious disruptions. Or perhaps troubled dreams came from sleeping in proximity to these clawed, fanged and winged creatures.

Summary: Legend and myth as expressed

in white quilted works

All-white corded and quilted medieval textiles were infused with the same imagery that was portrayed in all the medieval decorative arts, reflecting the religious faith, self-identity, social ideals, and status of their owners. Surviving textiles and written records consistently associate French Normans and members of the House of Anjou with these quilted pieces. This suggests that the political success of the Normans and Angevins may have been accompanied by a conquest of artistic imagination, contributing to the development of a rich tradition of decorative all-white corded and quilted textiles in southern Italy and in France. A similar investigation of inventories, documents and surviving decorative arts in other parts of medieval Europe would add to understanding of the extent of this practice.[48]

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Marc Bouxin, Conservateur en chef du Patrimoine, Direction de la Culture, Ville de Reims; Clare Browne, Curator, Textiles; Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Susanna Conti, Conservatore Direttore, Opificio dell Pietre Dure e Lab di Restauro, Florence, Italy; all of whom gave me access to rare works and their professional insights.

Endnotes

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2. The French word 'tapisserie' refers to a hanging, whether woven, embroidered or quilted.

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4. Bloch, R. Howard. *A Needle in the Right Hand of God*. New York, 2006: 18.

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7. Randles, Sarah. 'The Guicciardini Quilts'. *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol.5. Woodbridge, UK, 2009: 106–108. This chapter of Tristan lore precedes his memorable romance with Mark's wife Isolde.

8. Randles, Sarah. 'The Guicciardini Quilts'. *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, vol.5. Woodbridge, UK, 2009: 99, 107. 'Recent laboratory analysis of the V&A quilt…confirms that the stuffing is in fact cotton fibre'. Tristan quilt dimensions are: V&A 320 × 287 cm; Bargello 247 × 207 cm. Accessed 15 July 2009. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/objectid/O98183

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Tea Parties at the Museum - The collector J. H. Fitzhenry and his relationship with the V&A

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Abstract

The art dealer and collector J. H. Fitzhenry was a well-known figure in the London and Paris art worlds of the turn of the twentieth century, with a well-deserved reputation for connoisseurship as well as for his generosity as a patron of the arts. For over forty years, until his death in 1913, Fitzhenry was a prolific lender and donor to the V&A

museum. Yet today Fitzhenry is a forgotten figure in the history of collecting. Drawing on hitherto unpublished correspondence, this article brings to light the life and collections of Fitzhenry, and assesses his important role in the expansion of the V&A collections during this period.

> *'Dear Mr. Fitzhenry,*
>
> *During the course of last year you made a large number of valuable and important gifts to this Museum. Amongst them all there was none perhaps so remarkable and so welcome an addition to the collection as that of the magnificent series of French porcelain and French and Dutch faience, which you gave the Board in August and September. These two collections constitute what is probably the most valuable and generous gift which has ever been made to the Museum during the lifetime of the donor. They enable the Museum, which was hitherto lamentably deficient in objects of this character, to stand comparison with the collections of any museum in Europe'. [...]*
>
> *Sir Cecil Smith, Director of the V&A, to J. H. Fitzhenry.*[1]

Introduction

In 1910, the collector and dealer J. H. Fitzhenry (1836-1913) presented to the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A), London, two collections of ceramics, one of French porcelain, the other of Dutch faience. In the letter of thanks written by the then Director of the museum, Sir Cecil Smith (1859-1944), these collections were judged to 'constitute what is probably the most valuable and generous gift which has ever been made to the Museum during the lifetime of the

donor'.[2] This donation undoubtedly formed a centre-point for the museum's expanding collection of Continental ceramics, and represented the culmination of a forty year relationship between Fitzhenry and the V&A. Yet if this was one of the 'most valuable and generous gift[s]' ever made to the museum, why is Fitzhenry today a largely forgotten figure in the history of its collections?

Joseph Henry Fitzhenry was a man of many talents: an art-collector, an art-dealer, and a patron of the arts.[3] Little biographical information is known about him, and this absence must make the early years of Fitzhenry's life and career mere speculation. In his own lifetime he was perceived as a self-made man who, despite a modest background, achieved the education and experience to work successfully as an art dealer in mid-nineteenth-century Paris.[4] He was an acknowledged expert on the fine and decorative arts and he could count amongst his personal friends some of the most well known 'cognoscenti' and greatest art-collectors of the nineteenth century, including Sir Richard Wallace (1818-90) and George Salting (1835-1909), who he counted as his closest friend. As well as establishing a reputation that would attract some of the foremost art patrons of the day to enlist his services, most notably the American, J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913), with time Fitzhenry amassed a sufficient fortune to retire as a 'gentleman collector'. During the last 30 years of his life he lived at No. 25, Queen Anne's-Gate, Kensington, close to what was then known as the South Kensington Museum, to which he was such a generous benefactor.[5]

On Fitzhenry's death in 1913 it could be publicly stated that, 'Nearly every department of the South Kensington Museum contains loan exhibits from the Fitzhenry Gift - nearly all Mr.

Fitzhenry's best things, in fact, were confided to the safe custody of the Museum'.[6] Over a forty year period, the art collector would lend well over 3,000 items to the museum; this apart from the presentation of many numerous and valuable donations.[7] Yet today Fitzhenry is a largely forgotten figure both in the history of nineteenth-century British collecting and the history of the V&A. The most recent and comprehensive histories of the V&A, particularly 'A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum', and 'Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum' , fail to reference Fitzhenry.[8] Recent years have seen much interest in the relationship between dealers and the V&A during its early history, led by the research of curators Ann Eatwell and Clive Wainwright,[9] but yet again Fitzhenry is overlooked.[10]

This article aims, accordingly, to correct this oversight, to serve as an introduction to Fitzhenry and to evaluate his role in the early history of the V&A. This will be accomplished through an examination of the gifts and loans he made to the museum, his participation in the collecting policy of the V&A, and his relationship with the curatorial staff of the museum. The primary source for this research is the large collection of unpublished correspondence and papers between Fitzhenry and staff at the V&A, held in the V&A archives.[11]

A generous patron to the V&A

Throughout his life, Fitzhenry was a frequent and generous patron of the arts in Britain and France. He made loans and benefactions to museums across the United Kingdom, such as the Stoke-on-Trent Ceramics Museum, to which in 1908 he lent examples of Wedgwood and works of the English ceramic factories.[12] He also made gifts to French museums; in 1905 he donated a collection of over 200 examples of English earthenware and porcelain to the Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs, Paris.[13]

Fitzhenry was an active figure in the London art scene, regularly appearing as a lender to high-profile public exhibitions, such as those held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club. He was also involved at society level as an exhibition organiser in his own right, for example coordinating with Salting in 1907 a select private exhibition of 'miniatures, and other objects of artistic or historic value', to be held in a private residence.[14] Fitzhenry's reputation as a connoisseur was largely based on his expertise in two fields, French ceramics and European miniatures. As such it is no surprise to see him being selected to sit on the British committee for the International Exhibition of Miniatures, held in Brussels in 1912.[15] In addition, his public reputation seems to have been greatly increased by his association with J. Pierpont Morgan; the New York Times described Fitzhenry at his death as, 'for years J. Pierpont Morgan's confidential adviser and art representative [in London]'.[16] Fitzhenry himself was very proud of this connection, and his correspondence is peppered with rather boastful asides to his socialising at Morgan's London residence or on the 'Corsair', Morgan's luxurious yacht.[17]

Yet, first and foremost in Fitzhenry's attentions came the V&A.[18] The

records of the V&A show that Fitzhenry first started making gifts to the museum in 1870, when he was a young man in his thirties and presumably in the initial stages of his career. The very first gift listed is a 'Mechlin lace lappet'. The second gift was not made until 1877, a 'French terra cotta shaft or flue', presented along with an 'English earthenware jug'.[19] Gifts over the twenty-year period 1870-1890 were sporadic and modest in value. Loans and gifts increased during the 1890s, presumably by which time Fitzhenry was well established and successful in his profession. During these years he was also offering items for sale to the museum within his capacity as a dealer.[20] From 1901 onwards there is a dramatic increase in both the quantity and quality of gifts to the V&A from Fitzhenry. By this date he may have cut back on his professional work, and had the leisure and financial means to indulge his interest in the museum.

Fitzhenry is distinguished as a collector by the breadth of his collecting practices. This can be seen from the contents of his entire collection which, after his death, were sold at auction in London by Christie's. The collection was so large that - even after the deduction of an additional large group of items bequeathed to the V&A - the auction had to be spread over two weeks in November 1913.[21] Fitzhenry's collection was of an extraordinary diversity and scale, featuring

anything from French medieval wood carvings, to English Georgian silver, to a portrait attributed to the Spanish painter Velazquez (1599-1660). The total sale raised £35,265 7s 3d (gross), and this figure did not include valuable items of French origin, such as eighteenth-century porcelain and book-covers, which were later sold separately at auction in Paris.

The same astonishing diversity characterised Fitzhenry's loans and gifts to the V&A. For example, in 1902 he presented to the museum a collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century 'silver punch ladles' and 'silver caddie spoons', much appreciated by Keeper of Metalwork, H. P. Mitchell ('I believe we have not a single example').[22] Shortly afterwards he donated a Renaissance terracotta Virgin and Child, attributed at the time by one of the leading authorities on Renaissance sculpture, German art critic Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929), to the Master of the Pellegrini Chapel (Sant'Anastasia, Verona).[23] When on a buying trip to France in 1909, Fitzhenry wrote to Sir Cecil Smith: 'I have secured some interesting 'architectural' fragments from a very early chapel (being demolished) near Clermont-Ferrand. (Quite the best locality for that class of work). They are 12 corbels in stone of most complicated design'.[24]

Figure 1 - Fragments of arched doorway from St. Hilaire le Grand, Poitiers, about 1500. Carved Limestone. Museum no. A.12:1-1911. Fitzhenry Gift

Figure 1 presents similar architectural fragments donated by Fitzhenry to the V&A: the remains of an arched doorway from the early-sixteenth-century church of St. Hilaire le Grand, Poitiers. Despite ranging across Georgian silver, Renaissance sculpture and Gothic architecture, his correspondence with the museum testifies that Fitzhenry was not simply a magpie of a collector, acquiring objects at whim; rather his letters give evidence to an impressive breadth of knowledge covering diverse fields and periods of the European decorative arts.

By 1902, Fitzhenry had been allocated his own exhibition cases in the public galleries of the V&A, a very visible sign of the prestige Fitzhenry enjoyed through his collection. A V&A memo told how, 'The little collection of snuff boxes, watches, miniatures, etc, offered as an addition to his loan by Mr. Fitzhenry got together by him from the Pichon and Gavet collections and other sources, are all of small size and many of them of very fine quality. Space was provided for them several weeks ago by Mr. Skinner's instructions in one of the cases devoted to Mr. Fitzhenry's collection, which in consequence stands partially empty waiting to receive them. Their acceptance would thus displace nothing but would enable us to complete the arrangement of the case.'[25]

Fitzhenry frequently opened his home to the V&A and gave curatorial staff access to his private collection. A letter described how:

> *'Mr. Fitzhenry during the last few weeks has been making considerable changes in the collection which he has hitherto kept in his rooms. He is desirous of lending to our museum and that of the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris those objects which may be considered to be most suited for filling the existing vacancies in the collection of these institutions. He offered to lend us English and foreign silver and some more foreign porcelain. Messrs Wylde and Mitchell accordingly went to Mr. Fitzhenry's rooms and made their selection with great care. Mr. Fitzhenry has added also a few other things himself.'*[26]

In loaning items from his collection to the V&A, Fitzhenry was following a common practice of English collectors which had existed since the founding years of the museum. Ann Eatwell has shown how, during the nineteenth century, the V&A pursued an innovative policy which actively encouraged lending. It was perceived as an efficient means of expanding the collection and filling display space. From its earliest years the museum had relied heavily on the good-will of collectors and pursued a policy of encouraging potential donors. Due to lack of funds, the museum had used loans from connoisseurs to increase the quantity and quality of its exhibitions, and many such loans eventually became permanent gifts. A dedicated Loan Court was established to give a central position to these loans.[27] The foundation of societies for collectors interested in the decorative arts, such as the Fine Arts Club in 1857, and its offshoot the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1866 (both of which were founded by the first art curator at the V&A, Sir John Charles Robinson (1824-1913)), facilitated the museum in making contact with such collectors, winning their patronage and obtaining items for the collections. They could be actively encouraged to collect to fill gaps in the public collections.[28] An internal memo of 1908 already financially valued Fitzhenry's contributions to the museum's collections at 15,484-6-

0.[29] This was before many of his most important gifts to the museum were made.

The Fitzhenry collection of French porcelain

During his lifetime, Fitzhenry established a collection of French porcelain of unsurpassed quality that displayed the technical and stylistic development of the different porcelain manufactories from the late-seventeenth century onwards. By 1905, a large part of it was on loan to the V&A museum, including specimens of Sèvres, St.Cloud, Chantilly and Mennecy. C.H. Wylde, curator of ceramics at the V&A, published an article in 'The Burlington Magazine' devoted to the loan collection. He praised Fitzhenry for having 'brought together by years of indefatigable industry both in England and the Continent probably the finest collection of French pâte-tendre in the United Kingdom', at a time when little if anything was known about early French soft-paste porcelain in Britain. Wylde saw the importance of Fitzhenry's collection as lying not just in the quality and breadth of the items, but primarily due to the rarity of such a collection in Britain in the early-twentieth century.

> *'It is only by a thorough knowledge of the history of the development of continental porcelain that our English productions can be properly understood, and the opportunity given by Mr. Fitzhenry's generous loan, which it is in his power to remove at any moment, is one of the extremely rare chances afforded to students and collectors in this country of seeing and comparing the various products of the early French factories.'*[30]

This loan was just part of Fitzhenry's overall porcelain collection held at his Kensington apartment, and which part he later sold in Paris in 1909. The auction of the collection of 'Porcelaines tendres anciennes, françaises & étrangères' was handled by F. Lair-Dubreuil, and took place over four days, beginning on 13 December 1909. A preface to the auction catalogue was especially written by a leading French authority on ceramics, Count Xavier de Chavagnac (1846-1911). The motive for such a sale seems to have been to raise money to enable Fitzhenry to continue to indulge his passion for collecting. He seems to have prepared carefully for what he planned to be one of the most important sales of French porcelain in recent years. He moved to Paris over a month before the auction was scheduled, in order to supervise the preparations personally. His correspondence reveals he had high hopes.

> *'My sale promises to be a great success! People think it will make £12,000. If there is competition (very likely as there is no 'Pate Tendre' in the market) I cannot form an idea of the results! Anyhow, I will get enough to pay for all my late expensive art purchases (with something to spare!).'*[31]

His high expectations appear to have been justified; writing a month later that he had 'a very successful sale in Paris' which would enable him 'to lay off all my 'arts' debts as soon as settled up!'[32]

Figure 2 - Teabowl and trembleuse saucer, Saint-Cloud, about 1700-1715. Soft paste porcelain painted in underglaze blue. Museum no. C.433&A-1909. Fitzhenry Gift

In 1909, Fitzhenry permanently donated his remaining collection of French porcelain which had been on view at the V&A. Some of the most beautiful examples of early porcelain in the V&A collection today are gifts from Fitzhenry, such as an exquisitely simple teabowl and saucer (c.1700-15) (fig. 2), rare examples of early European soft-paste porcelain from the Saint Cloud factory, and an elaborate mythological group (1745-52) in the spirit of the rococo artist François Boucher (1703-70) produced at the manufactory of Vincennes (fig. 3). This gift, along with an important collection of Dutch faience made at the same time, was a highly valued contribution to the national ceramics collection. As noted at the time:

> *This offer of Mr. Fitzhenry is, next to the Schreiber Gift, the most generous which has ever been made to the Museum, for although not so valuable as the Jones or the Sheepshanks Bequest, the gift of a valuable collection in the donor's lifetime is far more magnificent than the bequest after his death when it can no longer be of any value to him.*[33]

Figure 3 - Venus and Adonis Mythological Group, Vicennes Porcelain Factory, France, 1750-55. Biscuit Porcelain with gilt metal mount. Museum no. C.356-1909. Fitzhenry Gift

Fitzhenry was in good company; Lady Charlotte Schreiber (1812-95) had been one of the earliest, most active and most successful English collectors of ceramics, along with other fields of the applied arts, including lace, fans and playing cards. Her donation of English ceramics to the V&A in 1884 largely established the national collection. Likewise, John Jones' important 1882 donation of French eighteenth-century furniture and porcelain, particularly Sèvres, greatly augmented the museum's holdings in this area, started in 1853 with objects from the collection of James Bandinel.[34] Fitzhenry's donation built on and enhanced these previously existing porcelain collections, and was perhaps more notable at the time as the visible success of a contemporary English collector, rather than for its specific scholarly value as a totality. Individual works were chosen for inclusion in Edward Dillon's 1904 publication,'Porcelain', which aimed to 'provide a definitive general survey of the history of the manufacture of porcelain, both Oriental and European, in the English language.'[35] Yet Fitzhenry's porcelain collection was never published by the museum as a catalogue. Perhaps if he had not separated and sold the collection, but retained it as a whole, it would have maintained a greater integral scholarly value.

The role of the Fitzhenry Gift

A striking characteristic of Fitzhenry, and one which must have been a contributing factor to his role as museum patron, was his awareness of the broader social potential of design, and the social role that could be played by his own collection. In the spirit of the 1851 Great Exhibition, Henry Cole (1808-82) and the origins of the V&A, he did not just collect for his own egotistical pleasure or reward, but he hoped that his collection would play a part in the continuation of contemporary British industrial design.[36] This is stated quite clearly in a letter of 1909: 'I have made some lovely purchases here especially French silver from 2 noted silversmiths and curio dealers here, so the 'provenance' is all right but (as I always do) I buy with the idea of benefitting our manufactures'.[37] Fitzhenry perceived that such designs could be of cultural interest and aesthetic inspiration to future generations of artists and designers. A central element of Fitzhenry's importance within the history of collecting lies in his recognition of the cultural value of the decorative arts, and the support he gave to the museums of design and the industrial arts which were founded in nineteenth-century Britain and Europe, one of the most influential of which was the V&A.

Despite this, Fitzhenry's art collection was also undoubtedly a means of obtaining prestige and status for himself. At the most basic level, it was a way of receiving public acknowledgement such as has been noted in Wylde's article on Fitzhenry's porcelain collection in 'The Burlington Magazine' . The fact that objects from Fitzhenry's collection were worthy of exhibition in a museum reflected on his personal success, both financially and academically: 'My triumph

however is not that but securing the grandest 'Virgin' in walnut 'École de Bourgogne'. I just came from that country, 14th century and simply as grand a work as any museum holds!'[38] Nor was Fitzhenry shy about boasting of the aesthetic and financial value of his collection, or of his donations to public collections. For example, when in 1909 he was considering presenting his valuable collection of French porcelain to the V&A, he wrote to Sir Cecil: 'I want to see you about the presenting to the Museum (at once) my superb collection of Pate Tendre. I own that it is a fine gift.'[39]

There were many instances when the V&A accepted unwanted loans or gifts from Fitzhenry out of appreciation for the many valued past gifts, and the hope of future ones. One example of many occurred in 1904 when the museum board rejected a gift of pewter offered by Fitzhenry. The action motivated many of the curators to urge the acceptance of the gift, particularly A. B. Skinner. In this instance, Skinner wrote a strongly-worded memo to the director.

> *'He is, as you know, a great benefactor of the Museum, having presented us with many valuable works of art which our funds would not allow us to buy. To mention one or two, you will remember that he has given us a very valuable collection of Italian tiles, which we could not possibly have expected to possess except through the generosity of some donor. He wished the other day to purchase for the Museum, and to give, a portion of the architectural details of the Château de Montal, but the lot for which he gave instructions to*

> *his broker exceeded his limit. I do not think it is really right that such generosity and interest should be respected in this way, and I beg leave very strongly to recommend that Mr. Oglivie be asked to allow us to keep these specimens of pewter and to thank Mr. Fitzhenry for his kindness towards the museum.*[40]

On this occasion, after much discussion, the museum board eventually agreed to accept the gift. The 'valuable collection of Italian tiles', referred to by Skinner in the above memo, are a collection of earthenware painted floor tiles commissioned in the 1490s by the Gonzagas of Mantua. Decorated with a variety of Gonzaga family mottoes and emblems, they were used to adorn the studio of Isabella d'Este.[41] More disagreement arose when Fitzhenry wished to present a Roman fresco, a nineteenth-century copy of a fourteenth-century original and in poor condition, picked up during Fitzhenry's 1910 trip to Rome. Internal museum memos show there was general consensus among the curatorial staff that the loan should not be accepted, there being no exhibition space for the object, and it being in such poor condition it would not be suitable to exhibit anyway. However, once again Fitzhenry's allies in the museum stepped in, with Skinner writing to the director.

> *'Had this been an ordinary loan I should have recommended its refusal because we have no room to exhibit it. But I have heard there is some prospect of Mr. Fitzhenry's loans becoming eventually the property of the nation, so that if this fresco were now refused, the Museum might lose it forever, while if it were accepted it might some day become a permanent possession.*[42]

The loan was eventually accepted, though after much debate. The museum was evidently courting Fitzhenry. Ironically, Fitzhenry seems to have been wise to this policy of placation; concerning a donation offered to the museum in 1903, he peevishly declared that he

did not ‘want it down as a favour, as I would rather give it to the oratory of some ‘Popish Church’ than have it stored away in a ‘cornor’ as it is a good thing’.[43]

Relationships at the museum

Fitzhenry took an active part in the daily activities of the museum, at times acting on behalf of other important museum donors such as J. Pierpont Morgan. For example, in 1909 he supervised the installation of a loan collection of Gobelins tapestries made by Morgan to the V&A. He took an interest in the most minute details of how his loans and gifts, and those of his clients, were presented - cases, lighting, room positioning, information cards - nothing was considered irrelevant.

Fitzhenry’s officious attitude does not always seem to have been appreciated by staff members, and perhaps inevitably he seems to have stepped on more than a few toes in his eagerness to participate and manage how his collection was presented and maintained. Nevertheless, he had close friendships with the director, Sir Cecil Smith, as well as with many of the curatorial staff. A mark of what could be perceived as either extraordinary generosity or arrogance was his offer to finance a study-trip for the Keeper of Sculpture and Architecture, A. B. Skinner, with whom he maintained a friendly relationship.[44] Writing to Sir Cecil Smith on Skinner’s behalf to petition for three weeks leave of absence, Fitzhenry made it clear he would organise and finance the trip himself. Evidently Fitzhenry very much saw himself in the role as ‘tutor’ imparting knowledge to a student (despite Skinner’s professional expertise).

> *'I am so glad you find it feasible to let Skinner come for a three-week tour with me, in the home of the 'Arts' (Sculpture and Architecture, Italian and Greek, he is so saturated with). He has to 'chalk out' the tour, as I want him to see everything we can (in the time) likely to improve his knowledge and taste in those 2 categories.'*[45]

The museum acted as a second home to Fitzhenry. In the summer of 1910, when most curatorial staff were away enjoying holidays, Fitzhenry could write to the director that 'I dwell in the museum and have a Daily Tea Party'.[46] In such a sense, the staff at the museum seems to have almost fulfilled the role of surrogate family.

As has been noted above, it was widely accepted by museum staff that at his death, Fitzhenry would bequeath everything on loan at the Victoria & Albert to the museum. Nevertheless, to the surprise of all concerned, Fitzhenry changed his mind shortly before his death, apparently due to increasing ill health and mounting medical bills. Director Sir Cecil Smith recorded the event in a memo in 1912.

> *On the 15th inst. Mr. Fitzhenry called on me. He informed me that during his recent illness his doctor had urged on him the necessity of making some arrangements for the disposal of his collection after his death; and that in consequence he had made a will and appointed an executor... He explained to me that, although his desire is that the whole of his collection now on loan to us shall become our property, circumstances are not such as to permit him to make a free gift of them now, as he would like to do.*[47]

Fitzhenry aspired to create a national art collection which would mirror those of friends such as Salting and Wallace. Yet, without the financial independence these friends enjoyed, Fitzhenry's aspirations could not ultimately be met. However, Fitzhenry had directly contributed to official museum policy regarding the formation of its

collections. After Fitzhenry's death, his entire loan collection to the V&A had to be sold, which created significant voids in the museum collection. The director wrote to one of the museum's trustees:

> *'Mr. J. H. Fitzhenry who recently died, had on deposit here a large collection which it was always understood he was going to bequeath to the Museum. It was, indeed, so much regarded as an accepted fact that our policy of purchase was to some extent governed by the idea that certain gaps were already filled by the Fitzhenry exhibits.'*[48]

Further corroboration of this policy is provided in' The Burlington Magazine' by an anonymous reviewer of 'Principal Acquisitions of the Victoria & Albert Museum', who, in 1915, lamented 'the removal of the late Mr. Fitzhenry's long loans to the [V&A] museum caused great gaps in the French and Italian sculpture'.[49] A case-list was compiled of artifacts lent by Fitzhenry to the museum and still housed there at his death - over a forty year period from his earliest loan in 1870, over 3,150 items had been lent, artifacts which now were removed and dispersed.[50]

Conclusion

In the opening quotation of this article, Sir Cecil Smith described Fitzhenry's donations to the V&A as 'the most valuable and generous gift... ever made... within the lifetime of the donor'. Although an important figure in the history of the V&A, such fervent praise should in hindsight be viewed as words of gratitude in acknowledgment of many past acts of generosity and with the hope of many more future ones. While his posthumous reputation as an art collector has undoubtedly suffered due to the breaking up of the larger part of his collections, Fitzhenry nevertheless deserves to be remembered for the donation of

many important gifts which helped to form and complete departmental collections, as well as for the support, both professionally and financially, he sought to give a newly developing museum. Fitzhenry offers an interesting insight into the complex relationship between the museum and such dealer-collectors, and the valuable role played by more modest donations in the overall shaping of the national collection.

Endnotes

1. V&A: MA/1/F677/13 -Ref: AM 3234-09 / AM 4690-09; 1910. The original punctuation, spelling and grammar are retained in the quoted extracts from the correspondence of J. H. Fitzhenry.
2. V&A: MA/1/F677/13 -Ref: AM 3234-09 / AM 4690-09; 7 June 1910, Letter from Sir Cecil Smith to Fitzhenry. The original punctuation, spelling and grammar are retained in the quoted extracts from the correspondence of J. H. Fitzhenry.
3. A reconstruction of the life and career of J. H. Fitzhenry is for the most part reliant on the body of his surviving correspondence in the archives of the V&A, as well as his 1913 obituary in The Times.
4. Obituary. *The Times*. 18 March 1913.
5. Unfortunately no visual image of J. H. Fitzhenry has yet been identified. At least one portrait of him is known to have been produced, a 1908 portrait by Sir William Orpen (1878-1931) which was sold by Christies in 1913. Its present location is unknown.
6. *The Times*. 29 August 1913.
7. V&A: MA/1/F677/22 - Internal memo
8. Baker, Malcolm and Brenda Richardson, eds. *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London, 1997. Burton, Anthony. *Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria & Albert Museum*. London, 1999.
9. Eatwell, Anne. 'Borrowing from Collectors: The role of the Loan in the Formation of the Victoria and Albert

Museum and its Collection (1852-1932)'. *Decorative Arts Society Journal* 24 (2000): 21-29. Wainwright, Clive. 'The Making of the South Kensington Museum: Part III - "Collecting Abroad"'. *Journal of the History of Collections* 14:1. 45-61; '"A gatherer and disposer of other men's stuffe". Murray Marks, connoisseur and curiosity dealer'. *Journal of the History of Collections* 14:1. 161-176.

10. However since the first draft of this article was written in the summer of 2009, the V&A has opened Phase 1 of the new Ceramic Galleries. Judith Crouch's online essay 'The Formation of the Ceramics Galleries' acknowledges for the first time Fitzhenry's contributions to the museum's ceramic collection (accessed 13/10/2009)

11. V&A, Fitzhenry Files (1817-1913), MA/1/F677/1 to MA/1/F677/22 inclusive. To date no other personal papers or correspondence relating to Fitzhenry have been located by this author.

12. V&A: MA/1/F677/8 -Ref: 81469; 20 January 1905, Letter from W. W. Watts to A. B. Skinner

13. V&A: MA/1/F677/8 -Ref: 17379/05; 3 November 1905, A. B. Skinner, memo

14. *The Burlington Magazine*. 1907, vol.11: 117.

15. 'International Exhibition of Miniatures'. *The Times*. 6 February 1912.

16. 'Fitzhenry Collection to be Sold'. *The New York Times*. 31 August 1913.

17. See for example V&A: MA/1/F677/13 - Ref: AM 3342; June 29th 1909, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith; V&A: MA/1/F677/14 -Ref: AM 2645/09; May 21st 1910, Letter from Fitzhenry to Arthur B. Skinner

18. The South Kensington Museum was established in 1852 following the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and was run by the Department of Science and Art. One of the primary functions of the museum was to disseminate knowledge about manufactures, aesthetics and culture, in the hope of fostering modern British industry. It was renamed the V&A in 1899.

19. V&A: MA/1/F677/15 -Ref: AM 6263; List of gifts from J. H. Fitzhenry, 1870 to 1908

20. See for example, V&A: MA/1/F677/1- Ref. 1817; Letter from Fitzhenry to V&A

21. The details of the Fitzhenry sale were reported in The Times, 29 August, and 18-27 November 1913

22. V&A: MA/1/F677/5 -Ref: 22521; 2 September 1902, Memo from H.P. Mitchell to W. W. Watts

23. Registration no. 62-1903. V&A: MA/1/F677/5 -Ref: 90837; 23 February 1903, Report by A. B. Skinner. Current scholarship now equates the Master of the Pellegrini Chapel with Michele da Firenze (active 1404-43). Paoletti, J. T. & G. M. Radke. *Art in Renaissance Italy*. London, 2005, 3rd edition: 337.

24. V&A: MA/1/F677/14 -Ref: AM 5380; 1 November 1909, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

25. V&A: MA/1/F677/5 -Ref: 22521; 2 September 1902, Memo from H. P. Mitchell to W. W. Watts

26. V&A: MA/1/F677/11 -Ref: M729/07; 14 February [1907], Letter from A. B. Skinner to Mr. Oglivie

27. Eatwell, Anne. 'Borrowing from Collectors: The role of the Loan in the Formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and its Collection (1852-1932)'. *Decorative Arts Society Journal* 24 (2000): 21-29.

28. The initial research on the topic was led by Eatwell, Anne. 'The Collector's or Fine Arts Club 1857-1874: the First Society for Collectors of the Decorative Arts'. Decorative Arts Society Journal 18 (1994): 25-301; and Wainwright, C. 'The Making of the South Kensington Museum: Part III - "Collecting Abroad"'. *Journal of the History of Collections* 14:1 (2002): 45-61. See also published histories on the V&A for cursory discussions on the most prominent collectors.

29. V&A: MA/1/F677/15 -Ref: AM 6263; List of gifts from J. H. Fitzhenry, 1870 to 1908.

30. Wylde, C. H. 'Mr. Fitzhenry's collection of early French pâte-tendre'. The Burlington Magazine. 1905, 28: 188-201.

31. V&A: MA/1/F677/14 -Ref: AM 5380; November 1st 1909, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

32. V&A: MA/1/F677/14 -Ref: AM 6160; December 18th 1909, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

33. V&A: MA/1/F677/13 -Ref: AM 3234-09; 4 August 1909, Memo from C.H. Wylde to Sir Cecil Smith. Wylde valued the bequest at approximately £6,317. There is unfortunately no evidence in published sources to show that Lady Schreiber and Fitzhenry were acquainted, though it is highly feasible that the two must have met, being both such active collectors of ceramics and highly involved with the V&A.

34. See Crouch for a concise history of the formation of the V&A's ceramic galleries.. (Accessed 13/10/2009)

35. Dillon, E. *Porcelain*. London, 1904. Five works from Fitzhenry's collection, principally eighteenth-century French,

were chosen to be illustrated in the book

36. Henry Cole was the first director of the South Kensington Museum (later called the V&A) from 1857-73

37. V&A: MA/1/F677/14 -Ref: AM 6223; 30 December 1909, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

38. V&A: MA/1/F677/1 -Ref: 377; 19 [January 1891], Letter from Fitzhenry to Richard Thompson. Richard Thompson had been Assistant Director at the V&A retiring in 1891

39. V&A: MA/1/F677/13 -Ref: AM 3342; 29 June [1909], Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

40. V&A: MA/1/F677/7 -Ref: T80614; 18 February 1904, Internal memo by A. B. Skinner

41. V&A: Reg. No. 334: 1-1903 to 334:6-1903

42. V&A: MA/1/F677/18 -Ref: 2913M; 8 August 1910, Memo from A. B. Skinner(?) to Sir Cecil Smith

43. V&A: MA/1/F677/5 -Ref: 2913M; 11 February [?] 1903, Letter from Fitzhenry to Unknown

44. Arthur Banks Skinner (1861-1911) was Director of the V&A from 1905 to 1908, until he was replaced by Sir Cecil Smith, who directed the museum until 1924. Skinner was relegated to Keeper of the Department of Architecture and Sculpture.

45. V&A: MA/1/F677/16 -Ref: 10/174; 2 February 1910, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

46. V&A: MA/1/F677/18 -Ref: 10/34737; 30 August 1910, Letter from Fitzhenry to Sir Cecil Smith

47. V&A: MA/1/F677/20 -Ref: 5361M; 18 October 1912, Internal record by Sir Cecil Smith of interview with Fitzhenry

48. V&A: MA/1/F677/21, 3 October 1913, Transcript of letter from Sir Cecil Smith to Sir Wyndham Murray

49. *The Burlington Magazine*. 1915, 28: no.151.

50. This figure did not include the numerous gifts he had previously presented to the museum. Although the V&A were thwarted of so much of Fitzhenry's collection, the museum was given preferential choice on artefacts from the collection before it went to auction at Christie's.

Manchu horse-hoof shoes: Footwear and cultural identity

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Abstract

Figure 1 - Manchu horse-hoof shoe, China (Quing Dynasty), about 1900. Silk with silk embroidery, hemp covered wooden heel. 12.5 x 22.5 x 8.5 cm. Museum no. LOST 110/FE.1 9/11,3,2

The Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the last empire in Chinese history, was ruled by the Manchus, a nomadic group that came from the north. Much of what we know today as Chinese material culture developed during this period. This includes objects related to Manchu dress, such as the long robe called a qipao and Han Chinese footwear, including the footbinding shoe.

This article was inspired by a Qing dynasty pair of Manchu 'horse-hoof' shoes in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 1). The Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911), the last empire in Chinese history, was ruled by the Manchus, a nomadic group that came from the north. Much of what we know today as Chinese material culture developed during this period. This includes objects related to Manchu dress, such as the long robe called a 'qipao' (旗 袍) and Han Chinese footwear, including the footbinding shoe.[1]

Although footwear has a long and complex history in China, Western scholars and collectors have focused their interests on the Han Chinese footbinding shoe rather than the 'naturally' sized Manchu 'horse-hoof' sole shoe. Why has the Manchu's 'qipao' become a Chinese icon, while the footwear worn by Manchu women has been ignored or regarded as invisible under the long robe?

In this paper, through an investigation of a pair of Manchu women's 'horse-hoof' shoes, I will explore the relationship between Manchu and Han Chinese women's footwear. I will do this first by analysing the artefacts and the way in which objects like these feature inChinese materials of the period and secondary works on Manchu studies; and secondly by using evidence provided by ethnographic observations of the recent past and comparing aspects of Manchu and Han Chinese cultures. In this way we

can investigate whether the Manchu 'horse-hoof' sole shoe had any impact on the Han Chinese's footbinding shoe and to what degree there was an 'interactive acculturation' between Manchu and Han Chinese cultures.[2]

Object analysis

Each shoe consists of two separate parts: a fabric upper and a wooden heel. With a sole at the bottom made of hemp-covered wood supporting a decorative embroidered upper, the shoe comprises two contrasting kinds of materials. The heel has a slightly curved 'horse-hoof' ('mati' 馬蹄) shape. The bottom of the sole was padded with layers of cotton, suggesting that the shoe would have been worn indoors or only on special occasions. Even though the toes are slightly pointed, the right and left shoes are interchangeable.

According to art historian Verity Wilson, 'the embroidered uppers were often made by women at home, and these decorated parts were sent out to a professional cobbler to be made up'.[3] In Han Chinese society, shoe making was divided according to gender: male workers mostly fashioned the wooden parts, while women did the embroidery. However, there has been little study of the origins and development of Manchu shoes. Historical texts tell us that Manchu women never bound their feet and that Manchus traditionally made shoes out of wood. (Tradition also holds that the thick-soled shoe was first created by a goddess to keep off the dust and insects when she had to walk in the mud.) When Manchu dress and hairstyle were reshaped in the mid-nineteenth century, 'horse-hoof' shoes became important accessories in Manchu fashion. In 1848, Chinese historian Fu Ge (福格) described the Manchu style as

consisting of a ‘qipao,’ high-heeled shoes, and hairstyles such as the ‘liangbatou’ (兩把頭). This ensemble made Manchu women appear taller, and led their bodies to move with a free, confident and swaying motion, called ‘enuoduozhi’ (婀挪多姿), which Fu Ge contrasted to Han Chinese women’s delicate and fragile beauty.

The Victoria and Albert Museum’s collection has several pairs of Manchu ‘horse-hoof’ shoes. One pair is covered with blue satin and has lace edges, evidence of the importation of Western material culture after the Opium war with Britain in 1842, when China was forced to shift its trade policy to open the port to western goods. A pair of male shoes in the collection has uppers of black-dyed cotton, with a geometric weave of varying stitched designs. These have thicker soles but the same edged satin stitch as the women’s pair discussed in this essay. According to Chinese fashion historian Valery M. Garrett, this black-edged satin stitch (which also appears on Manchu gowns) was adopted because it was easier to care for, as the stitching providing more strength at the border of the textile. It was the popular style for over two hundred years in the south of China, particularly in Guangdong, and later became the popular standard style for the labouring class during the 1920s and the 1930s.[4]

The ‘big feet’ of Manchu women

‘Even though Manchu women don’t bind their feet, they wear a special shoe to indicate the symbol of [the Han women’s] tiny feet’, wrote the

British missionary Gilbert Wills at the end of the nineteenth-century.[5] This contention, perhaps a reflection of the Han Chinese viewpoint of Manchu women's shoes at that time, has had a strong influence on the study of Chinese women's footwear. Sun Yan-Zhen, in her recent book, 'Women's Fashion Studies in Qing Dynasty', asserts that the 'horse-hoof' sole of the Manchu shoe can be seen to be imitating features of the Han Chinese footbinding shoe.[6] The Manchu 'horse-hoof' shoe emphasizes the Manchu woman's 'natural' feet, called 'heavenly feet' ('tianzu' 天足) or simply 'big feet' ('dajiou' 大腳), as opposed to the Han Chinese women's bound foot, which was given the poetic name 'sancun jinlian'(三寸金蓮), meaning 'three inch golden lotus'.

The implications and usage of the terms 'tianzu' and 'dajiou' should be clarified. It is unclear exactly why Chinese people were describing Manchu women's natural or unbound feet as 'heavenly', but it should be noted that 'tianzu' was a term of foreign inspiration, first voiced in 1875 when British missionary John MacGowan held a meeting of the Heavenly Foot Society of Amoy (Xiamen). It was an early anti-footbinding campaign that later contributed to the Republican Chinese feminism movement in the 1920s.[7] 'Tianzu' was actually a term deployed to criticize the practice of footbinding. As Dorothy Ko explains, 'The significance of the category tianzu lies in the transnational context of its birth and its overt Christian justification'.[8] I will therefore avoid the historical

anachronism of ‘tianzu,’ instead using the term ‘dajiou’ (大腳) or ‘big feet’. Recounted by Chinese ethnographer Zhou Hong, a folk song called ‘Making shoes’, from a Manchu village of Liaoning province, makes humorous use of the term.[9]

Looking for a woodworker to make a shoe heel

Looking for a woodworker to make a shoe sole

Using a roll and half of satin thread, using eight boxes of silk

Spending three years finally making a shoe

Calling a girl to try it on, neither too short nor too long

Big feet (dajiou) small shoe hard to fit it on

The girl’s left foot could crush eight tigers

The girl’s right foot could crush nine wolves.[10]

Figure 2 - Hezhe women, Huangqing Zhigong Tu, China, Qing Dynasty, about 1755-1761. Ink on paper, 20 x 13.5 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China

In Manchu society, women rode horses and hunted.[11] In a print by Huangqing Zhigong Tu (fig. 2), which depicts a Manchu woman hunting, the Chinese inscription in the upper left corner describes her as a ‘Hezhe woman’. This woman belonged to one branch of the Manchu ethnic

group called the Hezhe (???), from Heilongjia province. In the picture we can see that she wears a winter leather robe, with belt and fastened long stock. She also wears gloves and natural-sized shoes. At the left side of the print are depicted a small crossbow and a marten she has killed. As a tribute to the Qing government, the Hezhe group had to send marten skins every year. This picture indicates that Manchu women had to hunt as much as any men in their tribe. It also suggests that Manchu women's 'big feet' were requirements of their traditional nomadic life.[12] Once the Manchus established themselves as the rulers of China, they attempted to preserve their culture, and difference from Han Chinese, with a restriction against footbinding.

Shoes, body and space

The 'horse-hoof' shoe was not only fashionable among Manchu women, but also made them appear taller; the shoe reshaped the body. Together with the new longer 'qipao,' it brought an alternative standard for feminine beauty that contrasted with the bodily aesthetic of Han Chinese women. The 'horse-hoof' shoe and the 'qipao' seem to indicate that Manchu women were not only conscious of their different ethnicity to that of Han Chinese women, but also of their appearance. The

significance of Han Chinese elite women's fashion was related to their footbinding. The female body was an object to be seen, a fact signalled not only by dress and footwear but also by the very way they walked and moved.

A particular design issue that arose in this context was how Manchu women could perform their femininity while wearing 'a long Daoist robe.' The design of their shoes was closely related to their mode of dress through movement. Han Chinese women were supposed to walk discreetly, while the Manchu 'qipao' and high-soled, noisy shoes made their wearers more conspicuous when they were walking. Some courtesans' and wealthy women's shoes were ornamented with jewels and bells in order to draw still further attention to them when walking.

Economic factors: womanly work and footbinding

Fashionable adaptation and influence were both the result of interactions between Manchu and Han Chinese women. Dorothy Ko has argued that the bans Manchu rulers issued on footbinding brought the opposite effect, causing the practice to become an ethnic marker and to spread among Han Chinese of all classes.[13] The catalysts for the spread of footbinding were twofold. As Ko argues, 'Two deliberate policies of the Manchu state might have inadvertently contributed to its popularity among non-elite families: the futile early-Qing efforts to ban footbinding as a signpost of Han Chinese identity and the eighteenth-century promotion of the cotton

industry in rural areas'.[14] This argument shows how material culture links up with economic, political, and ideological formations. Susan Mann has suggested that 'we can plausibly assume that...the desirability of footbinding and spread of women's home handicrafts in peasant households were systematically linked'.[15]

In Qing economic policy, women were encouraged to undertake spinning and weaving of cotton at home. (In the coastal area of China, cotton was of more economic benefit than rice.) In some areas, like Nanhui County near Shanghai, peasant women played an important role in supporting the family economy, by toiling in the fields on a seasonal basis. This raises the possibility that footbinding helped some women to avoid work in the fields. The 'Nanhui County Gazetteer' depicts the situation of womanly work in the nineteenth-century as follows:

The women weave in order to supplement the [family] income and provide clothing and food. This is true not just for village settlements but also for the townships... The rate of woven cloth is one bolt (pi) per day but sometimes they can reach two bolts per day. They [women] work through the night without sleeping. The income men earn from the harvest of the fields goes to official coffers to pay interest and is exhausted before the year has even come to an end. For their food and clothing [the family] relies utterly on [the work of] women.[16]

Figure 3 - Women sewing, China (Qing Dynasty), about 1790. Watercolour on paper, 35 x 42 cm. Museum no. D.124-1898

This suggests that economic policy may have helped to spread the practice of footbinding in Han Chinese society. Traditionally, women were not allowed to join outdoor activities in feudal Han Chinese society; footbinding practices enforced this belief and ensured that they work at home. Wilson states, 'We know, however, that in 1881 there were 1,050 working people in Suzhou engaged in embroidery work and that these were principally women and young girls'.[17] She shows us a watercolour painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 3), depicting a woman embroidering: a well-dressed lady wearing footbinding shoes is doing domestic embroidery. This picture reveals that these feet are also for working. Women might prefer to work at home rather than in the fields.[18]

While Qing policy may have lead to the increase of Han Chinese women who bound their feet, some may have done so in the hope of changing their social class by copying upper class women's footbinding. As Georg Simmel argued, 'In a certain sense fashion gives woman a compensation for her lack of position in a class based on a calling or profession'.[19] In this case, Han Chinese peasant women's footbinding fashion was unlikely to change their working situation to have an 'easy' life. Simmel continues, 'Naturally the lower classes look and strive to towards the upper, and they encounter the least resistance in those fields which are subject to the whims of fashion; for it is here that mere external imitation is most readily applied'.[20] In this way, dress

and fashion allow humans to express themselves, showing both who they are and what they want to be.

Politics: the impact of the ‘xiunu’ system

There were several occasions when the Qing government tried to stop the Han custom of women’s footbinding. All failed; indeed, the practice increased. However, at the same time Manchu and Han Chinese exchanged and shared fashion styles and motifs.

The position of women in China was paradoxical: on the one hand, Han Chinese women occupied positions in economic production, but on the other, they were supposed to be invisible in public social life.[21] Most Manchu or Han women did not receive a proper education. As Lan Dingyuan wrote in 1712, ‘The basis of the government of the empire lies in the habits of the people. The correctness of the habits of the people depends on the orderly management of the family; the way (Dao) for the orderly management of the family begins with women’.[22]

In Manchu society, marriage was not only managed by the family but also controlled by the government. In the Qing dynasty, young Manchu women were required to join the imperial selection before a marriage could be arranged by their family. The system was called ‘xiunu’ (??), which can be literally translated as ‘elegant females’ or ‘beautiful females’ in the Chinese language (in Manchu, the term was ‘sargan jui,’ meaning simply ‘the daughters’).[23] On the appointed day, girls aged 13 were brought by their parents or relatives, together with their official local banner, to the Forbidden City to await selection for the imperial court. One of the key points of the ‘xiunu’ system was that all the women being inspected had to be Manchu.[24]

Did the ‘xiunu’ system have a direct impact on Han Chinese women’s footbinding? According to Shou Wang’s recent study of the ‘xiunu’ system, ‘Later in 1804 the Jiaqing emperor found some xiunu even had bound feet, wore only one earring (the Manchus customarily wore three ear-rings in each ear), and wore wide-sleeve robe like Chinese women. As a result, the Qing court narrowed down the scope of xiunu the selection to exclude some of Hanjun’s (the eighth banner of the Manchus) daughters (women from Manchu-Han Chinese intermarriage family) from xiunu selection’. In the Manchu’s ‘xiunu’ system, Manchu women were concerned not only with their bloodline but also with their behaviour and dress.

Han Chinese women were absent from the ‘xiunu’ beauty pageant because of their ethnic origin; and their exclusion was partly determined by their footwear. They were not considered as ‘daughters’ of the Qing government. Wang states that the ‘xiunu’ system was created under these specific historical circumstances in order to emphasize ethnic boundaries and to guarantee that the right women were selected for imperial marriage. Thus, footwear not only shows the cultural exchange between Manchu and Han Chinese women, but also the Qing government’s efforts to draw boundaries between them. As Wang concludes, the ‘xiunu’ system ‘helped minimize Han Chinese cultural influence in the inner court and slow down the speed of acculturation’.[25]

Conclusion

In Qing studies, scholars often talk of the 'sinicization' or 'assimilation' of Manchus. Evelyn S. Rawski notes that the key to Qing Manchu success, 'lay in its ability to use its cultural links with the non-Han peoples of Inner Asia and to differentiate the administration of the non-Han reign provinces'. Qing established cultural forms to distinguish themselves from the Han Chinese. Recently, in the study of material culture, Dorothy Ko has brought a fresh recognition of the role of Han Chinese footbinding in the Qing period by considering women's voices instead of a 'cultureless custom'.

The study of Manchu footwear can also be situated in this new discourse. It evolved at political, economic, gender, class, and social levels, and involved interactions between ethnic groupings. The matter of footwear was an appropriation of space, as well as of the object itself. With a long Han Chinese footbinding history, Han Chinese women were unlikely to change their footwear. As Ko has argued, it is not possible to speak of the 'free choice' of Han Chinese women's footbinding without consideration of the Confucian patriarchy. For Han Chinese literati, footbinding involved not only pressure from the outside world but also women's self-respect. Furthermore, she states, 'Without the participation of women, footbinding would not have spread so far in the face of persistent and vehement opposition by moralizing and pontificating men'.[26] Han Chinese women may not have had the choice not to bind their feet, but in binding them they may have been consciously resisting the Manchu 'elegant women' selection system.

By the same token, by not binding their feet and instead wearing the 'horse-hoof' shoe, Manchu women were declaring their own ethnic identity. In turn, this may have led more and more Han Chinese women to bind their feet during the late Qing

dynasty. In other words, there was mutual negative influence in culture and design. The Manchus had consciously slowed down the speed of Han Chinese acculturation by creating a cultural border between Manchu and Han Chinese women through the 'xiunu' system.[27] Thus, the Manchu 'horse-hoof' shoe was not only a physical object, but also played a mediating role in society. The shoe was a way to evoke elegance and cultural identity through the 'xiunu' system. Thus, the 'xiunu' system was a cultural policy, not just a political policy. It enhanced the fashion competition between Manchu and Han Chinese women. The 'horse-hoof' shoe unlocks multiple narratives about the impact of footwear on Chinese material culture.

Endnotes

1. On the 'qipao', see Steele, Valerie and John S. Major. *China Chic/East Meets West*. New Haven and London, 1999. On footbinding, see Dorothy, Ko. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley and London, 2005.

2. This term is borrowed from Bourhis, Richard Y. 'Towards an Interactive Acculturation Model: A Social Psychological Approach'. *International Journal of Psychology* 32: 6 (1997): 369–386.

3. Wilson, Verity. *Chinese Dress*. London, 1986: 98.

4. Garrett, Valery M. *Traditional Chinese Clothing in Hong Kong and South China, 1840–1980*. Hong Kong and Oxford, 1987: 73.

5. Willis, Gilbert and Henry Raymond. *Lonhqixia de chenmin: Jin dai Zhonggio lisu yu shehui* 龙旗下的臣民: 近代中国礼俗与社会》 trans. by Liu Yi Jun 刘一君, Deng Hai Ping 邓海平.

Guangming ribao chubanshen 光明日报出版社, 2000: 129

6. Yan-Zhen, Sun. Qingdai nuxing fushi yanjiu:《清代女性服飾研究》(*Women's Fashion Studies in Qing Dynasty*). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 上海古籍出版, 2008: 105.

7. Dorothy, Ko. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley and London, 2005: 14, 67.

8. Dorothy, Ko. *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley and London, 2005: 5, 16.

9. Hong, Zhou. *Manzufunu shenghuo yu minsuwenhua yanjin:《滿族婦女生活與民俗文化研究》Zhingguo shehuikexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社*. China Social Sciences press, 2005: 96.

10. *《作繡鞋》找個木匠繡鞋底，找個木匠做鞋幫，絨線用了一板半，細布用了八皮箱，一共做了三年整，一雙繡鞋作妥當，叫來姑娘把鞋試，還是短來還是長，姑娘伸腳試繡鞋，鞋小腳大紮得慌，趔趔歪歪倒后牆，左腳踩死八只虎，右腳踩死九只狼* Translated from the Chinese by Shengfang Chou.

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25. Wang, Shou. 'The Selection of Women for the Qing Imperial Harem'. *The Chinese Historical Review* 11: 2 (2004): 212–220

26. Wang, Shou. 'The Selection of Women for the Qing Imperial Harem'. *The Chinese Historical Review* 11: 2 (2004): 228–229

27. Wang, Shou. 'The Selection of Women for the Qing Imperial Harem'. *The Chinese Historical Review* 11: 2 (2004): 212–222

A silver-gilt cup commemorating the coronation of James II and the culture of gifts and prerequisites in Stuart and Hanoverian coronations

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tankards, cups, a punch bowl, a counter box, George II's canopy and George IV's footstool.

Abstract

Figure 1 – Cup and Cover, England, about 1685. Silver-gilt, unmarked. Height: 13 cm. Weight: 16 oz. 1 dwt. Museum no. M. 34-2008

The flat-chased Chinoiserie figures carrying a canopy on the newly acquired James II Coronation Cup demonstrate the original purpose of its recycled silver: they reflect the decoration of canopies carried by barons of the Cinque Ports over the heads of the newly crowned monarch and his consort. This article places the new acquisition in the context of surviving Coronation silver and furnishings in the V&A Collections and elsewhere , including canopy bells and staves,

The James II Coronation Cup

The Victoria and Albert Museum recently acquired a cup and cover which commemorates the Coronation of James II.[1] This silver-gilt cup and cover was made from recycled silver bells and stave mounts that adorned the canopies carried over James II and Mary of Modena at the Coronation on St George's Day, 23 April 1685. After the ceremony, the silver was shared by the barons of the Cinque Ports (five towns on the South coast) as a perquisite of their role in carrying the canopies over the king and queen in the Coronation procession.

Figure 2 – Cup and cover, Reverse of Figure 1, England, about 1685. Silver-gilt, unmarked. Height: 13 cm. Weight 16 oz. 1 dwt. Museum no. M. 34–2008

Two of the barons, members of the same family, Cresheld and Gawden Draper, combined their share - probably one stave mount and one bell - which were melted down to make this commemorative cup and cover. As the combined weights of one mount and one bell were just under 36 ounces, and the cup and cover weighs just over 16 ounces, it is possible that two cups were made, one for each member of the family who attended the coronation. However, only one is known today.

The cup stands on a cast circular gadrooned foot. The lower part of the body is applied with cut card work. The cylindrical bowl has a moulded lip and the body is flat-chased with four Chinoiserie figures carrying a canopy, with a fruit tree on either side (fig. 1). The opposite side (fig. 2) is engraved with an escutcheon of arms 'or, on a fesse between three annulets gules as many covered cups'.

The arms are flanked by two engraved cartouches, one inscribed 'Tria pocula'; the other 'Fero' (this Latin motto translates as 'I bear three cups'); the spaces between are engraved with branches and a bird sitting on a bough in the Chinese taste. A panel below the coat of arms contains the inscription, 'Hoc obtinui | Ex in aug: Iac: 2.d | Et Mar: Ap: 23. 85'. (I obtained this from the Coronation of James II and Mary, April 23 [1685].) The coat of arms represents the Draper family of Winchelsea. Cresheld Draper was amongst those supporting King James II's canopy and Gawden Draper (probably Cresheld's son) supported the canopy held over Queen Mary of Modena.[2]

Figure 3 - Monteith Racing Trophy by Robert Cooper, London, England, 1688–9. Silver, height 22.9 cm. Museum no. M.25-2002

Although the cup and cover are typical for the form at this date, and the armorials and inscription are standard for the 1680s, the 'Chinoiserie' flat chased decoration of figures supporting the canopy is of particular significance. Further research may demonstrate that the canopies used at James II's Coronation were of 'cloth of gold' woven in China. Increased interest in Chinoiserie was inspired by the publication of recent travels in China by Johannes Nieuhof (1618–1672). His account of 'An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Province, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperour of China 1665' , was first translated into English in 1669.[3]

The fashion for Chinoiserie decoration on contemporary silver extended to toilet services and vessels used in the service of wine. The toilet service from Sizergh Castle, circa 1680, and the Basingstoke monteith racing trophy (1688/9), used for serving punch and chilling wine glasses (fig. 3), are both chased with Chinoiserie and displayed in the V&A's Whiteley Silver Galleries.[4]

The taste for Chinoiserie reflects the growing importance of European trade with China following the foundation of the London-based East India Company in 1600. By the 1670s the establishment of a trading base off Fujian resulted in large-scale shipments to England of admired Chinese goods. Such trade fostered a European market for furniture japanned in imitation of true oriental lacquer. Bed hangings and curtains of imported Chinese silk damasks created appropriate settings for such exotic possessions. By 1688, John Stalker's & William Parker's 'A Treatise of Japaning and Varnishing' was published to appeal to the growing taste for professional and amateur japanning. It was appropriately dedicated to Mary,

Countess of Derby, Lady of the Bedchamber to the new Queen Mary II, daughter of James II and his first wife Anne Hyde. Chinoiserie was an appropriately exotic visual language for furnishings associated with the monarch.[5]

The Jewel House Delivery Book records the delivery of the silver ornaments for the canopies.[6] Three days before the Coronation, Sir Benjamin Bathurst received 'Twelve Large Canopy staves, crowned with silver 6 for his Majties & 6 for her Majties Canopy', weighing in all 369 ounces and 10 penny weights. Bathurst also received '8 gilt Bells' for 'each Canopy' with a combined weight of 61 ounces and 15 penny weights.

From the coronation of Richard I to George IV, canopies were carried over the monarch by the Barons of the Cinque Ports as a symbol of the role that they played in defending king and country.[7] The ports of Dover, Hastings, Hythe, Romney, Sandwich, and later Winchelsea, were granted privileges by the monarch in exchange for supplying ships and men to protect England's vulnerable southern coastline. They enjoyed the title of Baron for the day of the Coronation only. Their presence ensured that leading citizens from the regions were represented on such national occasions, to balance the presence of the Lord Mayor and aldermen of the City of London and the aristocracy who were always well represented at such historic events. After the ceremony the barons were entitled to claim the canopies of cloth of gold, and the silver bells and staves as a perquisite of their role in the procession. They were also invited to dine at the table to the right of the king and queen at the Coronation Banquet in Westminster Hall. The division of the perquisites was not always peaceful; at the Coronation of Charles II in 1661, the royal footmen tried to tear the canopy and its bells from the barons during the Coronation feast and

dragged the barons away from their seats in Westminster Hall. The canopy had always been the perquisite of the barons, and Charles II dismissed the footmen who were subsequently imprisoned.[8]

Other recorded examples of silver recycled from coronation bells and stave mounts include a tankard made for the senior baron Tobias Cleve, who represented Sandwich after the Coronation of Charles II (now in the collection of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London); and a punch bowl and ladle by London goldsmiths George Boothby and William Fordham, made following George II's Coronation, belonging to the Corporation of Hastings.[9] The tankard is inscribed, 'This Pott was made of ye Silver of ye Canopie when King Charles ye 2d was Crowned, Aprill 23d 1661'. The Hastings punch bowl is inscribed as follows:

> *This Silver Bowl was presented to the Corporation of Hasting (ye premier Cinque Port.) by ye Gentlemen whose Names are hereon Inscribed who had ye Honour to be unanimously Elected ye Barons of ye said Town to support ye Canopy over their sacred Royall Majesties King George ye 2nd and Queen Caroline at ye Solemnity of their Inauguration at Westminster the Eleventh day of October 1727. And ye same was made out of their Shares and dividend of the Silver Staves &c belonging to the said Canopy.*[10]

Recycled silver from George III's coronation was allegedly refashioned as a chandelier for St Clement's Church, Hastings (this no longer survives) and a basket (present whereabouts unknown).[11]

Figure 4 - Engraving Showing the Canopy Held Over James II from Francis Sandford, The History of the Coronation of James II, London, 1687. V&A: National Art Library

Francis Sandford (1630–1694), Lancaster Herald, was appointed by James II to publish an illustrated account of his coronation. ‘The history of the coronation of the most high, most mighty, and most excellent monarch James II, etc., and of his Royal Consort Queen Mary: solemnized at Westminster, 23 April 1685: with an exact account of the several preparations, their majesties most splendid processions, and magnificent feast at Westminster Hall’ , was published in 1687 with engravings by S. Moore of the procession. These show the canopies held over the King (fig. 4) and Queen (fig. 5), supported by the Barons of the Cinque Ports.[12]

Each figure in the procession was drawn from life. The barons were dressed in doublets of crimson satin, scarlet hose, scarlet gowns lined with crimson satin, black velvet caps fastened on their sleeves, and black velvet shoes. James II presented Sandford with a cup and cover in recognition of his role in recording the coronation for posterity.[13]

Figure 5 - Engraving Showing the Canopy Held Over Mary of Modena from Francis Sandford, The History of the coronation of James II, London, 1687. V&A: National Art Library

The caption to the engraving in Sandford’s publication reads, ‘A canopy of Cloth of Gold to be born over the KING by Eight of the Sixteen Barons of the Cinque-Ports (two to a Staff) with Silver Bells gilt at each Corner of the said Canopy,

viz. four in all (It was born by 16 of the 32 Barons of the Cinque Ports)'.

The key to the illustration reads:

A. The King's Majesties

B. The Bishop of Durham

C. The Bishop of Bath and Wells

D. The Four Earls eldest sons

E. The Master of the Robes

F. Sixteen Barons of the Cinque Ports

G. The Earl of Huntingdon Capt. Of the Band of Gt. Pensioners

H. The Duke of Northumberland Capt of the Guard in Waiting.

I. The Viscount Grandison, Capt. Of the Yeoman of the Guard

K. Gentleman Pensioners

The caption to the engraving in Sandford's publication reads, 'A canopy of Cloth of Gold, like that of the Kings, to be born over the QUEEN by Eight Barons of the Cinque-Ports with Four Silver Bells gilt hanging at the Corners. It was born by 16 Barons of the Cinque Ports there being 32 in all'.

The key to the illustration reads:

A. The Queen's Majesties

B. The Bishop of London

C. The Bishop of Winchester

D. The Dutchess [sic] of Norfolk

E. Four Earls Daughters

F. Sixteen Barons of the Cinque Ports

G. A Lady of the Bedchamber

H. Two of her Majesties women.

I. Gentleman Pensioners

Figure 6 - Canopy, Spitalfields, London, England, 1727. Brocaded satin wtih patterning wefts of silver-gilt thread. 131.7 x 94,4cm. Museum no. T.184-1975

There are other souvenirs from British coronations in the V&A Collections. In 1975 the museum acquired part of the canopy of Spitalfields silk which was carried over King George II at his Coronation in 1727 (fig. 6). The rich gold brocade, with lining of silver tabby and border of white lustring, was supplied by the textile dealer George Binckes, whose shop was in Covent Garden.[14]

Currently displayed in the British Galleries, this rich fabric with its metallic colours was adorned by four silver-gilt bells suspended from the corners, supplied by London goldsmith Francis Garthorne for George I's Coronation in 1713–1714. One of these bells, originally used for the Coronation of George I in 1714, was bequeathed to the museum by Sarah, Countess of Waldegrave, in 1873, along with two further silver bells which adorned the canopies held over King George III (1761–2) and King George IV (1825).[15] These are displayed in the V&A's Whiteley Silver Galleries. Two further bells associated with the coronations of Charles I and Charles II are recorded in private collections.[16] The Hastings Museum has a silver stave mount from the Coronation of George IV marked by the London goldsmiths Thomas and James Phipps, 1820–1.[17]

Figure 7 - Counter box, London, about 1821. Silver, unmarked, height 3.5 cm. Private Collection

Whilst writing this article, a silver counter box inscribed, 'This box is made out of one of the Staves born by the Barons of the Cinque Ports at the Coronation of Geo.4 July 1821', was brought in to the V&A (fig. 7). The lid is appropriately engraved with a royal crown.[18]

As a result of articles published in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* announcing the acquisition of the James II Coronation cup, a further bell from the Coronation of George II came to light in a private British collection.[19] This was acquired as a perquisite by the Hon. George Berkeley (1693?-1746), a baron of the Cinque Ports and MP for Dover from 1720. He gave it in turn to his sister Lady Elizabeth Germain (1680-1769).

Figure 8 - Bell by Francis Garthorne, London, about 1727. Silver-gilt, height 13.2 cm. Courtesy of Christie's

A further silver-gilt bell from the same coronation, originally given to Sir George Oxenden, from the collection of the late Duke of Kent and Princess Marina of Kent, will be auctioned in London this year (fig. 8).[20] In addition, the V&A was presented with a contemporary copy of the sermon preached at James II's Coronation in Westminster Abbey by Francis

Turner, Lord Bishop of Ely and Lord Almoner to his Majesty.[21]

These perquisites should be distinguished from the gifts given to officials by successive monarchs in gratitude for services rendered at coronations.[22] In 1665, Charles II gave Sir Sampson White, Mayor of Oxford in 1661 and 1665, a cup and cover in recognition of his services (presenting the sovereign with a silver-gilt bowl of wine) at his coronation. This belongs to the Corporation of Oxford.[23]

Figure 9 - Cup and Cover, Rundell, Bridge and Rundell, London, 1821-2. Gold, height 22.5 cm. Museum no. M.42-1982

In 1982 the V&A acquired a gold cup and cover, one of four presented by George IV at the time of his Coronation (fig. 9). The V&A's cup, supplied by Rundell, Bridge and Rundell for £230 16s 6d, was given to James Butler, 19th Earl of Ormonde (1774–1838), who served as Chief Butler of Ireland in succession to the Earls of Arundel, who officiated as successive Chief Butlers of England from 1243 to 1821.

The chair and footstool covered with purple velvet used by Archbishop Juxon at the Coronation of Charles II, and given to the Archbishop after that Coronation, came to the V&A in

1928 and are currently displayed in the British Galleries.[24]

In 1991 the V&A acquired at auction the footstool made for the king's use at the Coronation of George IV (on long term loan to the Westminster Abbey Undercroft Museum).[25] The James II Coronation cup and cover formerly belonged to J. Pierpont Morgan, an outstanding collector of paintings, manuscripts and decorative arts;[26] the V&A already has a number of pieces previously owned by him.

The earliest piece of silver in Morgan's collection was the small silver drinking bowl (1525–6) now in the Gilbert Collection, and displayed in the V&A's new Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Galleries.[27] In 1919 the V&A acquired an important collection of stained glass from J.P. Morgan's son. Examples are displayed in the V&A's Sacred Silver and Stained Glass Galleries.[28]

Although the James II Coronation Cup is currently displayed in the V&A's New Acquisitions Gallery it will return to the Whiteley Silver Galleries for display with the coronation bells in 2010. It is hoped that in due course, a small touring exhibition of Coronation silver may be arranged, including this exciting new acquisition, to be shown in museums in the Cinque Ports of Dover, Hastings and Sandwich.

Endnotes

1. This was purchased from Koopman Rare Art. It was sold by Sotheby's New York 19 April 1991, lot 327. It belonged to J. Pierpont Morgan by 1908. The cup was purchased with assistance of the Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Hugh Phillips Bequest to the V&A, the Friends of the V&A, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and an anonymous donor. See *Art Fund 2008/2009 Review*: 106.
2. The International Genealogical Index. Cresheld Draper (d.1693) originally from Crayford, Kent was MP for Winchelsea from 1678 to 1687. He married Sarah Gauden of Clapham, Surrey, in 1665. She was the daughter of Sir Dennis Gauden of Mayland, Essex.

3. V&A: National Art Library Press Mark 5.X.37

4. M.21-1968

5. For recent studies on Chinoiserie see Jackson Anna and Amin Jaffer. *Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800*. London, 2004; Beevers David, ed. *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain*. Brighton, 2008. A group of silver decorated with chinoiserie motifs dating from the 1680s is studied by Carl Christian Dauterman in 'Dream-Pictures of Cathay: Chinoiserie on Restoration Silver'. *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 23 (Summer 1964): 11-25. Philippa Glanville noted that the chasing technique uses a stabbed line, perhaps influenced by a common printed source. *Silver in England*. London and New York, 1987: 234 and 'English Seventeenth-Century Chinoiserie Silver' in *'The Jaime Ortiz-Patiño Collection: English Seventeenth-Century Chinoiserie Silver'*, New York, Sotheby's, 21 May 1992. For a summary of the discussion on methods of Chinoiserie decoration on 1680s silver see Wees, Beth Carver. *English Irish & Scottish Silver at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute*. New York, 1997: 73.

6. TNA / Public Record Office, London LC9/43.

7. Strong, Roy. *Coronation From the 8th to the 21st Century*. London, 2005: 103.

8. Strong, Roy. *Coronation From the 8th to the 21st Century*. London, 2005: 350.

9. Perry, Edward. Gift Plate from Westminster Hall Coronation Banquets. *Apollo*. Double Coronation Number, LVII, no.340, (1953): 198-200.

10. Baines, J. Manwaring. 'The Cinque Ports and Coronation Services'. *Hastings Museum Publication*, No.18, 3rd edition, 1968.

11. Baines, J. Manwaring. 'The Cinque Ports and Coronation Services'. *Hastings Museum Publication*, No.18, 3rd edition, 1968: 11. The information on the cake basket was provided by Charles Truman.

12. V&A: National Art Library, press mark RC. LL. 21.

13. Now in the collection of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths.

14. This bears an inscription attached to the selvedge which reads 'June the 11th 1727 Part of the Canopy held over George II head by one of the free Barons of Sandwich, at his Coronation. The other half is in the possession of Mr. Baker the late member for Canterbury who was

likewise one of the Bearers - woven in Spitalfields.'

15. V&A: 494,495,496-1873. These are illustrated in Clayton, Michael. *The Collector's Dictionary of the Silver and Gold of Great Britain and North America*. London, 1971: 27, fig.33 a,c,d. An identical bell to Clayton's fig.33c is lot 169 in Sotheby's New Bond Street 18 November 2009 sale.

16. Butler, Robin. The Albert Collection. London, 2004: no.374.

17. Butler, Robin. The Albert Collection. London, 2004: no.374. Baines, J. Manwaring. 'The Cinque Ports and Coronation Services'. *Hastings Museum Publication*, No.18, 3rd edition, 1968: 12. The stave mount is an inch in diameter and 3 ft 8 in long.

18. Private Collection. The box is 3.5 cm. high, 2.9 cm. in diameter.

19. This bell is also illustrated in Clayton, Michael. *The Collector's Dictionary of the Silver and Gold of Great Britain and North America*. London, 1971: 27, fig.33b.

20. I am grateful to Harry Williams-Bulkeley for bringing this to my attention. Marked by Francis Garthorne, it was subsequently in the Mulliner Collection and the Percival Davis Griffiths Collection and shown in the Park Lane Exhibition, 1929, no.55. It will be auctioned in London, by Christie's, on 20 November 2009 (lot 40)

21. The full title is A sermon preached before their majesties K[ing] James II and Q[ueen] Mary at their Coronation in Westminster Abbey, April 23 1685, London, Robert Clavell . This was presented by Mr O.S.Vickers and is in the V&A: National Art Library, press mark 802.AK Box II (5)

22. For Coronation silver given to the Earls and subsequently Dukes of Ancaster, who served as successive Lord Great Chamberlain; to the Marquess of Exeter, Lord High Almoner at the Coronation of James II; to the Dukes of Norfolk in their role as Earl Marshal and Hereditary Marshal of England see Jones, E. Alfred. 'Some Coronation Plate'. *The Burlington Magazine* 70, no.410 (May, 1937): 240-247.

23. Perry, 'Gift Plate from Westminster Hall Coronation Banquets'. *Apollo* (1953): 198.

24. V&A: W.12 & 13-1928. Wilk Christopher, ed. *Western Furniture 1350 to the Present Day*. London, 1996: 68.

25. V&A:W.7-1991. The footstool is of beech, stained and gilded with cover of red silk velvet trimmed with meal thread fringe; supplied by Bailey and Saunders for the Coronation of King George IV, British, 1821

26. Jones, E. Alfred. *Illustrated Catalogue of the Collection of Old Plate of J.Pierpont Morgan*. London, 1908: pl.LXXIX, 33.

27. V&A: LOAN: Gilbert 577-2008

28. Williamson, Paul. *Medieval and Renaissance Stained Glass in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London, 2003: figs 11-12.

Filling a Gap: Recent acquisitions of turned wood at the V&A

Glenn Adamson, Head of Graduate Studies and Deputy Head of Research Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

Figure 1 - Cup, Mazer, possibly made in Denmark of Norway, 1725. Silver and birchwood, painted. Museum no.1566-1903

Until very recently, the V&A has made little effort to represent the art of wood turning in its collection. The discipline involves shaping wood on a lathe, and often altering it through carving or other techniques. This gap in the collection has been redressed recently through a curatorial initiative, which has resulted in the acquisition of a small but important group of key works. This article explains the reasons for the relative neglect of wood turning in previous years, and also describes some of the recently acquired objects.

The V&A has a curatorial structure that is mostly based upon certain clearly defined media: ceramics and glass; furniture, textiles and fashion; metalwork; works on paper.[1] This structure permits the staff to develop unrivalled expertise within their subject areas, but it also leaves accidental gaps in collecting. Most notable in this regard is the museum's relative neglect of industrial design in the 20th century. The institution has never had a curator for plastic, for example, or rubber; or for that matter, vehicles or lighting. While there have been fitful attempts to redress this problem - through concerted collecting of radios and automotive design drawings, for example - only this year has the V&A appointed its first curator of product design. (She is Jana Scholze, and also looks after 20th century furniture.) The collecting of digital design has also commenced only very recently, with the addition of an exciting group of early works in the medium to the museum's holdings.

Figure 2 - ‘So Long Frank Lloyd Wright’ bowl, Mark Lindquist, Florida, USA, 1994, Burr maple, turned and carved using a chainsaw and router. Museum no. W.1-2009. Given by Donald Brecker

One of the less obvious omissions from the collection is the craft of turned wood: objects made on a lathe. Of course the collection has an enormous compilation of furniture that was made using turning, but until recently there were almost no lathe-turned objects in the V&A. The reason is simple: no one was in charge of that. Because they are usually vessels, turned objects are not the obvious province of the furniture and sculpture departments; and because they are typically made of wood (or occasionally ivory, alabaster, or other materials), they also fall outside the remit of the Ceramics and Glass and Metalwork departments. The result was that there were a few early pieces of treen in the collection (fig. 1). Alongside pewter, these wooden plates and bowls formed the everyday tableware of the lower and middling sorts until the expansion of ceramic production in the eighteenth century. But the V&A had virtually no examples of the contemporary revival of wood turning, which has been one of the key crafts within the studio movement since the 1940s.

The embrace of the lathe as an artistic tool had a promising start. Such figures as Bob Stocksdale learned from the modernist design of the postwar years, combining clean profiles with a deep understanding of their material. But things really got going in the 1970s, with the arrival on the scene of Mark Lindquist and David Ellsworth - two unusually creative turners, both of whom were fired by expressive innovations in ceramics. An infrastructure for the craft also developed rapidly, mostly thanks to

the efforts of Albert Le Coff, a former turner who founded the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia. Through exhibitions, collecting, and publications, Le Coff and his colleagues shone a spotlight on the progress of American turning, and also forged connections to activities elsewhere in the world.

Figure 3 - Two Bowls, Ron Kent, Hawaii, USA, 2004. Turned Norfolk Island pine. Museum no.LOAN:AMERICANFRIENDS.517-2007. Loaned by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Martha Connell and the Connell Gallery

When I arrived at the museum four years ago, I was surprised that this story of rapid growth had not had any impact on the V&A's collection. I had a strong interest in the medium as a result of a major survey exhibition that I helped to curate in 2003 (Wood Turning in North America Since 1930, co-organized by the Wood Turning Center and the Yale University Art Gallery). With the approval of the furniture department, I set about trying to fill this gap.

This has proved to be remarkably easy as collecting initiatives go, due to the generosity of a small group of American collectors and gallerists. From Rakova Brecker Gallery, based in Florida, came a major work by one of America's most accomplished wood artists, the aforementioned Mark Lindquist. Entitled 'So Long Frank Lloyd Wright', a nod to the Simon and Garfunkel song of the same name, the piece also refers to the great architect's design for the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York (fig. 2). Technically, the piece is important within Lindquist's career, as it was the first piece that

he carved using a computer-driver router. This was how the deep spiral was cut into the vessel's exterior.

Figure 4 - Black and White Pair of Vessels, John Jordan, Tennessee, USA, 2001. Turned and carved dyed box elder. Museum no. LOAN:AMERICANFRIENDS.519-2007. Loaned by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Martha Connell and the Connell Gallery

The inside of the piece features a more long-standing technique usedby Lindquist, a series of textural cuts made by plunging a chainsaw into the wood at regular intervals - a contemporary updating of the precision effects achieved using indexed ornamental lathes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Martha Connell, a gallerist based in Atlanta, donated to the V&A two fascinating pairs of objects by the turners Ron Kent and John Jordan. Both craftsmen can be considered formalists. They first create classical shapes on the lathe, and then use post-turning techniques to enrich the surface quality of the objects. Their means of doing so could hardly be more different, though. Kent works in Hawaii, and is known for his use of a distinctive wood that grows there called Norfolk Island Pine (fig. 3). When soaked in oil, this timber achieves a translucency when held under a strong light. The frequent punctuation of the wood with knots and streaks of spalting (a staining created by fungus) give the finished vessels a strong graphic quality. Jordan's post-lathe work is more craftsmanlike, involving the painstaking texturing of the surface with carving tool (fig. 4). He often paints his vessels black and white, discarding the natural colour and figure of the wood in favour of a starker effect.

Figure 5 - Inner Rimmed Vessel, Liam Flynn, Ireland, 2006. Turned and carved ebonised oak. Museum no. W.32-2008. Given by The Grace Barrand Design Centre

Jordan's work compares closely to another recent gift to the V&A, a stately vessel by the Irish turner Liam Flynn (fig. 5). Like Jordan, he often carves and paints his works after turning the forms, which are distinguished by a signature 'double rim' that creates a sense of expansive interior volume.

Without question however, the major recent gift to the V&A in this area has been made by Robyn and John Horn of Little Rock, Arkansas. They have donated a body of intelligently chosen works that mark key stages within the career of nine leading turners from America and Britain: Stocksdale, Ellsworth, Todd Hoyer, Ray Key, Stoney Lamar, Michael Peterson, Hayley Smith, Al Stirt, and Robyn Horn herself.

Of the group, the vessel by Ellsworth is a particular treasure: a rare example of one of the artist's early 'hollow turnings' (fig. 6). These works resulted from a major technical innovation - perhaps the first real quantum leap in technique that occurred in 20th century studio turning. At first, they present something of a ship-in-a-bottle conundrum: how are they made? The wood must be mounted on a lathe, its outside profile shaped, and then the interior gradually shaved away, leaving only an astoundingly thin and light balloon of wood.

Figure 6 - Hollow Vessel, David Ellsworth, USA, 1978. Turned cocobolo. Museum no.W.4-2009. Given by John and Robyn Horn

To achieve this Ellsworth devised a turning tool with a long, bent shaft, and a cutting edge mounted on one end. By using a series of these with different curvatures, he found that he could carve very steep curves without breaking through the vessel wall. The nearly horizontal top of this piece, and its sharply breaking corner, are to the trained eye a sort of daredevil performance in craftsmanship.

Also of particular note in the group are the two pieces by Horn, which chart her development from a mostly turned, minimal formal language to an explosive compositional approach achieved mainly through free carving (fig. 7), (fig. 8). The earlier 'Geode' is perfectly symmetrical, apart from the off-center division between heartwood and sapwood which gives the piece a sense of dynamism, while the later work is a fragmentary composition suggesting the sets from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Figure 7 - 'Geode' sculpture, Robyn Horn. USA, 1989. Turned and carved courbaril. Museum no. W.10-2009. Given by John and Robyn Horn

While Horn has still exploited the wood's natural properties, leaving an area of natural sub-cambium surface at the bottom and a bit of natural edge (highlighted by the shift to sapwood) at the top, she has also intervened with a great deal of carving. The only turned element of the piece is the shallow depression

at the center, a distant memory of the bowl-like logic of her early works.

These recent gifts to the V&A constitute a core of material which, if not a comprehensive account of this craft's development over the past few decades, at least give a sense of the many possibilities afforded by the disarmingly simple means of the wood turner. Hopefully the group will be supplemented by further gifts in the near future. In the meantime, some of the works discussed in this article can be seen on view in the newly reopened 20th Century Design gallery, alongside ceramics, furniture, textiles, and even a plastic radio or two.

Figure 8 - 'Redwood Shard' sculpture, Robyn Horn, USA, 1994. Turned and carved redwood and carved Macassar ebony. Museum no. W.9-2009. Given by John and Robyn Horne

As Scholze's appointment as curator of product design suggests, the V&A is now actively trying to fill the inadvertent gaps in its collection. New cross-departmental curatorial groups, which bring together specialists from across the museum according to period expertise, will no doubt be a help in this regard.

Of course the process of building a truly comprehensive collection will always be an unfinished project. As Craig Clunas, formerly the curator

of Chinese art at the V&A, once remarked to me, the problem with filling a gap with an object is that you create two new gaps on either side of it. This is certainly the case with wood turning; the gifts we have received to date represent only a few of the great names and ideas in the field. But it's an encouraging start.

Endnotes

1. Works on paper include prints, drawings, and photographs, all of which are housed in the Word and Image Department alongside paintings and books. Exceptions to the medium-based rule are the Sculpture and Asian Departments. The curators in the latter department cross over all materials within a given geographic area - the logic being that cultural and linguistic expertise are more vital in this area of the museum's collecting than materials-based connoisseurship.

Review: The Children's Book by A. S. Byatt

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The Children's Book by A S Byatt

The V&A has long been associated with the Booker Prize, not least through its growing collection of bindings from title-winning novels. Never before, however, has the museum itself played such a starring role in the narrative of a shortlisted work. Set in Edwardian England, an era of social and political upheaval, and a transitional moment in the museum's history, AS Byatt's *The Children's Book* resonates with current developments at the V&A (fig. 1). Largely unchanged since the building was completed in 1909 (an epic project discussed in the novel), the first phase of revamped ceramics galleries opened in autumn 2009. At this exciting time for the ceramics collections, it is particularly fitting that clay and glazes, modelling and remodelling, should become such powerful metaphors, and pots such deep vessels of meaning, in Byatt's latest offering.

Discovered camping out in the bowels of the museum at the outset of the novel, Phillip Warren, poor boy and aspiring potter, is whisked away by the keeper of precious metals to be tutored under the morose and explosive ceramicist Benedict Fludd. Introduced to Byatt's cast of characters at a glittering Midsummer party, both Phillip and the reader cast eyes over a bucolic scene of country house life at the close of the nineteenth century. Hosted by the beautiful Olive Wellwood, writer of children's tales, and with entertainment provided by puppet master Anselm Stern, the dazzle of the occasion, like all good

fairy stories, conceals a much darker set of circumstances.

Figure 2 - Kiln Waster, Delft, Holland, 1640-1660. Tin-glazed earthenware with fragments of fire-resistant clay. Museum no. C.10-2005. A pile of 34 blue-and-white decorated earthenware plates in Chinese 'transitional style' which have collapsed during firing, causing them to deform and fuse together. Attached to it are fragments of the fire-clay kiln-furniture which supported the plates for firing

Byatt's deft handling of the personal and the political, the social and the psychic, creates a richly textured novel. Plays, puppet shows, and fairytales are woven skilfully into a scholarly narrative, exploiting the magnetism of the real and the allure of the imaginary. With its contrasts of light and darkness, vivid prose and shadowy, sometimes frightening goings-on, the novel exhibits the hallmarks of the fairytale, rooted in the heartbreaking reality of history and human fallibility. The sins of the fathers (and mothers) bear heavily on the narrative. For this is the children's book, tracing the younger generation as they negotiate a shifting cultural landscape (inhabited by Anarchists, flawed Fabians and marauding women), and as their identities are shaped, like clay from the earth, by both internal and external vicissitudes (fig. 2).

Early on, Fludd's violent words of warning to Phillip Warren are more than a little prophetic, gaining greater significance as the novel progresses and the world into which the children enter becomes ever more uncertain: 'You are subject to the elements, he said. Any one of the four - earth, air, fire, water - can betray you and melt, or burst, or shatter - months of work into dust and ashes and spitting steam' (p.131).

Byatt's use of language is strikingly visual, with beautifully evocative descriptions of ceramic objects. As an object itself, and in all its complexity, the book maintains a powerful and pleasing completeness. Like the underground vaults at the museum, the alchemy of layered glazes on Phillip Warren's pots, or the network of subterranean caves in Olive Wellwood's stories, *The Children's Book* is immersive and spellbinding. Emerging, blinking into the light on finishing the novel, a good place to reflect might be rooms 140 to 146 at the V&A.

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