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Newsletter

No 32 Winter 2009

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## From the Chair

This is a busy time for the society, with printers proofs currently being prepared for the next issue of our Journal and last-minute arrangements being made for the *Cross-overs* event at Dumfries House (which will doubtless already have taken place by the time you receive this – sorry if you missed it!). Meanwhile we're also gearing up for this year's Annual General Meeting which will take place at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December. Do please join us if you can – further details will follow soon.

**Matthew Jarron**

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## New SSAH Grant Scheme

We are continuing to receive applications for our new scheme offering research support grants from £50 to £300 to assist with research costs and travel expenses. Here are some of the latest reports from grant recipients, coincidentally both from researchers in Texas:

**Michael Brown, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas**

I am indebted to the Scottish Society for Art History whose generous grant allowed me to research the origins of Duncan Fife/Phyfe (1770–1854) in February

of this year. I have to admit, it came as something of a surprise that in Scotland Phyfe is relatively unknown, whereas in this country he is arguably the most famous American cabinetmaker, his name being virtually synonymous with the finest furniture which espoused the classical idiom.

Duncan Phyfe is the first American cabinetmaker whose work and career attracted historical attention, beginning in the 1880s when the cabinet-maker/amateur historian Ernest F. Hagen (1830–1913) began to consult period sources and interviewed Phyfe's descendents. In 1909 his furniture achieved national recognition when the Metropolitan Museum of Art became the first art museum to organise an exhibition of American painting and decorative arts. The show spawned a plethora of publications, as well as reproductions which, in turn, prompted the museum to mount another exhibition in 1922 which focused on and celebrated Phyfe's oeuvre.

In spite of Duncan Phyfe's national renown, historians have found him to be an elusive individual. While his shop was in operation between 1792 and 1847, only nine labelled pieces of furniture are known. That number is significantly augmented by a group of pieces which are documented by their original invoices, and another cache has descended in his family, yet its limitations challenge scholarly efforts to make sound attributions. The manuscript record is equally thin, especially for an individual who was described by one of his clients in 1815 as "the United States rage."

The Scottish preface to Duncan Phyfe's biography is also limited by the dearth of manuscript materials. What is believed to be his baptismal record survives in the archives of the Abernethy and

Kincardine Churches near Grantown-on-Spey. And while some additional information has been uncovered, which may refer to his parents and other family members, their identification is not a certainty.

Edinburgh became my base of operation, and there I met with George Dalgleish, Stephen Jackson, David Forsyth and Carole Wilson at the National Museums of Scotland. I discussed with them the issues relating to the Fife genealogy and the family's migration. Mrs Wilson took a keen interest in my subject and has generously continued my research but to no avail. On and off, I spent much of my time there surveying the Seafield papers on deposit at the National Archives of Scotland. Included among them are manuscripts of the Clan Grant, which Duncan Phyfe's mother is believed to have been a member.

I strayed from Edinburgh to visit the charming village of Grantown. There I spent the good portion of a day with Mrs Molly Duckett and Mr George Dixon at the Grantown Historical Museum. Mr Dixon shared with me his extensive knowledge of the Grant family and their vast estates.

At present, I am working with a group of colleagues, Peter Kenny, Frances Bretter, Matthew Thurlow, and Debbie Waters, on the catalogue for a Duncan Phyfe exhibition which is co-organised by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and my own institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for January 2012. In the meantime, I have been asked to prepare a lecture on Phyfe for an upcoming conference on Scottish contributions to the American arts. This symposium will be held at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum this October. Organised by Patricia Halfpenny, in addition to myself, George Dalgleish and Stephen Jackson will also be speaking.

Once again, thank you to the SSAH for this generous grant. It has enabled me to learn more about and better appreciate the origins of one of the most famous American craftsmen.

### **Jennifer Way, College of Visual Arts and Design, University of North Texas**

A generous grant from the SSAH helped defray the costs of my travel to Edinburgh where during early June I studied examples of the art of Eduardo Paolozzi at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art along with related archival materials.

My goal was to clarify what it was about Paolozzi's standing figurative sculptures of the mid twentieth century that corresponded to a social subject or type of self, namely, a post-organic, post-

historic man then emerging in British, American and, to a lesser extent, European scholarly, critical and popular culture literature and visual culture. I wanted to fill gaps in my knowledge concerning the appearance, materials, fabrication techniques and structure of Paolozzi's sculptures and comprehensively track their critical and scholarly treatment in art world publications, paying special attention to items to which I do not have easy access.

To be sure, I had studied examples of Paolozzi's oeuvre in the galleries of Tate Britain and Tate Modern, where regularly they are featured in chronological and thematic presentations of British art. However, nothing compared to the amount of work available for study in Edinburgh. Daniel F. Herrmann, Curator of the Paolozzi Collection at the SNGMA, generously mentored me in studying the sculptures and work in other media installed in the gallery dedicated to Paolozzi that also included a portion of his studio; we looked at work off-site, too. Dr Hermann's superior knowledge of Paolozzi's life and art significantly enriched my hypotheses as did the opportunity to study so much sculpture in one location, which enabled me to reflect on questions of material method, iconography and chronology that subsequently yielded insights for my project.

My research was also superbly facilitated by Ann Simpson, Senior Curator of the Paolozzi Archive and Library, and her staff. They had taken great care to organise an enormous amount of material – object files, press clippings, catalogues, books and dissertations – so I could manage to review it most productively. As a result, I was able to perceive patterns in prevailing approaches to interpreting Paolozzi's sculptures. In addition, I felt confirmed in my project's ability to contribute new insights. Also, I realised how I could use a critical reading of the historiography as a point of departure. Happily, and unexpectedly, my research generated some new questions for future work focusing on Paolozzi's activity as a teacher.

I will use a portion of my research in a paper I present at a conference on transnationalism and art this fall. My larger goal is to publish an essay about the relationship of Paolozzi's figurative sculpture of the 1950s and early 1960s to cultural and social discourses of post-historic man.

## East & West: Cross-Cultural Encounters



Outwith our normal grant programme, the SSAH also offered funding for ten postgraduate places at this conference held at the University of St Andrews on 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September 2009. Seven PhD students made use of this funding, coming from the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and St Andrews. The conference attracted international interest and many favourable comments in the feedback:

“I found the conference to surpass my expectations”  
“I learned a lot about different aspects of Orientalism. It made me think of many more questions to address in my research.”  
“Wonderful multi-cultural experience.”  
“It was fantastic and the best conference I have ever had.”

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Full details of the SSAH's grant scheme can be found on our website. There are no deadlines for applications but decisions are made three times a year at our committee meetings.

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## Events

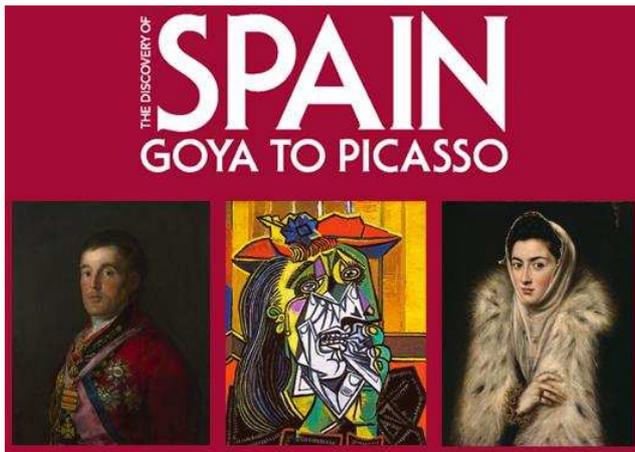
### ***The Discovery of Spain* exhibition tour, National Gallery Complex, Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009**

Until the Peninsular campaign, Spain was largely forgotten; its culture and art ignored or unknown in Britain. The wartime introduction to the works of Goya – whose penetrating portraits of Wellington and arresting prints of such heroic events as the defence

of Saragossa were circulated widely – kindled what became a British love affair with Spanish art. *The Discovery of Spain: British Artists & Collectors: Goya to Picasso* traces the development of this romance from the British side. Post-war travellers such as David Wilkie, David Roberts and John Phillip initially portrayed Spain and its people as exotically attractive – quaint in their superstitions and picturesque in appearance and surroundings. This superficial fascination ripened into a deeper appreciation for the history and culture as represented in David Roberts's loving study of the Alhambra. His precise rendering of its patterns and colours inspired the inclusion of Moorish design in the curriculum of British schools of design. On display near these is a delightful three-dimensional model in painted plaster of the beautiful archways of the Alhambra, the work of a Spanish scholar.

Spanish artists, whose paintings had been relatively unknown in Britain prior to the nineteenth century, enjoyed an unprecedented demand for their work. The Bishop of Durham purchased all twelve of Zurbarán's series of large canvases picturing the sons of Jacob. This signalled a developing acceptance of works by Zurbarán and El Greco, whose respective severity of composition and use of acid colours had not suited British tastes. These and the works of Velázquez and Murillo exerted an influence on British painting. J.E. Millais's unambiguously titled *A Souvenir of Velázquez* offers a modernising portrait of a little girl in tribute to *Las Meninas*. As travel became easier in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British travellers to Spain brought different aesthetic sensibilities with them, inspired by Impressionism. Artists combined Spanish compositions with Impressionist techniques. David Bomberg's *Toledo* is presented as an example of the fusion of El Greco's cityscape with Cezanne's grid-like arrangement and high horizon line. The exhibition concludes with a display of works by British and American artists whose paintings promoted the Republican cause during the Spanish civil war.

*The Discovery of Spain* came to fruition over several years. Claudia Heide, David Howarth and Nicholas Tromans co-authored the initial proposal for an exhibition on the nineteenth-century fascination with Spain. This was shaped further in collaboration with Paul Stirton. SSAH members who attended the tour that Claudia gave us benefited from her specialist knowledge of the reception of Spanish culture in Britain and Spain's Islamic past. She deftly guided us to the smaller and less familiar works as well as the more imposing favourites, providing an excellent overview whilst doing justice to individual pieces.



The critical reception of the exhibition has been positive, even effusive in some instances. All were dazzled by the loans of works by Murillo, Goya, Velázquez, Zurbarán and other Spanish artists; some were less enthusiastic about the British works. However, the emotional response to the large Spanish pieces need not undercut the British works that bear the burden of the narrative. Unfortunately, viewers' expectations were misinformed by the gallery's advertising campaign. Printed leaflets, posters and huge banners hung on the outside of the gallery announced SPAIN: GOYA to PICASSO in large capitals, relegating *'The Discovery of'* to small lettering on the margin of the title and ignoring the crucial *'British Artists & Collectors'* subtitle. Some of the participants in the tour brushed aside critics' complaints that 'minor' British works cluttered the exhibition, stating that these offered a more satisfying understanding of the taste for Spanish art than they have been credited with.

We are indebted to Claudia for her contribution to our enjoyment and understanding of this exhibition. The companion publication, *The Discovery of Spain*, contains two essays by Claudia, 'The Spanish Picturesque' and 'A Dream of the South: Islamic Spain'.

**Shannon Hunter-Hurtado**

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## Notices

### **Art History in St Andrews has moved**

In September 2009 the School of Art History at the University of St Andrews moved into new premises at 79 North Street. Right in the centre of town, and next door to the Library, the building has been

completely refurbished and includes five well-equipped teaching rooms and the Visual Resources Collection, as well as staff offices and extensive workspace for postgraduates. Our previous home at 9 The Scores has reverted to its traditional role as the residence of the Principal of the University and will be playing a major part in the fundraising associated with the University's forthcoming 600th Anniversary celebrations.

The School's full address is:  
 School of Art History  
 University of St Andrews  
 79 North Street, St Andrews KY16 9AL

More details can be found on our recently redesigned website at <http://www-ah.st-andrews.ac.uk>

**Annette Carruthers**  
**Head of School**

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### **Call for Papers: Seminars in the History of Collecting 2010**

The seminar series has been established as part of the Wallace Collection's commitment to the research and study of the history of collections and collecting, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Paris and London. In 2010, we aim at organising a series of 10 seminars. We are keen to encourage contributions covering all aspects of the history of collecting, including: Formation and dispersal of collections; Dealers, auctioneers and the art market; Collectors; Museums; Inventory work; Research resources.

The seminars, which are normally held on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of every month during the calendar year, act as a forum for the presentation and discussion of new research into the history of collecting. Seminars are open to curators, academics, historians, archivists and all those with an interest in the subject. Papers are generally 45-60 minutes long and all the seminars take place at the Wallace Collection between 5.30 and 7pm.

If interested, please send a brief text (500-750 words) as a proposal. For more information and to submit a proposal, please contact:

Leda Cosentino, Peter Marino Research Assistant  
 The Wallace Collection, Manchester Square  
 London W1U 3BN  
 E-mail: [leda.cosentino@wallacecollection.org](mailto:leda.cosentino@wallacecollection.org)

## Burrell Tapestries Research Project

By Patricia Collins



*The Death of the Virgin*, a South German altar frontal dating from the late 15th century, © Culture & Sport Glasgow (Museums)

Sir William Burrell loved woven tapestries. His interest in and admiration of this medium led him to acquire just over 200 separate pieces. These range from fragments, small panels and cushion covers to extravagant wall-hangings. Most were made in the late medieval period, between 1400 and 1600 – though there are a few items of later date – and originate from various regions of Northern Europe. Materials used to make them vary from relatively modest wool and linen to richly dyed silks and precious-metal threads. Their subject matter covers an extremely wide range, encompassing highly sophisticated theological iconography as well as familiar Bible stories, romantic trysts between lovers and even satirical aspects of medieval everyday life.

This group of tapestries is one of the largest and most important collections of its kind (i.e. not a continuously augmented royal or aristocratic collection) in the world. It consists of a coherent and comprehensive series of tapestries acquired by a man of exemplary taste, which are still kept, displayed and studied together, thanks to Burrell and his wife Lady Constance's generous donation of their complete collection to the City of Glasgow in 1944. Six seventeenth-century fragments and complete tapestries purchased and donated by Burrell to the Provand's Lordship Society in the late 1920s are also included in this group, as these are also now part of the city's collection.

Despite two previous serious attempts to catalogue them, most of Burrell's tapestries have never yet been published and are not as well known to scholars or to the general public as they should be. All this is now changing, and a major research and cataloguing project is currently underway at The Burrell Collection. To help fund this project Sir William Burrell's Trustees have contributed a

generous £30,000, and Glasgow Museums, Culture & Sport Glasgow's resources have been boosted further by a very welcome grant of £91,500 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. A collaborative PhD studentship, with partners National Museums Scotland and the University of Edinburgh, supported by a joint AHRC/EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme award, will also undertake an important role in the overall project; this associated exercise being based on chemical analysis of dyes used by tapestry weavers, particularly those who are assumed to have been working in England around the year 1600.

The aims of this three-year project are to prepare a scholarly published catalogue and a comprehensive research archive of all tapestries acquired by Sir William Burrell. These results will provide a sound basis for future research, management and public interpretation of the tapestries, and will publicise the collection both at home and abroad. To this end, each tapestry is currently being photographed and condition-checked in detail by specialist in-house staff, and an accompanying public programme of project-related displays, events and activities is providing an opportunity for visitors to learn more about Burrell's tapestry collection and the museum staff and external experts who are taking an active part in the project. The public programme has been generously funded in part by a grant of £14,000 from Museums Galleries Scotland.



*The Flight of the Heron*, an early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Franco-Flemish wall-hanging, © Culture & Sport Glasgow (Museums)

For more details of the project and associated public programme, see the website [www.glasgowmuseums.com/tapestriesproject](http://www.glasgowmuseums.com/tapestriesproject) or contact Patricia Collins, Curator of Medieval & Renaissance Art, Culture and Sport Glasgow on [pat.collins@csglasgow.org](mailto:pat.collins@csglasgow.org)

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### **New book on The Thistle Chapel published**

*By Elizabeth Cumming*

The Thistle Chapel in St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh is the chapel of the Order of the Thistle, Scotland's premier order of chivalry. A jewel of the Arts and Crafts movement, it was designed by Robert Lorimer and built in 1909-10 by many individual craftsmen including the Clow brothers, Thomas Hadden, Douglas Strachan, Louis Davis, Karl Parsons, and Phoebe Traquair. A lavishly illustrated new book has just been published by the Order to celebrate its centenary. Much more than a picture book, it tells for the first time in some detail the story of the Chapel and the people who worked on its design and construction as well as exploring the heraldry it contains. It provides a unique insight into one of Scotland's most fascinating buildings and will be of wide interest to art, design and architectural historians, those with a knowledge of Scottish heraldry, and all who have an interest in Scottish visual culture. It is at once both a reference book and an engaging account of a special building.

Publication of this handsome book follows the recent full renovation of the Chapel in 2005 – the first in fact since it was formally opened by King George V in 1911. The cleaning and restoration was undertaken by Charles Taylor Woodwork, under the supervision of Graham Tristram of Campbell and Arnott, the Cathedral's architects. The book contains nearly 90 photographs, including new ones taken by Saul Gardiner while scaffolding was in place for the cleaning. Many other photographs, from recent ones by David Allan to archive images from the collections of RCAHMS and National Museums Scotland, have never been published. All illustrate the process of the Chapel's construction and the extraordinary detail of its decoration.

The book has contributions from two SSAH members. Louise Boreham, granddaughter of Louis Deuchars who modelled much of the figural work in the Chapel, has written detailed chapters on the making of the Chapel, its carved stonework and woodwork and on work in bronze and fine metal. Elizabeth Cumming has provided sections on Lorimer

and the place of the Chapel in his career, and on the stained glass, enamelwork, and iron, leadwork and embroidery. The foreword is by Robin Blair CVO, Angus Herald of Arms Extraordinary, who, as Lord Lyon King of Arms and Secretary of the Order of the Thistle from 2001 to 2007, led the comprehensive programme of cleaning of the Chapel. Heraldry expert Charles Burnett, Ross Herald of Arms, has contributed chapters on the genesis of the Chapel and its role in the history of the Order, changes and additions to the Chapel after 1911, also a list of its heraldry. Elizabeth Roads details the work of the heraldic artists and an account of Her Majesty's Officers of Arms. For reference, the book also publishes comprehensive lists of the Knights, Ladies and Officers of the Order of the Thistle, the artists, craftsmen and companies – nearly 60 in number – who created it, plus a facsimile of the inauguration programme of 19<sup>th</sup> July 1911.



The book's designer is Robert Dalrymple, well known to SSAH members for his fine art catalogues. He has produced a book bound in Thistle green, beautifully printed on selected fine papers and in itself a work of art. It is published in a limited hardback edition of 1,000 copies, and would make the perfect 2009 Christmas present. It is available at the Court of the Lord Lyon, New Register House, Edinburgh EH1 3YT and the shop in New Register House. It can also be purchased by post from the Book Department, The Order of the Thistle, The Court of the Lord Lyon. The price of the book is £25.00 (plus postage and packing UK £4.00, Europe £6.50, rest of the world £11.50): payment is by UK sterling cheque or bank draft only, made payable to 'The Order of the Thistle'.

# Acquisitions

## Tracy Emin at Aberdeen Art Gallery

By Griffin Co

Aberdeen Art Gallery has acquired work by one of Britain's most acclaimed and successful contemporary artists, Tracey Emin.

The pink and blue neon work entitled *For You* which is now hanging in the Centre Court of the Gallery, was purchased with assistance from the National Fund for Acquisitions, The Art Fund, the National Collecting Scheme for Scotland and the Friends of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums.

Tracey Emin studied at the Royal College of Art in London from 1987 to 1989 and during the 1990s became part of the group known as the YBAs (Young British Artists). In 1999 she was short-listed for the Turner Prize and is perhaps best known for the installation piece that she showed *My Bed* which was a representation of the artist's unmade bed, complete with empty vodka bottles, cigarette packets and condoms. Always a controversial and high profile personality she affirmed her position as a highly regarded and established artist by accepting election to the Royal Academy in March 2007.

Emin is a storyteller whose subject matter comes from her own life. Her artwork often focuses on confessional texts which she combines with deeply personal objects and mementos. Emin regards her big neon pieces as "love poems" as she explains:

"Poetry can be one line, a sentence. When you read the words you imagine what you're seeing; you're given a sense of vision by the words".

Tracey Emin said: "The good thing about neon is it's not just about the words. It creates an atmosphere. Neon makes people feel happier, which is why you see it at fun fairs."

In 1996, Emin made the first of a series of neon pieces which were described by the art critic Neal Brown as "molten autobiography [in] pure candyfloss coloured light".

*For You* can be seen as love mutterings, a prayer or an exploration of a moment's emotion frozen in time. The words are scrawled in three separate lines:

I Felt You  
And I knew You  
Loved me  
x

Their arrangement and the kiss at the end of the message create a strange mixture of anonymity and

immediacy that is reminiscent of graffiti, text messages or post-it notes. This particular text could have different meanings: universal and layered, the 'you' whom Emin refers to in the text becomes open, a God, a lover, a protector, a friend, a stranger, everyone or no-one.

The colour of the neon heart is pink, the symbol of love, which is in contrast with the cool blueness of the words inside.

*Aberdeen Art Gallery is open 10am-5pm Tuesday to Saturday and 2-5pm Sundays. For further information please contact Assistant Keeper of Fine Art Griffin Co on 01224 523678.*

[Editor's note: unfortunately the organisation which administers Tracy Emin's copyright would not allow us to reproduce the work here without charging us, so you'll just have to go to Aberdeen to see it!]

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# Reviews

## Sharon Thomas - *Apotropaic*

**Museet for Religjøs Kunst, 14<sup>th</sup> March – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2009**

By Gráinne Rice, Glasgow School of Art

*"And wherever you do, whatever you do, there's always that damp little island called the past..."*

(Morrissey introducing *Big Mouth Strikes Again* at the SECC Glasgow, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2004)

Many of the works in the *Apotropaic* exhibition were developed whilst Sharon Thomas was a Sainsbury Scholar at the British School in Rome (2005-06). As implied by Morrissey's words (another ex-pat Anglo in Roman exile), the work in this exhibition is haunted by (rather than dreaming of) a brooding vision of England's pleasant pastures. Cheshire-born Thomas trained in the Painting Department at Glasgow School of Art in the late 1990s under Sandy Moffat and has a clear regard for the history of her discipline. As eloquently described in Francesco Nevola's accompanying catalogue essay, Thomas is refreshingly open about the artists who have over time influenced the development of her work listing: the Italian Old Masters; Rubens; Thomas Cole; Richter; fellow GSA alumna Jenny Saville; former tutor Moyna Flanagan; Lisa Yuskavage and John Currin amongst others. Somewhat unusual in its breadth and honesty, the essay traces the development of her work and ideas

from student days at GSA, to her Masters at the New York Academy of Art and mostly recently in Rome. The common thread that developed during these periods of didactic exile was that of the artist being away from the landscape of her childhood. Travel broadens the mind, and not unlike the effect that participating in the aristocratic tradition of travel of 'the Grand Tour' had on the work of British painters such as Richard Wilson and JMW Turner, Thomas's period away has reinvigorated her approach to Englishness both in content and style.

During her time studying and living in New York she made initial compositions such as *New Jerusalem* (2004) where the girl-next-door protagonist of her early student paintings is fore-grounded within the magnificent suffused palette of a Dutch-influenced English landscape. In the monumentally-scaled *Regina Res Publica* (also 2004), the heroine stops to view the landscape astride a bicycle, centrally placed within an elevated, bird's eye perspective of the vista. Regina stands like the proprietor in a 17<sup>th</sup> century Siberechts or Knyff painting, a proud huntswoman, the mistress of all she surveys. Regina's view is not topographic as the Flemish precursors of English country house portraiture would have been. The landscape is an imagined one, formed by Thomas's experience of rural Cheshire as well as the rich tradition of landscape in the history of painting. Making its first appearance is the abstracted motif of Beeston Castle rising above the idealised, fecund flatlands of the Cheshire plains. The exaggerated aerial or high viewpoint perspective reaches its apotheosis in the painting *The Parishes* (2005), instead of the topographic delineation of landscape of a flourishing economy of Flemish Prospect painting precedents it offers a high viewpoint for the Moulton Crow Man mumming ritual about to be enacted.

Thomas once said in conversation several years ago that she was God in her art and that she controls all that goes on within the picture frame, it's a world of her making. Thomas's imagination is spreading beyond the picture frame into the gallery space itself, yearning to control context as well as object. This is evidenced in the *Nights at Fairy Hill* installation of maquettes and vast unrolled charcoal landscape as part of her 2006 *Overlap* group exhibition in Rome and the recent 2008 two person *Mundane Shell* exhibition (with Laurie Figgis) as part of Gi: Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Visual Art at the Glasgow Print Studio.

Clearly in love with the landscape paintings of Gainsborough, Constable, Samuel Palmer and Blake, Thomas's work reminds us that the pastoral imagery of the genre is infinitely political. Instead of

understanding these vistas as beautiful, passive arcadias, backdrops to religious or mythological narratives, the multiple layers in Thomas's symbolism encourages a deeper, semiotic reading. The monumental scale of most of these paintings works declares them as competing with the classical and historical precedents.



Sharon Thomas, *Apotropaic* installation (courtesy of [www.sharonthomas.co.uk](http://www.sharonthomas.co.uk) )

The castle hill re-appears in later works up to and including the extensive *Apotropaic* Renaissance-styled cartoon from which the show takes its title. The anthropological etymology of the title of this work, and indeed the whole show, is the most obvious Roman influence that has seeped into the work. The word refers to cultish, popular objects that ward off evil spirits, such as the abstract symbols that were carved onto Suffolk chimney breasts to prevent demons from entering a house or the familiar sinister evil eyes charms that are sold as tourist *tut* in Greek and Turkish holiday resorts. Thomas employs the characters of Crow Men, inspired by the folk plays of her Cheshire landscape, frequently in the large-scale 'history' paintings, as well as in the smaller-scaled *Coffee Morning Series* (2007-08). The beaks and cones held by Thomas's priapic male characters, the rude mechanicals of her world, become the apotropes, as they cavort through the English landscape. These props are meant to be so comic as to diffuse the threat of male phallic power. The visual parallels to *Commedia Dell'arte's* beaked *Il Dottore* character remind the viewer again of the influence of Thomas's Italian experience. There are also resonances with Hieronymus Bosch's hellish beaked devils and Paula Rego's curious *Loving Bewick* sketch in her Jane Ayre series in which Jane, mouth open, is depicted lovingly

swallowing a pelican's beak, literally consuming Bewick's 1797 book *History of British Birds*.

Thomas has been rehearsing the dominant themes of this work landscape, masculinity, folklore home-grown mythologies for many years. The castle hill, like the brooding phallus of Glastonbury Tor as it throbbed its way through the BBC's 1986 adaptation of Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, serves as a Lacanian signifier of the phallus or male power. The Morris Dancer in *Ridicule (Is Nothing to be Scared of)* (2005) prancing across a recently ploughed Constable-esque field holds aloft a hoop cheerfully decorated with ribbons instead of the more familiar 'sword' stick. He has been de-nuded of his phallic instrument, the reference to Adam Ant's early 80's dandyism a reflection of the showy theatricality of this masculine folk tradition. *Fruits of the Forest* (2006) images a heavily pregnant man surrounded by a nauseating harvest of ripened fruit and flowers, purple plums in his lap. A reflection of Thomas's own initiation into motherhood at this time, it revisits the sinister fertility cult of the scenes of colourful pagan rituals of the hugely influential 1970s cult horror film *The Wicker Man*.

The 'average joes' depicted in the series of imaginary portraits, *Ripe for the Picking (band of brothers)* (2008) and the dirty, beak-swallowing priest of *A Birds Eye View#1 and #2* (both 2009) are parodies of contemporary masculinity over which Thomas is asserting her 'female gaze'. She makes a conscious decision to switch role from watched to watcher. The female characters of the powerful imaginary equestrian portrait, *Kate's Progress* and in the *Coffee Morning Series* of small monochromes (2007-08), become the powerful players, skirting close to the sexually threatening Crow Men lurking in the bushes but ultimately triumphing over the frustrated males.

"The Penis only comes to be elided with the phallus because female sexuality is considered a lack in patriarchal order, and the differences between male and female genitals become expressed in terms of the presence or absence of the male term [phallus]" (Henrietta Moor, *The Subject of Anthropology* 2007 p. 100)

It is the female characters in Thomas's paintings who hold the attributes of Lacanian phallic power, at once enacting a repudiation of, and reinforcing, sub-Freudian theories of female penis- envy. Thomas's characters are surrounded by phallic symbols but are not psychologically castrated men, they are the oblivious and heroic protagonists around which the corpulent average joes circulate.

You can see more of Sharon Thomas's work at [www.sharonthomas.co.uk](http://www.sharonthomas.co.uk) and in the exhibition **Tales of Shiney-shiney** at the North Wall Gallery, Oxford, 1<sup>st</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> November 2009.

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## Exhibitions

### **Picturing Britain: Paul Sandby (1731-1809)**

National Gallery Complex, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2009 – 7<sup>th</sup> February 2010



Paul Sandby, *Horse Fair on Bruntsfield Links, Edinburgh* (National Gallery of Scotland)

This winter the National Gallery of Scotland will present a major exhibition celebrating the bicentenary of the artist Paul Sandby (1731-1809). A pioneer landscape painter and brilliant innovator with watercolour, Sandby played a key role in promoting the appreciation of spectacular scenery across Britain and inspired many later travellers and artists. Although the significance of his work has long been acknowledged, this is the first exhibition to include and analyse the full range of Sandby's achievement.

Paul Sandby was born in Nottingham in 1731. He visited Scotland early in his career as a part of the Military Survey, which through map making, formed part of the campaign to control the country after the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. During his time as the Survey's chief draughtsman he was based in Edinburgh and produced numerous ground-breaking landscape and genre studies. These works became well known through prints, and stand at the beginning of the rich tradition of depicting the drama and beauty of Scottish landscape – which was later developed by artists such as Runciman, Nasmyth, More and Turner. Sandby also came to know the work of important Enlightenment figures, such as the poet Allan Ramsay and the

architect Robert Adam. Key works by Sandby exploring Scottish subjects in the exhibition include *Roslin Castle* (Yale Center for British Art), *Horse Fair on Bruntsfield Links, Edinburgh* (National Gallery of Scotland), and part of the 'Great Map' of Scotland of c.1753 (British Library).

Following his time in Scotland, Sandby settled in London where he worked as a teacher, landscape painter and printmaker, forging a considerable reputation. Thomas Gainsborough considered him 'the only Man of Genius... [for] real Views from Nature'. From the 1760s he made many highly finished watercolours and gouaches at Windsor, which are in a number of cases the outstanding works of his career. They include Sandby's dramatic *View of Windsor on a Rejoicing Night of 1768* (Royal Collection), which was painted in the year the artist became a founder member of the Royal Academy.



Paul Sandby, *The Rainbow*, c. 1800 (Nottingham City Museums and Galleries)

Sandby has often been considered the 'father' of watercolour painting in Britain; he refined the use of the medium and employed it to explore a broader range of subject matter than any previous artist in the country. He delighted in the study of rural and urban views, street scenes, royal parks and ancient castles, and always retained an interest in fascinating anecdotal details – which embrace the fashions, occupations and entertainments of the people he encountered. *Picturing Britain* features over one hundred loans, including oil paintings, watercolours, gouaches, prints and sketchbooks, coming from all the major collections which house his work: The Royal Collection, The British Museum, The British Library, The Victoria and Albert Museum and The Yale Center for British Art. It also includes some outstanding works from private collections, which have never previously been published.

The exhibition is a collaboration with the Royal Academy of Arts in London and Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery. Its catalogue has been published by the Royal Academy of Arts, and in 2010 the Mellon Centre in London will host a complementary academic conference. The research for the exhibition and accompanying catalogue have been generously funded by The Paul Mellon Centre for British Art.

For further information call 0131 6246 6200; or visit [www.nationalgalleries.org](http://www.nationalgalleries.org)

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### **Artistic Differences: 100 Years of the Duncan of Jordanstone Bequest**

Lamb Gallery, University of Dundee, 24<sup>th</sup> October – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009

By Matthew Jarron

While Glasgow School of Art's Mackintosh Building might be getting all the attention, another important centenary is being celebrated by Scotland's biggest and (at least according to the recent RAE results) best art school, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design in Dundee.

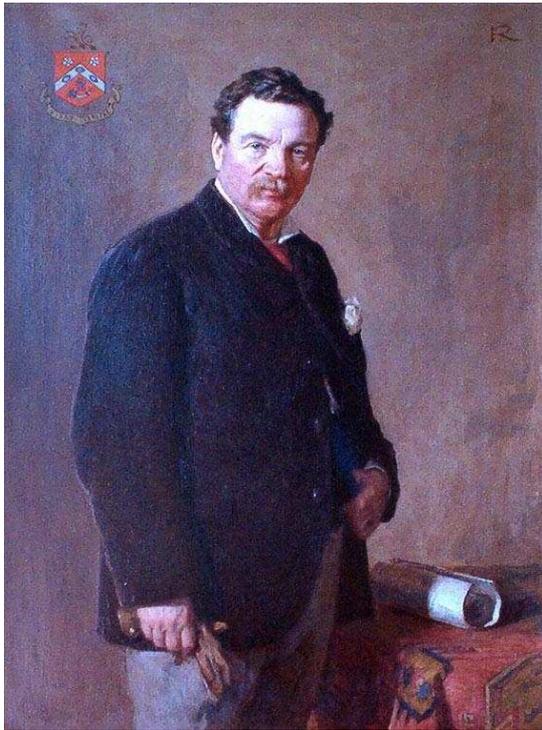
The growth of Dundee's art college has been an extraordinary achievement for an institution that for many years was very much a poor relation to its much grander counterparts in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The origins of this remarkable expansion go back exactly one hundred years to a bequest made by local businessman James Duncan of Jordanstone. But the story of his generous gift is far from straightforward, and involved almost half a century of power struggles, legal battles and funding problems before Duncan of Jordanstone College could finally fulfil its potential.

Dundee had had an art school since 1856, when John Kennedy began teaching evening classes at the High School. Over the next three decades numerous smaller art schools appeared throughout the city. Most of their students were tradesmen – joiners and mechanics who needed to learn the basic 'graphic sciences' such as Geometrical Drawing and Perspective.

In 1888 the Dundee Technical Institute opened on Small's Wynd, with the aim of providing far more advanced instruction for the city's working classes. Art was taught there from the start by George Malcolm, but it was the arrival in 1892 of Thomas Delgaty Dunn as full-time art master that

really marked the start of today's Art College. Dunn introduced day classes and massively increased the range of subjects on offer. When a nationwide re-organisation of technical and art education took place in 1901, the Technical Institute was designated a Central Institution with a region-wide remit. All other art classes in the city were disbanded and some 300 students now tried to cram into the two small art studios in the Small's Wynd building.

In 1906 a major fund-raising campaign was launched which led to a new building opening on Bell Street in 1910 with the name Dundee Technical College *and School of Art*. The new school hoped to be able to offer the full four-year Diploma courses in Art and Design, but to do that it would need considerable extra resources. In 1909, while the building was still under construction, a generous bequest came from out of the blue which seemed to be the answer to everyone's prayers, thanks to the late James Duncan of Jordanstone.



Sir George Reid, *James Duncan of Jordanstone*, c. 1890  
(University of Dundee Museum Services)

Born in 1825, Duncan had studied at Dundee High School before earning his fortune trading in South America. In his will, Duncan bequeathed some £60,000 towards "founding in Dundee a School of Industrial Art, to be named and known in all time to come as the 'Duncan of Jordanstone Art School.'" He listed in some detail the subjects to be taught there

and concluded by noting that the school should be run in collaboration with the Technical College but should be entirely independent of it.

The problems were quickly apparent. Duncan had made his will in 1899, clearly aware of the College in its original form but wanting his school to be a separate institution. By 1909, however, most of the subjects he expected it to teach were already being catered for by the College. This, plus Duncan's appeal for co-operation with the College, was enough to allow its trustees to make a swift bid for the money. A plan was drawn up to use available land adjacent to the new building, as the site for the Duncan of Jordanstone School.

It soon became clear, however, that the Technical College and the Duncan trustees were unable to come to an agreement, and for the next twenty years the bequest would remain like the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, tantalisingly close but always just out of reach. By the time Delgaty Dunn retired in 1927, he had successfully fought off attempts to have the money spent elsewhere, but was no further forward in securing it for his school.

It was down to his successor Francis Cooper to re-commence battle with the Duncan trustees, with the Technical College and with the Scottish Education Department. Cooper had come from teaching art in a girls' boarding school, and was much mocked by the students for his attempts to run the School of Art on similar lines. But his commitment to winning the elusive bequest was never in doubt, and his tenacity eventually won the day. Following a review by the Educational Endowments Commission, a complete re-organisation in 1934 led to the creation of Dundee Institute of Art & Technology, with the re-named Dundee College of Art given enough autonomy from the rest of the organisation to satisfy the Duncan trustees. In 1935 a site on Perth Road was acquired for a new purpose-built art college and architectural plans were approved in 1938 following a national competition. Just as everything was ready to go, the war intervened and the whole scheme was mothballed.

Cooper retired in 1953, just as the foundation stone of the new building was finally laid. The building opened in 1955 and under the dynamic leadership of Cooper's successor, Hugh Adam Crawford, the new college quickly built up a reputation far exceeding anything that had been possible before. New tutors such as Alberto Morrocco, David McClure and Scott Sutherland were among the best-known artists in Scotland, and were soon attracting students from throughout the country. In 1962 the College finally took the name of its benefactor of so many years

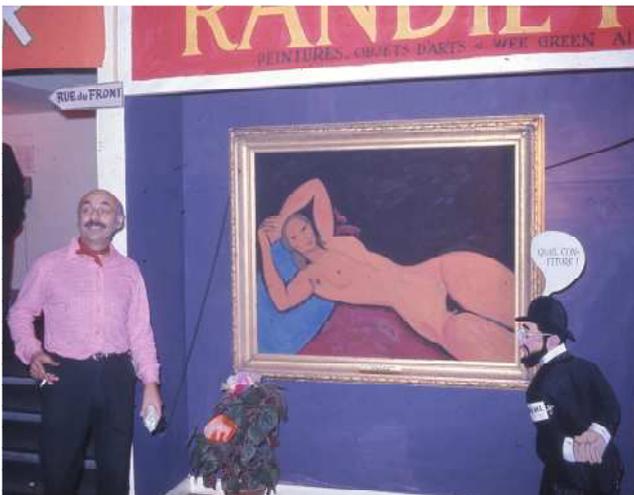
before, and became Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art.



Students campaigning for the new college building in 1950 (University of Dundee Archive Services)

This centenary exhibition explores the complex history of the bequest and celebrates the art college's achievements in fighting for survival for many years before finally emerging triumphant. Included in the show are unique documents, photographs and artworks from the museum, archive and library collections of Duncan of Jordanstone College, the University of Dundee and the University of Abertay.

The exhibition is open Mon-Fri 09.30-20.30 and Sat 09.30-16.30. Call 01382 384310 or email [museum@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:museum@dundee.ac.uk) for more information.



Alberto Morrocco at the Art College Revels, 1968 (Duncan of Jordanstone College Library)

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