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## **Rutgers Art Review**

### **Volume 26**

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## Sexuality in the Early Works of Albrecht Dürer

*Christopher Currie*

The life and works of Albrecht Dürer have attracted minds of a philosophical bent.<sup>1</sup> Art historians have given us an image of genius: of a Renaissance man, deeply engaged in various fields of study, bringing a spirit of scientific inquiry and exactitude to the visual arts; of a cerebral artist, creating images embodying complex philosophical programs derived from ancient and contemporary sources; of a heroic figure, furthering the march of progress through his conquest and assimilation first of his native idiom and then of Italian art; and of an unprecedentedly self-conscious and self-fashioned artist. We see Dürer claiming a place for the artist in the world and for himself in history, recording the infinitely various contours and textures of the natural world, tracing time and again the human figure in search of a canon of proportion, searching his own body and countenance and offering them up as exemplars of humanity. He was participating in the revival of the art and learning of the past as a bridge to his own success, and to the future of Northern art.

There is something in Dürer's life and work that resonates with such minds. Our image of Dürer is a product of that resonance—it is conditioned by the expectations and aspirations of some very erudite scholars. There has been little room in a study of Dürer for anything but the highest-minded concepts. His is a solemn project.

The underlying assumption of much of the writing on Dürer, as well as much of the art historical writing of the past century in general, is that meaning in art takes the form of iconicity, that the meaning of a work emerges from the process of identifying the individual objects and figures depicted and their significance within a larger structure of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> It is an irony of Panofsky's iconographic method that, while meaning is inherent in the work of art, the investigation of that meaning leads the observer away from the work itself, toward the broader vista of culture in general in search of ideas, words, or images presumably approximate to the objects represented. What is lost in the search for the explanatory source is the individual work of art. The elucidation of meaning is bought at the cost of the conflation of the work under scrutiny with other products of culture. This is simultaneously a process of clarification and obfuscation, of excavation and defilement, of retrieval and loss.

What passes under the radar of such approaches are the less cerebral aspects of Dürer's art. In particular, there are certain works by Dürer that address, very directly and engagingly, not the life of the mind but that of the body. Recent interest in Dürer's sexual identity has focused on works which take as their subject, or otherwise quite overtly address, the theme of same-sex sex: a drawing of Willibald Pirckheimer across the top of which is written in Greek "With erect penis, into the man's anus," a drawing of the Death of Orpheus in which appears a banderole that reads in German "Orpheus the first pederast," and an engraved Hercules, a figure sometimes associated with homosexuality. These works contain evidence considered reliable either because it takes verbal form or is the product of traditional iconological analysis.<sup>3</sup> And yet, to rely solely on verbal cues and conformity to pictorial or literary conventions is to overlook the vast preponderance of information conveyed by works of art. Reading Dürer's images internally, that is, focusing primarily on the relations between objects within individual works rather than on the significance of these objects within a broader iconological program, I find a number of works in which he addresses homoeroticism and other issues of sexual identity and behaviors. I pursue this avenue of inquiry

not with the aim of "outing" Dürer, but rather in order to begin to explore the ways in which the art of the early sixteenth century engages contemporary concerns with sex and masculinity, as well as the ways in which self-consciousness and self-fashioning may involve personal and public explorations of sex and sexual identity.

In the period from 1494 to 1505, Dürer—under the influence of Italian art and of his friend the prominent humanist Willibald Pirckheimer—produced all of his surviving treatments of mythological subjects and, more broadly and more importantly, began to engage with ideas and stylistic concerns derived from antiquity. His burgeoning interest in ideal human bodies takes the form of an unprecedented exploration, not of man in the abstract, but of men as physical, and moreover, sexual beings. During this period, Dürer's study of the male body is not simply the search for a canon of ideal proportions; it is that and much more: it is an exploration of power and potentialities, of delight in himself as a man, and delight in men as a reflection of that self. What these works reveal is a particular concept of manhood, one that relies on an inextricable mingling of power and desire: not simply the power and privileges of manhood but a distinctly sensuous experience and representation of that power. What is pictured in several drawings and prints from this period is an experience among men, but one that is defined in relation to woman, specifically through her subordination and exclusion. The particular conception of masculinity that Dürer constructs in these works is a blending of narcissism, homoeroticism, and misogyny. It appears not only in conventionally sexual themes such as *Adam and Eve* and the *Death of Orpheus*, but also, and more tellingly, in the sensuous application of Dürer's pen and burin to the depiction of the male body.

The most subtle, and therefore insidious, presentation of this conception of masculinity is his 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve* (Figure 1). The limitations and longevity of the iconographic method are particularly evident in the literature on this work. I should perhaps say the paucity of literature, for after Panofsky cracked its iconographic code in 1943, there followed a half-century of relative silence. To briefly summarize Panofsky's iconographic reading: the mountain ash, whose branch Adam holds, is the Tree of Life. In the center of the picture is the Forbidden Fig Tree, which bears apples. Adam has not yet bitten the apple; he is therefore still immortal and sinless, and no one temperament prevails in him. Four of the animals depicted represent the four temperaments: the elk, melancholic gloom; the cat, choleric cruelty; the rabbit, sanguine sensuality; and the ox, phlegmatic sluggishness.<sup>4</sup>

Equally important to Panofsky's understanding of this work is his consideration of style. This engraving is the first fruit of Dürer's systematic investigations of ideal human proportions. The idealized figures of Adam and Eve, derived from the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Medici Venus*—known to Dürer through Italian intermediaries, such as a drawing from the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio—are placed within the particularizing landscape that was the forte of Northern artists, a landscape in which textures and details are painstakingly rendered. Thus, *Adam and Eve* is the site of a dialectical process in which the idealizing art of the South meets the particularizing art of the North. Panofsky takes this point further: it is not the engraving but the mind of Albrecht Dürer that is the site of this dialectical process. That is, we are not dealing merely with a question of the integration of conflicting styles, but rather with conflicting psychological impulses. Regarding the appearance of the idealizing alongside the particularizing in Dürer's work, Panofsky writes: "To ascribe this interior tension solely to the impact of the Italian Renaissance on the mind of a German artist trained in the Late Gothic tradition would be too simple." He adds that "it would be more correct to say that Dürer's yearning for Italy was caused by an innate conflict in his mind than that the conflict in his mind was caused by the influence of Italy."<sup>5</sup> Panofsky seems to believe that there was an inevitability to Dürer's achievement. Dürer didn't simply get turned on to Italian art; he carried in his mind a template and needed only to cross the Alps to find the pieces that

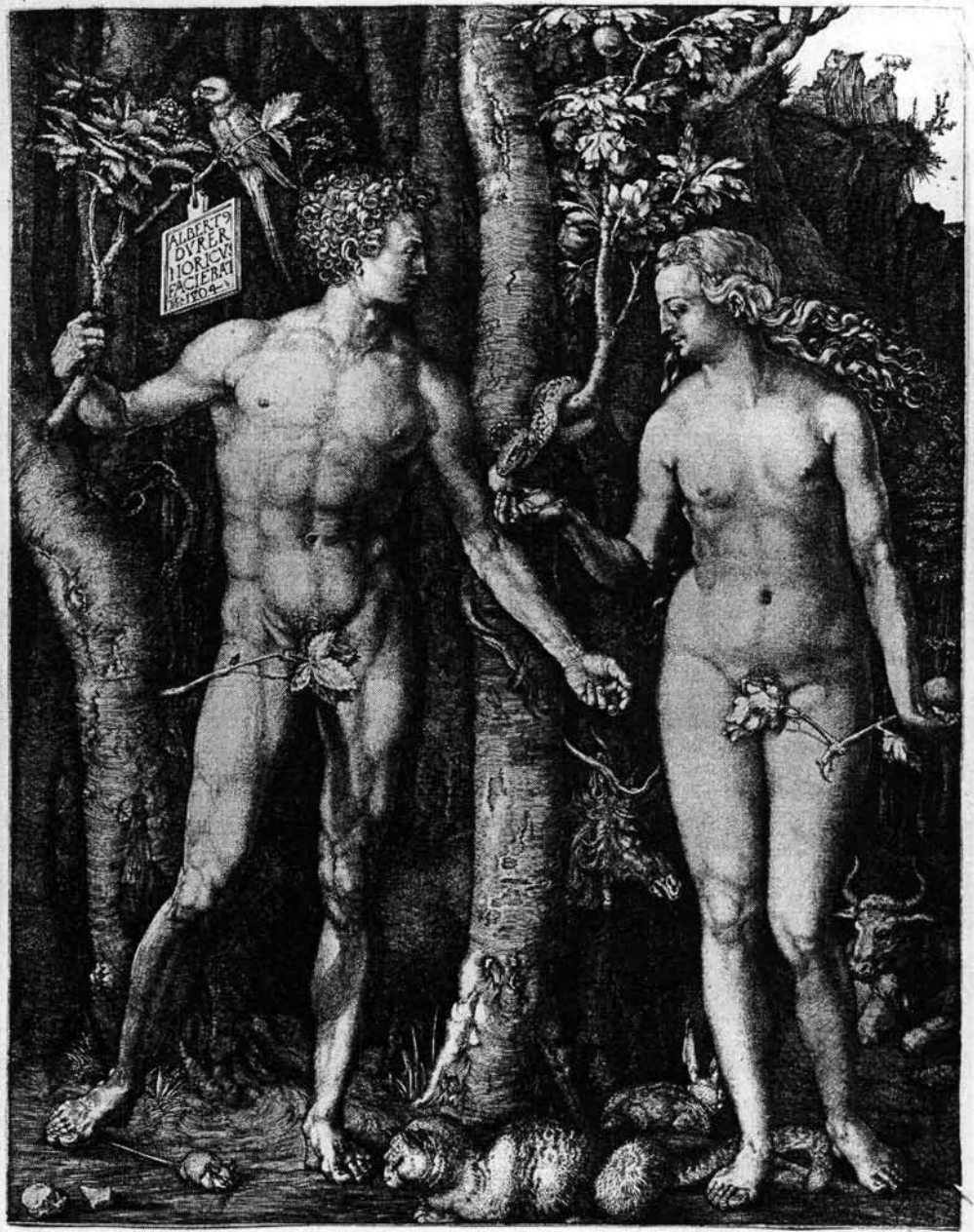


Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504. Engraving, 24.7 x 19 cm. Image courtesy of Art Resource, New York.

would fit into it. Dürer is thus not only an artistic genius; he is the agent through which spirit attains material form. Panofsky goes so far as to say that "if ever a great artistic movement can be said to be the work of one individual, the Northern Renaissance was the work of Albrecht Dürer. [...] It was he who imparted to Northern art a feeling for classical beauty and classical pathos, classical force and classical clarity."<sup>6</sup>

Panofsky's interpretation elevates the very style of Dürer's engraving to the level of iconicity. The classicism of the figures, that is, the degree to which they conform to a Greek ideal—not the figures themselves—becomes, along with the particular objects depicted, a symbol representing an abstract concept. Thus classicism is not merely the means of representing the subject matter; it is the subject matter. The consideration of stylistic elements, rather than bringing about a closer engagement with the work of art, contributes to an interpretation that places emphasis on concepts to which individual elements in the picture refer. It overlooks the ways in which these elements relate to one another, not as discrete concepts but, rather, as devices within a distinctly pictorial system of meaning. Panofsky's reading substitutes for the narrative and descriptive elements within the engraving an historical narrative within which this print can be situated through the identification of its iconic elements. What is Dürer's *Adam and Eve* about for Panofsky? It is about the Renaissance in Northern Europe.

However, interpreting the work, as Panofsky did, as being about the state of Dürer's art in 1504, that is, about his successful and self-conscious integration of the latest Italian innovations into his own characteristically Northern idiom, can only in small part explain the subject matter of the print. Nor can an iconographic reading elucidate what is depicted. Panofsky sought to come to terms with the subjectivity of the viewer. For him, looking must be sanctioned by method; one looks not with the naked eye but through the filter of a presumably objectifying apparatus. Panofsky's method involves what he called aesthetic re-creation and archaeological research.<sup>7</sup> He acknowledged the subjectivity of his observations: the object of study is, in a sense, not the work of art itself but rather his experience of it. The purpose of research is to determine what of that experience is admissible as evidence. Thus the interpretation of works of art is elevated from whimsy to science: the art historian is spared the embarrassment of simply reading his own feelings and thoughts into works of art. I would not argue that the role of the art historian is to use a work of art as a springboard for one's thoughts. I am arguing that placing oneself within the narrative of a work is an important step toward understanding that work, albeit understanding it in relation to its historical moment. I am arguing that reading works of art that relate to the body enlists not only our eyes and powers of reasoning but also our desires and memories of the tactile experiences of inhabiting a body.

What is a method but a statement of expectations? Inherent in a method is a presumption of not only what is knowable but what is worth knowing. Panofsky found in Dürer's *Adam and Eve* what, in a general sense, he expected to find there: meanings in the form of ideas—ideas in a Platonic sense that are preexistent and constant in that they are untainted by their achievement of material form. They are not located in a divine realm but within a structure of meaning within the human mind. Panofsky's Dürer is a product of his philosophical allegiances: the neo-Kantianism and humanism he shared with Ernst Cassirer.<sup>8</sup> He sees himself engaged in the same project as the artists and scholars of the Renaissance; he finds himself inhabiting and preserving the same realm of ideas. In such a situation Dürer may come to seem no less erudite than Panofsky himself, yet we would do well to remember that while Dürer did have access to Pirckheimer's library he did not enjoy the advantage of access to Aby Warburg's.<sup>9</sup> Nor should we assume that Dürer's interests were so exclusively erudite. The works themselves betray that they were not.

What does a shift in emphasis from the iconological to a more direct way of looking reveal in Dürer's *Adam and Eve*?



We see much more than objects symbolizing particular concepts. Meaning is generated through a series of contrasts set up by the way in which the figures of Adam and Eve mirror and contrast with each other. One's eye moves back and forth between the left and right halves of the page in a steady, even rhythm. This mirroring effect is repeated between the head of Adam and the bird, and also between the head of Eve and the goat perched atop a rocky crag in the upper right of the print. The goat also echoes Adam, they both face emphatically toward the viewer's right and look downward slightly, and Eve's somewhat birdlike face is echoed by the bird.

We see not only finely proportioned human figures but also a finely calibrated drama. All is peaceful and delicately balanced—even the goat on the mountaintop—but this harmony will soon be upset, and the ensuing discord is foreshadowed in the cat and mouse, as well as in the animals converging—particularly if one reads the image two-dimensionally—upon the body of Eve. Central to the narrative are the bold gaze of Adam and the averted, self-conscious, perhaps coquettish gaze of Eve. How can we best describe this moment, more nuanced than any described in the book of Genesis, that is passing between Adam and Eve?

Any good creation myth has to provide an explanation for gender difference. Why did God issue two distinct models of human beings? The story of Adam and Eve explains this: God fashioned Eve out of Adam's rib to be a companion, a helper, to him. Yet the story of Adam and Eve serves not to explain gender difference but to reinforce, or simply enforce, gender roles. Panofsky writes that with his engraved *Adam and Eve* "Dürer wished to present to a Northern public



Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait, Nude*, 1503. Pen and brush heightened with white on green-grounded paper, 19.4 x 15.4 cm. Schlossmuseum, Weimar. Image courtesy of Schlossmuseum, Weimar.



two classic specimens of the nude human body, as perfect as possible both in proportions and in pose."<sup>10</sup> Dürer fashions an image of man and woman, each in their ideal state. As two distinct ideals are depicted in this print, the theme of gender difference is unavoidable. The formal composition of the print, setting the eye in back-and-forth motion across the central axis marked by the Forbidden Fig Tree, encourages comparison of the two figures.

Dürer's Adam and Eve are depicted before the Fall; they don't yet know that they are naked and they don't know enough to cover themselves. Yet Dürer's Eve retains the modesty, or more accurately the shame, expressed by the pose of the *Medici Venus*.<sup>11</sup> While Adam's posture is open, Eve's is closed; while his legs are open, hers are closed; while his gaze is bold, hers is averted. Has Dürer merely retained the poses of his classical models, or do they reveal Dürer's expectations regarding gendered behavior? The presentation of Eve as weak and fallible, and therefore subject to shame even in her pre-lapsarian state, is reinforced by the positioning around her body of the melancholic elk, the sanguine rabbit, and the phlegmatic ox. In the world of this engraving, woman—even in her ideal state—is cursed with shortcomings, and man, it would seem, is cursed with her. Dürer's *Adam and Eve* evinces a delight in the male body and in man in general: his power and beauty, his self-control, and his command of his world. In this engraving these qualities are established by contrast with an image of woman, who even in her ideal state is passive and imperfect.<sup>12</sup>

Dürer's *Self-Portrait, Nude* affords us, inadvertently, something of the view from Eve's perspective (Figure 2).<sup>13</sup> Dürer leans toward us, as Adam does toward Eve, and leers at us with an expression more frank and commanding even than that of Adam. From our perspective, as the object of this gaze, it seems aggressive and threatening; we are challenged to deal with the physical, sexual presence of this figure. While we see this figure as a challenge or a threat, for Dürer there is a certain delight in the forceful presence that he simultaneously projects and apprehends. He takes pleasure in the power of his own sexuality and in the sensuous act of describing it, and he perhaps anticipates and takes pleasure in the viewer's gaze poring over the forms he delineates.

The subtle modeling of the torso, the work of pen and brush, creates a series of shallow though substantial interlocking forms: planes on the surface of the body, resembling armor or, as it is unmistakably organic, a carapace, the edge of which is delineated by a descending line, at once elastic and obdurate like the other lines of the torso. This line ends in two small undulating curves describing the pubic hair; together with hair and beard these are the only soft elements of this impervious, though supremely supple, figure. The hardness of the torso is exceeded only by that of the testicles, whose shape and texture suggest stone or bone, lending the genitals the appearance of a primitive tool. Although the torso is the most finished portion of the drawing, the expressive force of the work is achieved primarily through the face and genitals. An averted gaze—a very un-Dürer-like strategy, only found among his self-portraits in one he drew as a child in 1484—would, of course, radically alter the character of this work, and if we cover the genitals this direct gaze loses much of its impact.

The figure is lit from above and slightly behind, as he leans into the dark space between himself and the viewer. His hair, here unlike that in his painted self-portraits—especially that of 1500, in which it is lavishly arrayed—is tied back, so as not to distract from what is displayed: his body. It is not cleansed and idealized like that of an Adam or an Apollo, but made disconcertingly present through its particularity. The figure is all the more palpable, and unsettling, in that he seems to acknowledge our presence.

However, we must remember the first viewer of this work: Dürer himself, thrilling in the intensity of the image which he doubly creates, at once projecting and capturing it. The perception of power is very different when that power is one's own, different from the perception of the one upon whom this power depends: the viewer, in essence, the victim. The confrontational stance and gaze of the figure, the prominent and expressionistically rendered genitalia, the impervious shell

of a torso, and the dark space into which he leans all conspire to create the image of a menacing figure. We understand that the artist is playing with his own power, yet we remain outside this experience; the powerfully present figure reminds us: this is me, not you. Although only one figure is presented, the dynamic of the powerful and the powerless is more immediately inherent than in the engraved *Adam and Eve*. With the *Self-Portrait, Nude* we are not outside the narrative, free to contemplate, admire, or judge; rather we are engaged directly, challenged to establish our relation to this man. Can our position be anything but a subservient one? His nudity does not make him vulnerable; rather it is the force with which he disarms us. Our position is that of Eve, who looks away.

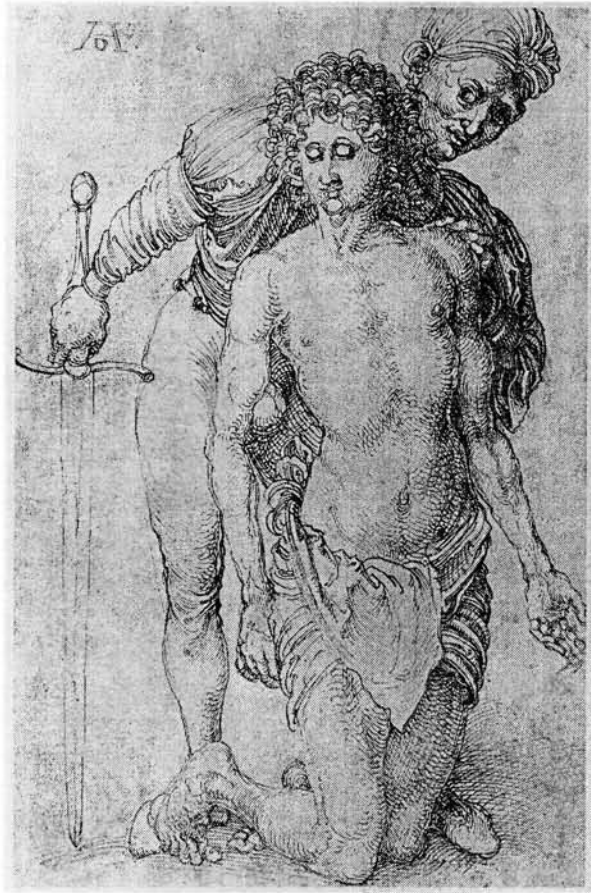
With a drawing of 1493, *Kneeling Youth and Executioner*, we are again outside looking in on a dynamic of power and desire (Figure 3). Once again, as in the *Adam and Eve*, this dynamic and the narrative element are established through contrast: the martyr is younger than the executioner, he is nearly naked while the executioner is dressed, his hands are open and empty while those of the executioner grasp, and his eyes are closed suggesting inner vision, while the executioner is attentive to his environment. In short, the executioner is in every way alert and in control, while the young man is passive and shows no command of his physical being. In the hands and faces of the figures there is a contrast of presence and absence, of grasping and release. The gaze of the executioner evinces his presence, his engagement with his surroundings; both his sight and his hands are filled with something present. As for the vision and the hands of the martyr, if they are filled it is with something that is materially absent. This absence suggests the potential of being filled, like an empty vessel.

All of this is lent greater significance by the bulging loins of the executioner. Dürer has made a choice here: the young martyr's arm might have been placed closer to his body, thus obstructing our view of the executioner's groin, or the position of the executioner could have been slightly different to the same effect. This protuberance is placed on the central axis of the picture and it is the central feature around which the composition is arranged. The tilt of the young man's head and the closing of his eyelids lead our eyes to it. It is not simply another element in the picture but appears in a parting of the young man's flesh, and when the picture is viewed two-dimensionally it is in contact with him.

The hands of the executioner present a contradiction. The hand upon the young man's shoulder introduces an intimacy that is incongruous in a scene of execution. The hands suggest a contrast of tenderness and violence; with one hand he holds the sword with which he will kill the young man, while with the other he tenderly touches his flesh. He looks not at the young man but into the distance, as if he were looking and listening to determine if what he is about to do will go undiscovered. He leans into close proximity with his victim. Such a menacing figure, his face partially in shadow, his genitals prominent, his posture threatening, would appear again in the *Self-Portrait, Nude*. What is notable in this drawing is that the mingling of desire and power is expressed overtly in terms of violence. The effectiveness of this drawing derives from a particular ambiguity: does the executioner intend simply to kill the young man or is he about to rape him?

This mingling of desire and violence achieves ever more refined form in Dürer's art over the course of the decade following the *Kneeling Youth with Executioner*. In the *Self-Portrait, Nude* the violent narrative of the earlier drawing is subsumed in a single figure projecting power through his physical presence. Dürer depicts himself as the embodiment of desire-as-power. When, in the 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve*, this theme finds expression in a finished work intended for a wider audience, the mingling of power and desire is more subtly expressed. We are presented with two specimens of ideal beauty, but one is certainly more ideal than the other. The power of one person over another is not presented there in terms of overt conflict; it is quietly expressed as inevitable, essential, and right, as part of God's creation. When depicted in relation to a female body, the

Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer, *Kneeling Youth and Executioner*, 1493. Pen and black ink, 25.4 x 16.5 cm. British Museum, London. Image courtesy of Art Resource, New York.



sensuous delight in the male body is more clearly a pleasure in domination and dominion. The engraved *Adam and Eve* legitimated the power embodied in the *Self-Portrait, Nude*. The raw expressiveness of the drawing finds more reasoned and restrained form in the engraving, and yet the same sentiment is embodied in both: the pleasure of being a man and the privilege that comes with it. Dürer's Adam is pleased with his mate to the extent that she is a means to his experience of his own power and beauty, as a means of access to the sensuous experience of his own body. He looks at her as if looking admiringly at himself in a mirror; all that she is not is a reflection of all that he is. For Dürer himself to experience this pleasure an actual mirror suffices, but in the public realm he lends this pleasure the guise of conventional subject matter. The engraving depicts what the drawing does not. In the engraving we see the cognizance that feeds Dürer's pleasure in the self-portrait, namely, the existence of a being he perceives as inferior. The pleasure expressed in the self-portrait is neither simple nor innocent; like that of the executioner, it is at once sexual and cruel.<sup>14</sup>

The sensuous pleasure of manhood is most overtly, though more lightheartedly, figured in a woodcut of about 1497, *The Men's Bath* (Figure 4). Edgar Wind recognized this print as satirical, yet in his interpretation the players, far from satyrs, are embodiments of abstract concepts.<sup>15</sup> In Wind's reading each of the four bathers is recognizable by its attribute as embodying one of the four temperaments: the phlegmatic by the mug, the sanguine by the flower, the choleric by the scraping knife, and the melancholic by the water tap. The five senses are also represented: taste by



Figure 4. Albrecht Dürer, *The Men's Bath*, c. 1497. Woodcut, 39.1 x 28 cm. Image courtesy of Art Resource, New York.



the drinker, smell by the man with the flower, touch by the man with the scraper, hearing by the man at the water tap listening to the two musicians, and sight by the young man looking into the bath house. The four bathers also represent, from right to left, intoxication, inspiration, anger, and dejection. Wind divides the picture down the center. The right is positive: the figures embody the Dionysian mystery of *Systole*, or inspiration, with the country in the background. The left is negative: the figures embody the Dionysian mystery of *Diastole*, or purification, with a city depicted in the background. He also divides the picture horizontally: the melancholic and the phlegmatic, occupying the top of the page, are inferior types, while the sanguine and choleric, occupying the bottom, are dignified types. Wind discerns diagonals as well: the phlegmatic and choleric are active, while the sanguine and melancholic are contemplative. The subject of the Dionysian mysteries is confirmed by a passage in Plato's *Republic* in which reference is made to young men who go to *Dionysiaca* but only inquisitively look on. Dürer's woodcut references these young men by the clothed man who looks into the bathhouse. Wind writes: "One cannot help marveling at the ingenuity which, in making a footnote to a passage in Plato, manages without visible effort to unite in one formula the images of the Four Temperaments and the Five Senses, and to produce thereby a poignant travesty of the different stages in the Dionysian ritual."<sup>16</sup>

One may also marvel at the ingenuity that manages to see such a complex web of meaning in this print. However, the sort of exercise Wind attributes to Dürer is less than a marvel. In fact, if such exercises were Dürer's sole achievement—assuming that Dürer can be credited with such erudition or such a mindset—his art would be of little interest. In discussing the figures and objects in this print solely as symbolical vehicles of meaning, that is, stopping short of addressing the physicality and character of the rendering of these things, Wind reduces Dürer's works to cleverly contrived emblems of philosophical concepts. The lasting interest of Dürer's works can only be addressed, excavated, and clarified by a less formulaic, less mechanical, more directly engaged, and inevitably subjective approach.

Wind argues that the man on the left is melancholic and therefore has an excessively dry constitution; his bladder is inactive, and this only contributes further to his sadness. The man looks at the phlegmatic drinker because he hopes for water—thus the suggestively placed water-spout. Wind points out that the German word *Hahn* denotes both cock and water tap; thus by decorating the tap with a little bird and placing it near the man's groin, Dürer engages in "a robust verbal and pictorial pun."<sup>17</sup> Wind relates this pun to the man's inability to urinate, yet I would argue that the pun is even more robust than Wind allows. It is the most explicit sexual reference in an already sexually charged image. The head of the man with the flower is superimposed over the groin of the fiddler and his mouth is suggestively close to the groin of the flautist, the sway of whose hips inclines toward the flower man. The strap of the flautist's garment is low on his hip, as if the garment were barely held on. The men with the mug and the scraper sit with hands between their legs. The muscularity of the men's bodies is echoed in the unhewn timber frame of the bath house. In the joint at the top of the page these vigorous forms come together like strong, limber bodies, the erect member of one passing between the legs of another. The sinewy, slightly curving form of the tree just outside the bathhouse is a more vivid—and perhaps more anatomically correct—suggestion of the male anatomy. Thus the suggestive positioning of the figures takes place within the charged atmosphere created by the rendering of taut, pliant forms. Nowhere is a sexual act explicitly represented, and yet the elements of such are present. What is barely concealed by the flautist's garment is visible in the tree; and while none of the men's bodies are in contact with one another, this coming together takes place in the joint of the timber frame. The water tap, topped with a bird and strategically placed, is not only a pun but also a way of sexualizing the figure without explicitly depicting his sex. He simultaneously is and is not depicted as having a large, not entirely flaccid penis. The incorrect perspective of the opening of the tap correctly imitates the

*crown of the penis.*

What is revealed by a closer, more tactile engagement with these works? We discover not just an underexplored aspect of Dürer's biography; more importantly, we find that even in his more public works—his woodcuts and engravings—there was a place not simply for the expression of sexual attitudes but also for a sensuous exploration of desire. Of course, such a level of engagement with these works involves a certain amount of reading one's own desire into them. Such engagement on the viewer's part is an essential aspect of the way in which these images function. They present the body, explore the body, and appeal to the viewer to respond with the body, that is, not with the mind but with the senses. They appeal to us to navigate, to find a place for ourselves within the picture: to admire, identify with, recoil from, and place ourselves under the power of the male bodies depicted.

An effort to more clearly define the conceptions of desire and sexual identity figured in these works is hampered by a lack of ready terms. The words homosexual and gay denote an identity as much as a variety of sexual behaviors. A sixteenth-century man would have engaged in sexual relations with another man without seeing himself as defined by his behavior. In fact, the censorious rhetoric of the time reveals that sex between men—one variety of sodomy, a term that also comprised sex with animals and acts between men and women which were considered to go against nature—was a temptation to which all men were subject.<sup>18</sup> Homosexuality as a clearly defined identity and culture did not emerge in Europe until the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> In the early modern period, while there was nothing comparable to our conception of sexual identity, there were certain patterns of sexual relations between men that we might with certain reservations call homosexual culture, although it is within the broader culture that these behaviors function. In a sense, it is the broader culture that these behaviors serve.

With the absence of a clearly delineated homosexual identity we also find the absence of a conception of heterosexuality.<sup>20</sup> We can speak of normative sexuality and of sin, of sexual behaviors that are perceived as supporting the society's interests and those that would seem to pose a threat. The latter would include adultery, rape, and a variety of sins against what was conceived of as the natural order of things—sins falling under the blanket term sodomy. And yet, if in the early modern period throughout Europe, men convicted of sexual relations with other men sometimes met with vicious punishments, including mutilation and burning alive, it does seem that normative male sexuality involved, at different stages of life, relations with men and women. In this regard we may speak of a homosexual culture functioning as the privilege of a broader male culture that included marriage and family.

Studies of homosexuality in the Renaissance have relied upon court records to develop an understanding of historical attitudes toward sex between men.<sup>21</sup> A limitation of this method is that it never goes beyond framing homosexuality as criminal behavior; what scholars fail to provide is a picture of intimacy between men. Many cases involve sexual assault: the unwanted or violent advances of one man toward another land him in front of a judge or council, which then metes out a cruel punishment. What all of these cases involved was the disruption of the social order. In addition, judicial bodies were particularly cruel and exacting in cases that involve the transgression of norms. Significantly, it appears that even within the set of sexual practices that were viewed as criminal, there was a conception of normative behavior. Thus, such studies point to the place homosexuality was afforded in Renaissance culture. While it was not condoned, it was to some degree tolerated, so long as it remained within certain bounds established to protect the interests of society against the will of the individual. The pattern of male sexual behavior that, although visible within the censorious context of judicial proceedings, was considered normal involved three expectations: that adolescents would take a passive role in sexual acts, that young men would take an active role, and that at a certain age (his late twenties or early thirties) a man would give up sex

with other men and focus on the responsibilities of marriage and procreation.<sup>22</sup>

As most sodomy trials from the period involved a threat to the social order, most often through violence, it would seem that sexual relations that posed no such threat were to some degree tolerated; that is, they did not attract the attention of judicial bodies. In Germany and Switzerland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, while official rhetoric against sex between men was condemnatory there was no systematic effort to police or root out such behavior. Such cases of invisibility point to the fact that homosexuality served a purpose for society. Men married relatively late, often not until their late twenties or early thirties, allowing them time to accumulate capital before establishing a household. In the meantime, homosexuality allowed young men an outlet for their desires, one that circumvented the taboos and consequences of sex between men and women out of wedlock.<sup>23</sup> The narrow scope of sodomy prosecutions in Renaissance Germany may point to a certain degree of tolerance of homosexuality, that is, of a homosexuality consistent with patriarchal mores. There was a tendency to demonize homosexuality in the abstract, but a failure to recognize it in concrete situations. Thus the Northern imagination was equipped with an image of the sodomite—often Italian and Papist—but one was slow to associate this figure with one's own experience of intimacy between men.<sup>24</sup> In essence, the image of the sodomite and the invisibility of actual same-sex practices together served the status quo, the former as a negative model against which to fashion communal identity, and the latter as an assurance of the sexual hegemony of men of socioeconomic consequence.

A name closely associated with Dürer's Italian journeys is that of Willibald Pirckheimer. Dürer traveled to Venice in 1494–95 and again in 1506–07, dates roughly bracketing the works in which he addressed antique as well as sexual themes.<sup>25</sup> Pirckheimer had attended university in the north of Italy, first in Padua and then in Pavia, studying Greek until his father insisted that he return to the study of law and then later demanded that Pirckheimer return to Nuremberg.<sup>26</sup> On his second Italian journey, Dürer received instruction from Pirckheimer to seek out certain luxury goods for him. A good portion of Dürer's letters to Pirckheimer from Venice are taken up with two themes: the details of such transactions, and allusions to Pirckheimer's sexual activities and proclivities. It is unclear whether these references point to actual behaviors on Pirckheimer's part, or simply to a certain rapport between the two men. On September 8, 1506, Dürer writes from Venice to his friend in Nuremberg, "You stink so much of whores that it seems to me I can smell it from here,"<sup>27</sup> and in the same letter, "O if you were here, what handsome Italian lancers you would find!"<sup>28</sup> This reference, together with Dürer's drawing of his friend with the Greek inscription (most likely in Pirckheimer's hand), "With erect penis, into the man's anus," suggest that a mingling of Italy, antiquity, and sexual relations between men was on the minds of, and a factor in the friendship between, these two men. However, as Christopher Wood has pointed out, "It is possible that homosexuality, for Dürer and Pirckheimer, remained a matter for rakish, misogynist wit and sophisticated mythological allusions."<sup>29</sup>

These exchanges between Dürer and Pirckheimer, much like the sexual allusions in Dürer's drawings and prints from the same years, speak not simply of a personal view of sexuality but of the place of sexuality within the fabric of society. In particular, they speak of sex with one's social inferiors (in age, gender, or class), whether a reality or a topic of conversation, as a means of asserting and enjoying one's dominion over others. Thus, with drawings such as *Self-Portrait, Nude* and *Kneeling Youth with Executioner*, with his engraved *Adam and Eve*, and with his letters from Venice to Willibald Pirckheimer, Dürer navigates and negotiates a place for himself within the structure of his society. Pirckheimer is not simply someone whose company Dürer enjoys; he is the artist's entrée into humanist circles, he is presumably an advisor on iconographic programs, and he is someone whose experience and connections are of use to Dürer in his travels in Italy. Talk of whores and Italian lancers serves to solidify and to celebrate a bond that, while placing

him in a position of obligation to Pirckheimer, gives Dürer access to power. The letters do not show a preference on the part of either man for men or women as sexual partners. What they do reveal—and this is perhaps of much greater significance than any question of sexual preference—is Dürer placing himself on an equal social footing with Pirckheimer. By reference to the subjugation of others, be they whores or Italian lancers, Dürer claims for himself a complicity in the dominion his friend enjoys over the bodies of his inferiors.

The works considered here are all products of the young manhood of Albrecht Dürer, those years between adolescence and the age at which most men of his social class would have married.<sup>30</sup> Although Dürer married relatively young (at twenty-three), his sexualized exploration of the male body and male power coincided with a stage of life when he, like other young men of his time, was negotiating for himself a place within his society. This process involved the acquisition and assertion of power, the means to which were social, economic, and sexual, three elements we often find closely linked. The drawings and prints, like the letters to Pirckheimer, give form to that conception of power. The sexual identity fashioned in them is not, as our age conceives of homosexuality, an experience outside of or alternate to a dominant conception of sexuality; rather it is an experience that is embedded in, and thus participates in and nourishes patriarchal society. To Dürer's accomplishments we must add that of giving visible form to this aspect of early modern European culture.

To once again render these forms visible, we must expand our conception of the issues addressed by sixteenth-century works of art and the means by which these works functioned, not only socially and intellectually, but also as viewing experiences. A more capacious understanding of sixteenth-century concerns and the methodologies that may fruitfully be brought to bear on sixteenth-century works of art is necessary if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of Dürer's art.

*Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean semper lacinia erat. Maecenas sit amet volutpat sem. Duis eu viverra est. Aenean non blandit nibh. Mauris quis est arcu. Donec faucibus ligula eu purus rutrum fringilla. Sed rhoncus elementum posuere.*

## Notes

1 In particular, Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); and Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Though the corpus of Dürer scholarship is vast, the reader should be aware that this paper was written based upon primarily English sources.

2 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Oxford University Press, 1939). On the limitations and historical fortunes of iconography: Svetlana Alpers, "Picturing Dutch Culture" in *Looking at Seventeenth Century Dutch Art*, ed. W. Frantis (New York, 1997); Michael Ann Holly, *Iconografia e Iconologia*, (Milan: Jaca Books, 1992); Keith Moxey, "The Politics of Iconology" in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy, (Princeton, 1993), 27–31; and Moxey, "Motivating History," *Art Bulletin* 77 (1995): 392–401.

3 A complete and concise statement of the documentary evidence regarding Dürer's sexuality is provided by Christopher Wood in his entry on Dürer: "Albrecht Dürer," in *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, ed. George E. Haggerty (New York: Garland, 2000), 262–3. On Dürer's treatment of themes of homosexuality also see Betty Rosasco, "Albrecht Dürer's *Death of Orpheus*, Its Critical Fortunes and a New Interpretation of its Meaning," *Idea, Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthall* 3 (1984): 19–41; James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance, Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 32–3; Edgar Wind, "Hercules and Orpheus: Two Mock-Heroic Designs by Dürer," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1938–9): 206–218.

4 Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 85.

5 Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 12.



- 6 Erwin Panofsky, "Albrecht Dürer and Classical Antiquity," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 281.
- 7 Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Art History and its Methods*, ed. Eric Fernie (New York: Phaidon, 1995), 184–195.
- 8 Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, trans. S.G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Cassirer distinguishes between nature and culture, arguing that the latter, as a product of the mind, is knowable; thus he posits a direct connection between the mind and the products of culture: meaning is located in the work of art and in the mind; comprehension is a matter of recognition. Cassirer's book is a more thorough presentation of ideas touched upon in Panofsky's "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline." Both of these works were published in 1940, while their authors, former colleagues at Hamburg, were in exile from Nazism, and it is tempting to see their arguments for a cosmos of culture as a response to the political situation—as an insistence upon the dignity, reason, and unity of humanity.
- 9 Regarding the intellectual climate in the Veneto in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (that in which Pirckheimer's humanism took shape—in particular the situation at Padua, where Pirckheimer studied), see Deno John Geanakoplos, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 10 Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 85.
- 11 On nudity and gender in Classical art, see Larissa Bonfante, "Nudity as Costume in Classical Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 93 (1989): 543–570. On nudity, gender, and, in particular, the *pudica* pose, see Nanette Salomon, "Making a World of Difference: Gender, Asymmetry, and the Greek Nude," in *Naked Truths*, ed. C. Lyons and A. Koloski-Ostrow (New York: Routledge, 1997), 197–219.
- 12 On Renaissance attitudes toward women, see Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Clausia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–163; Vern L. Bullough, Brenda Shelton, and Sarah Slavin, *The Subordinated Sex: A History of Attitudes Toward Women*, revised ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman, a Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- 13 Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 239, argues that the *Self-Portrait, Nude* is a preparatory drawing for the engraved *Adam and Eve* of 1504.
- 14 Rosasco, "Albrecht Dürer's *Death of Orpheus*," 26, writes: "...among the artists known to have been admired by Dürer, one thinks immediately of the Pollaiuoli as creators of imagery apparently addressing a masculine taste that glories in tough, even sadistic scenes of brute strength, forceful action, and in at least one instance, pleasure in the suffering of an effeminate victim." The "one instance" is *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (National Gallery, London).
- 15 Edgar Wind, "Dürer's *Männerbad*: a Dionysian Mystery," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1938–9): 269–271.
- 16 Wind, "Dürer's *Männerbad*," 270.
- 17 Wind, "Dürer's *Männerbad*," 269.
- 18 Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 16.
- 19 Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 81–114.
- 20 For arguments in favor of the use of the terms homosexual and heterosexual in discussing early modern Europe, see Joseph Cady, "'Masculine Love', Renaissance Writing, and the 'New Invention' of Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England: Literary Representations in Historical Context*, ed. Clause J. Summers, (Haworth Press, 1992), 9–40; and "Renaissance Awareness and Language for Heterosexuality: 'Love' and 'Feminine Love,'" in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Clause J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 143–158.
- 21 Helmut Puff, *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

22 Puff, *Sodomy*, 69, 91–92.

23 Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 78. Ruggiero points out that as a result of economic considerations—the desire to limit the number of collateral branches of a family formed in each generation, the lack of adequate dowries for all women—some members of the Venetian ruling class did not have the option of marrying and thus “found their sexuality beyond the boundaries of accepted behavior.” Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros*, 15.

24 Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, 77.

25 Regarding Dürer’s Italian journeys: Jane Campbell Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer, A Biography* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990), 40–47, 78–96.

26 Regarding Willibald Pirckheimer and his relationship with Dürer see: Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer*, 48–56.

27 Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer*, 93.

28 Wood, “Albrecht Dürer,” 263.

29 Wood, “Albrecht Dürer,” 263.

30 In 1493, when Dürer produced the *Kneeling Youth and Executioner*, he was 22 years old; in 1504, the time of the engraved *Adam and Eve*, he was 33.

## Norman Lewis: Rhythm and Self-Representation

Hilary Haakenson

Colour is a power which directly influences the soul.  
 Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers,  
 the soul is the piano with many strings.  
 The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another,  
 to cause vibrations in the soul.

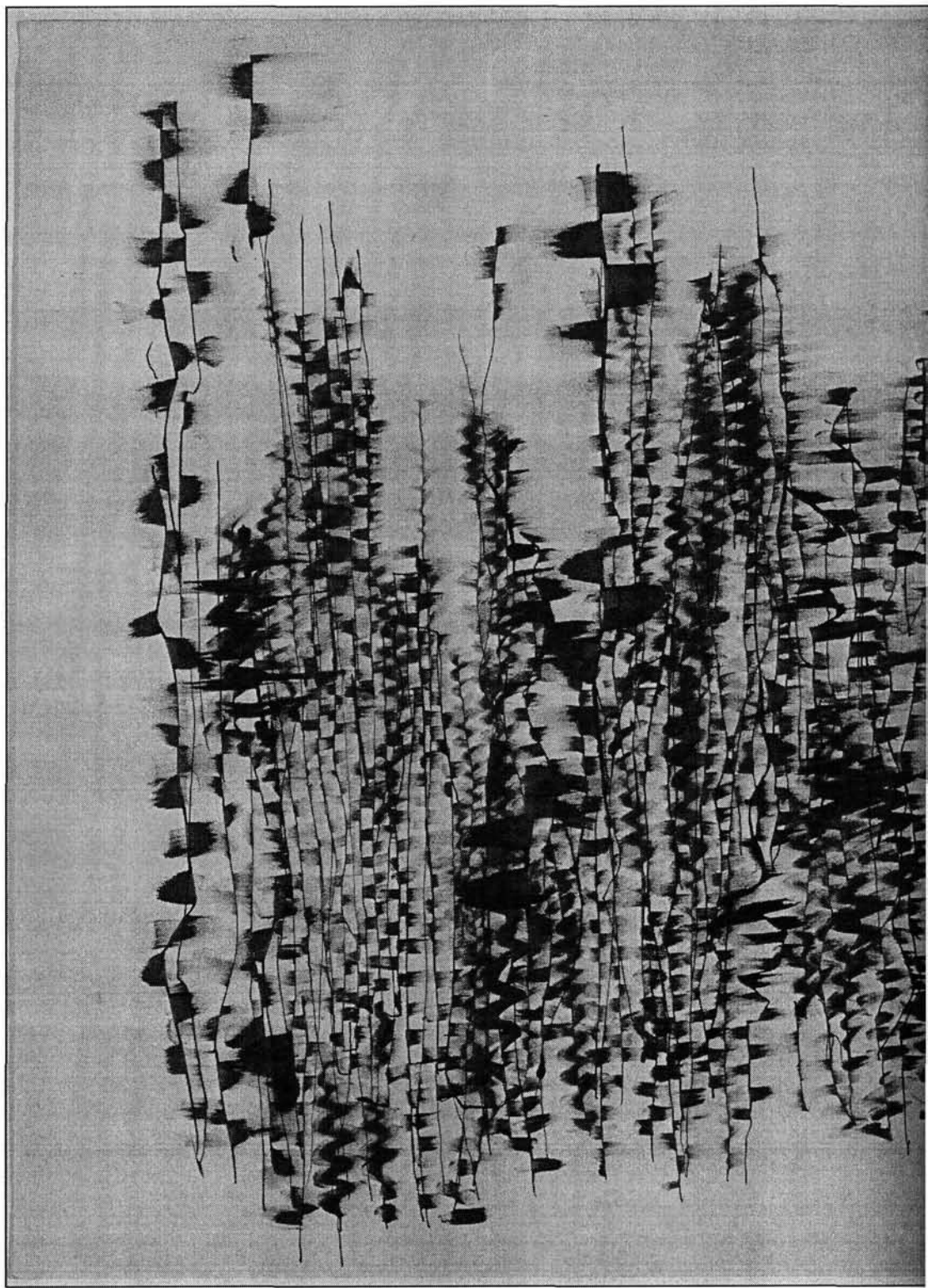
-Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstraction and the Self

1950...it was that pivotal year in which Jackson Pollock's whirling style embodied an American ethos. Though the immediate trauma of the Second World War had receded, rationality was left shattered in the wake, and the undercurrent of McCarthyism's political anxieties prevented its reconstruction. Pollock's dizzying dance-like process, chaotic images, and perhaps most of all, his alienation and characteristic drunken impudence, encapsulated a general desire to retreat from rational, industrial postwar society. To varying degrees, each of the painters of the Abstract Expressionist movement participated in composing this postwar aesthetic for America. To symbolize a time in which everything but the existential subject was meaningless, they often refrained from titling works, an action that might endow a work with seemingly objective significance. They generally rejected figuration to protect their work, and in turn their reputations, from association with the propagandistic manipulation that had plagued images during WWII. The artists privileged the individual's expression to such an extent that they rarely agreed upon anything except their intended pursuit of personal expression.

Having rejected the traditional methods of linguistic and pictorial self-expression, during the late 1940s and early 1950s the Abstract Expressionists moved towards the styles and methods of working by which art historians have retrospectively defined them. Pollock adopted his so-called "drip painting" technique and Barnett Newman fashioned his initial "zip" paintings. These distinctly individualized styles and methods, as well as the visible traces of the artists' working processes—so characteristic of Abstract Expressionism—made the artist and the art inseparable personalities.

It was at this time that the African-American artist Norman Lewis began to create his ink-on-paper works, such as *Echoes* (1950), which mark a pivotal shift in his career (Figure 1). The 19" x 24 1/8" *Echoes* depicts a series of vertical striations rendered in black ink. By drawing his brush back and forth horizontally along the length of the still-wet striations in an action scholars have termed "stitching," Lewis set the lines in motion.<sup>2</sup> They seem to multiply and converge, creating a visual effect akin to vibration. Some appear like wavelengths, their S-shaped curves tracking the oscillation of his hand as it moved up or down the line. The ink of others resisted such fluid manipulation and produced bulging gradations of black along the axis. Slight smudges of the ink make the convergence of interpenetrating lines in the central zone appear to quiver as they emerge



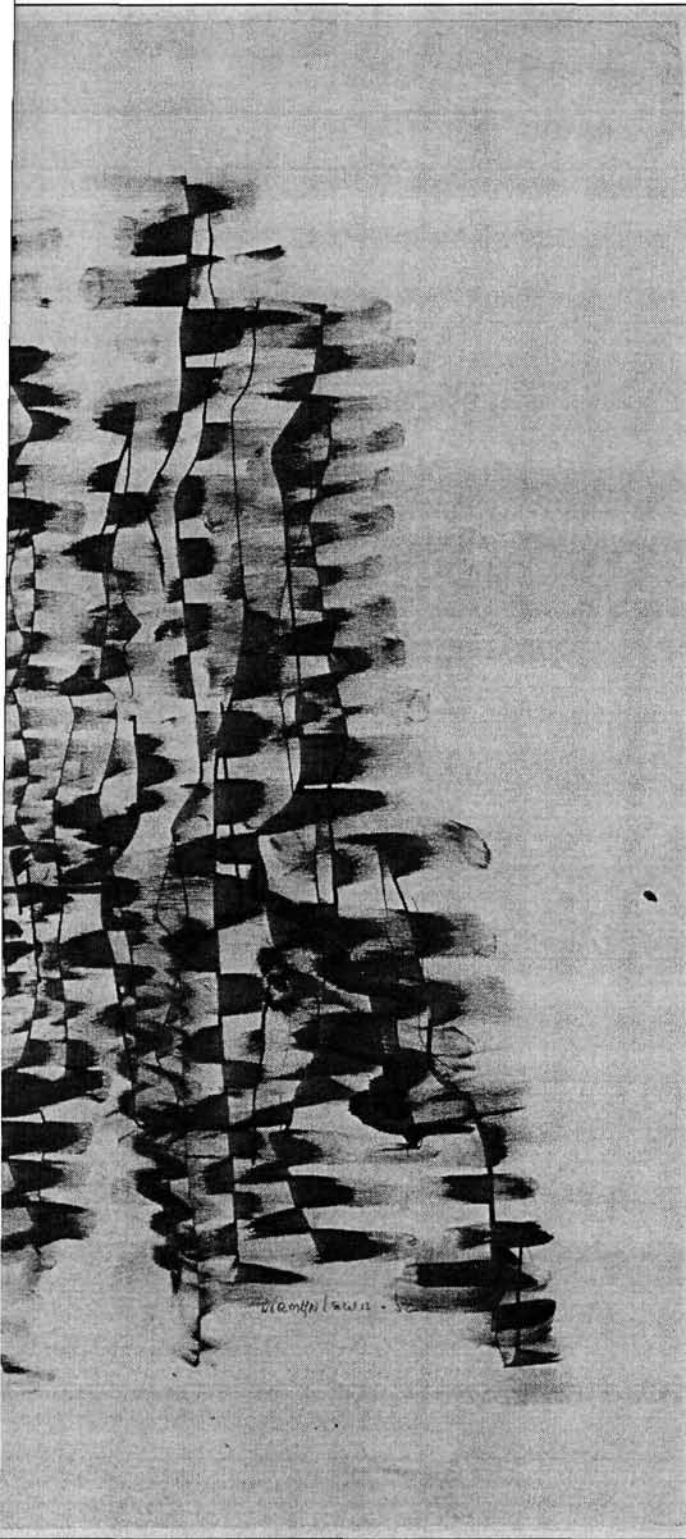


Figure 1. Norman Lewis, *Echoes*, 1950. Ink on paper, 48.3 x 61.3 cm. Image courtesy of the Norman W. Lewis Estate.



from the background and hover, neither suspended nor supported. At first the overlap and differentiated endpoints of the lines evoke a three-dimensionality. Yet the overall composition, formed by a blurring that knits the lines, simultaneously denies such illusionary space. With this strange duality of visual presence and lack of plasticity, the images appear to have spontaneously materialized. In accordance with the title, they exist like echoes—nothing and something, nowhere and everywhere. And, as an echo is essentially reproduced sound, the image implies an auditory component.

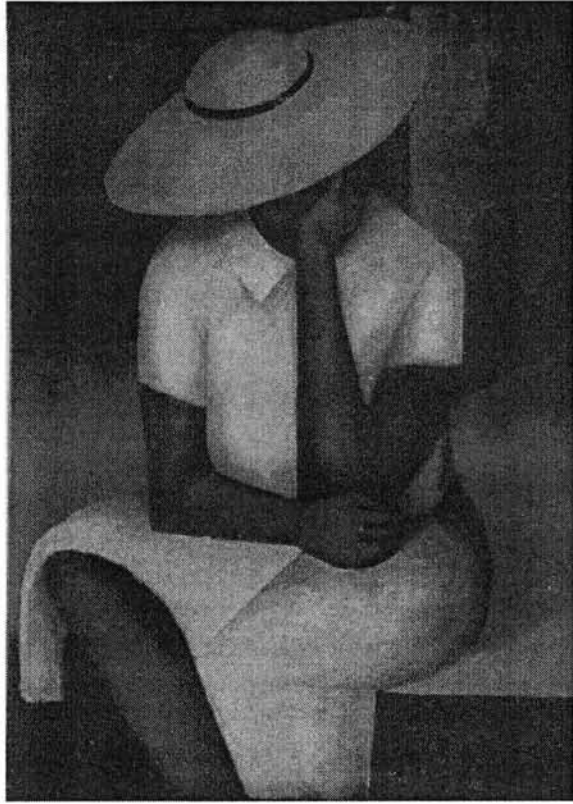
Like the seminal abstract works created when his white colleagues settled into their signature styles around the middle of the century, the ink-on-paper images indicate Lewis's shift to a form of visually animated abstraction that would characterize his style thereafter. Unlike Pollock and the other white Abstract Expressionists, however, Lewis never served as the personification of postwar America. This paper proposes that in conjunction with his race, Lewis's repeated references through his style and titles to music, and more specifically to jazz, made his art subject to the erratically shifting reception of jazz music by white audiences throughout the mid-twentieth century.

Lewis's limited recognition belies the prominent artistic status his accomplishments and accolades would suggest. He participated in the Artists' Sessions at Studio 35, which delineated the ideas of Abstract Expressionism; he exhibited with the American Abstract Artists; he showed in the Museum of Modern Art's *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* (1951) and the Whitney's *Nature in Abstraction* (1958), and his notoriety grew to international proportions when he contributed to the U.S. Pavilion at the 1956 Venice Biennale. The prominent Marian Willard Gallery in New York represented him for fifteen years and held eight solo exhibitions of his work,<sup>3</sup> and he won the popularity prize at the 1955 Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh.<sup>4</sup> Finally, along with Romare Bearden, Charles Alston, and Hale Woodruff, he founded Spiral, an artists' group that came together to promote civil rights, and with Bearden and Ernest Crichlow he formed the Cinque Gallery in 1969.<sup>5</sup> Despite the relative prestige this list implies Lewis would have enjoyed, he never achieved the status of his colleagues and his legacy faded quickly into the historical margins of Abstract Expressionism.

Born on July 23, 1909, Lewis was raised and attended school in Harlem.<sup>6</sup> His artistic career began around 1932 in the two-room apartment studio of Augusta Savage on 135<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>7</sup> Savage introduced Lewis, already an accomplished artist, to his initial opportunities for exhibition, and brought him in contact with other African-American artists in Harlem.<sup>8</sup> Like the works of Charles Alston and Beauford Delaney, Lewis's early social realist paintings such as *Girl in a Yellow Hat* (1936) express the struggle of African Americans in the Depression years and reflect the school of thought promulgated by Alain Locke, who sought to establish a specifically African-American aesthetic (Figure 2). Both Locke and his followers often made reference to jazz.<sup>9</sup> Locke advocated that African-American artists, musicians, and intellectuals alike should strive to embody the "New Negro" whose "genius to-day relies upon the race-gift as a vast spiritual endowment from which [the African Americans'] best developments have come and must come."<sup>10</sup> The painters associated with this movement acknowledged that the "folk" quality of their paintings, which were accepted by much of white America as representations of the "authentic" black experience, did not necessarily reflect the lives of the individuals who painted them. Yet, they adopted a stance similar to the proponents of the Harlem Renaissance, who considered "folk" art to be a necessary initiative in the campaign for the equal reception of their work in America.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid 1940s, Lewis renounced social realism and claimed to relinquish the political impetus behind his work. Having met many of the Abstract Expressionists while working alongside them in the Works Progress Administration (WPA), he adopted their theoretically anti-political view on art.<sup>12</sup> "Painting a picture about social conditions doesn't change social condi-

Figure 2. Norman Lewis, *Girl in a Yellow Hat*, 1936. Oil on burlap, 92.7 x 66 cm. Image courtesy of the Reginald F. Lewis Family collection.



tions," he said in 1977.<sup>13</sup> In a frequently quoted statement from Lewis's 1949 application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, written just prior to the creation of *Echoes*, Lewis denoted a major shift in his artistic outlook. "I had struggled single-mindedly to express social conflict," he said, but he gradually came to realize that the development of aesthetic capabilities suffered from such emphasis. The content of truly creative work, he believed, must be inherently aesthetic or the work would become merely another form of illustration. Therefore, the goal of the artist must be aesthetic development and, in a universal sense, to make in his own way some contribution to culture.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis withdrew from the communal goals of Locke's racially based aesthetics, which condemned Clement Greenburg's "art for art's sake" motto as elitist and ineffectual for African-American artists, and he joined the soon-to-be Abstract Expressionists in their formative meetings. Significantly, Lewis praised the artists "because they got together and talked about art like musicians talked about music."<sup>15</sup> Thus Lewis sought to transgress the label of "African-American artist" to join the ranks of those simply called "artist," assuming that the best way for African-American artists to achieve the status of their white counterparts was by demonstrating their artistic excellence.<sup>16</sup>

Undoubtedly, Lewis's race problematized his role as an American art icon following WWII. It seems his colleagues' renunciation of the superficial structure of society made them attractive paragons of a disillusioned American society, yet their appeal lay less in what Ann Eden Gibson has called their embrace of society's "mantle of marginality" than in the action of rejecting the traditional role of the white male.<sup>17</sup> Lewis was, therefore, at a disadvantage. By default, his race positioned him at the margins, and this robbed him of the opportunity for the tragic rebellion

Americans sought in the new generation of artists. Thus, by trying to forge a place among the Abstract Expressionists, Lewis attempted both to enter the limelight and to gain the acceptance of those who outwardly disparaged it. This contradiction, inherent to his position as an African-American Abstract Expressionist, impacted his critical reception. In addition, however, I propose that the close connection between Lewis and jazz compounded the ambiguity of his position, as it left him at the mercy of the shifting reputation of jazz.

### A Passion for Music

Jazz was an extremely personal interest for Lewis. While painting always remained the focal point of Lewis's artistic practice, his participation during the 1930s in the 306 Group, a gathering of African-American artists who met at 306 West 141<sup>st</sup> Street, exposed him to an art world that fostered cross-pollination among the arts by uniting artists, poets, dancers, dramatists, writers, and intellectuals.<sup>18</sup> Charlie Buchanan, who managed the nearby Savoy Ballroom where figures like Chick Webb, Count Basie, Jimmie Lunceford, Fess Williams, and Duke Ellington played, granted free admission to all the 306 artists.<sup>19</sup> In the 1950s, Lewis moved to a studio apartment in Harlem on 125<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue,<sup>20</sup> near many of the major venues for live jazz, including the Apollo Theater, the Baby Grand, the Braddock Bar, the Club Shalimar, and the 125 Club, all of which Lewis regularly attended.<sup>21</sup> Finally, his own music collection was, according to friend and musician Julian Euell, "substantial as well as impressive." Euell continued to describe Lewis's passion for jazz saying, "His taste ran from blues to jazz to symphonies. He often played the blues on the piano for me. Although he listened to a wide range of music, his heart and soul were in blues and jazz."<sup>22</sup> According to his daughter, Tarin Fuller, Lewis also befriended Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, and Ornette Coleman.<sup>23</sup> Thus, music saturated Lewis's world and for him, its presence in his work transcended its relationship to a specifically communal African-American aesthetic.

Lewis's love of music may also reflect his family's preference for music over painting. While disapproving of Lewis's pursuits, his parents favored his brother, a violinist who played with the likes of Count Basie and whose occupation proved more lucrative.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Lewis's love of jazz and sense of inferiority next to his musical brother resonates with the hierarchy of the arts expressed in the theories he explored during his turn to abstraction.<sup>25</sup>

### Echoes of Jazz in the Art of Lewis

Musical undertones pervaded Lewis's social realist paintings of the 1920s and 1930s as well as his later abstractions. Thus, when taken together with the profusion of musical references in Lewis's titles, such as *Harlem Jazz Jamboree* (1943), *Jazz* (1945), *Street Musicians* (1945), *Jazz Band* (1948), *Jazz Musicians* (1948), *Five Phase* (1949), *Players Four* (1966), *Playtime* (1966), and *Blue and Boogie* (1974), it is reasonable to suggest that the lines in *Echoes* reflect the polyphonic lyricism of the jazz that permeated Harlem in the middle of the century. Conceived as such, the entirely abstract images executed in the late forties and early fifties, including *Echoes*, signal Lewis's departure from the early style in which his use of jazz reflected his participation in a community of African-American artists. These painters and sculptors, such as Archibald Motley, Jr. and Aaron Douglas, sought to assert their own racially founded genre of art in part inspired by the ideals of Locke's "New Negro."<sup>26</sup> Lewis's abstract works, however, belong to the phase of his career when he sought to establish himself primarily as an "American" artist and only secondarily as an African American. In this later stage, jazz served as a formal tool, assisting in the definition of his style and



providing a means of personal expression.

After Lewis had taken up abstraction, he employed the common strategy of speaking about art through musical metaphors. For instance, he stated, "I suppose [painting] is just like in music, like sound. You hear a new nuance, which to me in color can be subtly explosive."<sup>27</sup> This method tapped into a tradition of integrating music and musical philosophy and aesthetics that had permeated the themes of modern art throughout its history. Friedrich Nietzsche, writing in the late nineteenth century, praised music as the highest art form. "Music" he said, "stimulates us to the metaphorical viewing of the Dionysian universality," a status to which he challenged the other arts to aspire.<sup>28</sup> Following in his footsteps, artists and aesthetic theorists like Wassily Kandinsky drew on music's latent potential as a metonym for abstract art. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky writes:

A painter, who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art. And from this results that modern desire for rhythm in painting, for mathematical, abstract construction, for repeated notes of colour, for setting colour in motion.<sup>29</sup>

The belief in the superiority of music over other arts is evident in this statement as well as Nietzsche's aesthetics.

In 1945, one year after Kandinsky's death, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York launched a major memorial exhibition of the artist's work; shortly thereafter, they published his two treatises, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*. Lewis visited the memorial exhibition, and at this crucial point in his shift to abstraction he drew upon the earlier artist's forms and ideas.<sup>30</sup> When juxtaposed with Kandinsky's 1914 *Improvisation with Lifeless Figures* (Figure 3), Lewis's paintings such as *Phantasy II* (Figure 4), created the year after the show at the Guggenheim, reveal the influence of Kandinsky's paintings. In both images, thin black lines play freely across a background of interpenetrating colors. *Phantasy II* integrates the eye-like forms found in the upper-central register of *Improvisation*, and, finally, a similar color of blue acquires a central focus in each painting. This blue is often shaded towards black on one hard edge while on its opposing limit visible brush strokes of gradually lighter tonalities merge with the surrounding colors.<sup>31</sup>

Lewis also studied the work and ideas of Paul Klee, who as both a painter and violinist amalgamated the aesthetics of art and music in his lessons at the Bauhaus.<sup>32</sup> As a final example of Lewis's recourse to modern art's traditional integration of musical aesthetics, a marked-up copy of Wolfgang Paalen's *Form and Sense*, published in 1945, was discovered among his books.<sup>33</sup> A statement written by Paalen regarding Kandinsky perhaps best exemplifies the inspiration Lewis may have drawn from these sources. Paalen wrote:

Whether the medium was language, as it was in the writings of Maeterlinck, or sound as it was in the music of Wagner, the key was "repetition" which set up an "objectless vibration" in the soul. In Music it was the first leitmotiv that carried that vibration across the entire composition; next the use of dissonance that would be "the music of the future."<sup>34</sup>

If applied to *Echoes*, this quote enunciates three characteristics of the print: its auditory quality (here associated with music as it is in Lewis's other work), the repetition of a form to create



Figure 3. Kandinsky, *Improvisation with Lifeless Figures*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 119 x 139 cm. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



Figure 4. Norman Lewis, *Phantasy II*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 71x4 x 91.2 cm. © The Museum of Modern Art; Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource.

the composition's meaning, and the "objectless vibration" so characteristic of the artist's black and white ink drawings and paintings of the period. In light of Lewis's knowledge of such aesthetics and the compatibility that surfaces in his work, it becomes apparent that Lewis's interest in music—more specifically, jazz—superseded a strictly symbolic incorporation of it. In fact, beyond the titles, the images address jazz's formal relationships and visceral qualities, a reading supported by Lewis's own comments. Regarding his work entitled *Blending*, which is executed in a style similar to that of *Echoes*, Lewis declared that "just as dissonance in music can be beautiful, certain arrangements in color have the same effect."<sup>35</sup> His use of dissonance, a term directly related to the formal qualities of jazz, reveals his principal interest in music as a structural element. Musical structures are evident in images like *Echoes*, *Blending* (1946), and *Every Atom Glows: Electrons in Luminous Vibration* (1951) (Figure 5). Two textures comprise *Every Atom*; a series of vertical lines "stitched" at alternating intervals along their central axes emerge against a background of dark, vertically oriented, nebulous forms. Neither the lines nor their perpendicular, oscillating smudges are evenly dispersed or of equal length. At times they converge. Like two discordant notes, the striations seem to mimic jazz's characteristic dissonance, perhaps the moment before the clash of two notes is resolved. The unregulated pattern of their placement approximates jazz's often syncopated or irregular rhythms. Behind this primary series of lines, the amorphous background reaffirms the verticality and imprecision of the striations. In addition, it serves as a counterpart, pushing the depicted space away from the picture plane and pulsing from its more distant position. Thus, like the low throb of a contrabass, it highlights the higher frequency of the stitched lines that become the protagonists in a kaleidoscope of images or sounds.

Auditory qualities continued to appear in Lewis's work throughout his career, and were not lost on critics of the time, who constantly deployed a musical vocabulary to describe his art. Speaking of *Five Phases*, for instance, one critic writes: "He starts softly on the blank page like a musician improvising, and as he sees a suitable motif taking shape, swings into it with confidence, plays it up for what it is worth, and then, satisfied he has gone the whole way with it, permits it to fade softly out."<sup>36</sup> Another critic reads the linearity of images like *Blending* and *Every Atom Glows: Electrons in Luminous Vibration* as "evocative pattern[s] of tremolos."<sup>37</sup> Descriptions of Lewis's musicality go on and on. The plethora of lyrical connections made by critics, friends, and Lewis himself, came to endow his entire oeuvre with a jazz musicality. Even if images like *Echoes* were not intended to allude to jazz, this connection, as the characteristic quality attributed to his style, became a latent theme. Because his work, like that of the other Abstract Expressionists, was seen as individualistic inner expression, the way his work was received came inversely to dictate how he was perceived. In turn, jazz music became integral to both Lewis's personal and artistic reputations. Yet I propose that Lewis's integration of these musical motifs as a component of his signature style was detrimental to his critical reception and to the endurance of his prestige.

### Jazz: Improvisation and Identity for Black Musicians

The shift from the public to the personal significance of jazz in Lewis's work to some degree mimicked changing perspectives on the musical genre in the African-American community. Originally a form of entertainment that cleaved a space in popular culture for African Americans, jazz, for its participants, matured into an art that superseded popular culture and embodied self-expression. In turn, African Americans perceived it as an accomplishment specific to their race. Following the "controlled improvisation, blues tonality and rhythmic regularity" created by musicians including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and others, jazz came to signify an Afro-Modernism for an African-American audience.<sup>38</sup>

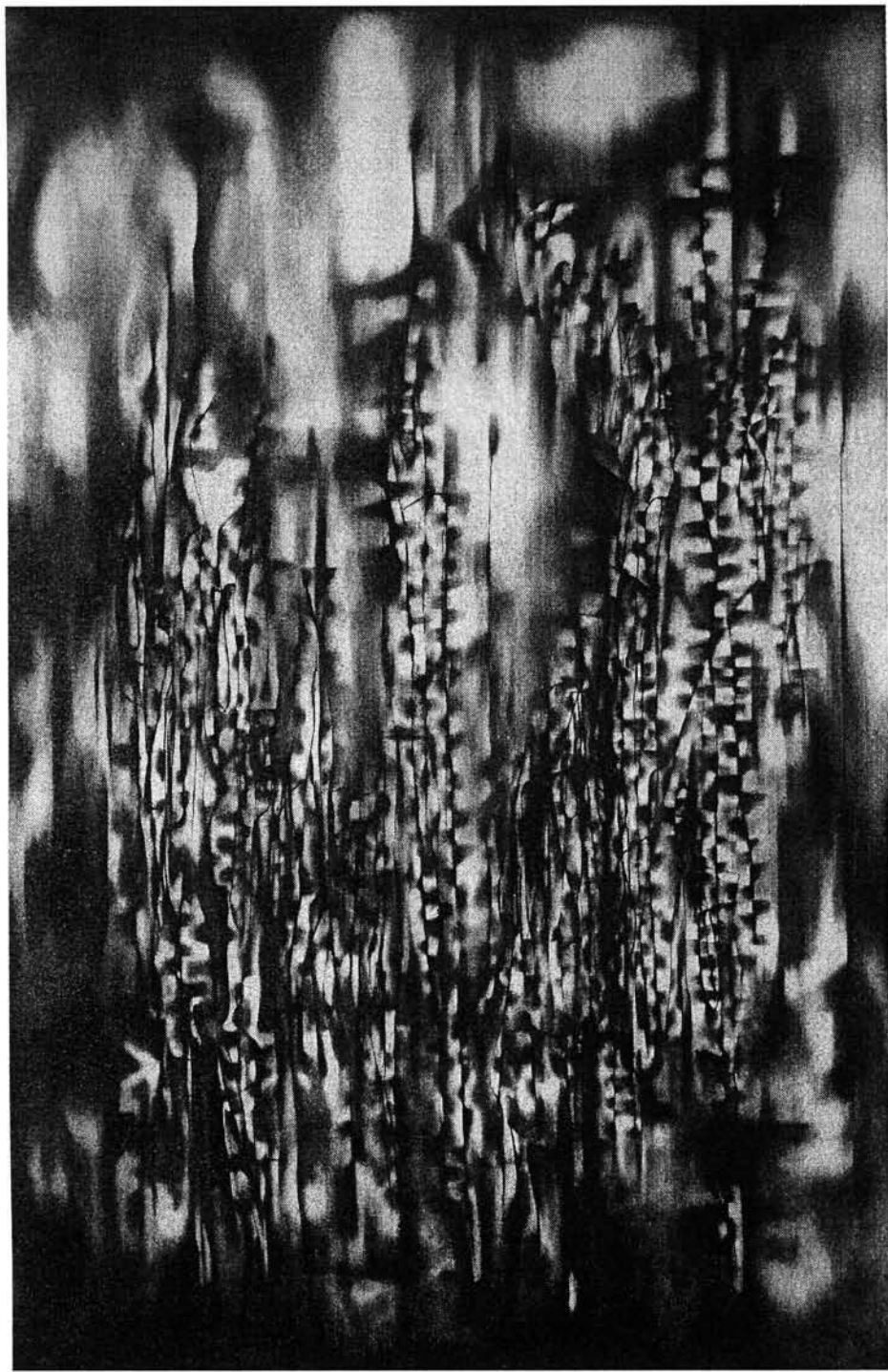


Figure 5. Norman Lewis, *Every Atom Glows: Electrons in Luminous Vibration*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 88.9 cm. Image courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Despite the significance accorded this musical genre, so associated with African Americans, the prevalence of venues called “black and tans”—clubs that promised black musicians and “almost white” dancers—as well as the existence of jazz clubs and speakeasies catering to (or exclusively serving) whites, made the implications of jazz ambiguous for African Americans. Its widespread and cross-racial success relied on the approval of white patrons, but the praise of those patrons was essentializing. To give the first of just two examples, the white composer Darius Milhaud stated, regarding his appreciation of jazz, that

primitive African qualities have kept their place deep in the nature of the American Negro and it is here that we find the origin of the tremendous rhythmic force as well as the expressive melodies born of inspiration which oppressed races alone can produce.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, B. S. Rogers wrote:

An appreciation of Mozart doesn't preclude an appreciation of jazz, intelligent people can and do enjoy it. They do it not in the spirit of slumming, but because no matter how cultivated you may be you are also capable of unsophisticated emotions—of raw tempers, simple melancholy, violent passion, and slapstick comedy, and even moments of vulgarity. And surely you are capable of being delighted and moved by fantastic musical colors and extremely complex yet basically savage rhythms, colors and rhythms which go far beyond the trickiest schemes of the most sophisticated of modern composers.<sup>40</sup>

Responding to such opinions during the second Harlem Renaissance, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Kenny Clarke reconstituted jazz in the form of bebop, which was “improvisational, harmonically experimental, rhythmically daring, highly personal, and African-American in identity.”<sup>41</sup> Their new emphasis on improvisation and discordance came to be seen as a tool to prevent direct imitation by white musicians, and also wrested a degree of power from the recording industry. Moreover, the musicians were, according to Ralph Ellison, “concerned...with art, not entertainment.”<sup>42</sup> These developments posited jazz as a musician's art rather than a performer's art, in that its form and content were dictated by the musicians' will rather than the desires of the audience.<sup>43</sup>

### **Art and Music Align: The Meaning of Jazz for Black Artists**

Yet, for African-American artists whose proximity to these musicians allowed them to witness, understand, and participate in the development of jazz, the nuances of jazz provided a vocabulary that was both personal and communicative. In effect, depending on the perspective, jazz in art was either essentializing or liberating. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about the “twoness” implicit in the life of the African American, who is “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”<sup>44</sup> It seems that this twoness remained an integral part of jazz as a symbol of African Americanness.

During the sixties, jazz came to be perceived as a potential medium of revolution. For the musicians as well as black activists, it bore a duality that endowed the African American with a connotation of both the primitive and the genius that could, theoretically, though less concretely, overcome that primitiveness. Responding to this dual reputation, it seems that black artists' in-



corporation of jazz into the fine arts likewise held a twofold significance, part reductive and part explosive.

### **A Blind Embrace: How White Audiences Appropriated a Symbolic Jazz**

The appeal of jazz music for white audiences experienced radical fluctuations in the mid-twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, this appeal began with artists such as Gertrude Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Mamie Smith, who partook in vaudeville, carnival, and minstrel shows. However, even after the production of the first blues album in 1920, jazz and blues remained primarily for a black audience, and jazz only truly acquired its (white) middle-class following with New York performances by musicians including Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Jimmie Lunceford, Sy Oliver, and Benny Carter. Following the arrival of Louis Armstrong, all-white jazz bars began to open, and between 1944 and 1948 the 52<sup>nd</sup> Street clubs began hosting Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

As Jon Panish points out in his book *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*, the connotations of jazz in the middle of the century were not set in stone and differed across race lines.<sup>45</sup> After the First World War, Americans adopted the rhythms of jazz as a nationalistic, grassroots emblem of freedom. Gilbert Seldes articulated this symbolic embrace of jazz in his best-selling book of 1924, *The Seven Lively Arts*. "Jazz," he said, "is the symbol, or the byword, for a great many elements in the spirit of the times...As far as America is concerned it is actually our characteristic American expression."<sup>46</sup> With this "Americanism" in mind, white artists repeatedly incorporated jazz into their paintings, such as when Arthur Dove composed six paintings based on his auditory experience of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* as performed by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra.<sup>47</sup>

For white Americans, the meaning of jazz had by then become a symbol, essentialized and emptied of individuality in relation to its African-American inventors. Gibson has discussed how, when a dominant culture incorporates aspects of another culture that they perceive as primitive, the second culture is perceived to lack the "intelligence and personal skills to manipulate consciously their own heritages."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the use of the characteristics supposedly drawn from the "primitive" culture never accurately reflects the nature and complexity such elements originally embodied.<sup>49</sup> Jazz did not escape this reduction and alteration of its significance. For white America it could, in turn, be integrated into art to convey something specific. It was one word in a larger vocabulary at the artist's disposal.

In the 1950s, white American subcultures—artists, youth, bohemian authors, musicians, and intellectuals—embraced the spontaneity and rebelliousness of jazz music. However, assisted by the social division that is a prerequisite for social subversion, white Americans preserved ideas about jazz as an unrefined art form. Even when parts of white America ultimately came to perceive the genre as a potentially transgressive art form, they remained oblivious to the import jazz held for individual musicians, and followed the tradition of glorifying the primitivism they perceived in it. They sought its "low-art" quality, its reckless energy, its popularity with an oppressed people, and its direct engagement with the audience to which it played.<sup>50</sup>

### **Tethered to Jazz: The Implications for Lewis's Critical Reception**

Despite Lewis's direct connection with the musical world of New York, I would contend that his continuing incorporation of musical qualities and metaphors in his Abstract Expressionist style

served as a vehicle by which his work was dismissed. When Lewis infused his art with his parallel musical passions by using titles associated with music and a style consonant with musical motifs, both he and his art were drawn into a complex stereotype of the black musician. The contemporary Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline precisely acknowledged the existence of this undesirable predicament when he stated that from a black artist, society would “only take realistic images. If you stay here you’ll have to tap dance, play jazz, paint little wide-eyed children in the fields and be patient.”<sup>51</sup> In his early paintings, Lewis’s integration of jazz singers most apparently reflected and reinforced the perceived primitive qualities of African Americans that were in vogue at the time, but likewise, when he later incorporated jazz references into his abstract works, they acquired the same ambivalence that the music itself cast on its African-American authors.<sup>52</sup>

As I have established, the jazz that Lewis integrated into his work was not the jazz that emanated from it for all viewers. Somewhere in the frame of the canvas, between the paintbrush in Lewis’s black hand and the eyes of the almost entirely white audience receiving the finished work, the nuance of Lewis’s very personal work was submerged under white preconceptions about the relationship between black artists, black musicians, and the work that each produced. Thus, because of his musical affinities, Lewis’s reputation rose when jazz rhythms pulsed through popular culture in the late 1940s and early 1950s, only to fall rapidly as jazz came to be perceived as a mechanism that served a threatening, revolutionary black identity in the mid- to late 1960s.<sup>53</sup>

Lewis was not the only Abstract Expressionist employing comparisons between art and music. Rothko, for instance, wrote:

Movement in relation to the picture plane—away from it, toward it, and simultaneously across it—is the means by which the pictorial experience is achieved. It is much the same in music, where it would be impossible for us to think of a musical statement in any other fashion than movement in time, up and down the scale, or progression through beats of a rhythm.<sup>54</sup>

However, Rothko’s appropriation of a musical structure was not perceived in a stereotypical way. For him, music held no essentializing quality that might define him as a white male or belittle his status. If anything, as Ramsey has pointed out, associations with classical music have elevated the reputation of white artists through the genre’s perceived “difficulty, audience alienation, disdain of the popular, and dismissal of signification grounded in social meaning.”<sup>55</sup> White artists could embrace music, which for Nietzsche “is not like all those [other arts], the image of appearance, but an immediate portrayal of the will itself...the thing-in-itself as compared to all appearances.”<sup>56</sup> For African-American artists, the definition was inverted. Music represented not the soul but its antithesis, its superficial appearance. Thus, interpretation of the style with which Lewis chose to express himself only perpetuated the symbolic lineage of social realist painters and all of the earlier stereotypes associating African Americans with entertainment, music, and dance. When, in his essay for a 1976 retrospective of Lewis’s works on paper, Lawson asks, “what could be more closely identified with black American culture than jazz?” he implicitly points to the problem.<sup>57</sup> Norman Lewis became the emblematic African American artist, not because of what he put forth, but because of how it was interpreted. His art and his racial identity reciprocally affirmed his status as a “primitive” artist. Thus, while implementing musical modalities in art advanced Rothko and his white colleagues, for Lewis (and his African-American colleagues) it acted to his detriment.

#### **A Problematic Association: The Erratic Reputations of Lewis and of Jazz**

As Henderson and Bearden later recounted in their history of African-American artists, "what attracted Lewis more than the Abstract Expressionists' aesthetic theories was their insistence on each artist's right to determine how he or she should paint."<sup>58</sup> Lewis adopted the individualistic outlook they expounded, but took it at face value. He subscribed to the new school of thought in which African-American poets, writers, musicians and painters sought to prove that their talent measured up and deserved recognition. But when art becomes a representation of the individual's authenticity, the artist and the art are inherently connected as one sign, and as semiotic theories explain, a sign has no meaning without its context.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, Lewis, his art, and the jazz in that art became a free-floating sign whose significance was dictated by the elitist context of his white colleagues and the dominant white culture of America. Lewis could not, therefore, eradicate the stigmas and stereotypes attached to African-American artists.

Ann Gibson has proposed that Lewis's post-1950 use of the color black, at once achromatic and polychromatic, acts as a metaphor for the absence and presence of the African American. If her theory appears a bit unfounded, it reveals precisely the problematic ambiguity of an image like *Echoes*. Lewis's compositional techniques paralleled those of his fellow Abstract Expressionists, but their reception was entirely different, as evidenced by Clement Greenberg's comparison of the artists he supported to "twelve-tone composers":

The all-over painter weaves his work of art into a tight mesh whose scheme of unity is recapitulated at every meshing point. The fact that the variations upon equivalence introduced by a painter like Pollock are sometimes so unobtrusive that at first glance we might see in the result not equivalence, but a hallucinatory uniformity, only enhances the result.<sup>60</sup>

This quotation could easily serve as a descriptor of one of Lewis's works from the fifties, but the fact remains that it did not. Pollock, not Lewis, became the post-WWII rebellious American hero in art.<sup>61</sup> Executed in the same year as Pollock's first drip paintings, *Echoes* only experienced and perpetuated white viewers' biases, all under the guise of Lewis's inner expression. The understanding of the musical connotations of Lewis's images and the mediocrity of his success mirrored what many white viewers wanted to see in his work: an essentialized primitivism incapable of dictating its own significance.

*Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean semper lacinia erat. Maecenas sit amet volutpat sem. Duis eu viverra est. Aenean non blandit nibh. Mauris quis est arcu. Donec faucibus ligula eu purus rutrum fringilla. Sed rhoncus elementum posuere.*

## Notes

1 Wasily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M. T. H. Sadler as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (London: Constable, 1914), <http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm>, section V, originally published as *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Munich: Piper, 1912).

2 David Craven et al., *Norman Lewis: Black Paintings, 1946-1977*, ed. Stephanie Salomon (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1998), 31. [Hereafter referred to as *NLBP*.] Ann Gibson [one of the authors] connects Lewis's "stitched lines" to his needlepoint and sewing work for a presser in Harlem in the 1930s.

3 Jorge Daniel Veneciano, "The Quality of Absence in the Black Paintings of Norman Lewis," in *NLBP*, 19.

4 See Harry Henderson, "Norman Lewis, The Making of a Black Abstract Expressionist, His Achievements and His Neglect," *International Review of African American Art* 13.3 (1996): 58-64. Lewis won for *Migrating Birds*. It is at this exhibition that Marian Willard approached Lewis with the proposition to exhibit his work.



- 5 Ann Gibson, "Black is a Color: Norman Lewis and Modernism in New York," in *NLBP*, 9.
- 6 Jeff Richardson Donaldson, "Generation 306—Harlem, New York," (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1974), 161.
- 7 Lewis supposedly stumbled upon the studio in which he would soon live and work. It was through Savage and the artists he met through her that he became involved with the "306 Group," named for the location of Alston's Studio on 306 West 141<sup>st</sup> Street. This group included artists like Romare Bearden. See Donaldson, 161.
- 8 Donaldson, 161–4. During his first year studying with Augusta Savage, Lewis exhibited his work for the first time at the 138<sup>th</sup> Street Y.W.C.A. He developed a local reputation rapidly and exhibited at the John Reed Club Gallery with the likes of Jose Clemente Orozco and Ben Shahn. His reputation in the broader New York art scene was solidified when he represented the Savage Studio at the Metropolitan Museum's "Exhibition of Free Adult Art Schools of New York City." In addition, Lewis won a scholarship at the John Reed Club School of Art, acted as the secretary of the Harlem Artists Guild, participated in the artists' union throughout the 1930s and 1940s, worked for the W.P.A. as a mural painting instructor, etc. Finally, Lewis taught at the Frederick Douglass Junior High School (1935–37), the Harlem Community Art Center founded by Savage (1937–39), the Jefferson School of Social Science (until 1949), etc.
- 9 David C. Driskell, ed., *African American Visual Aesthetics: A Postmodernist View* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5.
- 10 Alain Locke, *The New Negro*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1925), 47.
- 11 Donaldson, 46.
- 12 In keeping with their supposed renunciation of politics, as Irving Sandler recalled, there was "an almost total absence of political discussions." [Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 7.] I use the term "theoretically" as an allusion to the political significance scholars like David Craven, as well as those analyzing the racial and sexual biases of the Abstract Expressionists, have discussed. See, for instance, David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism As Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 232.
- 13 Drawn from a 1977 video interview quoted in Peter Plagens, "Norman Lewis: Studio Museum in Harlem," *Artforum* 36.10 (1998): 125.
- 14 Norman Lewis as quoted by Jones, in Frank Bowling et al., *Energy Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006), 8.
- 15 "Oral history interview with Norman Lewis," July 14, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Lewis was introduced to Adolph Gottlieb, Jackson Pollock, and David Smith as he worked with them through the WPA. He taught with Ad Reinhardt at the Thomas Jefferson School for Social Science in New York from 1944 through 1949, and met Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clifford Still at these early meetings at 53rd Street and Sixth Avenue.
- 16 For Bearden's position, see William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 251.
- 17 Ann Eden Gibson, "Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics" in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Francina (London: Routledge, 2000), 307.
- 18 Gibson, in *NLBP*, 15; Ann Gibson, "Recasting the Canon: Norman Lewis and Jackson Pollock," *Artforum* 30.7 (1992): 225. The 306 Group included individuals such as Romare Bearden, Ronald Joseph, Jacob Lawrence, Elba Lightfoot, Charles McKay, Georgette Powell Seabrooke, Countee Cullen, Ralph Ellison, Claude McKay, Orson Welles, Charles White, John Wilson, Richard Wright, and Robert Blackburn.
- 19 Donaldson, 160. This information is drawn from a quote by Bearden.
- 20 See Juliette Harris, "Norman Lewis—Tarin Fuller: A Stormy, very Loving Relation," *International Review of African American Art* 20.3 (2005): 16.
- 21 Julian Euell in his contribution to Norman Lewis and Kenkeleba Gallery, *Norman Lewis: From The Harlem Renaissance to Abstraction: May 10, 1989–June 25* (New York: Kenkeleba Gallery, 1989), 51. Euell recalled that it was a "five minute walk to the famous Apollo Theater, and live music could be heard in five or six nightclubs on or near 125<sup>th</sup> Street...All of these featured jazz, and the Baby Grand and the 125 Club had a full floor show. If you were inclined to walk or take a quick taxi-cab ride uptown, on the 135<sup>th</sup> there were three more well-known clubs: Small's Paradise, Wells', and Count Basie's, as well as many others. Norman frequented these clubs throughout his life in Harlem."

22 Euell, 52.

23 Harris, 13.

24 Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African American Artists: from 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 316. Writing as friends and colleagues, Bearden and Henderson state, "Norman and Johnnie were subordinate to Saul, Norman believed, partly because his parents appreciated Saul's musical activity and it paid well." See also Henderson, 59.

25 "Oral history interview with Norman Lewis." Lewis is responding to the question: "Were either of your parents artistic?"; See also Henderson, 59; Bearden and Henderson, 316.

26 These artists painted such images as Motley's *Syncopation*, *Stomp*, and *Black and Tan*, or Douglas's *Jungle and Jazz* mural at Club Ebony on 129<sup>th</sup> Street. For the construction of an African-American aesthetic, see Scott and Rutkoff, 139–40; and Amy Helene Kirschke and Aaron Douglas, *Aaron Douglas: art, race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995).

27 Henderson, "Norman Lewis, The Making of a Black Abstract Expressionist," 63.

28 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Ian Johnston, (Nanaimo, BC: Malaspina University-College, 2009), [www.mala.bc.ca/Johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy\\_all.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/Johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm), originally published as *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (Erstausgabe: Leipzig, 1872), 16. The use of the term "universal" coincides with Lewis's own interest in a finding a personal aesthetic mode that might address the universal. This concept is expressed by other Abstract Expressionists as well, but becomes particularly problematic for an African-American artist, especially one who, like Lewis, becomes connected to popular culture and the stereotypes associated with jazz. This has been partially addressed by scholars, but is outside the scope of this paper and warrants a discussion of its own. See Norman Lewis, *Norman Lewis: A Retrospective* (New York: The Graduate School and University Center of the City of New York, 1976).

29 Kandinsky, IV.

30 "Norman Lewis: Prehistory," Daytona Art Institute, [tours.daytonartinstitute.org](http://tours.daytonartinstitute.org). In addition to these artists and philosophers, Lewis is noted to have studied and collected books on Cezanne, Van Gogh, El Greco, Picasso, Persian prints, Max Bechman, German Expressionism, Marc Chagall, Milton Brown, Paul Klee, American art, and Cubism. He read the literature of Balzac, Pushkin, Ellison, and Kafka, and listened to the music of Berlioz and Chekhov. See Henderson, 60.

31 Additionally, in the center of both paintings an abstracted face appears with only one eye visible. Near each of these faces a heavy black strip is broken by a red, orange, and yellow streak. The ladder-like structures in the upper left of *Improvisation* and the lower left of *Phantasy II* are also similar and such commonalities can be detected with other works by Kandinsky.

32 Kerry Brougher et al., *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900* (Los Angeles; New York: Hirshhorn Museum; Thames and Hudson; Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 52. Klee also drew upon the ideals of Delaunay and Kandinsky.

33 Norman Lewis, *Norman Lewis: From The Harlem Renaissance to Abstraction*, 17.

34 Amy Winter and Wolfgang Paalen, *Artist and Theorist of the Avant-garde* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 11.

35 Lewis quoted in Bearden and Henderson, 321.

36 Henry McBride, *New York Sun*, 1949, and *Art News*, 1951, quoted in Norman Lewis, *Norman Lewis: A Retrospective*, n.p.

37 Parker Taylor, "Norman Lewis," *Art News* 55 (1954): 53.

38 See Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., "Free Jazz and the Pride of Black Musical Abstraction," in Bowling et al., 72.

39 See Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92. In 1939, Joseph Kaye wrote regarding the "The Joys of Jazz" that "as Negro music is truly American, so is the vaudeville, musical comedy and dance music of to-day. We may affect scorn for ragtime and jazz, but...there is something in the American character which reacts to this popular music. There is in it exhilaration, gaiety, boldness, smartness romanticism and sentimentality typical of America." [Joseph Kaye, "Says Jazz Would Galvanize American Opera," in *Musical America*, July 22, 1922, republished in Karl Koenig, *Jazz in Print (1856–1929): an Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz* (Hillsdale NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 196.]

40 B. S. Rogers, *Esquire* 4 (1939), quoted in Paul Douglas Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2002), 193.

- 41 Scott and Rutkoff, 261.
- 42 Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 210.
- 43 Scott and Rutkoff, 274.
- 44 W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903, New York: New American Library, 1969), 45.
- 45 See Jon Panish, *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).
- 46 Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (New York, 1924), 83. It is probably significant that 1924 is the year when Louis Armstrong left King Oliver's Creole Band for Fletcher Henderson's Roseland Band, thereby relocating the center of jazz music from Chicago to New York. Donaldson, 22.
- 47 Following his attendance at the performance of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra in December, 1925, Dove is known to have acquired several jazz records and painted six images associated with jazz music: *Rhapsody in Blue* (Part I and Part II), *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise*, *An Orange Grove in California*, *Rhythm Rag*, and *Improvisation*, all unsigned and dated 1927. Bearden learned some of his techniques for incorporating jazz into painting from Stuart Davis. See Myron Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), 107.
- 48 Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 60.
- 49 Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, 60.
- 50 See Panish, xviii-xx.
- 51 Sam Middleton quoting Franz Kline during an interview by Ann Gibson, Amsterdam, March 3, 1988, in Gibson, *NLBP*, 28, footnote 44.
- 52 Scott and Rutkoff, 143. Certainly, white musicians offered praise. Leopold Stokowski, who conducted the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, for instance, noted that "jazz has come to stay because it is an expression of the times, of the breathless, energetic, superactive times in which we are living...[African-American jazz musicians], with their new ideas, their constant experimentation, they are causing new blood to flow in the veins of music... They are pathfinders into new realms." Quoted in Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 494.
- 53 For the embrace of jazz as a radical revolutionary tool, see Frank Kofsky, "The New Black Radicalism" and "Black Revolution and Black Music: the Thought of Malcolm X," in *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution in Music of the 1960s* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998), originally published as *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970).
- 54 Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, ed. Christopher Rothko (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 48.
- 55 Bowling et al., 77.
- 56 Nietzsche, chap. 16.
- 57 Thomas Lawson, *Norman Lewis: A Retrospective* (New York: The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1976), np.
- 58 Bearden and Henderson, 321.
- 59 For example, see Ferdinand Saussure, *Writings in general linguistics* [Ecrit de linguistique générale] (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010); and Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
- 60 Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," 1948, in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 157.
- 61 In later years Lewis certainly realized that his race inhibited his success. He referenced the limitations of the "Negro Idiom," and stated how "now and then we encounter the phrase 'disinterested criticism' or we are told it is possible to approach a scientific appraisal. I grow steadily [more] convinced that in the world of the arts, especially literature, no such commodity exists." Norman Lewis, 1956, quoted in Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, 58.

## Romney's Blank Canvas

*Hannah Williams*

Considering the formal and decorous manner in which women were customarily represented in eighteenth-century British portraiture, the informality and intimacy that characterizes George Romney's portrait of *Emma, Lady Hamilton* (c.1786) presents something of an irregularity (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Romney (1734–1802) offers the viewer none of the usual signs through which eighteenth-century audiences were accustomed to interpreting the identity of the sitter. Instead, the conventionally symbolic elements of setting, clothing, and accessories have been pared down to create a stark and ambiguous image. Emma (1761–1815) appears set against a dark unspecified background, her body accompanied by only a table and a sketchily painted object that is probably a mirror but could also be a book. Romney's muted monochromatic palette intensifies the illegibility of the scene, providing a minimum of descriptive detail in the sitter's generalized attire and in her strong yet enigmatic expression. If the majority of eighteenth-century representations of women were instances of "society portraiture," where the paintings were a means of defining property, ancestry, and wealth, then evidently Romney's portrait *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, with its self-conscious lack of legible social signifiers, was a painting intended for a different purpose.<sup>2</sup>

In order to understand the alternative visual language employed here, I argue that Romney's painting be considered not as a portrait serving the primary aspirations of an elite patron, but rather as a dual articulation of identity resulting from the artistic encounter between an atypical sitter and, in many ways, an atypical artist. Emma's unusual position as a social outsider at the time the work was painted—a working-class woman living as a gentleman's mistress—required a departure from the traditional language of portraiture. Yet while she is the subject of the painting, and her identity is therefore implicit, Romney's idiosyncratic portrayal of his sitter does not allow Emma to be a portrait subject in the conventional sense. Instead she seems to act in this painting as a screen for Romney's own projection of artistic identity, foregrounded in his expressive, painterly treatment of the canvas. To interpret the complex intersections of identity engendered by Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* requires an analysis of the painting that takes into account the presence on the canvas of both sitter and artist. While Romney's aesthetic interests may be a central concern of the painting, his particular artistic engagement was only possible because of Emma's unusual position as both a social outsider and a non-professional performative figure. Beginning with a discussion of the importance of the theme of expression in Romney and Emma's artistic association, and in eighteenth-century portrait practice more generally, this essay goes on to explore the dual articulation of identity in *Emma, Lady Hamilton* by interpreting the portrait as an index of the performative act of portrayal.<sup>3</sup> By analyzing Emma's theatrical role as the subject of the work and Romney's dramatic painterly technique as a trace of his role as its creative agent, this essay explores the notion of expression to make sense of the intriguing plurality of identities within this portrait.

Emma and Romney's artistic association was distinctive, not only for its intensity, but, more significantly, for its foundation in performance and expression. According to Romney's *Sitters Diaries*, now archived in the British Library, Emma first sat for the portraitist in 1782 and then continued to sit for him regularly until 1786 when *Emma, Lady Hamilton* was painted. At this point, she was sent from London by her then-lover, Charles Greville, to live in Naples with

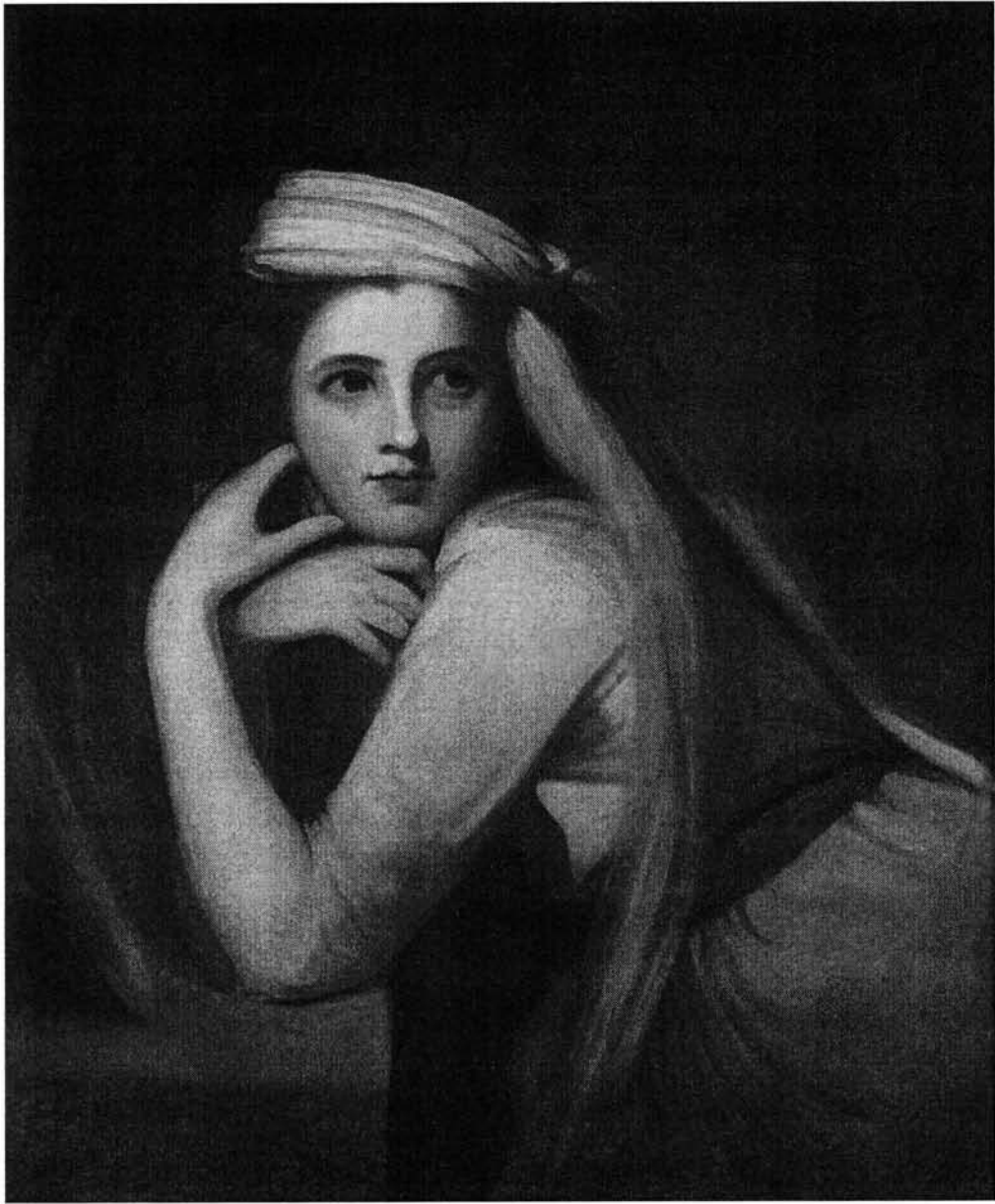


Figure 1. George Romney, *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, c. 1785-86. Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 59.7 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Charles' uncle, Sir William Hamilton. When Emma returned to London for a few months in 1791 to marry Sir William, she recommenced her sittings with Romney almost immediately and with renewed enthusiasm, as exemplified in their considerable number: thirty-four sittings over a period of only three and a half months.<sup>4</sup> William Hayley, Romney's friend and biographer, emphasized Romney's interest in Emma's theatrical and expressive abilities, recounting how "her peculiar force and variation of feeling, countenance, and gesture, inspirited and ennobled the productions of his art."<sup>5</sup> During their association, Romney painted a vast number of portraits of Emma (possibly as many as fifty-seven), painting her more than he did any other sitter.<sup>6</sup> He also produced countless drawings and figure studies of her, in addition to which she served as his model for several other non-portrait works, the most notable of these being his dramatic Shakespearean allegories.<sup>7</sup>

Among the finished portraits that Romney produced of Emma, theatricality dominates. The majority of these paintings are "fancy portraits," in which Emma appears as a variety of allegorical types, from the mythological—*Emma Hamilton as Circe*—to the religious—*Emma Hamilton as St Cecilia*.<sup>8</sup> The other portraits do not have specific titles and are known simply as portraits of Emma Hart or, like the portrait in question, as portraits of Lady Hamilton, an anachronistic use of her married name and the title she acquired later upon her marriage to Sir William. What is significant about these, as it were, "untitled" portraits is in fact how similar they are to the fancy ones, both in their lack of specific references to Emma's individualized identity and in their insistent theatricality. While these imprecise representations do not bear the same obvious artificial layers as the ostensibly anonymous images of mythological figures, they do not seem to be any more intent on inscribing the actual social identity of Emma Hart. Instead these paintings seem to be concerned, both thematically and materially, with performance or expression itself.

Contextualizing Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* within the site of its production, namely the eighteenth-century artist's studio, goes some way towards demonstrating how important such a performative emphasis is to an understanding of portraiture in this period. Sitting for a portrait in eighteenth-century Britain was a performative act. As scholars such as Marcia Pointon and Shearer West have suggested, the artist's studio in this period was a semi-public social space and hence the process of sitting for one's portrait should be understood as akin to a theatrical experience.<sup>9</sup> In a professional space such as Romney's Cavendish Square studio, a sitting was not a personal interchange between artist and sitter, but rather a more staged performance on the part of the sitter, directed by the artist and witnessed by any number of friends, relatives, or studio assistants forming an impromptu audience in the painting room. Romney's sketch of Emma in his studio provides a lively interpretation of such an intimate yet public interaction (Figure 2). While Emma plays her role as "The Spinstress" (for a portrait of her that Greville commissioned in 1784) and Romney captures her likeness in a sketchbook, the scene is witnessed by an animated audience made up of Greville and Hayley.<sup>10</sup> The sense of theatricality in Romney's sketch is evident. The figures are spread across the paper in a shallow foreground space reminiscent of a stage set, with dramatic lighting contrasts and a shadowy backdrop of a curtain falling behind the figure of Emma on the right-hand side. Romney seems to have exploited the theatrical atmosphere of the studio so much so that it is no longer entirely clear who is performing for whom, or where the performance ends. He has depicted himself in as artful and self-conscious a pose as Emma his portrait-model, and he holds his sketch book up as though to emphasize his mediating role between her dramatic enactment and the audience's comprehension of its meaning. The complex web of connecting and unobserved gazes between artist, model, and audience sets up a captivating scenario of personal exchanges, like a visual comedy of manners. This characterization of the studio-space-as-theater is an apposite analogy for most professional painters' establishments in eighteenth-century London, but it is particularly pertinent to our understanding of Romney's practice because of the distinctly



performative interests that were the basis of his artistic association with Emma Hart.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the notoriety gained from her infamous association with Vice-Admiral Nelson at the end of the century, Emma Hart, later Lady Hamilton, was perhaps most renowned for her celebrated "Attitudes"—a series of dramatic bodily compositions with which she entertained Sir William's houseguests in Naples.<sup>12</sup> In his *Italian Journey, 1786–1788*, Goethe provides a vivid account of these unique performances:

She lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses, gestures, expressions, etc., that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees what thousands of artists would have liked to see realized before him in movements and surprising transformations—standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious.<sup>13</sup>

Emma first performed her "Attitudes" in 1786 in the months following her arrival in Naples, so they evidently post-date the production of Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* (or at least the sitting for it, which must have taken place before Emma's departure in April of that year). Yet because the theatrical character of these actual performances is so similar to that of her painted performances by Romney, they provide an engaging framework through which to interpret her portrait, particularly when considered in relation to Emma's dramatic practices in Romney's studio, which, as the French artist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun observed at the time, were no doubt formative experiences for these later pose-based performances in Naples.<sup>14</sup>

If Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* is compared with one of Frederick Rehberg's drawings inspired by the "Attitudes," then certain connections can be observed in the dramatic pose and expression, and in the self-consciousness of her performance (Figure 3). Yet as West notes, the sense of movement highlighted in Goethe's account of the "Attitudes" is lost in Rehberg's static engravings, in contrast to the lively treatment of Emma's body found in Romney's seemingly spontaneous brushwork.<sup>15</sup> As in the "Attitudes," it was pose and expression that were central to her performance in Romney's painting, and the visual language employed here makes Romney's representation seem more like a *tableau vivant* than a portrait likeness. The loosely pyramidal structure of the composition, carried through the contrasting angles of her left hand and back, enhances the statuesque stability of her body as it rests firmly on the plinth-like table. Romney's emphasis on her pose heightens our sense of Emma's performative agency here. While ostensibly presenting a relaxed posture with hands thrown haphazardly, the position of Emma's body is actually far from artless. She leans low onto the table with her body at quite a distance from it, while her back arches provocatively to accommodate such a stance. Yet the force required to support her weight is hardly articulated in the fluidly rendered flesh of her arms. Her head is also turned unnaturally to the side in an almost mannerist twist that plays against the apparent solidity of her form. Such a heightening of artifice foregrounds the theatricality of Emma's representation, and the staginess of Romney's lighting, which, casting its deep shadows and spotlighting the expressive features of her face and hands, completes the dramatic effect. Finally, there is her costume-like attire, which strikes a non-specific exotic note with its departure from everyday fashion, particularly with the scarf as headdress. Romney's handling of paint in the scarf adds a further dimension of expressiveness to the work, for the long, thick strokes, which give the material a lightness as they taper away to wispy ends, animate the center of the painting through the curvilinear lines that sweep across the surface of the canvas.<sup>16</sup>

Emma's performances and their connection with Romney's portraits has been compellingly addressed by West in her essay, "Romney's Theatricality," where she examines Romney's artistic association with Emma in a discussion of his representations of actors and actresses.<sup>17</sup> West



Figure 2. George Romney, *Group drawing of the Hon Charles Greville, William Hayley, George Romney and Emma Hart*, c. 1784. Pen and brown ink, with grey wash over graphite, 36.7 x 52.5 cm. British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 3. Plate 1 from Frederick Rehberg, *Drawings Faithfully Copied from Nature at Naples and with Permission Dedicated to the Right Honourable Sir William Hamilton, His Britannic Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples*. By his most humble servant Frederick Rehberg, Historical Painter in his Prussian Majesty's Service at Rome, 1794. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

argues that Romney was concerned with a particular mode of dramatic expression that emerged in the late eighteenth century, which drew on antique sculpture and a nuanced expression of the passions rather than the lower pantomimic style of theater. Such an interest is indeed evident in *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, where Emma's sculptural form rests on its supporting plinth and her face presents a dramatic yet strangely illegible expression. Her eyes are fixed as she stares at something to the right of the canvas; her mouth is closed but her lips are not tightly pressed; and her hands play distractedly around her face—it appears to be a moment of unconscious reverie. Yet the intimacy of the painting, our proximity to her body as it is pressed up to the edge of the picture plane, and the contrived character of her coquettish pose all point to the consciousness of her performance, and are thus seemingly at odds with her feigned unawareness. Indeed, it is almost as though she is literally wearing a mask. The idealized oval shape of her face with its almond eyes and immobile features has a veritable mask-like quality and the position of her hands around her face refuses the possibility of confirming or denying such an assumption.

The eighteenth-century vogue for actresses' portraits has been the subject of much fascinating scholarship in recent years. Art historians have demonstrated the interplay between art and theater during this period, noting the interactions of artists like Romney with figures from the theater world, and comparing stage-performances and portrait-performances as analogous spectacles of display.<sup>18</sup> With the theatricality inherent in Emma's self-conscious pose and masquerading nature, Emma's portrait would seem on the surface to invite comparison with Romney's portraits of actresses, but any such comparison is complicated by the very different social roles involved. Emma was no Sarah Siddons or Mary Anne Yates, at least not in the 1780s when she was living privately as Greville's mistress.<sup>19</sup> In a portrait, where the intention is to represent the identity of the individual, Emma's performance necessarily signifies differently from an actress' performance. In Romney's *Mrs. Yates as the Tragic Muse*, for example, Yates' performance—her pose, expression, and costuming—was a direct articulation of her public and professional identity (Figure 4). Yates' social role was premised on her physical embodiment of character through performance—it was performing *as* something (here the tragic muse) that codified the sitter as an actress. Emma's performance, by contrast, did not codify a professional status because she was not a professional performer. Nor did the portrait fit into the category of disguised portraiture favored by aristocratic sitters at the time, for there was no actual character being enacted, no distinct guise being donned. Emma does not perform *as*, she simply performs.

As a low-born individual, Emma Hart did not possess the kind of legitimate social role for which the conventional iconographies of eighteenth-century portraiture were designed. Daughter of a Cheshire blacksmith, Emma started life as a servant and then, following a series of amorous affairs with Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh and Charles Greville, eventually climbed to the heights of eighteenth-century British society by marrying Sir William and becoming Lady Hamilton in 1791.<sup>20</sup> While Emma did not have a recognizable public position in 1786 when Romney's anachronistically titled *Emma, Lady Hamilton* was painted, it is evident from her unusual social maneuvers that she inhabited a performative mode in everyday life. Emma's identity can be compellingly interpreted as a progression of role-plays through which she presented the world with a variety of consciously performed social positions. Marcia Pointon has addressed the issue of Emma's indeterminate identities in *Strategies for Showing*, where she discusses the numerous mythological portraits of Emma as a Bacchante, painted by Romney and other artists including Joshua Reynolds and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. She argues that the problematic identity of Emma demanded an extreme solution, that is, a pictorial staging in which the portrait of the low-class person was transformed into a site of collective fantasy via the highest ideals of art.<sup>21</sup>

Pointon's argument is an engaging way of thinking about Emma's allegorical portraits from her years as Lady Hamilton (with all the subsequent fame and notoriety that she achieved),

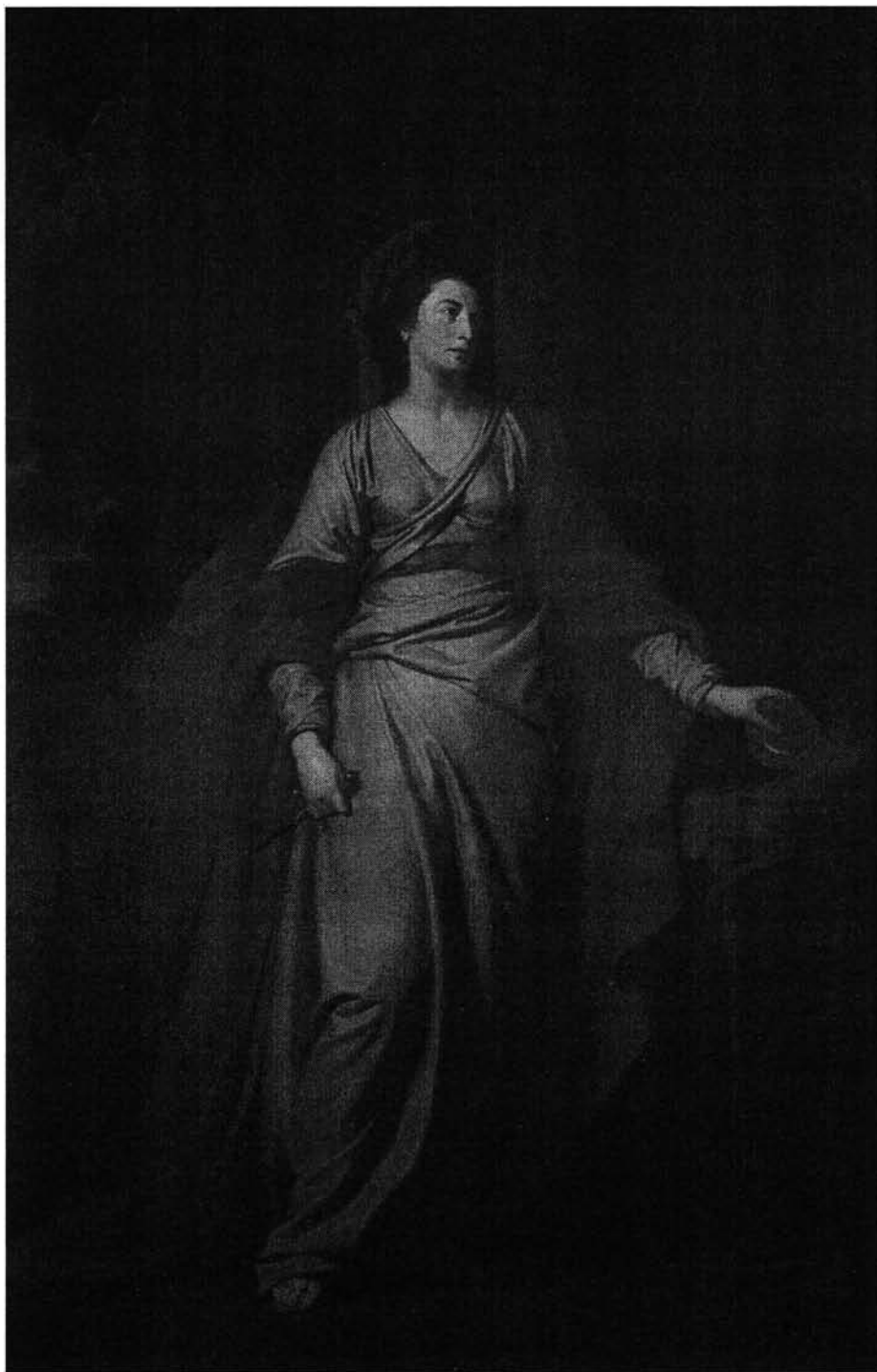


Figure 4. George Romney, *Mrs Yates as the Tragic Muse, Melpomene*, 1771. Oil on canvas, 238 x 151.5 cm. Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. Gift of Lady Trout, 1988. © Queensland Art Gallery.

but at the time when most of Romney's paintings of Emma were produced, her identity was not actually such a "problematic" element. In Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, the artist's aim seems not to have been to construct an ameliorating public identity for the socially questionable or illegitimate Emma, for such a task would hardly have been necessary for an unknown woman who, in 1786, had no significant public role to negotiate. Instead, it was her lack of social status—the very fact that she was "nobody"—that defined her in this portrait, because while she signified nothing socially, she signified endlessly in terms of what could be projected onto her. A portrait of an actress performing a role was always a portrait of that actress, but a portrait of Emma performing was not necessarily a portrait of Emma. Given the conventions of eighteenth-century portraiture, Emma the person was much more easily absented from her painted performances, much more easily disposed of in order to see just the character; Mrs. Yates as the tragic muse was always Mrs. Yates, but Emma as a bacchante could easily become just a bacchante. Thus the question that must be asked of this portrait is not how it constructs Emma's identity, but rather to what extent it can be viewed as a traditional articulation of its sitter's identity in the first place.

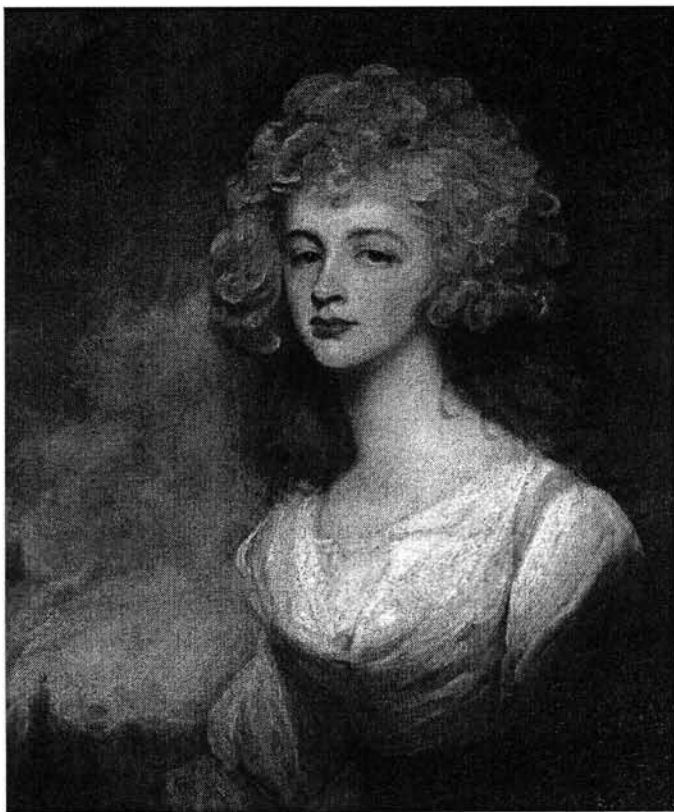
Romney's painting of Emma's expressive masquerade instead encourages a mode of interpretation that considers the portrait as the index of an encounter between two agents: sitter and artist. *Emma, Lady Hamilton* may be a visual representation of the body of Emma Hart, but it is also an expression of Romney's artistic identity, conveyed here in his painterly conception of an ideal of feminine beauty. As we have seen, Emma's identity in Romney's portrait is in many ways obscured through that ambiguous lack of specificity. She represents a sensuous beauty staged alluringly for the viewer and captured through the self-proclaiming art of the artist. Romney's use of curving lines throughout the composition (except in the table and mirror) creates a feminized visual field that is further emphasized in his vigorous brushwork, particularly where the curved strokes of her sleeve provide a vivid sense of fabric stretched across flesh. Such sensuality is perhaps most marked in the treatment of her hands and face. Through a passage of contrastingly fine brushwork, Romney draws the viewer's attention to this more highly finished section of the canvas, and though the eye is kept busy by the lively handling of paint elsewhere, the central oval, formed by the scarf and curving forearm, constantly returns the viewer to this point. Here the figure's hands emphasize tactility as she caresses the contrasting textures of her dress and the smooth flesh of her skin, and her crossed forearms touch softly; therein the viewer is invited to imagine the pleasure of such sensations via the sitter's performed experience. In this painting, Emma's performance becomes a vehicle for Romney's artistic practice, through which his aesthetic interests are played out and made materially discernable in the painterly trace.

Some indication of Romney's profound interest in Emma as a subject is to be found in the artist's Sitters Diaries, the logbooks he kept to record the sittings that took place in his painting studio. Emma is by far the most commonly recurring name in the books, often appearing more than once in any given week; over the course of their acquaintance, she sat for him on at least 117 occasions.<sup>22</sup> Romney's engagement with Emma was clearly intensive, yet significantly it appears to have been more aesthetic than market-related, although these two aspects are not always clearly defined. Emma seems to have served as a vehicle for Romney's artistic experiments of the 1780s as he fervently attempted to develop a visual language that matched his aesthetic ideals following his experiences in Italy in the 1770s. Alex Kidson has suggested that it was through his series of paintings of Emma that Romney was able to establish in his mind a distinction between routine society portraiture and creative portraiture, a form of representation that Kidson argues was more intimately felt, more spontaneously painted, and often left unfinished.<sup>23</sup> If Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* is understood in this context of Romney's aesthetic experimentations, then we can begin to understand the role it played in his artistic development during this period.

Even the function served by Emma's portrait demonstrates its place in Romney's artistic



Figure 5. George Romney, *Lady Altamont*, 1788. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm. Tate Britain, London. Presented by Lady Mary Browne through the Art Fund, 1947. © Tate, London.



practice. While some of the Emma portraits were commissioned (mostly by Greville and Hamilton), the majority were not, as in the case of the portrait in question. Nor were these works publicly exhibited, since Romney had refused to exhibit any of his paintings after having been rejected by the Royal Academy earlier in his career.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Romney seems to have had little interest in the print market, with only eight of the Emma portraits being engraved during his lifetime, only two of which were produced before 1786 and only one of which was a non-fancy portrait in the same vein as *Emma, Lady Hamilton*.<sup>25</sup> It was in fact Romney's apparent reclusiveness and lack of interest in the market that helped to generate his distinctive artistic identity, which would differentiate him from his contemporaries like Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough, and it is likely that he cultivated such an appearance for this very reason. His refusal to exhibit was particularly appreciated by his elite clients who were thrilled by the sense of exclusivity that Romney's practice therefore created.<sup>26</sup> As he did not exhibit at the Academy, the semi-public space of Romney's painting studio also served as a publicizing display of his paintings, which could be viewed by prospective customers, members of the press, and other generally interested persons. People could visit the studio to determine the size, style, and pose they desired for their own portraits by selecting elements from the arranged works. Many of Emma's portraits were displayed in the studio and so did, in this respect, have a connection with Romney's commercial practice by functioning as models for potential patrons.<sup>27</sup> As a social "nobody," Emma appeared to Romney as an un-inscribed figure—a blank canvas upon which he could create any image.

Unlike any other sitter, Emma became for Romney a ready vehicle encompassing a multiplicity of possibilities, through which he could freely experiment with visualizing notions of





Figure 6. Detail of Figure 4.

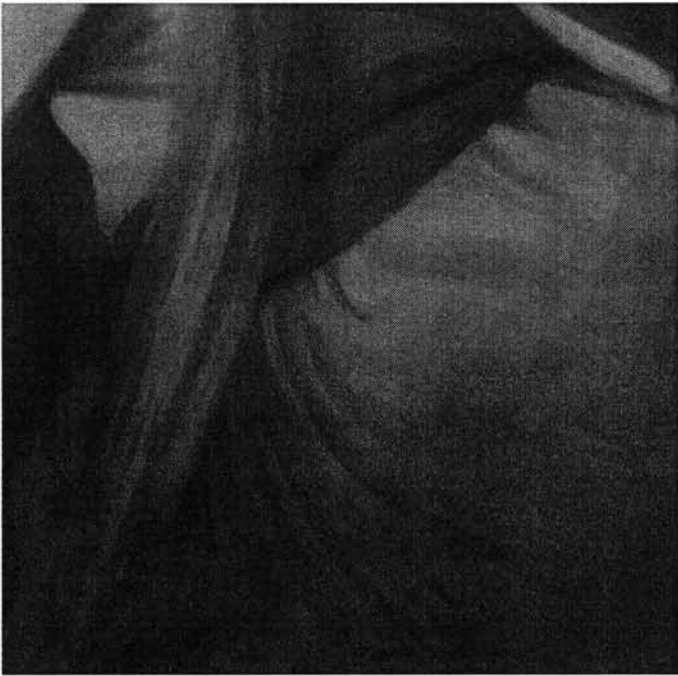


Figure 7. Detail of Figure 1.

Figure 8. George Romney, *Lady Hamilton (The Ambassador)*, 1791. Oil on canvas, 159.1 x 133.1 cm. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin. Bequest of Jack G. Taylor, 1991. Photo Credit: Rick Hall



feminine beauty in paint, creating works that could in turn demonstrate to others his remarkable ability to do so. A number of his female society portraits from the late 1780s certainly bear a formal connection to the earlier experiments Romney undertook with Emma, both in terms of bodily form and expression and in terms of stylistic innovations in his painterly manner. This is evident, for example, in the half-length portrait of *Lady Altamont* (Figure 5), which demonstrates Romney's conception of intimate beauty in the figure's alluringly ambiguous expression and exemplifies his bravura handling of paint, both of which are recognizable elements from the earlier portraits of Emma.

Viewing *Emma*, *Lady Hamilton* as an aesthetic rehearsal of Romney's formal and stylistic concerns reveals how this portrait articulates something of Romney's artistic identity, despite being a representation of someone else. The painting exemplifies Romney's interest in dramatic expression; in particular, this concern finds a material form in the expressive sketch-like approach to paint as a medium, a style that also served to highlight his creative role through the prominent trace it left behind. With the distraction of color being minimized to the russet-red used to define the sitter's lips and cheeks, the tonally restricted palette of whites and browns is immediately reminiscent of monochromatic graphic media. Romney appears to use paint in this portrait in the same way that he might have used ink or chalk on paper, delineating the body through sketchy contoured lines, as seen in the folds of drapery below the waist, rather than through shading. This treatment of fabric in particular marks a significant contrast with his earlier approaches. The

disguised brushwork in the finely detailed treatment of drapery in *Mrs. Yates as the Tragic Muse* of 1771 (Figure 6), for example, could not be further from the broad strokes sitting insistently on the surface of *Emma, Lady Hamilton* (Figure 7).

Romney's growing interest in drawing has been attributed to his experience in Italy between 1773 and 1775, during which he became associated with the Fuseli circle in Rome, ardently sketching antique sculpture and developing an appreciation of drawing as an autonomous medium.<sup>28</sup> It is evident from Romney's output following this period that he began to incorporate this interest in the spontaneity and expressive qualities of drawing into his painted works. In *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, his fluid brushwork certainly suggests some of the immediacy of his drawings. The apparent rapidity with which certain sections of the canvas have been painted, especially the few straight strokes forming the mirror on the left-hand side, is indicative of Romney's graphic approach; here detail is reserved for the key expressive sites of the face and hands, while the rest of the canvas receives a sketchier treatment more intent on capturing pose. We find parallels in Romney's aesthetic focus at this point in the work of Henry Fuseli, who was a significant influence on Romney during his Italian Grand Tour of the 1770s. During this period, as Martin Myrone has argued, Fuseli was intent on exploiting the dramatic and abstracted qualities of his new technique in a series of unconventional drawings, which Myrone sees as a conscious attempt on the part of the artist to proclaim his sublime genius.<sup>29</sup> Dissatisfied with the life of a society portraitist and desiring the prestige of the history painter, Romney too seems to have found a similar redressing fulfillment, or at least a creative outlet, in the artistic experiments he undertook with Emma as his model. Writing to his friend Hayley in February 1787, Romney's frustration was evident: "This cursed portrait-painting! How I am shackled with it! I am determined to live frugally, that I may enable myself to cut it short, as soon as I am tolerably independent."<sup>30</sup> Clearly Romney was seeking more from his artistic practice than the creatively unsatisfying experience of portraying elite clients in repetitive forms. In the "portrait" of *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, by contrast, we encounter a self-conscious proclamation of artistic skill and innovation (if not quite sublime genius) in the highly visible trace of the artist across the physical surface of the work, to the point where Romney's artistic identity and Emma's own agency as the portrait's sitter are both equally present within this complex articulation of expressive subjectivities.

An appropriate conclusion to this discussion of Romney and Emma's artistic relationship is found in the final painting to be produced from their association: Romney's portrait of Emma as *The Ambassadors*, painted in 1791 (Figure 8). Emma sat for the final portrait on the day of her wedding to Sir William, the day she eventually became "somebody," achieving a recognizable social status as Lady Hamilton. What is most significant about *The Ambassadors* in the context of the Emma portraits as a whole is that it is Romney's only painting of Emma that employs the conventions of society portraiture to articulate the sitter's identity. Romney encodes Lady Hamilton's social position for the viewer through a language of legible signs. She is dressed formally in contemporary fashion, possibly in her own wedding dress, and she is placed before a landscape of an erupting Mount Vesuvius, an unambiguous reference to her home in Naples and to her role as wife to the British Ambassador. In this altered approach to Emma as a portrait subject, Romney seems to have marked the end of his personal artistic relationship with Emma, representing her with a specific and legitimized social identity in which there was less room for his own aesthetic experimentation. As the wife of Sir William, Lady Hamilton could not play the same artistic part as the more ambiguously positioned Emma Hart. The image Romney painted of her in this final portrait suggests her legitimacy by being a portrait of the sitter as her social role, rather than as an artistic idea drawn from Romney's imagination.

Quite poignantly, after painting this portrait, Romney appears to have uncharacteristically stopped work completely for over a month. His usually crammed list of appointments in

the Sitters Diary ends abruptly after Emma's final sitting. It is tempting to imagine that this was Romney's response to an awareness that the moment of Emma's social legitimization was also a turning point for him, marking the end of the unique artistic relationship that they had shared. For *Emma, Lady Hamilton*, this comparison with *The Ambassador* highlights the multivalency of identities represented by the earlier work, where Emma's indeterminate social status and her engaging theatricality offered Romney a blank canvas of infinite possibilities for his artistic experiments. As such, Romney's *Emma, Lady Hamilton* preserves a complex trace of both Romney and Emma, those two primary agents of artist and sitter, each of whom is inscribed on the canvas in that performative act of portrayal.

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## Notes

1 This article is based on Master's research undertaken at the Courtauld Institute of Art and was awarded The Romney Society Bursary in 2006. I would like to thank Sarah Monks and David Pullins for their valuable suggestions.

2 On eighteenth-century conventions of society portraiture, see Nadia Tscherny, "Persons and Property": Romney's Society Portraiture," in *Those Delightful Regions of Imagination. Essays on George Romney*, ed. Alex Kidson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 33; Marcia Pointon, "Portrait! Portrait!! Portrait!!!," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 95.

3 For an analysis of the portrait as an indexical sign of the act of portrayal, that is, as a sign of the portrait painting process itself, see Harry Berger Jr., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze in Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations* 46 (1994): 87–120.

4 Records of Emma's sittings for Romney are contained in his Sitters Diaries (except for the year 1785, which is now lost): George Romney, "Sitters Diaries," vol. III (1781–1783), vol. IV (1784, 1786, 1787), vol. VI (1791–1793) (British Library Manuscripts, Add. 38083, Add. 38084, Add. 38086). There are several biographies of Emma, including Kate Williams, *England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006) and Julie Peakman, *Emma Hamilton* (London: Haus Publishing, 2005).

5 William Hayley, *The Life of George Romney* (Chichester: 1809), 119–20.

6 The exact number of portraits that Romney painted of Emma varies according to attribution of sitter. Ward and Roberts indicate fifty-seven in their catalogue raisonné, while Barry Maclean-Eltham suggests a smaller figure: Thomas Humphry Ward and William Roberts, *Romney: A Biographical and Critical Essay with a Catalogue Raisonné of his Works*, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Agnew & Sons, 1904), 180–7; Barry Maclean-Eltham, *George Romney. Paintings in Public Collections* (Kendal: Romney Society, 1996), 32–4.

7 Shearer West, "Romney's Theatricality," in Kidson, *Those Delightful Regions*, 144–145. On Romney's paintings for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery and Emma Hamilton's role as model, see Yvonne Romney Dixon, *Designs From Fancy: George Romney's Shakespearean Drawings*, exhib. cat. (Washington D.C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1998), 41–55.

8 George Romney, *Emma Hamilton as Circe*, c. 1782 (Tate Britain, London); George Romney, *Study for Emma Hamilton as Saint Cecilia*, c. 1785 (Private Collection).

9 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 41; West, "Romney's Theatricality," 145–6. The studio as social space is also explored in Angela Rosenthal, "She's got the look! Eighteenth-century female portrait painters and the psychology of a potentially 'dangerous employment,'" in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 147–66, and David Mannings, "At the portrait painter's. How the painters of the eighteenth century conducted their studios and sittings," *History Today* 27:5 (1977): 279–87.

- 10 George Romney, *Emma Hart as 'The Spinstress'*, 1784 (Kenwood House, London).
- 11 On the characterisation of Sir Joshua Reynolds' studio and his portrait practice in theatrical terms, see Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1996), 129–58.
- 12 Gilles Chazals, "Les 'Attitudes' de Lady Hamilton," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* XCIV (1979): 219–226; and Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on Some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770–1815* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 111–136.
- 13 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786–1788* (1817), trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 200.
- 14 Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs de Madame Vigée Le Brun*, vol. 1 (Paris: Charpentier & Cie, 1869), 195–6. On the connection between Emma's experiences sitting for Romney and her later posing "Attitudes," see David A. Cross, *A Striking Likeness. The Life of George Romney* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 124; Holmström, 126–135; and West, "Romney's Theatricality," 148.
- 15 West, "Romney's Theatricality," 149.
- 16 As the scarf is obviously such a key site for the work's dramatic expression, it is significant that the shawl later became the major prop device through which Lady Hamilton enacted her "Attitudes" in Naples.
- 17 West, "Romney's Theatricality," 131–158.
- 18 Of particular note are the collected essays in *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776–1812*, ed. Robyn Asleson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003); Gill Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations: Viewing the Actress in British Art and Theatre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); and Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (London: Pinter, 1991).
- 19 On connections between actresses and courtesans in the social hierarchy, see Martin Postle, "Painted Women: Reynolds and the Cult of the Courtesan," in Asleson, *Notorious Muse*, 22–55; Perry, 40.
- 20 For details of Emma Hart's life see Williams and Peakman. For an earlier biography including reprints of many of her letters, see Hugh Tours, *The Life and Letters of Emma Hamilton* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).
- 21 Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture, 1665–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon 1997), 178.
- 22 The number of sittings that took place between Romney and Emma was no doubt far greater but given the loss of the Sitters Diary from 1785 it is impossible to calculate exactly. It should be noted that 1785 was a significant year for their artistic association, with a number of portraits now being attributed to that period. George Romney, "Sitters Diaries," vol. III (1781–1783), vol. IV (1784, 1786, 1787), vol. VI (1791–1793) (British Library Manuscripts, Add. 38083, Add. 38084, Add. 38086).
- 23 Alex Kidson, "George Romney: An Introduction," in *George Romney, 1734–1802*, exhib. cat. (Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery; London: National Portrait Gallery; San Marino: Huntington Library, 2002), 33–34.
- 24 On Romney's attitude to the Royal Academy, see Kidson, "George Romney," 23.
- 25 For a discussion of Romney's attitudes to and dealings with the print market in eighteenth-century Britain, see David Alexander, "A Reluctant Communicator: George Romney and the Print Market," in Kidson, *Those Delightful Regions*, 251–70 and also the Appendix, "Chronological List of Singly Issued Plates after George Romney to 1806," 271–87. The portraits of Emma that were engraved during Romney's lifetime are *Nature* (engraved 1784), *Emma* (engraved 1785), *The Seamstress and Alope* (engraved 1787), *St Cecilia*, *Sensibility*, and *The Spinster* (engraved 1789), *Cassandra Raving* (engraved 1795), and *Bacchante* (engraved 1797).
- 26 Tscherny, 39; Kidson, "George Romney," 23–4.
- 27 Romney's success as a society portraitist at this time is evidenced in the figures offered in John Romney's biography. In 1786, Romney painted portraits to the total value of 3504 guineas at a time when he was charging only 20 guineas for a three-quarter-length portrait (the most common canvas size he painted), indicating the sale of approximately 175 portraits that year. John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Romney, including various letters, and testimonies to his Genius &c. also some particulars of the life of Peter Romney, his brother; a young artist of Great Genius and Promising Talents but Short Life* (London: 1830), 150.
- 28 Kidson, "George Romney," 2; 19–21. For a discussion of Romney's drawing practices in Rome, par-

ticularly with regard to his study of life drawing, see Martin Postle, "Romney's Grand Tour, 1773–1775," *Transactions of the Romney Society* 3, (1998): 8–10.

29 Martin Myrone, *Henry Fuseli* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), 26–7. For the influence of the Fuseli circle in Rome, see Martin Myrone, *Body Building: Reforming Masculinities in British Art, 1750–1810* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 163–190.

30 Hayley, 123.

31 In Romney's Sitters Diaries, he entered her name on 5th September 1791 (the day before her wedding) as the usual "Mrs Hart," and then on the 6<sup>th</sup>, following her marriage, he entered her in the book under her new persona of "Lady Hamilton." George Romney, "Sitters Diary" vol. VI (1791–1793) (British Library Manuscripts, Add. 38086).

32 George Romney, "Sitters Diary" vol. VI (1791–1793) (British Library Manuscripts, Add. 38086). *Lady Hamilton*, by contrast, we encounter a self-conscious proclamation of artistic skill and innovation (if not quite sublime genius) in the highly visible trace of the artist across the physical surface of the work, to the point where Romney's artistic identity and Emma's own agency as the portrait's sitter are both equally present within this complex articulation of expressive subjectivities.



**Review:*****Cultural Emergency in Conflict and Disaster*****Berma Klein Goldewijk, Georg Frerks, and Els Van der Plas, editors****Prince Claus Fund****Amsterdam: NAI Publishers, 2011***Lauren Kane*

The Prince Claus Fund has finally given credence to the presumption preservationists have held for decades: Without objects and sites as loci of cultural heritage, societies cannot survive. *Cultural Emergency in Conflict and Disaster* sets out on a self-proclaimed "pioneering effort" to bring broad awareness to the crisis of recent cultural heritage destruction. Rather than taking the traditional approach of cultural heritage surveys that present preservation's greatest hits—the rebuilding of Europe after World War II, the looting of Roman artifacts for display in American museums, the theories of Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc—the Prince Claus Fund boldly takes on recent and raw memories. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century wars, natural disasters, climate change, global economics, accelerated rates of development, and numerous other aptly designated cultural emergencies serve as inspiration for case studies and reflection. In its entirety, the book calls practitioners to action, encourages communication across fields, and posits the potential for cultural heritage professionals to partner with humanitarian aid workers who are often already on the front lines of the very sites most at risk for cultural emergencies.

This hefty text differs from many other cultural heritage surveys in its wide geographic scope, attention to both objects and sites, and consideration of field practices. It is not a textbook but rather a sourcebook navigating a complex and contested field through scholarly analysis, field reports, and photographic essays contributed by interdisciplinary professionals and academics from around the world. Since editors Berma Klein Goldewijk, Georg Frerks, and Els Van der Plas have broadly defined culture to include moveable and immovable objects, things tangible and intangible, cultural traditions, and natural legacies, the essays in this text are methodologically and physiologically diverse. Each, however, is collected under one of five thematic headings: "Why Cultural Emergency?," "Cultural Emergency in Conflict," "Cultural Emergency in International Law," "Cultural Emergency Response and Reconstruction," and "Culture in Emergency Relief." In each section, extant cultural policies are analyzed and new avenues for research and development proposed, thus making this a practical sourcebook for the rapidly changing face of cultural heritage advocacy. The interdisciplinary and global approach to case studies and authorship that the editors have chosen speaks directly to the state of the field: Cultural heritage preservation is a collaborative, innovative, and growing field intricately connected to the world in which we live and to the cultures that define that world.

Developed from the germ of an idea planted at a 2006 conference at The Hague in honor of the Prince Claus Fund's tenth anniversary, this book has clearly become a project of passion that has engaged field experts and undergone extensive editorial review. From renowned Dutch artist Irma Boom's cover design (which allows readers to symbolically scrape off a layer of silver coating to reveal an image of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas) to the inclusion of powerful photo essays, the book is beautifully orchestrated. One exception, however, is the monospaced font.

While it cleverly suggests that the pages have been pulled directly from a field report, it makes reading tedious.

Although the chapters of *Cultural Emergency* do not deliberately exclude cases in the Western world, the book focuses on sites most recently and severely impacted by unrest in the Middle East, natural disasters in Asia and the Caribbean, problems of unregulated tourism in the southern hemisphere, and the growing black market of cultural contraband in South American, Asian, and African source nations. Many of the sites of these (often ongoing) traumas are in nations without sufficient funds or infrastructure to stabilize or focus on preservation, putting cultural heritage at an even greater risk. In light of this reality, the editors have wisely chosen to focus the content of their book on regions where culture is in a state of direst emergency. A fine job has been done to balance contributions by practitioners from both Eastern and Western backgrounds. Thus, despite the authors' divergent paths and varying origins, the ways in which members of the international preservation community are working towards shared goals are clearly highlighted.

The first section of the book reflects on the challenges cultural heritage preservationists face when pitted against the brutal humanitarian and health issues that accompany natural disasters and postwar landscapes. Although the overall tenor of the book is non-Western, David Lowenthal, Emeritus Professor of Geography and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London, quickly reminds readers and practitioners that in our increasingly global world, clear boundaries cannot be drawn between cultural groups. Likewise, clear boundaries cannot be drawn between emergency humanitarian and emergency cultural heritage aid since, in the eyes of the editors and authors, culture is critical to a society's survival.

Collectively, chapters in the second section allude to a non-discriminating, worldwide ebb and flow of tragedy followed by restorative hope, and encourage preservationists to equally consider both parts of the cycle. The chapters mimic this cycle, as some describe the destruction and looting of rock art in Morocco and Niger and the ransacking of Lebanese, Kuwaiti, Afghan, and Iraqi museums during war, while others tell of successful recovery efforts, exhibits, and workshops. In light of lessons learned from these various emergencies and recoveries, Matthew Bogdanos, Manhattan Assistant District Attorney and U.S. Marine Corps Reserves Colonel, proactively offers a "Five Point Action Plan" to prevent and recover from future disasters of looting and illegal trade through legislation and cooperative efforts. In summation, the editors succeed in making the reader feel that while tragedy may be inevitable, the fate of cultural heritage is in everyone's hands.

The book's third section, "Cultural Emergency in International Law," describes and illuminates legislative efforts through a clear history of cultural heritage laws. These chapters are incredibly accessible and succinct while still raising important questions about the effectiveness of international laws and policies. This section, therefore, acts as a primer for the reader before he or she engages with the philosophical and ethical concerns presented in the fourth section of *Cultural Emergency*, "Cultural Emergency Response and Reconstruction."

There, contributing authors posit the possibility of blending humanitarian and cultural priorities while rebuilding sites and communities. Acknowledging that there is no way to equate the loss of human life with the destruction of property, authors in this section rally for the involvement of local communities, craftsmen, and tradesmen—and, moreover, local opinions—in reconstruction efforts. Their goal in doing so is for traditions, memory, and society to be reconstructed simultaneously with the buildings themselves. While acknowledging how preservationists have consistently moved toward more organic and locally rooted reconstruction and recovery efforts, the authors insist upon an even greater attention to communities' needs and desires in relation to their threatened or destroyed cultural heritage. For example, one of this section's photographic essays illustrates the relationship between the Prince Claus Fund and the Mandalay Marionettes Theatre, enlisted to serve as the local eyes and ears of the Fund's recovery mission after Myanmar's

Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Under the Theatre's advisement, the Fund directed relief efforts toward the religious shrines and unique puppet theatres that were invaluable to the region's cultural identity, rather than toward other sites of obvious art historical value.

"Culture in Emergency Relief," the final section, effortlessly weaves together all the themes and goals set out in the book's introduction and touched upon in each following chapter. With acute awareness that cultural emergencies—whether manmade or natural—are not going away any time soon, Georg Ferks, Chair of Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management at Utrecht University and Chair in Disaster Studies at Wageningen University, insists on the potential of capacity-building activities, which employ local artisans and entrust indigenous populations with political, economic, and social responsibilities. In doing so, external aid organizations can encourage the people of disaster-stricken regions to reclaim their valued cultural heritage with a sense of purpose, strength, and pride. This is a new, revolutionary suggestion that adds one more facet to the interdisciplinary field of cultural heritage preservation: partnership with already-robust humanitarian groups who, in the wake of catastrophe, often aid the very same populations as cultural heritage preservationists do. Ferks is careful to note, however, that these response efforts cannot be homogenized, but rather must carefully consider the needs of local communities, the skills of their people, and the voices of their own particular heritage situations.

Overall, the text delivers on its stated goals. Various chapters are markedly stronger than others and might serve well as standalone articles for seminars on cultural heritage or training for policy makers and humanitarian first-responders. For example, Jiri Toman's "Protection of Cultural Heritage in Emergencies: Responses of International Law," Jan Hladik's "Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the Role of UNESCO," and David Lowenthal's "Dilemmas of Heritage Protection" all stand out as strong chapters that provide comprehensive overviews of the state of the field. As a collection of essays, *Cultural Emergency in Conflict and Disaster* is undoubtedly an important contribution to the world of cultural heritage. As cultural heritage studies gains strength in the academic arena, scholars can look to this as an important text on the field's progress in recent decades. Most importantly, this book raises questions seminal to a burgeoning field caught somewhere between academia and the world at large: What works? Why does it work? How can we improve upon what other sites and cultures have already determined as successful emergency relief for heritage sites?

If not as a whole, then at least in selected segments, this text is a critical read for anyone studying cultural heritage objects, sites, and traditions. More specifically, this sourcebook is an invaluable guide and inspiration for policy makers, museologists, archaeologists, art historians, anthropologists, and preservationists entrusted with the protection of cultural heritage from destructive emergencies.

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