



Friends of York Art Gallery

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September 2020

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EDITORIAL

Well, we've at least emerged from Lockdown to the extent that York Art Gallery has reopened. As predicted in my comments on the reopening of European Galleries in my last editorial, however, this aspect of the 'New Abnormal' has to incorporate a number of regulations, in this instance in line with UK Government requirements. These regulations can be studied at leisure on the Gallery's website: for Friends, the most important are that visits have to be pre-booked, preferably online, and that all visitors have to wear a face-covering, and abide by social distancing rules (would-be visitors who can't book online can do so by telephoning 01904-687687).

Unfortunately two of the Gallery's major opening exhibitions, 'Views of York and Yorkshire' and 'Your Art Gallery – Paintings Chosen by You', will have closed by the time this Bulletin appears. The Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition continues, however, as does 'Ancient and Modern', an Exhibition of large-scale sculptures by Michael Lyons (a Cawood-based artist who, sadly, died last year) in the Artist Garden behind the Gallery. But in particular I would like to draw Friends' attention to the excellent online exhibition 'Views of York: Exploring York through the Evelyn Collection', accessible at <https://viewsof.york.ac.uk> – Genevieve Stegner-Freitag, the departing Friends-supported York Art History MA student, is to be congratulated for her hard work in curating this project, which she describes in a contribution to this Bulletin.

Another sign of our emergence from Lockdown is that a Friends' visit has been planned to Nancy and Metz, 29 April-3 May. This five-day visit will explore the Art Nouveau Movement in France with the guidance of an expert, Dr Scott Anderson. Highlights of the trip include a visit to the Ecole de Nancy Museum, the Villa Majorelle, the Maison Bergeret, Nancy Musée des Beaux Arts, and St. Stephen's Cathedral in Metz. Accommodation in Metz will be in the Central Mercure Stanislas Hotel, and travel will be by Eurostar from London St. Pancras. The closing date

for applications is 31 October, and Dorothy Nott reports that there has been a good response so far. For further information, ring 01904 676288, or email wattnott@btopenworld.com

We can also announce a new departure. Mainly due to the input of recently co-opted Committee Member Benjamin Hilliam, the Friends have now branched out into social media with a new Twitter account (@FriendsofYAG), which can be found on the link: <https://twitter.com/FriendsofYAG> - we hope that this additional platform, which follows in the footsteps of our new website, will enhance our online presence: so, if you have a Twitter account, we would love you to follow us, say hello and engage with our content!

Other Galleries are opening of course, but the experience of Lockdown has alerted all of us to resources which galleries and other institutions have made available online. Sue Greenhow, one of the team which produces these e-Bulletins, has asked me to mention the website of The Fleming Collection. The Collection is owned by the Fleming-Wyfold Art Foundation, whose aim, in its own words, is to 'further an understanding and awareness of Scottish art and creativity through exhibition, events, publishing and education with an emphasis placed on initiatives outside Scotland'. The Collection is regarded as the finest collection of Scottish artworks outside public institutions, and comprises over 600 works dating from the seventeenth century to the present day. The rich and imaginative website, among many other things, offers the latest Scottish art news, and carries copies of an excellent magazine on Scottish Art. This magazine, *inter alia*, carries features in which various celebrities (the latest being Sir James Macmillan) share their thoughts on 'Their favourite Scottish Work of Art'.

The FYAG e-Bulletin may not quite be able to aspire to such heights, but it does reflect the interest and opinions of a number of Friends who have been kind enough to offer me contributions, based on their varied interests. In this issue, we are introduced to three new FYAG Committee Members who this summer were co-opted onto the Committee as a result of Covid-19 making last year's AGM an impossibility. Brian Kesteven and Dorothy Nott each offer their reactions to an artwork that has particularly

engaged them. Hannah Savage, a member of the Gallery staff, writes on the life and work of the potter Ann Stokes, four of whose pieces are in the Gallery's collection. As mentioned, Genevieve Stegner-Freitag, our departing MA scholar, reflects on her input into the 'Views of York' online exhibition. And, finally, John Staples offers a stimulating opinion piece.

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September 2020

INTRODUCING THREE NEW FYAG COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The onset of Covid-19 made it impossible to hold the Friends Annual General Meeting last March, and we therefore could not go through the normal processes of electing new Committee Members. Early in the Summer, three new Members were co-opted onto the Committee to fill this gap. They will stand for election next year. Here they briefly introduce themselves:

MOIRA FULTON



Having taken early retirement from my post as a Deputy Head in a large comprehensive school in 1992, I determined that, in future, I would spend a life of cultivated leisure. Since then, though life has been interesting, so far leisure has not been completely achieved. In the years after retirement, I have studied for a MA at the University of Leeds in Country House Studies and at the University of York in History of Art. I have also lectured for the WEA and the Centre for Lifelong Learning at York. One of my great interests is Garden History, and I have been a member of Yorkshire Garden Trust almost since the foundation of the Trust. Together with a colleague, I undertook a survey of historic parks and gardens in the Yorkshire Dales, which Yorkshire Dales National Parks commissioned the YGT to produce. From 2007 until 2019 I was Chairman of the York and East Yorkshire Art Fund and organised a full programme of events for members, normally between sixteen to eighteen a year. For the York Georgian Society, I act as coordinator of their lecture programme. This year I have joined the Committee of FYAG, and also have taken on the role as events coordinator for the Events Sub-Committee.

BENJAMIN HILLIAM



I returned to York in 2018, having first lived here between 2009 and 2013, during which time I fell in love with the city's architecture, history, and snickelways. Primarily, my career has focussed on public sector procurement, and I have worked within the NHS and the Police in the pursuit of spending public money fairly and effectively. At present, I am a Senior Buyer at Network Rail. In addition, I have previously worked in the publishing and heritage sectors at various points since my graduation from the University of Durham in 2004, and have volunteered in archival and curatorial capacities. An avid researcher of nineteenth-century British Art, I am especially interested in the Lincoln-born history painter William Hilton the younger (1786-1839). I firmly believe in the transformational, uplifting, and reflective qualities of art - for societies, for communities, for families, and for individuals. In joining the Friends' Committee, I look forward to acting upon the interests of the membership, to supporting the activities of the Gallery in this extremely challenging environment, and to exploring new ideas – particularly with consideration to encouraging philanthropy, opportunities for participation, and greater representation.

MARGARET MAY



When I was aged five, a reproduction of Dürer's *The Hare* made a lasting impression on me. In my teens I was greatly impressed with the beauty of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo in St Peter's Basilica. Later, spending three weeks alone in Paris, I came under the spell of August Rodin, deciding that his old woman *Celle qui fut belle heaulmière* was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen. Forty years later I was much less taken by it!

Before I embarked (as a very mature student) on my MA in the History of Art at the University of York, the only formal reading I had undertaken - some fifty years before - was *The Story of Art* by E.H. Gombrich.

I came to live in York just as the Gallery closed, but I had already visited it several times and was delighted to be welcomed to FYAG by Dorothy Nott. I look forward to contributing what I can to its valuable work.

Here a Friend, who has long been involved in the practice and teaching of art (teaching at many levels – secondary, adult education, college, and university extra-mural), shares his reactions to the Poussin painting, which was exhibited at the York Art Gallery between 13 July and 22 September last year, thanks to the National Gallery's Masterpiece Tour, 2019.

NICOLAS POUSSIN AS A SOLOIST

In 2019 a solo painting by Nicolas Poussin, [*The Triumph of Pan, 1636*](#) was exhibited for a number of weeks at York Art Gallery - a generous opportunity to enjoy the work of such a titan.

A welcome: a bright wristband began my first visit. My extra-weekly taste was switched on, expecting developments over the period of the visit.

At the far end of the gallery room was a composition of highly seasoned colouring, carrying continuous movement.

After a visit or two, reward came with increasing ease in reading the pace and pitch of the painting. Visual journeys through a contrived space would be the stuff of my subsequent visits. Experience has led me to expect beauty from Poussin's harnessing of major elements: I know I am in good hands.

The measured tempo of the work means a steady release of pictorial material; it's not to be hurried, then gives value in its own good time. Here the tempo is maintained through the knots and scummages at the heart of the composition. Approach more closely, and the painting is likely to engage, then capture you for a tour. This will perhaps be a journey across the illuminated limbs and backs at the front of the stage.

Already familiar, these figures have been returned from an earlier age to perform here, under directed stage lighting. In their presence and distribution, there is something of the sculptor. There is little of the unrehearsed.

Each figure radiates in its own colouring, then links up to pass on its contribution to the whole.

Colours display across the forms, concentrated areas promote the whole painting; here deep yellows give a clarion call, swags of wide-awake blue

appear at the corner of one's eye. The dominant may dispense milder hues around the system.

Traversing the painting, pause: wherever you stop, the frame will reflect the order and proportion, as of the whole.

Once settled, I found it was the painter's comfortable mastery of scale, with the juxtaposing of the various identities, which most engaged me. The smoothness of the gear-changes from the smallest to the large and back is the cohesive element.

Chosen for a part in a Poussin painting – reveller, vase, goat - you will be valued for your size and purpose, then matched with an enhancing situation.

The central core of the composition is capped by heads, each of which plays a responsible part in directing attention.

From one visit to the next, the elements of the painting would regroup to deliver something fresh.

I have got to know the figures as well-bred beasts, limited to registered poses, each handsomely painted. Beyond the tumult is a lightly painted 'rest area' with a view of the Peloponnesus.

Through a continuous run of visits (only Poussin and I know how many), this single painting invariably continued to interest. The abstract powers that drive the composition give the energy from which this painting contributes so much, I believe.

This opportunity spawned the 'I shall be back shortly' rather than the 'that's it' outlook. With journeys to Edinburgh, London and Cardiff, there have been other chances to view a Poussin. This was altogether different: Poussin came to visit us. Thank you to York Art Gallery for promoting the visit and for the pleasing support material.

Thank you also to Susan Greenhow for her particular encouragement.

© **Brian Kesteven**

September 2020.

Many Friends will have been impressed, when visiting York Art Gallery, by the bust of Alfred Wolmark displayed in the Burton Gallery. Here Dorothy Nott investigates the background to this exceptionally striking work, exploring the life of both the sculptor and his subject.

ALFRED WOLMARK BY HENRI GAUDIER-BRZESKA



Henri Gautier Brzeska, *Bust of Alfred Wolmark*

©York Museums Trust

My first impulse on approaching the bust of Alfred Wolmark is to bury my fingers in his deeply furrowed curls, to trace the line of his forehead past the indentation around his eyes, before homing in on his wonderfully expressive nose. The audacious angle of the head, focussing just above the viewer, tells me that this was a man of confidence, self-awareness, even panache, a man it would not be easy to ignore. Who then was Wolmark, and why was he sculpted by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska?

Born in Poland in 1877, Wolmark was part of that body of Eastern European immigrants to Britain that included Jacob Epstein, David Bomberg, Mark Gertler, and Jacob Kramer. Although older than Gaudier-Brzeska, the two artists became friends, and in 1914 Wolmark exhibited his own portrait of Gaudier-Brzeska entitled [*A Street-fighting Man*](#).

Larger than life, this shows his fellow artist in a vivid red shirt and black cloak against an equally vivid red background, the face alternately blue, green, and red, as if bruised in a brawl, the left hand held out palm upwards drawing his opponent in. The art critic P. G. Konody referred to this as 'a piece of pictorial impertinence that goes beyond a joke', though, by a nice reciprocity, it is interesting to note that Gaudier-Brzeska in his self-portrait used large quantities of bright green, red, and yellow to accentuate the chiselled structure of his face.

Wolmark's use of colour was known to be so bright that, in an exhibition of the International Society of Artists, no English painter dared hang work next to his, and it was finally placed alongside a work by Van Gogh, a matter of considerable pride to the artist in later years. As well as the intense colours, Wolmark's paintings are characterized by a bold application of paint, dominated by heavy impasto, leading Walter Sickert to complain that 'you cannot see pictures for the paint'. As a post-impressionist Wolmark exhibited at Roger Fry's 1910 *Manet and the Post Impressionists* at the Grafton Gallery, though in some ways he is closer in style to the Scottish Colourists and the Fauves.

Gaudier-Brzeska was equally flamboyant. Everything about him was exaggerated. He was precociously talented and referred to by Jim Ede of Kettle's Yard as *The Savage Messiah*, the title of Ken Russell's film about him in 1972. He was certainly striking to look at physically as well as in mannerisms and behaviour, and, when the poet Ezra Pound first met him in 1913, he referred to him as a 'well-made wolf or some soft-moving bright-eyed wild thing'. *Wild Thing* was also the name given to an exhibition of his work along with that of fellow sculptors, Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill – both of whom attracted their own controversy – at the Royal Academy nearly a century later in 2010.

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska was born Henri Gaudier in 1891, but after he met a Polish woman Sophie Brzeska, some twenty years older than he, he formed a platonic relationship with her, and he added her name to his. In many ways she was like a mother to him, and at times, to avoid censure,

they held out that they were brother and sister. They moved from Paris to London, which latter city at the time appeared more accepting of their relationship. Gaudier-Brzeska remained there until the First World War, and was only twenty-three when he died in the trenches in 1915. For such a short life he has left an astonishing legacy behind him.

At the age of sixteen he had won a scholarship to the Bristol School of Art, where he was constantly sketching landscapes, buildings, and people, before returning to France. Initially he identified as a painter, but by 1910 he had decided to devote himself to sculpture and had started by modelling busts of his friends, much like the one under discussion; but, after his return to Britain in 1911, his artistic breakthrough came when he met Epstein in 1912. At this meeting, Epstein asked him if he carved directly from the material. Too ashamed to admit that he did not, he went home and immediately started on a work, carving direct from stone in preparation for a visit by Epstein three days later. From then on most of his work was created in this way, carving rather than modelling. Although initially he had much in common with the Italian Futurist movement, he soon became attracted by the Rebel Art Centre, which, under the aegis of Wyndham Lewis, morphed into the Vorticist movement, a movement which set itself against much of the art on show in the national galleries, praising 'primitive' art at the expense of derivative forms of Greek sculpture and the cult of Hellenism. For the Vorticists, the machine was at the centre of their art, as in Epstein's famous *Rock Drill*. Gaudier-Brzeska was excited by this new movement which championed an art directly expressive of machine-age dynamism. In 1915 he exhibited with the Vorticists at the Dore gallery, and he contributed to the first of two editions of the iconoclastic magazine *Blast* with an article entitled 'Vortex'; he even scribbled a few notes for the second edition, but by the time this edition was published he was dead.

Between 1912 and his death Gaudier-Brzeska created 80 sculptures and 2000 drawings. He visited the British Museum for inspiration, and, after an initial obsession with Ruskin, he started copying Michelangelo and Rodin - though he later moved away from Rodin and became more interested in the 'primitive', for which he professed a profound admiration and sympathy. As for Michelangelo, he said that he came to understand his work by adopting the tools of Cubism - that is, by drawing boxes and

then linking them up. He formed a useful relationship with Ezra Pound. Pound came across him at the Allied Artists' exhibition in the Albert Hall, when looking at *Wrestlers*, one of his most famous works (1914); Gaudier-Brzeska introduced himself before suddenly disappearing. Pound invited him to dinner. Gaudier-Brzeska did not go, but in turn invited Pound to his studio, when he was rewarded by the sale of two sculptures. Pound shared the need to return to the 'primitive', and it was not long before Gaudier-Brzeska was engaged in his monumental head of Pound, greatly influenced again by his visits to the British Museum and in particular the Polynesian section. Gaudier-Brzeska was a prodigiously fast worker, the author and playwright Edith Bagnold saying that he worked 'like some marvellous chef who was cooking with both hands'.

If we return to the bust of Alfred Wolmark, you can immediately see the essence of Wolmark's character – bold, defiant, interesting, a face that is said to bear a strong resemblance to Beethoven, and one that would be hard to overlook. The energy, dynamism, and intense muscularity which exude from this sculpture are truly memorable – the heightened features, the deep ridges in the hair, the prominent nose, the tilt of the head are all extremely suggestive and contribute to the impression of the man. Feeling those angles and ridges under your fingers you get a real sense of this energy, this poetry, this embodiment of Alfred Wolmark. I believe that this work exemplifies Gaudier-Brzeska's remark to Ezra Pound when he sat for him: 'it will not look like you. . . it will not look like you . . . it will be the expression of certain emotions which I get from your character'.

When the opportunity arose of buying this sculpture, one of six cast, all eleven members of the Friends of the York Art Gallery Committee, including Dean Eric Milner-White, approved the purchase, which approval was confirmed by the President, Herbert Read. It has proved popular ever since.

© Dorothy Nott

September 2020

Hannah Savage, a member of York Art Gallery's Visitor Experience Team, provides us with a fascinating introduction to the life and work of the potter Ann Stokes, wife of the art critic and painter Adrian Stokes.

ANN STOKES - POTTER (1922 - 2014)



Anne Stokes, Swan looking Glass

©The Estate of Ann Stokes/York Museums Trust

Ann Stokes once declared: 'Painting is what I pot for. It is to give myself something to put my leaves and animals on. Most potters do it for the pot itself'.

A talented, self-taught potter, Ann produced work that stands out as unique, with her themes of birds, fish, and the use of mirrors. Despite

having no formal training, she gained recognition from the art establishment, and her work is now highly collectable all over the world.

York Art Gallery was very fortunate in acquiring four of Ann's pieces in 2017, after her death, with the help of her son Philip and the Art Fund. Ann's dramatic *White Wall Mounted Swan* looks down from its position above the CoCA 1 doorway, surveying the ceramics gallery.

Ann Stokes was born Ann Mellis, in 1922, in East Lothian, Scotland, the youngest of four children. Their father was a United Free Church Minister who had been a missionary in China. When she was a young girl, Ann liked to climb trees, and even slept in them - so earning the nickname 'Tarzan'! This passion never left her. She said, 'I love trees from the inside and the outside'. In 1935, when she was thirteen years old, Ann saw the film *Top Hat*, featuring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. She immediately wanted to become a dancer. Her sister's husband-to-be, Adrian Stokes, sent her the book *To-night the Ballet*, and, encouraged by this, she took up ballet, passed her exams, and trained at London's Royal Academy of Dance. Knee problems resulting from a pony-riding accident meant that Ann had to give up ballet in 1947, when she was twenty-five. However, the fluidity and 'miraculous movement of grace' stayed with Ann and greatly influenced her ceramics. She said: 'The spread of the arabesque and the lift, as in a "pas de deux", is much like the final swoop of the bluebird to her mate; this is what fascinates me in animals; where the line, elegance and grace exist naturally'. Dance was always to be part of Ann's life, and she continued to enjoy tap dancing, belly dancing, and salsa after she could no longer do ballet.

As a child Ann attended St. Leonard's Boarding School, where she became captain of the lacrosse team. At the age of seventeen she left school and moved to St Ives in Cornwall, where she lived with her sister Margaret and Margaret's art-critic husband, Adrian Stokes. The couple had married two years earlier, and they had a baby, named Telfer, whom Ann looked after. Ann, Margaret and Adrian mixed with a group of artists who had escaped war-torn London and were also working in St Ives, including Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, and Naum Gabo. Ann not only looked after her nephew Telfer, but also helped to look after Barbara

Hepworth's triplets. Often there would be such a large gathering that Ann would have to sleep in the corridor of the house, thus allowing guests to sleep in her room.

During the Second World War Ann joined the Women's Royal Navy Service, serving as a radio operator using Morse code, and spending some time serving in France.

In 1946, at the end of the war, Margaret and Adrian Stokes divorced. A year later in 1947 he married his sister-in-law Ann, Ann being twenty-five and Adrian forty-five years old. Because British law would not allow such a marriage, they moved to Ascona in Switzerland, where the marriage of a man to a sister of a living former wife was legal. Surprisingly, Ann's parents approved of the match. They wrote to Adrian very warmly: 'We both think you and Ann suit each other to perfection in gaiety and doings, and I know she will take good care of you, and sooth you, and keep you in perfect peace. If you aren't pleased with her, I'm afraid we haven't any more daughters. My goodness two is plenty'. Despite the unusual circumstances of their marriage, Ann and Adrian would still visit Margaret, her new husband, Francis, and son Telfer.

Adrian continued his work as an art critic, and also as a painter. Ann acted as his life model, posing nude for his paintings. In 1948 their son Philip was born, and three years later, in 1951, Ann and Adrian had a daughter, Ariadne. Sadly, she was diagnosed with autism, and was moved to a care home in her late teens.

By 1957 Philip was showing some interest in art, so Ann took him to Well Walk Pottery in Hampstead for lessons. She was immediately hooked on ceramics, declaring, 'I never got over the magic of it'.

Ann set about making her own potter's wheel, adapting a weighted car wheel as the flywheel, and she bought her first kiln five years later in 1962. Ten years later, Ann started to have sales of her ceramic work each Christmas at her home in Hampstead.

Ann's work was innovative. She wasn't tied down by accepted techniques, but was experimental, going against the conventions of the twentieth century pottery movement and working in a more sculptural way. She improvised her own tools and techniques, using mainly earthenware clay, and worked out how to produce new colours herself. She said, 'You had to keep guessing, you had to try it out!'

Ann felt that she had more in common with contemporary painters than potters. Her works were inspired by nature. Explaining why she rarely depicted the human form, commenting, 'I don't draw well enough'. John Golding, the painter, said of Ann: 'She is a purely instinctive artist. She pots as others might sing or hum to themselves, or as we all quite simply breathe'.

In 1966, at the age of 44, Ann started to learn Modern Greek. Inspired by the Ancient World and Mediterranean pottery, as well as *The Procession of the Trojan Horse into Troy* (1760) by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo at the National Gallery, she created ceramic tiles featuring Greek scenes, Greek sailing ships, fish, and horses. She went on to create a series of life-size crocodiles, which were illuminated from inside, and more than eighty mirrors decorated with birds, such as peacocks and swallows. She even made a strip cartoon of two doves for stair risers in her house. Ann also made decorative tableware, with one plate measuring three quarters of a metre by half a metre. She purchased a new larger kiln in 1966, which enabled her to produce such large works.

York Art Gallery owns four of Ann Stokes' ceramic pieces – [*The White Wall Mounted Swan, The Trigger Fish Serving Platter, the Globe Fish, and the Swan Looking Glass.*](#)

They are eye-catching, bold, humorous and charming. The swan has come from the artist's own collection. It is made from several pieces of clay which were moulded into shape and joined together. Its head and

throat are tubular and hollow. The wings have holes in them giving an abstract feel, whilst the neck gives a feeling of movement.



Anne Stokes, *White Wall Mounted Swan*

©The Estate of Ann Stokes/York Museums Trust

Adrian sadly died from a brain tumour in 1972. He had been hugely influential in Ann's work, sharing with her his love of art and his preference for the colours blue and green. However, after his death she found a sense of freedom and detachment and new opportunities to progress her artistic development. She was aided in this by Philip, who started promoting his mother's work.

Four years after the death of Adrian, Ann married the Orwell Scholar Ian Angus, who was Chief Librarian at King's College, London. They travelled abroad together, living part of the year in Tuscany, where she set up a studio.

In 1985, Ann showed her work at the Hayward Annual. This was the first and only time that a potter has been shown at the Hayward Gallery in London. From 1995, her work was represented and regularly shown at the

Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London. Ann's first solo show there was held in 1998, which delighted her. She was thrilled that her opportunity had come at last, '.... even if I had to wait for my 76th birthday!'. For this exhibition, as a promotional card for her gallery, Ann chose an early photo of herself hanging upside-down in a tree. She continued exhibiting at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery until 2004.

Ann Stokes liked to tell of a meeting she had with Bernard Leach in the 1960s. He asked Ann what she did, and she replied loud and clear, as she thought him a little deaf, 'I pot, I am a potter'. There was a shocked silence, and she added, blushing, 'That is, I mean to be a potter'. She recalled that after that all went well.

Ann's enthusiasm, experimentation, and determination made her an original and innovative ceramicist. She was indeed 'a potter', who incorporated sculptural and painterly techniques to create her own unique style.

© Hannah Savage

September 2020

Friends of York Art Gallery Research Partnership Scholar Genevieve Stegner-Freitag reflects on the year and her upcoming plans.

A PARTNERSHIP IN THE AGE OF COVID 19

My experience this past year has been, as for everyone, full of unexpected twists and turns. Despite the biggest elephant in the room, COVID-19, I am immensely grateful for my time at the University of York and as the M.A. Studentship Scholar sponsored by the Friends. The reasons for the international recognition of the University of York's History of Art Department and York Art Gallery (YAG) are clear: I have had countless opportunities to learn about others' research, explore various intellectual pathways, and collaborate with others. As I prepare to walk away from this academic year, I leave with a more acute understanding of art historical methodologies and late Georgian-early Victorian art. When I walked into this year, I had experienced opportunities only at large arts and heritage institutions, but my time working at the YAG exposed me to the inner workings of a gallery at a smaller scale. The intricacies of art storage and management, of curating exhibitions and their logistics, and connecting to visitors personally and intellectually is knowledge borne out of experience, with which the Friends and YAG provided me.

During this year, I was privileged to create an online exhibition, 'Views of York: Exploring York through the York Art Gallery Evelyn Collection'. Under the supervision of Beatrice Bertram, the Senior Curator, I helped with the curation of 'Views of York and Yorkshire', which opened in the Madsen Galleries after COVID-19 lockdown. These exhibitions deepened my knowledge of local history, which was the fundamental reason I chose my 'Views' project in September 2019. I had never before had curatorial opportunities; working with Dr Bertram allowed me to understand the process of selecting and organizing works of art across different media and subject matter into a cohesive exhibit. I am thankful to the Friends for granting me the partnership to develop the virtual 'Views' exhibition, but also for allowing me to work closely with the curatorial staff at YAG.

'Views of York' began as a project in which I explore generic responses to the City produced between 1795 and 1825. The exhibition initially centred around the economic crises of the late Georgian period and its

effect on artistic depictions of York. A comparison between late Georgian hardship to the potential difficulties from Brexit was also to be included. What did J. Nethercliff's lithograph *Petergate, with Part of York Minster* (after Mrs Heming's 1810 engraving) subtly reveal about the hardships of the period (waves of unemployment and heightened economic inequality)? How did the Picturesque prints visually dissuade the viewer from recognizing the financial difficulties of the period? These were questions that featured in my initial research. The emergence of COVID-19 and lockdown measures, however, gave me something else to consider. It was not just local audiences who enjoyed artworks that became the Evelyn Collection: these works were enjoyed by people who did not have access to the Minster or views of York. During lockdown, I found myself looking at these works, thinking about the Minster – what it was like to see it for the first time, what it represents to the city, and how the Evelyn Collection works mediated my experience when I could not freely enter the city centre. This revelation led me down another path of research which complemented my work on the economic difficulties of the early nineteenth century. It's not often that you can see history unfolding in front of your eyes, and even less often that it coincides with an ongoing art-history project.

In early September, 'Views of York' launched in partnership with the University of York, York Art Gallery and Friends of York Art Gallery, and marks the end of my partnership. With a bit of luck, however, I hope to call York home again next Autumn as a PhD student in the University of York's History of Art Department. Between December and September, I will return to my post at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., as an archivist in the Botany Department. With all the 'surprises' that 2020 has offered, I found that the climate gave me new avenues to explore when considering the Evelyn Collection and endeared me closer to York.

© **Genevieve Stegner-Freitag**

September 2020



Petergate, with part of York Minster, J. Netherclift, after Mrs Heming, 1850-90 (original 1800-1820), coloured lithograph: © York Museums Trust.

We end this e-Bulletin with a thought-provoking contribution from someone who was a former Chair of FYAG, who formed links between the Friends and the University of York History of Art Department, from which he graduated, forming a student society before he did so. John Staples has also hosted the annual meeting of the British Association of Friends of Museums at York.

TO HANG OR NOT TO HANG

Museum and art gallery curators will have many issues facing them when next they open their doors fully to the public after lockdown.

What do the public want to see? Something that's pleasing to the eye? There are only so many Monet or Hockney shows you can put on, although both artists were prolific in their output.

Who can be persuaded to finance an exhibition? The outcome of B.P.'s sponsorship at the National Portrait Gallery was not, as they must have hoped, to enhance their reputation but to spotlight their operations, which drew criticism from the environmental lobby against the use of fossil fuels. Where else to look for funding? Government, local or central, will have more pressing priorities. And when it comes to finance, how in these straitened times can curators add to their collections? The Art Fund is a valuable source and so are other charities, but the prices that works of art can demand and get from private buyers exceed the sums our public curators can muster.

How to respond to calls for the return of objects to their countries of origin when they have been acquired in dubious circumstances? The British Museum has repatriated works of aboriginal art to Australia, but persistent demands from Greece for the return of the Parthenon Marbles have been refused. So the principle has been accepted, but each case has to be decided on its merits - and how are those merits to be assessed? The Arts Council is looking to set out criteria, but has not yet done so.

The critics upon whom the curator depends for publicity require a stimulating experience about which to write. In providing that experience may not influential groups be offended? The 'Sensation' show at the Royal Academy attracted large crowds but the portrait of Myra Hindley, child murderer, had to be withdrawn: a decision made not on aesthetic grounds

but for ethical reasons. The Saatchi Gallery covered some of its exhibits after religious groups were offended.

Should galleries look again at their collections and withdraw those images that seem to us now to be inappropriate? The Walker Gallery in Liverpool temporarily took down Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs*, a painting popular with visitors but to other eyes now too close to child pornography. Statues have been taken down from public display to show our dismay at the link between the subject of the statue and slavery. The one of Edward Colston in Bristol has been moved to a local museum, giving the curator a security headache. Again, these were decisions made on moral grounds not aesthetic ones. Is the curator qualified to make such judgments or does he or she take the line of least resistance?

Some curators have become hugely influential. Niall McGregor at the British Museum made a name for himself through his articulate and straightforward presentations to the media on objects in the collection. It is not part of the training of curators to be at ease in front of the camera, but McGregor's success sets an expectation on others. Nicholas Serota at the Tate has turned significant spaces in both Tate Britain and Tate Modern into studios for displaying contemporary art. The Turbine Hall draws large crowds, especially of foreign tourists. The impact has been to turn on its head the traditional idea that museums and galleries are of the past; a collection of what in former times had been revered. For the curator it brings in an added stakeholder: you don't have to ask Picasso how he wants his work hung, but you do have to consult Anish Kapoor.

The character and moral behavior of contemporary artists will come under scrutiny more than those of the past. Two American artists, Chuck Close and Thomas Roma, who were to be given major exhibitions by the National Gallery in Washington DC, were told they had been cancelled owing to allegations made against them of sexual harassment. There are a number of well-regarded artists of the past whose work might be withdrawn if their personal behaviour was to be a criterion. Indeed, the walls of many galleries would be bare.

In a democracy there is no central authority to which the curator can turn to seek guidance or instructions: we have no requirement to place on the gallery walls only images conforming to 'social realism', or to remove images that might be described as 'degenerate art'. But that does not mean the curator is free to choose to display art for reasons that make sense to him or her. There are vociferous voices pressuring curators to act on the basis of factors quite other than the quality or artistic interest of

a work: the offence it may cause even to people who never enter a gallery; the nefarious behaviour of the artist; or concern that the subject of the art or the sponsor of the show may arouse controversy.

These constraints on the work of the curator are not all new and reflect the world we live in, where diverse views are expressed. Social and ethical considerations are entering the gallery and museum. But that is as it should be. Public art is not a privileged world shut off from real life, and curators need to engage in these debates not to give way but to explain their decisions. There will be times when they lose the argument, but that is better than maintaining an icy silence. I admire the many curators who struggle with these issues and do seem to be picking their way through this minefield with great sensitivity and good judgement. McGregor and Serota offer excellent role models, and I am sure their successors will be as able and adroit as they need to be to avoid falling into the trap of total appeasement.

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