

*Visual Virtuosity—
Contemporary Quadratura Painting:*

An Allegory of a Portrait

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Wayne Brookes

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Introduction

This research project generates a body of work, which represents an investigation into the physical, allegorical and historical narratives of Quadratura Painting in terms of motif, genre and technical prowess. Specifically, it attempts to address the evolution of issues associated with the visual virtuosity of objects within a pictorial space and its affiliation with contemporary Realist painting. It examines the physical apotheosis of ornament and attempts to establish a comparative relationship between painting, object and illusionistic space. While touching on the precedent of Hyper-realism and the Neo-Baroque, it addresses the integrity of obsession and the indolent fortitude of an abandoned schema gone ballistic. This project also attempts to rein in the concept of disembodiment as self-portraiture and the re-emergence of the image as an ocular gush, specifically the "The Wow Factor".

This paper has a direct correlation to the body of work. It is an instruction kit that expurgates the vortex of peripheral issues that have plagued this project from its inception and gives it some order of sequence. While the project began as an historical anecdote of portraiture, the final images of the lavish interior of The Napoleon III apartments in The Louvre, are a translation of this experience and have become a distillation of self-image. The paintings are constructed as hybrids of the original source and emerge as physical evidence of subjective witness. They are an examination of new breath in the old carcass of portraiture and much like the infamous Professor Gunther von Hagens with his "*Körperwelten*"¹ cadaver carnival; the works are that of a plastic surgeon. They balance between a reconstruction of a Baroque archetype with a Neo-Classicist

¹ "*Körperwelten*", or "*Body Worlds*" was an exhibition of human and animal bodies that were plastinated for display by Gunther von Hagens' patented process, (exhibition) London, 2002.

emblematic makeover and the showgirl closet of Liberace. All the images generated within this project are direct cosmetic appliances derived from endless self-examination and exist because of a prolonged reverence for the history of painting and the extant experience of these images.

Much has been made of the lingering demise of painting. Originally this fear was initiated in the Nineteenth century by the onslaught of photography. Indeed Daguerre's belief that his invention would 'give a new impulse to the arts'² was quickly followed by Turner's resolve that, "This is the end of Art"³. It is often referred to, as a relic with more recent criticism suggesting that painting is an anachronism, failing the brief of 'a new art for a new century'. While this sounds like a familiar echo, it has been the manifesto of artists and critics who believe in vapour, spent objects or the breathless heights of digital decoupage. While this emerges as "cutting edge", a more comforting biopsy appears to exist between factions of taste who recognise the absurdity of assigning mortality to physical disciplines. In this respect nothing is actually dead, it's merely ignored. The quintessence of practise must be visual or sensory sensation, authorship, the signature and the physical participation of the conjurer. If anything has been absorbed from post-modernist ethos, it is the belief that the past will become future again in a loaded Mannerist fragment that turns revolution a full circle and empowers the new exemplar with profundity. The Zeitgeist suggests that, for the moment, painting is back with renewed Realist vigour, but its genealogy contains new chromosomal material. It has had to become a hybrid because of decades of disrespect.

Beneath all of this is the fundamental suggestion that painting is alchemy with its very essence being the pure inscription of the artist's gesture, will and body. In this respect, the act of translating any reality, be it truth or invention through the transmogrified body of paint establishes a hypostasis synopsis; life does exist in the frozen skin. The rationale of ego and self is perpetually linked to the outcome of this experience. The very substance of paint, then, becomes a pool of reflection, allowing the painter to drag out possibly submerged issues about themselves and record them within the material. The painter is the painting, and that is the allegory of painting. Self-portraiture, then, is a perpetual cycle and perhaps, all painting is self-portraiture.

The work in this project addresses the specifics of genre and it is therefore critical to audit its context within the developmental factions of European and American painting. In order to begin an examination of a contemporary status for authoritative illusionists, it is essential to be immersed within the Italian Quadraturisti⁴, with it's paraphrase of the French trompe l'oeil; the agony of visual truth as articulated by the Flemish School and

² Linda Chase, essay "The Not-so-innocent Eye: Photorealism in context. *Photorealism at the Millennium*", Louis K. Meisel (Ed), Harry N. Abrams Inc, New York, 2002.

³ *ibid*, page 11.

⁴ The Quadraturisti were illusionistic wall and ceiling painters who specialised in architectural and perspective schemes. It is derived from 'Quadra', meaning picture and 'Turisti', meaning tourist.

its convoluted trajectory within American Realism. There is also a need to address the relationship between wall and ceiling painting, 'the big picture'⁵ and the anthropological context of ornament. In this way, I believe I may conciliate my own position within the schema of things.

Central Argument

The development of the project accentuates the comprehensive catharsis that this proposal initiated. It identifies the extensive historic module of the work and the extent to which this component was intensified by overseas research. Prior to this was a professional practice that was immersed in figurative religious iconography and its consequence within art history. International exposure was supposed to consolidate this but instead forced me to confront more substantial issues about myself. The poignant metaphor of "The Fat Man in History" was primarily a novel method of tagging the process of projecting my persona as a template onto the cultural icons of the experience. It rebounded with such critical veracity that it compelled me to eliminate the figure. The removal, however, did not espouse complete denial; rather it facilitated a more prudent form of self-appraisal. The crucial constituent of the entire project has been the grafting of self-image onto an external artifice. Persona had become an ornament or pendant on an artificial, physical device. The substitution of visage with Judith and Salome; the unconscious projection of my hands on the model in Paris; my photographic witness of international art idols; the anthology of my father and the final construction of a splendid chamber are all vessels of the same pathogen.

The epitome of this cathartic hone was the fabrication of four walls gleaned from an extensive catalogue of images amassed during two separate excursions to the Louvre in Paris. While the first encounter contributed to the process of nemesis and subsequent liberation, (as discussed within the Development of the Project), the second audience was an immaculate reconnaissance. It enabled a fine-tuning of the forensic collection. The "Paradise" series is an anthology of memoirs. Each painting was assembled from the scattering of a ledger that represented both a photographic expurgation of the site and the counterfeit inclusion of material referenced from design catalogues, circa 1850. This exercise amounted to a 'dusting for fingerprints' analogy because the anatomical draft was teased from this disseminated stockpile. Each ornamental fragment became a cell within the physique of the painting and bound the total surface together. This network is much like a synapse relationship, with each organism triggering its associate in order to initiate an outcome. The total surface is a synthesis of this

⁵ This is merely a term used to describe large scale, installed works rather than direct frescoes.

inter-relationship and the visual language of art history is the tissue which maintains its suspension. In this way, the conglomerate shell of the surface map becomes the skin of the painting's face. That face is unquestionably the face of the author.

Enmeshed in this proposition of artifice was the milieu of plastic. The effect of manipulating the real induces the conception of the artificial. The very material of the paintings in this project was codified by the synthetic. Acrylic paint was the plastic means by which these images came into existence. Their identity was determined by the nature of this material and the method of their construction gives rise to a kindred analogy of either plastic surgery or the purely cosmetic. Plastic, by definition, is considered to be synonymous with substitution and, logically a device of illusion. This process was clearly not vivisection, rather it has associations with the relatively recent patent of plastination⁶, whereby organic material is leached from the cadaver and symbiotically fused within a polymer resin. This definitive method of embalming engenders both the suspension and mimicry of truth. It is the visible evidence of both the emulsive surface of the photograph and the anticipated shield of photorealism. This manipulation of truth is as much a process as it is an outcome and is central to the "*Paradise*" series of paintings. The substance of their manufacture even impersonates the traditional nuance of oil paint.

As the 'conquest of truth' has had exhaustive variables throughout the centuries immediate to Modernism⁷, issues pertaining to enclosed space are as affixed to authenticity as they are to device. Absolute truth was possibly unobtainable without some machination and what we refer to as Naturalism was possibly expressed as a homogenised account of the intention. Truth in this respect may have been objective, but was probably far too repulsive to be immediately tolerated, and in this respect, perhaps the Quadraturisti offered some redemption, some filter, by promising an alternate reality. Its precedent was scale, because it adorned physical space within the patron's quarters comparable to human dimensions and this exercise was the antithesis of interior painters. Irrespective of their masterful achievements, intrinsic maestros such Pieter Saenredam and Jan Vermeer virtually only practised the intimate. While this may well have been a practical restriction, as suggested by Dàvid Hockney⁸, the images can never dominate you beyond their diagrammatic delicacy. These are the conspicuous foundations for the work within my project and directly relate to my desire to replicate the Napoleonic Suite's Grand Salon (*Fig. 1*). Yet despite the purity of the intention, the construction of these works catapulted them into some other purgatory in an arc away from truth, to that of a facsimile of reality. Here substitution was the law and every conceivable source would facilitate their completion. Each painting was a construct that may have had its origins in photographic documentation,

⁶This was the process used by Professor Gunter Von Hagens to develop the "*Body Worlds*" exhibition.

⁷With Photography's chemical qualification of reality, as previously reflected by devices using mirrors or lenses, 19th Century painters were liberated by alternative rationales for their craft.

⁸In David Hockney's "*Secret Knowledge*", Thames and Hudson, London, 2000, he suggests that there was a direct relationship between the scale of Flemish painting and the size of the reflected image, which was around 30 cms. square.



Fig. 1, Napoleon III Grand Salon, The Louvre, Paris.

but by completion, had accumulated all the manners of prosthetic appliances. In many respects, the marquetry or mosaic method of constructing these works, possibly challenges the traditional conventions of painting.

This affirmation of surface immediately suggests some obligation to discuss the relationship between photography and painting. Whereas the properties of the work within the project belie the tradition of the painting with their cold, plastic face and minimum depth of field, they need to be recognised as images derived from photographs rather than emulating them. The photographic process must be seen as a point of collection of information. They are topographic notations enabling the image's constituent parts to be mapped. As each work is an assemblage from a multitude of images they become hybridised. The paradox, however, is that the tonal key of the photograph is accepted as fact, so the colour varies from painting to painting as determined by exposure times. The hybrid becomes even more assured as areas of ornament are substituted because of inherent lack of detail. The photograph is the evidence of reality and instructs the process of illusion.

The Pathology of History

Chapter 1: Prologue:

This paper traces the evolution of authenticity and its association with spectacle. It identifies the issue of the 'maestro' by examining historic conquests of reality and its alliance with illusionary painting, specifically, *Quadratura*. It explores the possibility of grounding this genre within a current vernacular and proposes that the visual language incumbent within the physical attributes of this painting style may serve as a definitive metaphor for self-portraiture as catharsis.

The oeuvre of Realism is massive. Fundamentally, it references an articulation of life outside of Abstraction. For the purpose of discussion, Realism has to be fragmented into arenas of context, primarily to ascertain the purpose of the project within such broad parameters. There are, however, enough crucial connections within specific genres to warrant an investigation into the historic development of Illusionism within both European and American painting without necessarily dealing with the intense scrutiny of the amenities of *trompe-l'oeil*. (Although, there is an ephemeral connection with nineteenth century American *trompe-l'oeil* through the work of William Michael Harnett and John Frederick Peto because of their penchant for the nostalgic.) For the purpose of demarcation, I have defined *trompe-l'oeil* as a device which refers to the manner of illusionary painting. In this respect, a further differentiation was required as a means of identifying parallels within the content of the work. The consequence of this has been the conscious decision to investigate some connective pathways while only transiently observing others. Without such a bracketing of issues, the project would have out-grown the expediential.

In many respects, "*The Gates to Paradise*" series of paintings have affiliations through content with the Dutch interior painters (c1620-90). But given that the Dutch were reluctant to completely eliminate the interactive notion of 'figure' and 'place', and the consequential scale of these works, then the relevance becomes fleeting or inconsequential. I recall struggling with this dilemma at the Pieter Saenredam exhibition (*Fig. 2*) at the John Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2002⁹ and then a month later in front of Pieter de Hooch's "*Mother*" (1659-60) and Emanuel de Witte's "*Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam*" (1680) at the Gemaldergalerie in Berlin. I verified from those encounters that my work wasn't about interior painting all, instead it appeared to pertain to a more intensely symbolic core. The quandary, however, occurred when dealing with contemporary painters such as Michael Zavros¹⁰ or Andrew

⁹ "*The Sacred Spaces of Pieter Saenredam*", John Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, April—July, 2002.

¹⁰ On completion of his residency in Milan, Zavros produced a body of work in 2002 based on Baroque interiors.

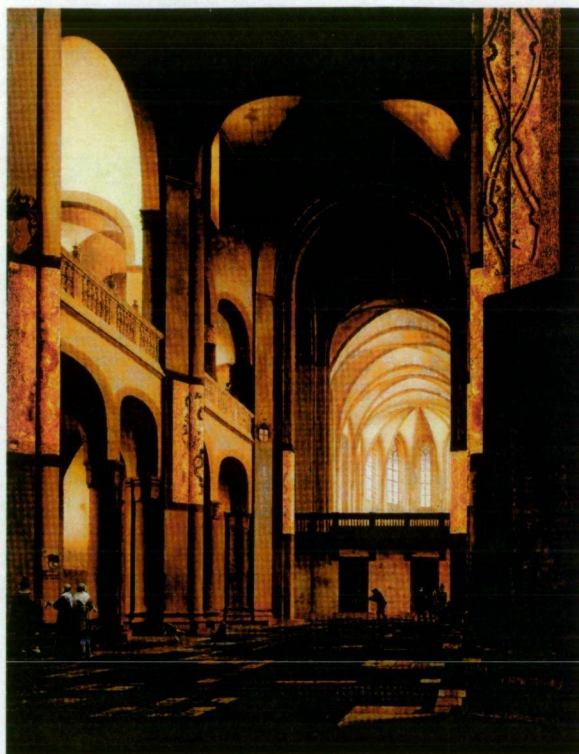


Fig. 2, Pieter Saenredam, *The Nave and the Choir of the Mariakerk in Utrecht, seen to the east*, 1641, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Grassie, (*Fig. 3*). Their feasts of detail and explorations of the nourishing ornament of space comply with older traditions, but their purpose ordains them with the conceptually more sophisticated convulsion of "paintings within painting"¹¹. They deal with the spectacle of opulent interiors within the museum and consequentially align themselves within the

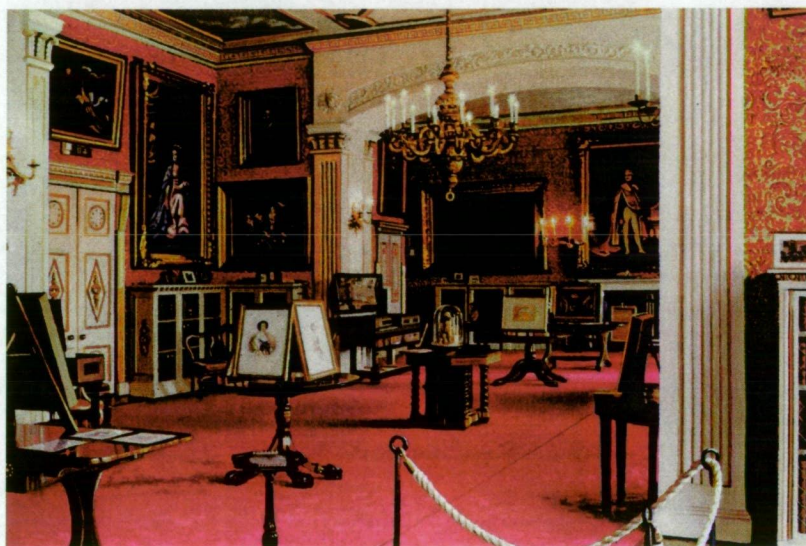


Fig. 3, Andrew Grassie, *Tabley (house)*, 2000.

¹¹ Grassie re-installs the completed work within the original referenced space.

abstract considerations of my work. But, as with the Flemish neurosis for detail, the comparative relationship between their images of heightened sensitivity and my constructions of The Grand Salon of the Napoleonic III Suite are grounded merely by the intensity of surface enrichment. It was also within the Northern Schools that ornament developed a secular language by intensifying aspects of the visible world¹². Again, the relationship between this historic account and the "Paradise" series is merely through association of the stylistic motive.

The connection within an historical context is the work's alliance with Quadrature painting, the 'big picture', and Photorealism. The Quadratura emblem is a means by which the work can be sanctioned or qualified within a genre. It refers specifically to installed images of architectural or illusionary schemas and the discussion of an historic sequence helps to identify both its stature within the evolution of painting and its consequence within contemporary practice. Inherent in this, as well, has been the development of the temper of 'visual truth' as an issue and the essential desire to inspire a sense of awe in terms of spectacle. For the sake of argument, it was necessary to identify a painter whose ambition qualified this. Caravaggio is woven into the text as an example of a practitioner whose passion sanctified the crux of fact, but also possibly exaggerated its outcome by enlisting the use of facsimile through visual mechanism. My work, therefore, occupies a transient space alongside truth and the illusionary edifices of Quadrature painting because of their scale and physical content. They ultimately transcend complete compliance with this purpose, however, because of their more astute relationship to the photograph. There is a considerable dichotomy between the representational portal espoused in the Quadrature contrivance and the compacted seal of the emulsive veneer, irrespective of what truth it actually captures.

The European exemplars, then, serve as a reminder of both the filament technicalities of Realist painting and, by means of the 'big picture', how scale served to reinforce the ocular might of painting in the era before technology. The grand cinematic vista provided the audience with a myriad of psychological, physical and spiritual implications. It exemplified the spectral might of divinity by reinforcing the meagreness of individuality; it acknowledged the struggle and the heroics of historical triumph and inspired personal conjecture through didactic narratives. Scale initiates a physical confrontation and speculates beyond the legacy of painting as a decorative embellishment on a greater surface. The 'big picture' completely dominates the attention with its panoramic chronicle. The irony of the work within this project is that they actually espouse a greater sense of vastness than is their physical property. Rationality recognises that they are proportionally only fifty percent of the actual scale, and in that respect, they are virtually miniatures.

¹² The articulation of the "real world" exemplified their understanding of the tangible or observable rather than the miraculous. This inevitably generated a passion and market for allegories associated with the beauty of simple objects that existed within a secular realm.

The American connection accentuates painting as an agency for humility. This may seem peculiar, given America's Post Modern super-ego, but the search for an identity within the fabric of painting, was initially a very humble, conservative, if not introspective experience. American Realism transcended the epoch of the gigantic and majestic, by rationalising scale and championing the courageous introversion of its post-Pilgrim stock. In order to understand the psyche that initiated the pure plastic gesture of Photorealism required examination of this ground swell of a national identity. The reflective bounce of banal America that fuels Photorealist content clarifies this identity, and as such, operates within the guise of portraiture. These culturally specific images are abbreviations that serve to inform and connect us with an alternate consciousness. They, therefore preside over an audience like a substitute moniker of state. This may appear to be a convoluted tangent, but in terms of the incessant scheme of ornament, object and disembodiment as propositions in portraiture, these works have significant premise within the project. Whereas the historic and emblematic consequences of a European mantle afforded the "Paradise" series content and context, the American model accounts for their physical properties of surface.

Chapter 2: The Paths of Righteousness - European Illusionism

Painting has always had the power to inspire veneration. Its very existence was initiated by the compulsion to find a language for the unenlightened. Knowledge was obtained through direct visual induction, loaded from a sweet menagerie of the ordained symbols of heroes, gods, Saints, sinners and Satan. In the epoch of innocence painting was enlightenment, painting was lore. Between artifice and art, the bridging spectacle of illusion initiated a total visual language grounded in scriptural splendour. The plaster panoramas of piety convinced the heretics that the sacred stories were records of witness and authentication. This conviction was pure and persuasive; an evolution of kind that advanced the origins of spectacle from traced silhouetted memory into the shadows¹³ of the Testaments. This spectral space offered painting as truth. But truth has many faces and the countenance of this may be measured in the mathematical methodology of those early initiatives of the Quadraturisti.

The connection between architectural space and the evocation of the Scriptures appears to be connected with the metaphor of the Church as a physical structure within Christianity and therefore biblical tales began to be represented as parables dwelling within an enclosed space. Critical to an examination of Quadratura is an understanding of the relationship between truth and a convincing artifice. While perspective was to provide the artist with the nomenclature for their ambition, Quadrature painting initially developed in the late Antique period as interior decoration with

¹³ Pliny The Elder (23-79AD), in his "*History of Nature*", tells the story of the 'invention of drawing' as a shadow tracing on the wall by a Corinthian maiden of her lover as a memento before his departure to war.

perhaps the most sumptuous example of these ancient beginnings being the Golden House, built for Nero between 64 and 68 AD. It reached its full maturity within the hangover of the Proto-Baroque with triumphant ceiling makeovers in the late sixteenth century.

There is a legend that proposes that while Giotto was still apprenticed to Cimabue in Florence in the late thirteenth century, he painted a fly on the nose of a portrait. The deception was so real that his master attempted to brush the insect away. While this deliberate trickery was not a specific feature of his enterprise, Giotto's vision of God's fingerprint on the natural world liberated the Fourteenth century from the medieval manacle of illuminated ornament and served to induct painting into the realm of mathematical collaboration. He confirms a movement towards an increasing reliance on a perspectival system. The fresco had always been a flat appliance, which was its very nature, but Giotto begins to construct a space that could serve considerably different narrative contexts. Within "*Faith*" (1302-05) (*Fig. 4*), a detail from the Cappella dell'Arena fresco in Padua, Giotto toys with the illusion of convincing the spectator that this is not a two-dimensional figure; instead it occupies its ground with persuasive solidity. The venture here, however, was to propose a figure that implies the fundamentals of a statue but hovers in some transient moment, suspended within the fresco. It's a perfect dichotomy of substance contra to suggestion with pigmented plaster on the 'plane' emulating a three-dimensional marble figure.

These were little steps, however, in comparison to Filippo Brunelleschi's roaring invention of linear perspective¹⁴. Now an artist's template was determined by their capacity to demonstrate the strict rules of optic engagement. The birth of Quadrature painting was borne of a furious desire to encase spiritual truth within a projected formula. Masaccio's



Fig. 4, Giotto, Faith, Cappella dell'Arena, Padua.

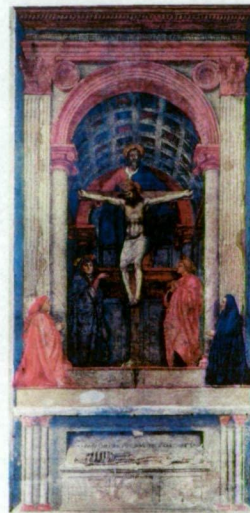


Fig. 5, Masaccio, Holy Trinity Sta. Maria Novella, Florence.

¹⁴ Martin Kemp in "*The Science of Art*", Yale University Press, New Haven, Massachusetts, 1990, suggests that Brunelleschi was associated with linear perspective from around 1413.

"The Holy Trinity" (c1425-8) in Sta. Maria Novella in Florence (Fig. 5) represents the most galvanised evocation of a desire to create space within a space. Here device could dominate with its pure illusionary baiting. It represents a forbiddingly rugged application of the intellectual power of perspective. He differentiates between the spiritual plane and the mortal realm, virtually a Fifteenth century portal between 'us and them'. The first Stargate perhaps, but essentially the crucial pith of Quadraturista painting! Basilicas became still-life cinemas where perspective collapsed the tradition of marking the kill on the walls. Here a martyred, virtuous life, ensconced in projected geometry, provided the visual irony of watching 'the great indoors', indoors. Spectacle was an unquestionable endowment and from it came a contrivance of truth. You could stand before the grand illusion and see nothing of the world behind you but everything that was potentially alluring in that orbit beyond you. The Quadraturista was an entry into the Twilight Zone.

But this was hardly *trompe-l'oeil*. As The Kingdom of Heaven had no referential post-cards, there cannot be a reality check. Reality was an ornamental issue and the personal intimacy of space and object loaded the Flemish brush with ego. Here the ideal of being convincing, visually, in terms of surface replication became the purpose of painting. *Trompe-l'oeil* was the heightened summit of virtuoso rendering. The device of pattern nourished this trickery. Undulating a pattern on a surface could intensify weight and the illusion of form. Nature was pattern and the use of it to embellish a surface saturated the paintings with the grammar of the real world. Ornamental style had been significantly different between Northern and Southern Europe from around the Fourth century onwards¹⁵. From the collision of the decorative and the harmonious that was the International Gothic style came a reluctance to rationalise ornament. This reluctance was centred north of the Alps. Whereas ornament was largely delegated to the exterior world¹⁶ in the Italian Renaissance, Flemish painters embraced the language of accessory and intensified their vision of the world with it. Secular rhetoric appeared to be missing¹⁷ before the Renaissance. It was temporarily restrained by its immersion in the doctrines of faith. The Catholic vision was made militant by the mesmerising delusion of an ethereal paradise. The secular voice was amplified by the pensive truth of the mirror. It was a retentive obsession with objects and the shift from the illusory portal to true reflections of the material world that defined future aspirations for painters in Fifteenth century Flanders.

The Flemish miracle workers endlessly probed life, rummaging through the filaments of nature solving secrets of surface. While the Italians struggled with gesture, physical beauty, scale and harmonious composition, Flanders solved the conundrum of detail. Their world was

¹⁵ Mediterranean ornamentation was largely based on the Roman motif, characterised by the acanthus leaf; North of the Alps was characterised by a zoomorphic style derived from Celtic exemplars which impacted on medieval book illumination and is prevalent in the later International Gothic style.

¹⁶ This is a generalisation, but it refers to the simplified Quattrocento style where ornament from nature, be it interior decoration or architectural motif. Apart from the agitated style of Botticelli or Lippi, pattern became more of a preoccupation with Flemish painters.

¹⁷ This is a generalisation but it is evident in the use of poetry, literature and mythology.

hardly fresco ballet¹⁸, each hair, each jewel, each stitch of embroidery was gracefully re-animated under veils of oil. Here truth had a pseudonym within the gossamer constituents of detail and the only victim was the contrivance of humanity as a porcelain mannequin. If you can ignore some of the frozen mannequins in Rogier van der Weyden, then the remaining aggregate of surface elicits the 'gush'. Here technical prowess consumes all rationality. The Italians had referenced the Scriptures within intensified scrutiny in order to extract a more convincing rationale of the event. While centuries of The Nativity had elicited the belief that the Infant was born in a barn, Van der Weyden invites the stock to participate in 'love among the ruins'. In the "*St Columbia Altarpiece*", (Fig. 6) (1455, Alte Pinakothek, Munich), he follows a convention by relocating the proud parents within architectural rubble. In terms of shelter it's hardly sufficient, as they no longer remain indoors. Remarkably, at the opposite end of his mortal cycle, in the centre panel of the "*Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*", (1445-50, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp), Christ gets to hang out indoors. As a poignant metaphor of the church as the spiritual enclosure, the Calvary episode is poised to become a ritualistic foundation of Christianity within the vaulting muscle of a Gothic Cathedral. Symbolically the priest turns his back and instead worships an effigy of the Virgin.

The Sixteenth century edict of painting was to either conjure a reflective, facsimilised narrative of the natural world by emulating the actual, or the harmonising of its ruggedness by idealising it. Before the pious orb was

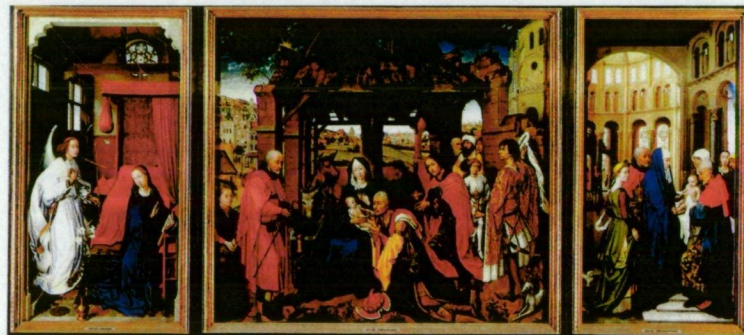


Fig. 6, Rogier Van der Weyden, *The St. Columbia Altarpiece*, Antwerp.

rent asunder by the Reformation, painting was clearly subservient to Papal principle and discipline. Quadratura appears in abundance during this quest for harmony and innovation. Beginning with Giovanni Bellini's "*Madonna with Saints*" altar-piece (1509, Church of San Zacaria in Venice) and concluding with Pietro Pesenti and The Alberti Brothers non-figurative architectural embellishment on the walls of the Palazzo Ducale, Venice, in 1590, the extreme boundaries of this century can be tracked. Bellini's perspectival mastery threatens the divine moment, but it is arrested by both the virtuous resonance of the occasion and the understated

¹⁸ Italian painting, while being aware of new advancements was largely preoccupied with the constraints of "telling the story" in an increasingly more dynamic manner.

poignancy of the blessing offered by the upright Christ-child. Pesenti and The Alberti Brothers offer a massive reversal of this balance with a fresco of an uncompromisingly sterile marble edifice. This is a surprisingly stark contrast to their frescoed vault in the Sala Clementina (*Fig. 7*), in the Vatican Palace in Rome (from 1596). They perforate the vault, exposing a unification of architecture, figuration and atmosphere. Accelerating between these two vanishing points clarifies the relationship between



Fig. 7, Pesenti and the Alberti Brothers, San Clementia, Rome.

the Renaissance, the Proto-Baroque and veracity. Decorations within the Palazzi of Rome in the late Sixteenth century reveal a notable Mannerist predilection for frescoes with mock panels of stucco and drapery. One of the finest examples of this is one of the reception rooms within the Palazzo Farnese (*Fig. 8*). This is pure interior decoration, free from any of the hangover profundity of the era. The pure visual luxury of heavy drapes implies a desire for containment rather than a yearning for associations with Scriptures, heroics or mythology.



Fig. 8, Reception Room, Palazzo Farnese, Rome.

Within a parallel universe dogged with truth or heresy, artists had been confronting the logistics of scale. The fracturing of the church elicited a desire to accelerate the inflated grandeur of Catholicism. Fiddling with illusionism for the more modest practitioners had amounted to creating an extra room for those patrons who could only afford a flat wall. It was an optical solution to budget restrictions. Here was an opportunity for virtual indulgence, the Hologram deck for the future Baroque Starfleet. The options amounted to either the on site manifest of the fresco or the installation of the 'Big Picture'. Clear nominations for a late Sixteenth century cinematography award were both Venetians. Tintoretto for his 12 metre "Crucifixion of Christ" (Fig. 9), (1565 in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco); either of the 14 metre high "Last Judgement" (1562) or "Moses receiving the Tables of the Law" (1562, both in the Madonna dell'Orto), or finally, the breathtaking 22 metre "Paradise" (Fig. 10), (1588-92 in the Palazzo Ducale), all in Venice. Veronese offers for contention a 10 metre "Wedding at Cana" (1562-3, The Louvre) or a 13 metre "Feast in the House of Levi" (1573, Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice). Veronese's further benefaction as a Quadraturisti was exemplified by his ceilings within the Doge's Palace in Venice¹⁹ or the wall frescoes in the Villa Barbara (Fig. 11) in Maser²⁰. Ceiling installations were offered two distinctive perspectival operatives at this juncture. The 'quadro riportato' was a straight transferral using conventional perspective, as in the tradition of The Sistine ceiling. The wilder alternative was the 'sotto in su' or the 'up from under' method. This was the quintessential template for the future with its extreme foreshortening and levitating figures.

¹⁹ These included the "Triumph of Venetia", "Neptune and Mars" and "Jupiter Hurling Thunderbolts at the Vices" (Now in the Louvre), executed between 1556 and 1582.

²⁰ These were collaborative works carried out with Veronese's brother and assistant, Benedetto Caliari from 1560-6.



Fig. 9, Tintoretto, *Crucifixion of Christ*, Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice.



Fig. 10, Tintoretto, *Paradise*, Palazzo Ducale, Venice.



Fig. 11, Veronese and Caliari, *Villa Barbara*, Maser.

Prior to the Reformation, truth had several accomplices. Leonardo had searched beneath the skin, Michelangelo within the stone and Titian beyond the surface. The Crisis heightened factionalised passion. This hunger for the hunt became a character reference and competence became a virtue. The highest standard of achievement used as an exemplar by Guilds to define an apprentice's graduation in status was specifically referred to as the 'masterpiece'. By the cusp of the Baroque, those attracted to the principle notion that it was the absolute commandment for an artist to model the earthly kingdom with brutal accuracy also ascribed to the creed that ability equals character. The clearest example of this was the extreme derision that Michelangelo Merisi de Caravaggio felt for any artist who didn't take their vocation of the virtuoso seriously. His rival, Giovanni Baglione was stalked, attacked and publicly defamed²¹ for his meagreness. "By a good man I mean someone who can perform well in his art, and by a good painter a man who can paint well and imitate natural things well.... I do not know anything about there being any painter who praises Giovanni Baglioni as a good painter"²². This passion for truth and genius of execution at its most filthy was an obstinate taunt for the righteous Seventeenth century Jesuits. The soldiers of Jesus were horrified by the ignoble savageness of Caravaggio's modelling pool, but his unconditional fidelity did serve as a murmured manifesto of sorts for the youth of Rome searching for modern invention. Here is a dichotomy of truth as revolution and naturalism as the enemy of painting. Objects and flesh were longer secret codes. Saints, martyrs and disciples passed beyond generic duplications of devout iconography to become recognisable public identities. The lineage of pattern books that had instructed painters was abandoned for the direct observation of actual figures and their individuality. This was ultimately an affront to Catholic taste because visual honesty was considered to be far too raw or bleak for popular consumption and bordered on blasphemy²³.

Artists had romanced a form of visual procreation since the Quattrocento. Those addressing the absolutes of surface integrity flirted with the dichotomy of secular divinity. Their pigmented evocations defined the natural world. As they engaged the tools of an omnipotent God, the flock created a wondrous new flesh, the painted surface. The 'real' could be articulated in a reflected suspension, barely millimetres thick. This was so poignant that an interpreter became necessary, and as idealised vision was challenged by observed truth, so the mirror emerges again but as the interloper between these twilight zones. God was in the detail but there appeared to be extreme reluctance to face this. The portal also returns in disguise, because the clear delineation between ethereal space and mortal territory has compacted. The comfort zone was a filtered process. From theatre to window to mirror, the painting now distilled fear. Much more than the evidence of existence bounced from Jan Van Eyck's

²¹ Peter Robb, "M", Duffy and Snellgove, Potts Ponit, N.S.W., 1998, page 225. There is detail of the offensive poem allegedly written by Caravaggio and Onorio Longhi that resulted in a deposition for libel initiated by Baglione.

²² Catherine Puglisi, "Caravaggio", Phaidon, London, 1998. Page 419, Appendix V; Excerpt from a Caravaggio deposition, 13th September 1603.

²³ Clearly Caravaggio's predilection for 'Truth as his Master' earned him condemnation throughout his life to the extent that, in 1660, Poussin claimed that he 'came into the world to destroy painting'.



Fig. 12, Jan Van Eyck,
Betrothal of the Arnolfini, National Gallery, London.

"*Betrothal of the Arnolfini*" (Fig. 12), (1434, National Gallery, London), Naturalism embarked on articulating the absolute fact. When Caravaggio loitered with the desire to elevate the banal nuances of existence to that of the sacred story, he went beyond the Flemish fetish for surface and decoration by merging the spiritual with the actual. Strangely, that proved to be too much and Caravaggio's truculent story was an influence that was at best meagre. Indeed this titan of truth's life consisted of hounded condemnation by authority and whispered revelation by the few. The irony of Caravaggio's inclination for truth, however, is contained within his definitive contribution to *Quadratura* painting and its resolute distortion of it. His ceiling "*Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto*" (Fig. 13), (1599-

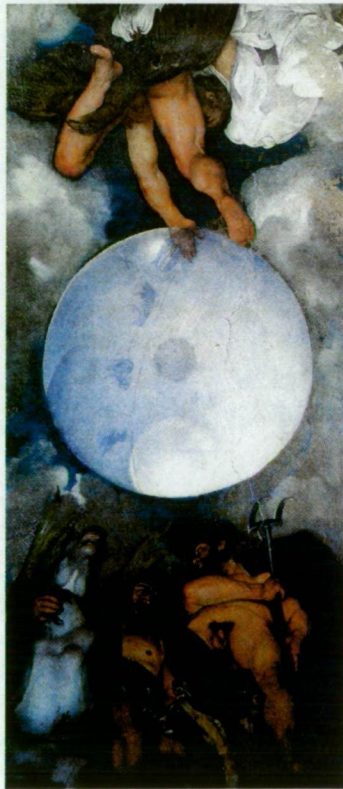


Fig. 13, Caravaggio, *Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto*, Villa Boncompagni-Ludovisi, Rome.



Fig. 14, Romano,
Sun and the Moon, Palazzo del Te Mantua.

1600, Villa Boncompagni-Ludovisi, Rome) articulates the Mannerist model of appropriation rather than the direct logic of referencing a live model. According to Catherine Puglisi²⁴ there is a precedent for suggesting this influence came from Giulio Romano's *"Sun and the Moon"* (Fig. 14), (1527-34, Palazzo del Te, Mantua). Regardless, with the turn of the century, Naturalistic altarpieces would define his genius. Perhaps the artificiality of ceiling painting placed too great a strain on his tenacity for life.

Simulation was Annibale Carracci's business card. He cast a significant shadow on the sensibility of Seventeenth Century Rome. Here was a lightness of touch, a conscious freshness of vision that recalled the grandeur of the High Renaissance, and historically endured a longer shelf-life than any soiled innuendos pertaining to Caravaggio's actual breathing replications of the Scriptures. The blunt articulation of Caravaggio's Lena the whore in *"Death of the Virgin"* (1601-3, Louvre, Paris) or the egocentric fury of his signature in the blood of St John in *"The Beheading of the Baptist"* (Fig. 15), (1608, St. John Museum, La Valetta, Malta) or the paedophilic implications of Cecco in *"Love the Winner"* (1601-2, Capitoline Museum, Rome) were subsumed by smeared anonymity. But the dynamics of contrast are simplified by a direct comparison between a Caravaggio and a Carracci ceiling schema. Carracci's Palazzo Farnese fresco (Fig. 16), is a metaphor for restraint. It simply takes a compartmentalised wall composition and pins it overhead. Despite the breathtaking sincerity of Caravaggio's later pantomime, painting obviously had to transcend the ordinaire, the tangible, and the actual. It had to be



Fig. 15, Caravaggio, *The beheading of the Baptist*, The Cathedral of St. John, Malta.



Fig. 16, Annibale Carracci, Palazzo Farnese, Rome

²⁴ Catherine Puglisi, *"Caravaggio"*, Phaidon, London, 1998, page 112.

bigger than life itself. The simplistic view, then, was of a possibility of choice between two roles, witness or conjecture, and in many respects this lurked beneath the surface of painting conventions for two centuries until Modernism took the Eucharistic goblet and swallowed them both whole. The Caravaggio penchant for truth as a contemporary template easily becomes a fluttering anachronistic anecdote within current practise, but its premise is central to my industry.

The late Baroque's compulsion for witnessing ascension has an early fingerprint with Antonio Correggio's *"Assumption of the Virgin"* (Fig. 17), (c.1530) in the cupola of Parma Cathedral. Here the Madonna is given the Christian moniker of the 'whirling dervish' as she is whisked to eternity within a billowing vortex.

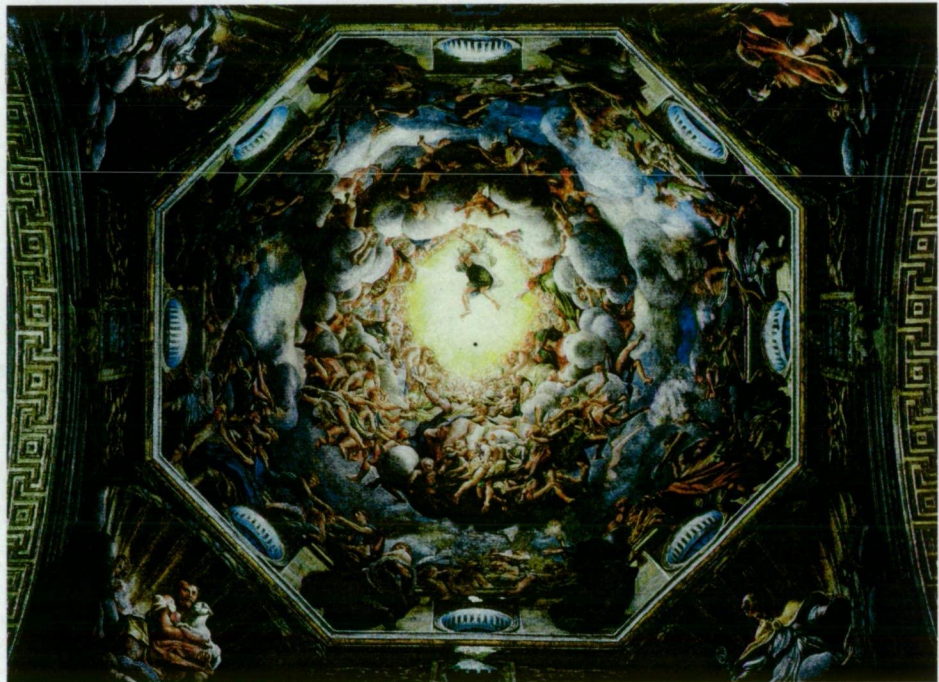


Fig. 17, Antonio Correggio, *Assumption of the Virgin*, Parma Cathedral.

with certainty, Naturalism met a convulsive conclusion with the tornadic twist of the fully-grown Quadraturisti. Pietro da Cortona's *"Triumph of Divine Providence"* (Fig. 18), (1633-39, Palazzo Barberini, Rome) and Gaulli's *"Worship of the Holy Name of Jesus"* (Fig. 19), (1670-83, Il Gesu, Rome), mangle perspectival convention by catapulting figures out of the golden square into the purgatory of architectural ornament. By evoking the model of those most divine of men and purpose, a lottery of judgment has been initiated. In Michelangelo's *"Last Judgement"* (1535-41, Sistine Chapel, Rome) we experience the 'cliff-hanger' with unredeemable souls spilling from the moral horizon to the depths of depravity. In Cortona and Gaulli rejected wraiths don't simply slide down the wall; rather, as the pious rise to the occasion, the transgressional souls fall to our feet



Fig. 18, Pietro da Cortona, *The Triumph of Divine Providence*, Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

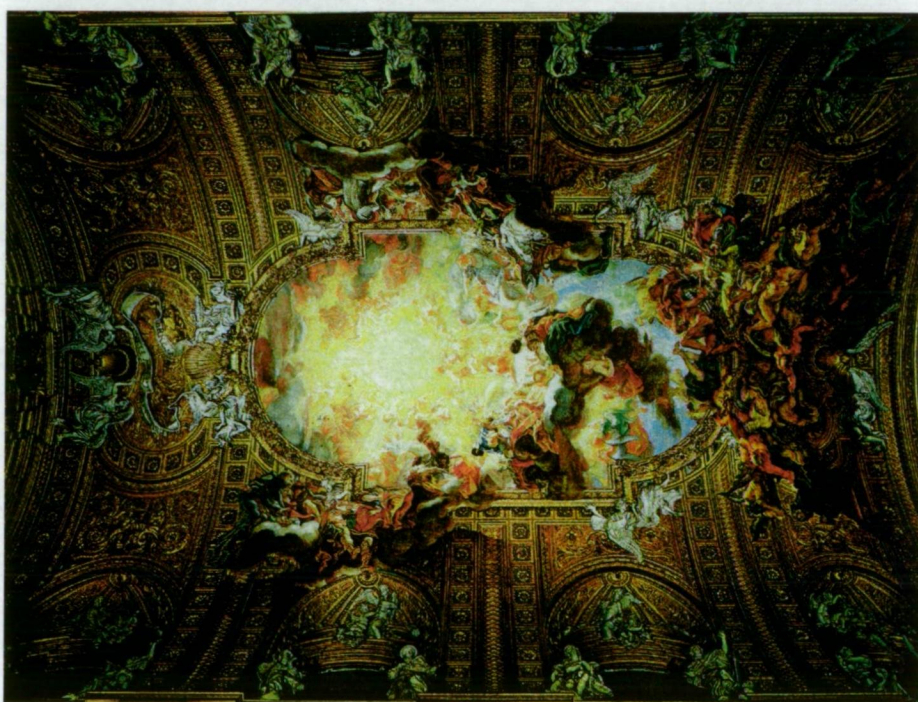


Fig. 19, Gaulli, *The Worship of the Holy Name of Jesus*, Il Gesu, Rome.

in unbecoming froth. But Gaulli and Cortona were merely aperitifs. The Master of this ceremony was Andrea Pozzo. Here was the Electrolux man who hoovered the faithful to paradise. Much like looking up God's trouser leg, "*Allegory of the Missionary Work of the Jesuits*" (Fig. 20), (1691-4, the ceiling of the Jesuit church of St. Ignazio, Rome) is the perfect anti-gravity device. Here True Believers accelerate towards divinity while the congregation struggles to maintain their balance. You actually find yourself

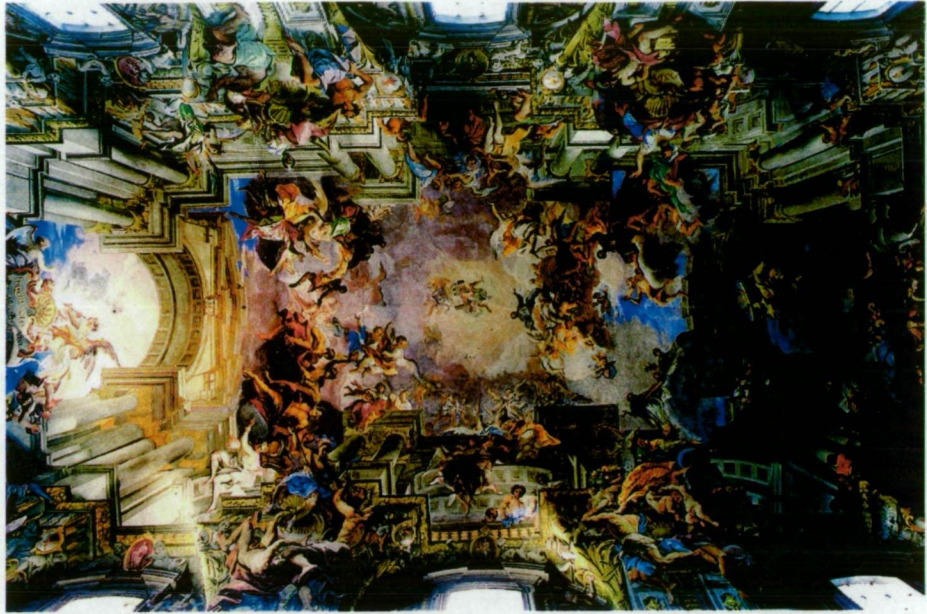


Fig. 20, Andrea Pozzo, *Allegory of the Missionary Work of the Jesuits, Saint Ignazio, Rome*.

reaching for the comforting solidity of the furniture to check the wave of weightlessness. But despite the implications of the vision, this spasm is checked by the physical properties of the stone enclosure. Holy or not, the restraint is a human contrivance; we cannot teleport through that ceiling, we are not vaporous projectiles; we are grounded by the stoic militancy of architecture. Only a skylight offers a window of opportunity because at least this barrier is transparent and not deceptive. Beneath this canopy the room contains cryptic voices. Once we surrender to the Rapture, is there any hope of our return.

Theatre inevitably consumed the Rococo, propelling it beyond the gymnastic or the rational. If there was any arrested flamboyance, then it washed from the palette of Giambattista Tiepolo. More a pre-emptive gesture of the Romantics than a hangover from the Baroque tempest, his astral panoramas open a buffer between the earth and Heaven by illuminating the walls and ceilings with sensual vistas of sky. He smears the body across the space, reanimating mythology in a pageant of frivolity. With his *"Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy"* (Fig. 21), (1762-66, Palacio Real, Madrid), he grants the Spanish sovereignty audience with the hierarchy of Mythology, yielding noble peerage for all participants in this ethereal cavort. This concession for aristocratic vanity creates further parenthesis within the issue of 'The Portal'. Conceivably, all Christians will inevitably experience the calling to Heaven, but mythological canopies are a suspension of belief, dealing with ego rather than the soul. They allude to the company you keep rather than a spiritual nemesis. With *"The Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra"* (Fig. 22), (1746-7, Palazzo Labia, Venice), he has not yet found his girth within in the ostentatious, instead he creates a virtual culinary moment, enabling the witness to be perpetually in the company of legend at the dinner table.



Fig. 21, Tiepolo, Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy, Palacio Real, Madrid



Fig. 22, Tiepolo, The Banquet of Antony and Cleopatra, Palazzo Labia, Venice.

Ultimately the projected reality of this fantasy and the scurrilous relationship between affluence and arrogance found its benchmark in the French Bourgeoisie. This convivial political obscenity immersed itself within that parallel kingdom envisaged by Tiepolo, mixing metaphors with Apollo and Venus. Here wealth and privilege enabled a satellite civilization to hover within a fragment of time that was a crucible for the future affirmation of painting. The visual luxury of faith and prosperous propensity was partially usurped by the populace. As a vehicle for veracity the Revolutionary painters spoke a language of resurgent honour within the pithy aesthetics of the working class until the First Empire re-established an ascendant model for the chronicling of consequential grandeur through the avarice of another despot.²⁵ Without this cradle of revolution and the execution of the redundant, painting may have remained a superficial indulgence of the elite, but with the seizure of The Louvre and The Versailles as cultural collateral with the designed potential for Museums for the proletariat, heroic assertion became the thesis of the new order. This massive mutation in a social mandate engendered painters with renewed vehemence for the 'big picture', exemplified by Jacques Louis David's *"Coronation of Napoleon 1"* (Fig. 23), (1806-07, The Louvre, Paris). Visceral spectacle was the manifest of Paul Delaroche two decades after the fall of the First Empire with his allegorical preceptor *"Hermicycle"* (Artists of all Ages) (Fig. 24), (1837, Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris) which at a staggering 25 metres, clearly became a mentor for the new canon of frescoes.

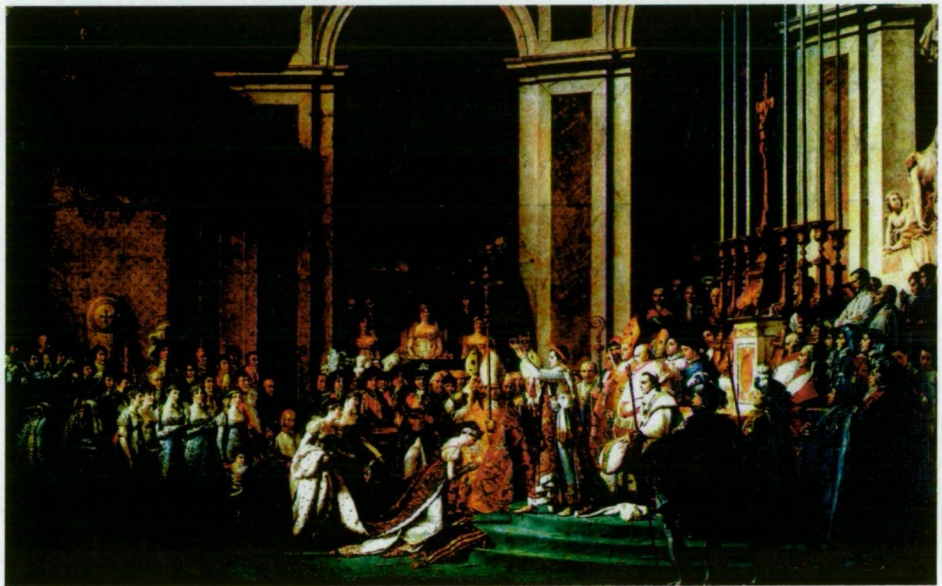


Fig. 23, Jacques Louis David, *Coronation of Napoleon I*, The Louvre, Paris.

²⁵ This refers to the emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte who was appointed to the position of First Consul in 1799, paving the way for the 'Napoleonic Code'.



Fig. 24, Paul Delaroche, *Hermicycle* (detail), Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

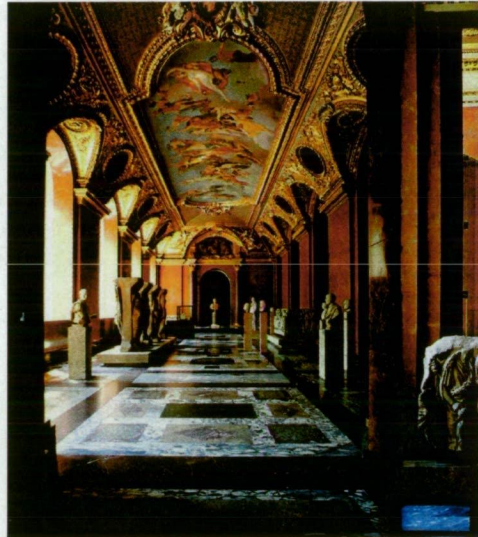
The complexity of the Nineteenth century inters painting within a nebula of issues. The terrain of the Quadraturisti had been indeterminate since the flippant gesture of the late Rococo. The passage between neo-Classicism and Romanticism re-animated a mythological predilection. As a paragon of this 'declaration of purpose' The Louvre becomes a fulcrum for decorative entablature, and The 1848 Revolution proclaimed the noble ambition of this in the words of Victor Hugo. The ruinous palace was to become the "mecca of intelligence".²⁶ This era galvanises peripheral issues within my project. With Delacroix's commission for the ceiling of Galerie d'Apollon, the spirit of the 'Grand Manner' has a brief restitution. While "*The Triumph of Apollo*" (Fig. 25), (1850-51) is ebullient Romanticism, it murmurs the memory of Tiepolo without the rehearsed



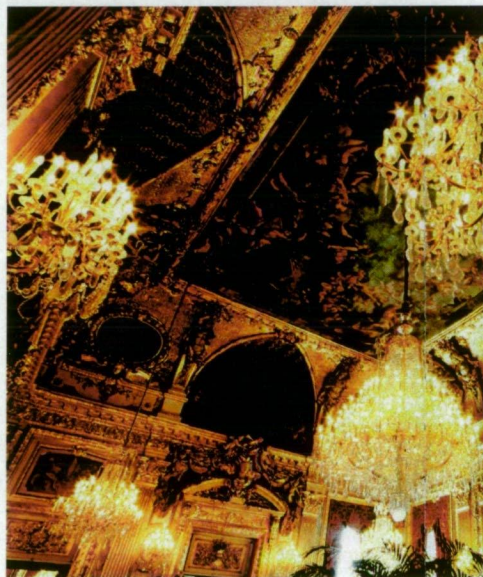
Fig. 25, Delacroix, *Triumph of Apollo*, Galerie d'Apollon, The Louvre, Paris.

²⁶ Genevieve Bresc Bautier, *The Louvre Architecture*, Editions Assouline, Paris, 1995, page 17.

choreography. With the *Quadraturisti* revisited, under the lash of architect Hector Martin-Lefuel, Matout decorated The Hall of Augustus (*Fig. 26*), (1851-53); Marechal, The Grand Salon in the apartments of Napoleon III (*Fig. 27*), (1859-60); Cabanel, the consultation room of the graphic arts department (*Fig. 28*), (1862-72) and Charles-Louis Muller, the large Denon Salon (1864-66). All of these works co-exist within the stucco, crystal and entablatures in muted silence. They have little voice as paintings; they are decorative pastiches of either the Poussinisme²⁷ or the Rubenisme²⁸. The picturesque has sublimated historic heroics or the fiesta of the flesh for unobtrusive wrapping paper.



*Fig. 26,
Matout, Hall of
Augustus, The
Louvre, Paris.*



*Fig. 27, Marechal, The Grand Salon, Apartments of
Napoleon III, The Louvre, Paris.*



*Fig. 28, Cabanel, Consultation room, Graphic
Arts Department, The Louvre, Paris.*

²⁷ Artists who declared themselves to be followers of Poussin by emphasising line as opposed to colour.

²⁸ Artists who exalted the merits of colour before line and followed the example of Rubens. Watteau and Fragonard were apparently associated with this.

The breast pounding, barefaced brawn of 19th century Realism was a liberating force. Courbet with his fearless, bohemian vanity evokes sensual images of languid abandonment, while Gericault's noble salt-of-the-earth flesh straining against the tide of industry is the triumph of humanity over the soil and master of the common. It was an alternate vision of perfumed, ribald clarity or ruddy-faced urchins, all stinking of piss and sweat. Humanity becomes an acrid olfactory visitation, light years from the decorative trampolines on the ceilings and walls of Parisian palaces. But this division between the humble and the haughty has an international stage and introduces the American vision.

Chapter 3: Westward ho and the Five & Dime - American Realism

It was within the climate of adventure and Colonial impediment that America evolved it's sublime, picturesque aesthetic. Europe had fostered a passion for the elaborate and the grotesque within the aesthetic elaboration of Christianity. Within the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century the evolution of 'wall paintings' were reactive religious prejudices against art as luxury. Mostly procured by 'folk artists', they contained simplistic decorative elements, which testify more to the virtuous humility of New England taste than any significant art issue. The 'bigger picture' concerned itself with the Godliness of the terrain, but reached beyond Thomas Cole's Atlantic, Arcadian regurgitation of Claude Lorrain to the scholarly vista of Fredrick Edwin Church's matinee spectacles. While only a postcard by comparison to his European forefathers, "*Heart of the Andes*" (Fig. 29), (1859, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) pre-empted the American public's future predilection for Hollywood's extravaganza. Barely 3 metres in width, it collapses the staggering enormity of the wilderness to a 19th century plasma screen. The urgency for National unification in a heroic struggle across the great plains was burned into the pioneer psyche by the more



Fig. 29, Fredrick Edwin Church, *Heart of the Andes*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

substantial fresco, "*Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*" by Emmanuel Leutze (1861, United States Capitol Building, Washington D.C.). Similarly, a propensity for magnitude furthered Albert Bierstadt's artificial derivations of uncivilised wasteland and while Paris staggered in the wake of the Post-Impressionist eye, America re-invented The Renaissance. Surely one of life's more bewildering experiences is to stand before John La Farge's "*Rhinelander Altarpiece*" in the Church of the Ascension in New York, whispering under your breath, "1887". It does, however, help explain the kevlar replication of global monuments that empowers Las Vegas.

As a parallel contagion of this spirit of grand adventure was the 'medicine show' trickery of the American exponents of trompe-l'oeil. William Michael Harnett (*Fig. 30*), and John Frederick Peto (*Fig. 31*), operated within the wasteland of the post- Civil War psyche. They tuned a predilection for nostalgia, even if this was slight rather than vintage. They managed to create tiny tabernacles of an immediate history suspended in a twilight of decaying memory. These were not pristine post-cards of celebration; rather they were fragile reflections of sentimentality. They looked back with a sense of loss, inspiring an emotional connection with what else the nation was forging within the milieu of heroic geographical and social advancement. To the public, the sensibility was masked by their technical prowess. They appeared to be sideshow contrivers, capable of affecting disbelief for the gullible masses. Indeed, Robert Hughes tells a story from 1886²⁹ of a guard being placed beside Harnett's, "*The Old Violin*" to prevent it from being plucked from the wall and bowed it was the simple contrivance of visual virtuosity in its purest form.

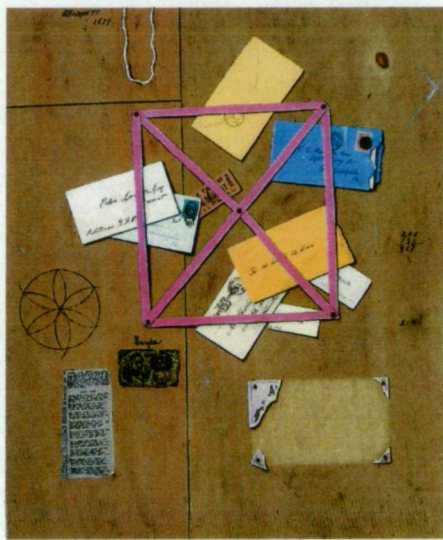


Fig. 30, William Michael Harnett, *The Artist's Letter Rack*, 1879, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

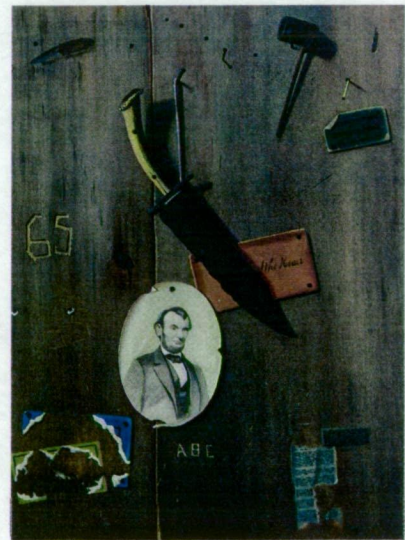


Fig. 31, John Fredrick Peto, *Reminiscences of 1865, 1897*, Watsworth, Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

²⁹ Robert Hughes, "*American Visions - The Epic Story of Art in America*", Harvill Press, London, 1997, page 316.

American painters offered an eclectic old-world amalgam of European sensibility, without necessarily understanding it. There was a strong memory of religious persecution that underpinned the American aesthetic. They were once pilgrims and this fuelled a stoic resolve to find independence within the world and this effectively meant holding some European culture at arms-reach. The European Avant Garde was held in contempt. This, however, didn't thwart importation. It was clear by the end of World War 2 that American art collections had swollen with souvenired booty from all centuries. Regardless of the spoils of war providing an opportunity to build substantial private and public collections, the American legacy for the tradition of Realism had developed without the anecdotal smears of religious patronage. America maintained a frontier resonance that illuminated a blinkered belief in the strength and merit of their own identity. The 1930's were a product of post Depression patronage and Thomas Hart Benton (*Fig. 32*), gives us robust self-congratulatory evidence of his country's oblivious comprehension of an aesthetic lineage. A cartoon effigy of his growling South of the Border contemporaries Benton summarises his generation with his critical aside, "I wallowed in every cock-eyedism that came along, and it took me ten years to get all that Modernist dirt out of my system."³⁰



Fig. 32, Thomas Hart Benton, Mural, Missouri House of Representatives, Capitol Building, Jefferson City, Missouri.

³⁰ Caroline Cass, *Grand Illusions*, Phaidon, London, 1988, page 16.

In America, banality may be the most practised religious cult or a life-style choice. Content, as a reflection of culture, became a serious issue, particularly after Modernism virtually banned the ancient dictum of technical prowess as a character building exercise. Good art was visceral, not maestro. When the patriotic figurative bowed to the roaring holocaust of pure sensation through the pulse of Pollock and de Kooning, the conservative populace cowered in huddled confusion. A nation built on rawhide and spittle would never wander too far from the barn or the drug store.

The very thing American Realists had was facility, what they lacked was cathedral culture or grand gesture. You can identify two variants: the first represents a warm social realist commentary, similar to 19th century urban fallout and maintains a Fine Art dignity that translates the aftermath of the Metropolis. The second embraces the mechanics of photography and sets up cold windows of extreme realism that actually abstract our visual language, often distancing itself from personality. Humility and the cool concern for the little things in life feature substantially in the work of Andrew Wyeth, Phillip Pearlstein, Don Jacot, Edward Hopper, Linda Bacon, Charles Bell, and Ivan Albright, while the alternative dimensions of a drive-in aesthetic and the bright lights of Downtown belongs to Richard Estes, Tom Blackwell, Davis Cone, Ralph Goings, and Robert Bechtle.

The grass seed savanna of windswept Maine imbibes Wyeth with the whimsy of German Romanticism, the figure, the adventure and the restlessness of nature beckoning the soul away. The "*Helga Suite*" (Fig. 33), executed between 1971 and 1985, with their sublimated erotic mask had espoused the virtue of hidden carnal want masquerading as objectified devotion. Here the artist and model were hidden from the family and scrutiny for two decades, resulting in a tango of titillation. From somewhere above allegation³¹ he says, "There is a motion in Rembrandt - his people turning towards the light. But it's a frozen motion; time holding its breath for an instant and for eternity. That's what I'm after."³²

Ignoring his motives, it is possible to celebrate his surface, for this is a craftsman who weaves. His epidermis is alive, a woven topography of skin and persona. When Wyeth references Rembrandt he speaks of a lineage that intersects with Caravaggio. Here truth is an empirical encounter with life.

Centuries beyond this bloodline, on a collision course with Mattel, is the terry-towelling talcum of Phillip Pearlstein. Much like his namesake, his pearled plasticity is surely only a couple of F-stops shy of Barbie chic. What he has is an enormous virtuosity with light source, but as Courbet celebrates the areola and dimple, this American's saturnine

³¹ There was a great deal of speculation about Andrew Wyeth's relationship to Helga Testorf, given the secrecy of the act. Clearly this was pure media sensation, driven by the intimacy of the images.

³² John Wilmerding, "*Andrew Wyeth - The Helga Pictures*", Harry N. Abrams Inc. New York, 1987, page 172.



Fig. 33, Andrew Wyeth, *Lovers*, 1981.

festivity of flesh indicates a fumbling with his buttons during his special moment. Presumably, his figures all wax lyrical. But before we venture into complete denial, we discover the secret virtuosity of Pearlstein. It's not the Rubenstein polishing of a Lucien Freud chunk; it's the spacial elegance of his multi-directional shadows. It eroticises the wooden rocker and the bath-towel in a manner that he denies his figures.

Don Jacot visualises the claustrophobic incarceration of consumerist displays. His work is a maximum optical daub of glass, lens, chrome plastic and light. His *"Camera Repair"* (Fig. 34), (1997) is a wild irony of the utmost clarity in terms of its focus. It's a wry visual pun because here the camera, that heavily disputed device that is often cited as the enemy of painting, emerges as a spectacular icon, catalogued and displayed with a myriad of alternative accessories. Edward Hopper's world doesn't offer us any alternatives. His world is cool neon. It's brick Vermeer for boogie-woogie. Although he is often viewed as a critic of urban alienation, the bravest moment in his legacy of the boulevards of broken dreams, was the moment when a space moves beyond the theatrical implications of human intervention and becomes a place where the figure does not exist. No longer a peek-a-boo, the entity has left forever.

Linda Bacon and Charles Bell juice up the manifesto of *tromp-l'oeil* by establishing a complex aggregate of the toyshop. Bordering on a nightmare, a child's mechanical gadgets gleam and sneer suspended in mid clatter. In *"Bingo"* (Fig. 35), (1998), Bacon has a greater investment in the nursery rhyme because her surrender to the illustrative forces a reading of the work that is quite smug and sinister, almost as if the "Jack-in-the-box", or in her



Fig. 34, Don Jacot, *Camera Repair*, 1997.



Fig. 35, Linda Bacon, *Bingo*, 1998.



Fig. 36, Charles Bell, *Dazzling Dozen*, 1994.

visual language, "The Penguin" is watching your every move. Bell's pinball and marble apocalypse challenges the senses with their faultless rendering. With "*Dazzling Dozen*" (Fig. 36), (1994) we are presented with a hand-made analogue ideal beckoning to assume the mantle of digital.

The enemy of beauty, the carnival of sores, Ivan Albright, harasses and subverts the physical. He drives it into a fetid mesh of tortured ectoplasm. The seams of internal and external gone forever; skin and apparel merge and seethe. A suspension of mortality, his flesh avows premature putrefaction for the living and his objects have a kindred DNA of surface. Everything within an Albright composition is treated with the same virus.

They are claustrophobic compressions of figure and ground. The Lucien Freud chunk is now left well beyond its use-by date. The pivotal points in his melodrama were the *"Picture of Dorian Gray"* (Fig. 37), (1943-44, Art Institute, Chicago), which confronts the proposition of the self- image as pure narcissism, while *"That Which I Should Have done I Did not Do (The Door)"* (Fig. 38), (1931-41, Art Institute, Chicago) is an agony of effort. He details all surfaces to the point of madness and his figures impersonate the torrid, emotional escapology of Oskar Kokoshka. He cruises a turnpike of permanent alizurine, dioxi-purple and hookers green. It's that window of psychological opportunity that Rembrandt stepped into but his stoop is a place where few would loiter in comfortable. He reminds us of how far beneath our flesh the portrait really rests.

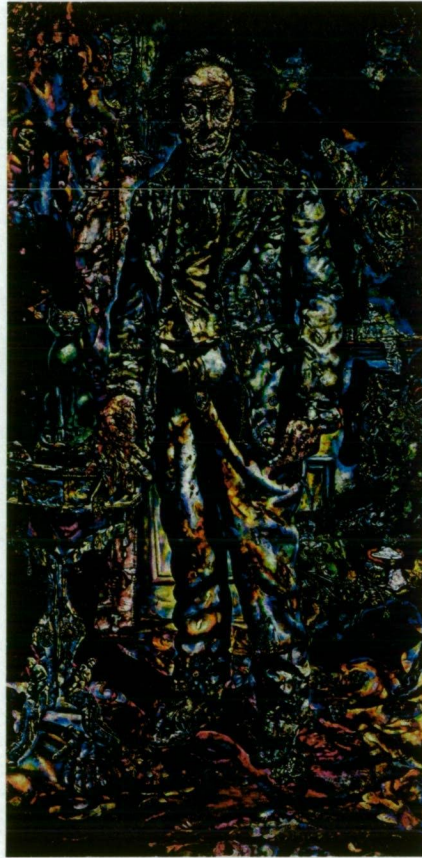


Fig. 37, Ivan Albright, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1943-44, Art Institute of Chicago.



Fig. 38, Ivan Albright, *That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do, (The Door)*, 1931-41. The Art Institute of Chicago.

The space becomes even more significant for the Photorealists. Goings polishes Walt Disney from Norman Rockwell's chest. He gives us the 'burger and fries' American postcard. In *"Vitality"* (Fig. 39), (1996) he offers us a chrome space that represents the comfort zone of familiarity. It's not P.C. it's not weight-watchers, it's just mundane honesty. Estes is 'Breakfast at Tiffanys'. He's a polished rocket that subverts us with his reflective flash. The nickel-and-dime twinkle of his fabulous surfaces all scream for attention. The Arnolfini mirror, gleaming, urbanised, divided

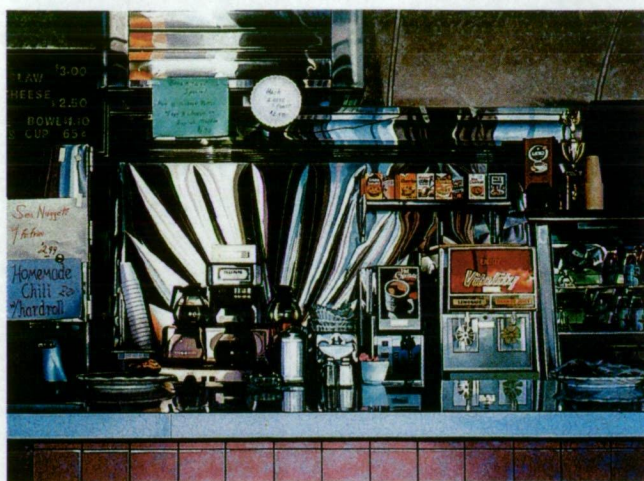


Fig. 39, Ralph Goings, *Vitality*, 1996.



Fig. 40, Richard Estes, *M104*, 1999.

and conquered, becomes Saturday Night Fever's mirror ball. His space is stinkingly clean. His streets exude a carbolic hospital sanitisation. They are as antiseptic as a surgical wound. His "M104" (Fig. 40), (1999) offers us nothing of the experience of that city. Completely absent its grinding glamour and stinking underbelly. All of the lurching anamorphism of Andrea Pozzo is now stretched to a manicured horizon of the straight and narrow. Tom Blackwell emulsifies the physical barriers between observation and reflection. His windows contain an arrogant Narcissism that is suspended between our dominion of space and existence and that of the desirable 'beyond'. It connects with the Catholic rhetoric of Renaissance frescos where an invented paradise lurked in the skin of the plaster. In "*Odalisque Express*" (Fig. 41), (1992-3), the phantom of Ingres hovers in the looking glass, no longer enduring spinal manipulation³³, she now appears to be silicon enhanced. Davis Cone, however, articulates a prosaic reality of street-life. In "*Metro*" (Fig. 42), (1996), his compactingly retentive snowdrifts offer a parallel overload of labour, evident in Albrecht Altdorfer's almost clinically absurd chronicle of cloud formations.³⁴ Betchle

³³ Much has been made of the possible number vertebrae in the spine of the figure within Ingres' 1814 painting, "*Grand Odalisque*".

³⁴ This is in regard to the density of Altdorfer's clouds in his 1526 painting "*Landscape*". The irony here is that one pays too much attention to observation, the other not enough.



Fig. 41, Tom Blackwell, *Odalisque Express*, 1992-3.

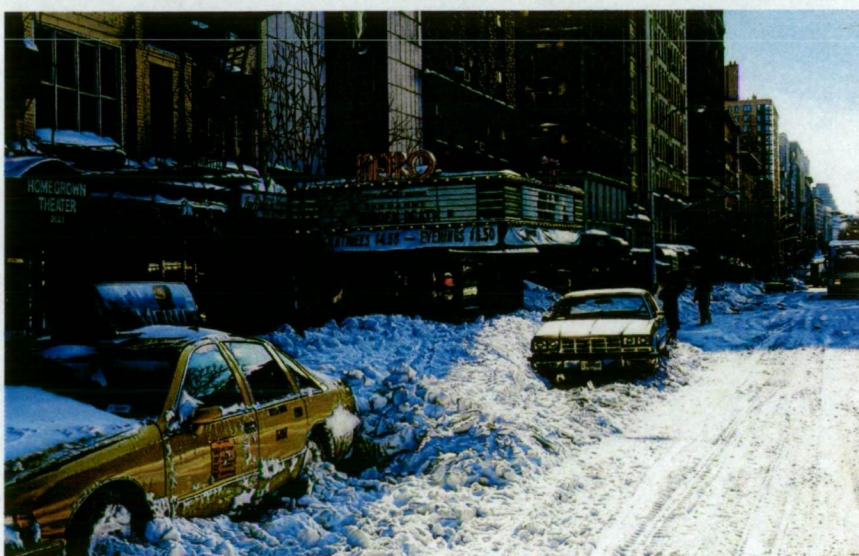


Fig. 42, Davis Cone, *Metro*, 1996.

worships objects. The Zenith television or a 1960 Thunderbird occupies the same relative cultural documentary as Caravaggio's lutes or Holbein's scientific instruments. The space is warmed to room temperature by tokens of routine. The surface ebbs with Valium naturalism. Caravaggio is back, but he can't afford a Cadillac.

Where, then, is the evidence of truth, or indeed, any need for it? Is it implied within the mapped illusion of their photographic transcriptions, or does the effigy project beyond absolute reality to a contrivance of virtual space? Clearly this has dogged the hyper-realists since their inception in the 1970's, when eloquent technique appeared to evoke critical condemnation and begin the de-evolution of painting. Hal Foster³⁵

³⁵ Hal Foster, *"The Return of the Real"*, October Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, page 141.

suggests that Photorealism is a subterfuge against the real and is pledged not only to pacify the real but seals it behind surfaces, embalming it in appearances. This is further considered by Linda Chase³⁶ who refers to the typical photorealist irony of both honouring and denying illusionistic depth for the flatness of the picture plane. Their reality is not concerned with the object, rather its allegiance is to the picture. The embalmed surface is an emulsive surface, a surface of plastic. That surface is the surface of a photograph, which is effectively a copy of reality. The convolution of this logic is that these painters affect another generation of reality. This discussion is intensified by Plato's suggestion that art was merely a duplication of experience³⁷, which in itself, was merely a copy of a 'fixed and eternal ideal'. Gombrich assures us that, "What a painter inquires into is not the nature of the physical world, but the nature of our reactions to it"³⁸ Photorealists react to it through photographic choice without overlaying it with personal or subjective interpretation. Herein lies the departure point from Quadratura to photorealism. The big pictures of previous centuries could operate as pendant versions of Quadrature experience by allowing open access to their inner mechanisms, a reprisal of the portal consideration. Psychologically the door swings in both directions, just as a window is both transparent and reflective. Scale does not assist the photorealists because very few produce canvases larger than two metres in width. With the exception of pre-paralysis Chuck Close, only Anthony Brunelli (*Fig. 43*), offers anything resembling even the scale of a Fredrick Church. Whereas Church offered a blithe Utopian paradise, here we are slammed against the bulletproof barrier of a photographic surface. Unlike the conjured jungles of South America, in this market place there is strictly 'no entry'.



Fig. 43, Anthony Brunelli, The Old Quarter "Hanoi", 1999-2000.

³⁶ Linda Chase, *The Not-So-Innocent Eye: Photorealism in Context*, Photorealism at the Millennium, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2002, page 15.

³⁷ E.H. Gombrich, *Art And Illusion - A study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Phaidon Press, London, 1960, page 83.

³⁸ *ibid*, page 49

Chapter 4: From a Whisper to a Screen: The Wilderness of the Wall

The search for a modern or contemporary Quadratura archetype may be loaded with aesthetic horror, particularly as it literally hits the wall. The same possibly applies to 'the big picture'. When James Rosenquist produced "*F-111*" (1964-5, Museum of Modern Art, New York) he was motivated by the desire to encapsulate himself within a space that evoked the fluttering evil of technology accelerating towards catastrophe. He speaks of his dreaded fantasy of becoming a pasted smear on his Manhattan billboards within that millisecond of a nuclear airburst.³⁹ His work forces you to propel yourself, headlong at that media barrier as a reaction to having your face rubbed in it. Similarly, it heralds the velocity with which cinema and digital projection has confiscated the veracity of the canvas billboard. In the decades since the launch of his 'freedom fighter' the mural has become a neighbourhood threat and the I-Max annexes all. It is the total image revolution with 'wall-painting' applying to a franchise from whence Rosenquist came, only to be cameoed in contemporary terms as 'urban art'. It also perpetuates the obligation for story telling, but often the narrative is the ravine between literature and pulp fiction.

The division between Quadrature painting and fine art becomes defined by purpose or outcome. There is a distinctive purgatory between Fine Art and the contemporary muralist. The critical fulcrum is the definition of Mural and its intension. Value judgments and taste conventions become a considerable restriction as you pass into the modern era. Whereas some contemporary practitioners of 'The Mural' support their crimes by quoting antiquity and sampling past Masters, they barely survive above a panel-van idiom. In "*The Temptation*", (Fig. 44), (1969-83, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire), the British muralist Graham Rust agonises with Veronese's ideals, but allows Bernini's "*Neptune and Triton*" to wrestle within the embarrassing company of a pink spoonbill and a granite Flipper. Somehow the purpose has been marred by a total surrender to home improvement, with the integrity of painting being delegated to an ulterior motif. In this respect painting does survive, but as an outboard, rectangular appliance to the 'other' surface. Kurt Wenner, (Fig. 45), however, gracefully addresses the sanctified purity of tradition in his street paintings. Although the 'proficients of the pavement' have their own awkward cultural premise, Wenner elevates this phenomenon to a platform of extreme virtuosity. Whereas generations of Christians raised their heads to the ceiling for solace, Wenner has us staring at our shoes as bystanders of the possible complications of damnation. He does not replicate second-hand anamorphic triumphs; rather, he fashions a contorting underworld of The Last Judgement and Tomb Raider. Wenner must concede to having had a significant influence from muralists such as Giulio Romano because there is clearly a notable comparison between his apocalypse and Romano's "*The Fall of the Giants*" (Fig. 46), (1532-34, Palazzo del Te, Mantua).

³⁹ Robert Hughes, "American Visions-The Epic History of Art in America", Harvill Press, London, 1997, page 538.

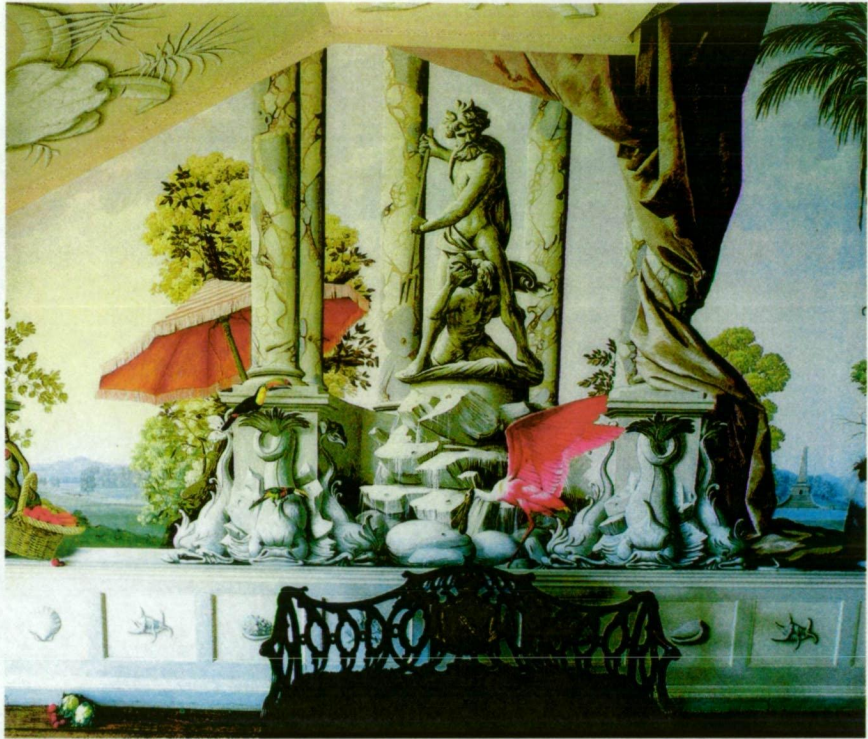


Fig. 44, Graham Rust, *Temptation*, 1969-83, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire.

Of greater concern has been the vanquishing of the Quadraturisti into the decorative recital of Modern Home and Garden. The contemporary adaptation of this style is frustrated by cultural paranoia. The 'mural' is bewitched by a negative aesthetic that evokes the evidence of thousands of criminal acts on businesses and in playground across the universe. Even within the parameters of privilege, drama and romance has been infused within the abode. The elegant can entertain within palatial urban edifices that arouse the spirit of the jungle or nature in the raw. While there is an argument that this is a direct translation of the Catholic ideal, it does little for this genre's integrity. More specifically, secular civilization has gagged its meritorious voice.



Fig. 45, Kurt Wenner, *Cocito*, Pasadena, California, 1994.



Fig. 46, Giulio Romano, *Fall of the Giants*, 1532-34, Palazzo del Te, Mantua.

The Idiom and the Odyssey

Chapter 5: Genesis

Finding the thread of personal allegory is always daunting. To begin to understand the development of my painting is to wander backwards and forwards through an indecisive history searching for some point of entry. While there is no ancestry to my practise in my family's species, it is because of my family that I search for myself in my work. I paint because I obsess over things and as a result a passing parade of genitals and Cadillacs⁴⁰ have featured in my plastic neurosis for decades. History burrows deeply into me and my decision to return to academic rigour amended the issue like orthopaedic correction, stopping my relentless pacing through unknown corridors permanently. There is much to acknowledge in terms of motive and much to recognise as future purpose. Having gone through a clandestine menopause, when my work hovered in an uneasy space of apprehension, I can see clearly now. Although my penance was gentle, I now blame history for distracting me. It whispered false promises and made me envious of the past. As I stepped from the studio as an adult, the world of fluttering evidence no longer distracted me.

If I stand still for a moment I see two horizons. One is content, the other is context. My craft, while having no discernible genetic lineage, was initiated as an emotional neutraliser, brandished against the severity of punishment. It was a childhood saviour, an air bag and my invisible buddy. Colouring-in, in isolation, was a shield against a disciplinary zealot. It was a prophylactic protuberance of my own soul and it made me paint to forget the ignorance and pain. The images I conjured of war and heroics sent imaginary troopers to the heels of the patriarch. I will never forget those giant moments of anguish for using the wrong paper or misplacing his pencil. Now my suburban bedroom is rendered obsolete by the haughty splendour of the Napoleonic Suite. You search for a substitute when you out-grow the relationship. Bonaparte's grand salon was his gorged bunker. When he stepped forth from the enclosure, his ego seemed to get him into all sorts of trouble. Although my character had been maintained by my childhood boudoir, my persona was clarified by that space in the Louvre. It was my perfect skin and reproducing the walls of this space begat a plastic brood.

The Masters project started with a beheading. Initially the "Head Huntresses" project consisted of a desire to deconstruct Baroque narratives and reconstruct these as contemporary theatrical events. Under the mantle of "The Severing Sisterhood" I was excited by the prospect of exploiting the University community as marionettes of heroic martyrdom, all pumped up with the visceral gymnastics of the full-blown Baroque.

⁴⁰ This refers to a solo exhibition in 1990, entitled, "*Disgraceland — A Celebration of Americana*", Despard Street Gallery, Hobart.

Witness the tantalising possibility of morphing Judith with Salome into a broader context of lust, seduction, sacrifice and blood. Who could resist the central politics of the original work, issues of defiance of patriarchal power, feminine evil and decapitation as castration?

Regardless of the perceived roles as either the icon of righteousness or the vacuously damned executioner, Judith and Salome shared a subtle symbiosis of both virtue and vice throughout their debutance in Catholic painting. Part of the original project recognised a considerable shift in the contextual flora of the murderous duo and by the 19th century, the post-industrial holocaust with its hollow, dispassionate whores and self-possessed magnates had savagely maligned these paragons of faith. There was no longer any margin for sympathy; Salome's lack of self, masqueraded as Lolita, while Judith's empowerment became cold-blooded murder. Their melding became the hybrid idol of perversity - the spirit of Artemisia Gentileschi mauled by Albert Von Keller. His *"Love"* (1908)⁴¹ is as much a purely galvanised image of this century's penchant for misogyny and male masochistic fantasy as it is a representative blend of feminine heroism and pure cock-defiance. It also clearly paves the way for the intense introversion of Twentieth Century Expressionism. The parables of Judith and Salome were to emerge not only as exquisite fodder for those painters exploring the notion of anorexic, self-possessed temptresses who were "irritated by masculine nonsense";⁴² it also served as a perfect vehicle for self-exploration.

My motivation for painting has always been somewhat forensic. A personal crisis was always best examined in paint and the content had always found itself in some motif within the parameters of catholic iconography. They were always ex-lovers, Eve, Leda, Judith and Salome⁴³. What begins as a private metaphor can quickly become a camp perversity in the public arena even with the delicious temptation of indulging yourself in the craft of past masters. Heroes are necessary and Caravaggio has always been the most enduring. While the entire obsession with the decapitants had both installed and stalled the project, I deviated on a tangent into the mapped chronology of St. John the Baptist (*Figs. 47, 48*). Through Caravaggio's wildly erotic, youthful depictions of the *"John in the Wild"*⁴⁴ I tried a form of surrogate adoption by becoming Cecco, the painter's fuck-boy. The pageant of pure theatre accelerated again with two final images of Salome. In the first she is beholding the beheaded and the second is the ferociously dark Malta execution, his biggest masterpiece. They were replicated by staging the event. Just like the set of Jarmon's film, the girls frocked up, the bloke donned a toga and I got to morph my head onto the caterer's platter. It became the only work to be produced

⁴¹ In this painting Keller has combined Salome and Judith in the body of a naked woman who stands proudly posing with the sword she has just used to decapitate her lover.

⁴² Bram Dijkstra, *"Idols of Perversity"*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986, page 379.

⁴³ This refers to a series of exhibitions predating my post graduate research, which focused on issues such as awkward couples in Western Art, *"The Honeymoon Killers"*, 1992, (Cameleon Gallery, Hobart) and *"Judith & Holofernes meet the Gonzo Baroque"*, 1995, (Despard Gallery, Hobart) and 1996, (Linden Gallery, St. Kilda).

⁴⁴ Between 1598 and 1604, Caravaggio produced 5 versions of the youthful John the Baptist, allegedly using his companion Cecco as the model.



Fig. 47, Wayne Brookes, *Waynus Baptista*, 1997.



Fig. 48, Wayne Brookes, *Bad Baptist*, 1997.



Fig. 49, Wayne Brookes, *Larry, Curly and Moe*, 1997.

under the mantle of the original project. Here "*Larry, Curly and Moe*" (Fig. 49), (1997) are subsumed by homage. In hindsight I wilt at the thought of "Quoting Caravaggio", but strangely enough, he maintains considerable significance throughout the remainder of the project. I still wither at the tenacious bravado of his imagery, the purity of his filth, the brutality of his

truth. He is the vagrant of violence; I am Bambi and he is Godzilla. This mimicry, this splatter-culture parade through history had to collapse and it had to become personal. The compulsion for narrative dissolved into personal chronology, my own history as reflection. Paris was to be my nemesis. Gratefully, the sisterhood then simply faded into oblivion. There had always been a problem with my flesh. Weighted under a practical formula, I had espoused the virtue of life but had emulated the cadaver. All those Adam and Evils just lingered in the House of Wax. Their skin was never alive; instead it was incarcerated within the space. Their Boris Karloff bodies, complete with rubber mask, were clearly a life-skill gleaned from the fat-boy, his childhood and his books. Bearing witness to this became a greater issue than the absorption of contrapposto dynamics. Figurative painting had another lineage and I still had to define the project. Before I could encounter the origins of my universe, I had to visit a second-hand store; I had to visit American collections.

From The Pacific to the Atlantic I scoured private and national museums searching for the Figurative and The Naturalist. The pure eclecticism of American Realists prompted recognition of a desire to research the epidermis, the space, the portrait and a need to reconcile my identity. It prepared me for the walled brutality of Europe. As much as I had loathed the demeaning idea of portraits, I was drawn to those painters who, regardless of their contempt for the content, actually accentuated their craft by obsessive fabric fetish. The lingering fixation for textile embellishment falls at the feet of Holbein, Bronzino and Ingres. Together with the Caravaggisti, the research list was beginning to bloat.

All those books, all those slides and yet nothing prepares you for actual engagement. They are all gorgons and they will turn your heart to stone. I had stupidly arrived with some sense of self-worth and still tattooed across this adventure, in huge neon tubes of awe, was the infection of the Caravaggisti. I thought I was one because I liked him. As the true believers of his methods revealed themselves to me, my trespass within their dominion became wickedly obvious. The salacious whispers of Le Valentin, Saracini, the Gentileschi, Guercino and Ribera all appeared to mouth the same words: "What the hell are you doing here?"

There was a moment of great revelation in Paris that inevitably settled my dust. Antiquity is the golden calf. The barricade of the green door and the iron challenged me about enclosed space. I simply removed it and collapsed the formatted Baroque homage into macro obsessions of flesh and fabric⁴⁵. You begin with a weird, distracting fascination with the architectural and physical manners of the space, but rather than wanting to emulate these; you loiter over their silent mutterings, their straining breath and their whispered truths of history and horror. The cataleptic carnival of stone and steel forces dirt in the face of sheer ignorance. You come for its heart but barely wrinkle its skin. I could never again paint history that wasn't mine.

⁴⁵ This refers to a body of 14 works produced in the studio during the residency, exhibited as the "Paris Series" with the "Anachronist" show, 1999, (Despard Gallery, Hobart).

While the elegant exuberance of Phillip de Champaigne and the bombastic enormity of Charles Le Brun elicit a desire to pursue overwhelming scale, I began painting from Titian. The arresting manner of "*Venus with a Mirror*", (1555, National Gallery of Art, Washington), "*Isabella of Portugal*" (1548, Prado, Madrid), "*La Bella*" (1536, Palazzo, Pitti, Florence), and "*Flora*" (1515-20, Uffizi, Florence) were pure placebo substitution, merely filling a void and providing an avenue to engage a process. My journal becomes an outpost of ranting, swaggering between a Larry Flint editorial, pure gonzo and amateur art-speak. At dawn the fever breaks and I come back to the belly of Venus, my lover's belly. Paris forces me to confront ownership of imagery. I remember Wyeth, I remember Courbet and I remember those thousands of painters who simply dealt with the relationship between artist and model. It becomes a focused response to the romance of the occasion (*Figs. 50, 51*).



Fig. 50, Wayne Brookes, *Paris Series II*, 1997.



Fig. 51, Wayne Brookes, *Paris Series VII*, 1997.

The intimacy of the space draws you into an engagement of personal examination in the face of history roaring from the cobblestones and from behind closed doors. It's both alienating and consuming. But what begins as an engagement with a lover's flesh, enshrined in the decorative embrace of embroidered fabric, actually emerged as a subliminal return to self-image. Her hands were mine, despite all observation to the contrary. I was reflected in her surface. The scale was directly related to contact with the painters from the Northern Schools of the Quattrocento. At 20x25 cms, they represented the smallest works I had ever attempted and afforded an opportunity to build a body of work specifically about Paris.

Battered by ambition, the grand absorption tour had served its purpose. I had been to the mountain but had lost the tablets. I had been granted the wisdom to recognise the folly of following false prophets. My expulsion from paradise initiates the notion of Adam and Eve with Massacio's

image of the wailing couple forever burnt into my memory. Much like the sacred story then, this taste of forbidden fruit unleashed both demon and revelation. In the McCulloch Studio, my knowledge of the flesh became recognition of personal allegory in abstracted terms and my rapture was the belief that by mapping my visual history I could use portraiture to transcend the focal veneer. I could expose the phantoms of the very purpose of painting and by scrutinising the allegory of the act, I could rationalise the fundamentals of this genre in both historical and contemporary contexts. Scale was unfortunately going to be an issue. In the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp I experienced Rubens' *"Descent from the Cross"* (1608-12). This altarpiece was possibly one of his greatest achievements and purges you instantly of the Rubenesque clichés pertaining to ample flesh and ruddy children. It was contrapposto virtuosity writhing to the martyr's waltz. Here Christ is balanced between ascent and descent, a lingering missile of pure genius.

All of this adventure served to alienate the purpose of my painting even further. It had devoured the will. As evidence of this spiritual sojourn I had amassed a plethora of photographic documentation, whimsically footnoted as the Fatman in History. Two significant moments focused the future. The first was an encounter with Artemisia Gentileschi's *"Allegory of Painting"* (1630, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle) and the second was an overwhelming image of silent desperation taken at the beginning of the Paris residency. Here essentially was the visual summation of the entire dilemma, a centrifuge for catharsis. I would paint myself in the quiet contemplation of the act of painting. I finally acknowledge the purity of the self-portrait. I paint myself in the quiet contemplation of becoming my father as my own history. I become a portrait painter but recognise the figure will be incarcerated in beguiling space. The interior was a significant metaphor for all of my experience. For the Fatman in History to be fully realised, I had to move beyond the phobia of portraiture.

Portraiture has had a reproach within the history of painting. Its emergence as a more formal proposition is heavily linked to the decay of the arts within those countries most affected by the Reformation. Its power was distributed amongst the impotent infidels who could no longer conjure with the pompous viagra of Catholicism. With a greater master than The Almighty breathing down your neck, the portrait emerged as bread and butter. It was a respected facsimile of office. In the absence of flesh and blood the visage would preside over affairs of the state or ceremony. It was a pigment witness to occasion. Those painters, who dipped their wicks to acknowledge opulent vanity, took the task of rendering life to a pitch of breathlessness.

The retentive Dutch, with their vows of Holy Poverty, installed within a franchise of the Burgher kings, accentuated rationality of life as an ordinary cycle, sometimes in spontaneous gesture. While the Reformation had begun as a complete denial of the Image, the dust settled around the Guilds and their ambitious desire for visual immortality. While Rembrandt scoured his bath looking for fragments of humanity, Steen and Hals licked the face of pleasure with virtual instamatic ambience.

This Polaroid selection contrasts sharply with Ingres' spaces of pure dichotomy. His faces, his flesh are checked by a paraffin veneer, but his detail worships his affection for the visual properties of life. The fluff, the perfume the reflective silver of the boudoir. But his space is suspiciously deceptive. His *"Napoleon 1 on his Imperial Throne"* (Fig. 52), (1806, Musee de l'Armee, Paris) denies entry from any manifest. The space is a shallow incarceration of the figure. Against the tide of eyewitness and document, Jean Auguste Dominique manipulates for pure pleasure. Here, composite photography has perhaps afforded him the possible visual nomenclature to confidently lock out admission. It pre-empted the spatial anomalies attributed the following century's superrealists. An 1806 detractor declared the work to be "Gothic and barbarous"⁴⁶.



Fig. 52, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne*, 1806, Musee de l'Armee, Paris.

This visual feasting is only qualified by those painters with the heightened sensitivity to take portraiture beyond the historic stigma. Treated as genre painting, the portrait manages to stagger along with the embroidered star of the academy laced to it. Indeed the establishment of National Portrait galleries creates the same sense of exclusion that marks the "special" spaces in a car park. It is as if

⁴⁶ A critical comment made by Francois-Leonor Merimee concerning Ingres' portrait in a report submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, as quoted by Philip Conisbee in the catalogue *"Portraits by Ingres, Image of an Epoch"*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Publications, New York, 1999, page 69.

portraiture is a dismembered faction, exiled by sheer function, a mute menagerie with no particular place to go. They are mausoleums for the ghosts of a civil past. The silent sadness of these spaces is daunting and the rows of faces mimic picture post-cards on the inscriptions of a crematorium. But by the guiding hand of fate I discover Mark Gilbert and Adam Tift in The National Portrait Gallery in London. Gilbert's notable link with Lucian Freud and Tift's interest in the environmental issues of the working class deny the 80's fascination with simulation and return the essence of subjectivity.

Chapter 6: The Fatman in History

The Fatman in History now draws into his belly the pages of an alternative antiquity. It returns to the introspection that has galvanised my practise. By surrendering to the cycle of pure self-portraiture, it immediately allowed for the shedding of awkward side issues and half-baked metaphors that, in their layering, had possibly asphyxiated earlier works. It was no longer about painting, it was painting and the history was mine. The first portrait "*Fat Man in History 1*" (Fig. 53), 1998, affirmed the notion of 'self-portrait as the allegory of painting'. But the problems didn't immediately dissipate. The second portrait, "*Fat Man in History 2*" (Fig. 54), (1998) referred to the process of preparing to produce the image of me in the Paris studio and further layered the notion of the allegory. The tension of these works lies in their awkwardness in addressing the whole concept of 'The Fatman in History'. Clearly, they were transient images that were part of a perpetual torment and alluded to a bigger picture. The crux of the 'Fat Man' metaphor was the extent to which my confrontation with so many examples of Western painting had resulted in aesthete obesity. I had simply consumed beyond my capacity and needed closure.



Fig. 53, Wayne Brookes, *Fatman in History I*, 1998. Fig. 54, Wayne Brookes, *Fatman in History II*, 1998.

There have been a great many poignant images that operate as both allegory and portrait. They stalk you all your life. Some, like Velazquez's "*Pope Innocent X*" (1650, Galleria Doria, Pamphili, Rome) have shadowed me for years. This image has always haunted me as an apparition of my father as the inquisitor to the 'sons of Sodom'. What I see is a generic image in terms of physical inheritance. As the epidermis declines, I become my father and as a visual proposition, it contains unquestionable references to the perversities of interiors. With apologies to Vermeer, I am a creature of enclosure, my father an enclosed creature. We are self-contained and contained within the self. My father was the dominating patriarch, the joker, the inquisitor and the enforcer. Within a few seconds at a family gathering at Christmas in 1998, my father assumed the guise of Innocent by the simple act of donning a party hat. Giovanni Battista Pamphili was fair but righteous and somehow the two images were perfectly synchronised. My father with his extremely conservative political career and Innocent X with his inquisitorial tendencies were symbiotically linked.



Fig. 55,
Wayne Brookes,
George, 1999.

If my history begins with my father, then I phantom his history. There is an image of Jeff Koons at full throttle, espousing the virtue of exploiting the masses to a group of school children. There is also a photograph of my father selling the workings of the Junior Council to a group of school children in 1968. Koons' entrepreneurial propensity was a luscious aperitif. It suggested that inclusion of yourself in the act was unnecessary. This relinquished the need for the autobiographical in self-portraiture, after all, as Koons might suggest 'God is in the detail'. The extrapolation of this is that if I find myself in the aging flesh of my father as replicated in the history of art, I can see myself in the bodies of others or beyond the figurative. With "*George*" (Fig. 55), (1999), The Fat Man triptych was final.

All of this was a necessary rite of passage for the development of the final work for submission. Much like those hallowed beings of Hollywood, the Thespian becomes director or cinematographer when the issue of self becomes too large for the issue of script, character or role. In the bigger picture, the control of every nuance induces a greater stimulation of ego than physically being part of it. History is always there, directly in front of you even if it casts an even bigger shadow behind you. It begs the question of the implication of the figure. Is it actually a physical necessity within a portrait? Like Hopper, I wanted the figure to leave the building. I had invested so much reliance on the cult of personality and loading the surface with a familiarity of strategy. The future had be an investigation into the pure visual virtuosity of objects within a space. I had wandered through so many splendid corridors and had denied the true strata of fixation. Distracted by the saturation of genius adorning the walls, my focus had started to linger. The crown of the spectre was the muscular cornice above the paintings. Like some jitterbug epilepsy you flicker between Trecento and Baroque, but the room returns like a distant echo.⁴⁷ These spaces were originally domicile, containment for antiquitous acumen and yet I see myself everywhere.

Chapter 7: The Gates to Paradise

The corporal space of the Louvre became a nostalgic rendezvous with enclosure. Opulent splendour is largely disregarded in favour of the precious adornment. If art is reflective of an experience, then the Object d'Art dominion in The Louvre was my galvanised expression of that at its most immaculate. Everything is contained within that space: the furtive apprehension of history, the uncomfortable acknowledgment of repression, the aching desire of ambition and the melting affirmation of genius. They are there, in a space that represents another confine. The Fatman has his nemesis. Everything is accommodated within that space. It is another wall, another room but the definitive room. This museum distils my practice. The replication of this fabulous space would summarise the broad horizons of both my practice and facilitate the objective of my project.

⁴⁷ This is a nostalgic reference to my daily visits to the Louvre.

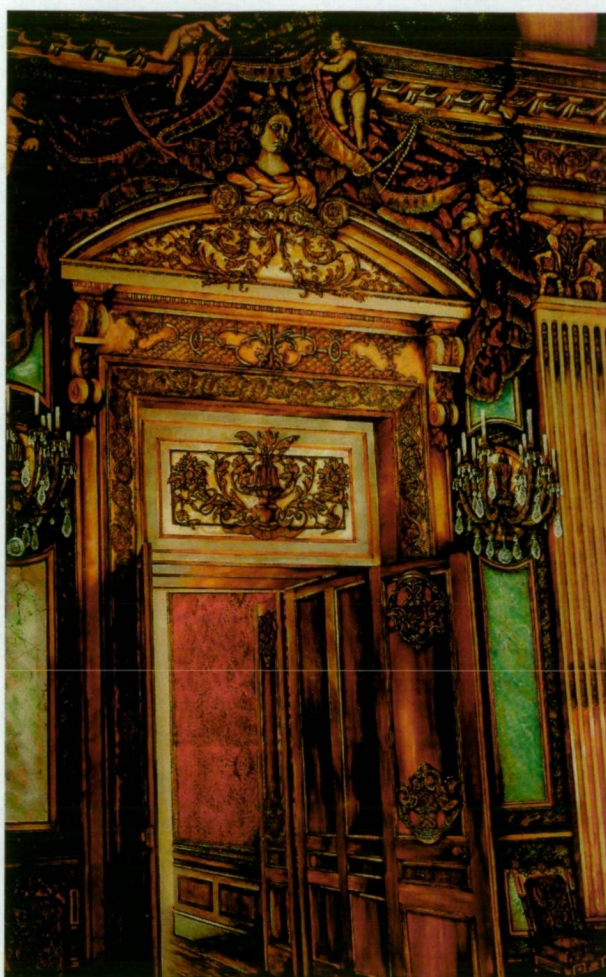


Fig. 56, Wayne Brookes, *Gates to Paradise I*, 2000.

Four images were chosen to represent the 'enclosure', or four walls. The paintings from these images would need to dominate the viewer and therefore replicate the original experience, albeit an abstracted one. The four images were absolutely bound by the spontaneity of that first contact and were therefore subject to photographic anomalies. These would include compositional awkwardness, light depletion or saturation and the obvious technical constraints of the equipment.

The first painting "*Gates to Paradise 1*" (Fig. 56), (2000) leans backwards and twists to the right in a gauche convulsion. Much like a visual shrug, it affirms a hesitancy of choice. Its hard cropping denies connection with either the floor or the ceiling, so it lingers in a spatial purgatory. The heavily ornate pediment above the open door off-balances the painting's centre of gravity and assists with the vertigo-enhanced backward tilt. The golden shaft through the doorway offers some salvation for a viewer who requires entry. Beyond this point of passage is a claustrophobic cliff of accessory that completely denies access. As a deliberate residue from the 'Fat Man' forerunner, the noble head and cherubs are transplanted Renaissance and Baroque images⁴⁸, as are all the ornamental patterns. This was a matter of necessity given the lack of macro detail available from the original photographs.

⁴⁸ These include imports from Giulio Romano's "*Virgin and Child*" (1520-25); Juseppe de Ribera's "*Immaculata Conceptio*" (1635); Michelangelo's "*Holy Family and St John*" (1504-6) and "*Tomb of Lorenzo de Medici*" (1519 -34) and Correggio's "*Jupiter and Antiope*" (c1524).

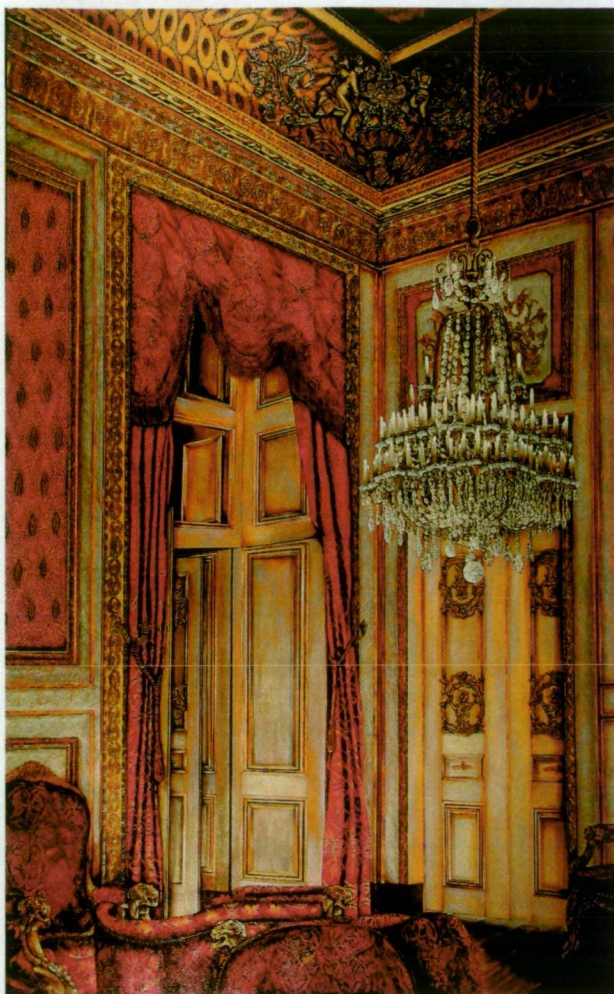


Fig. 57, Wayne Brookes,
Gates to Paradise II, 2001.

The second canvas, "*Gates to Paradise 2*" (Fig. 57), (2001) has a distinctively lighter tonal key and draws further back from the point of engagement. The expanse is also a spatial dichotomy avowing a shallow, physical compromise for the furnishings and furniture but it allows the chandelier to be suspended within a discreetly greater corral of volume. While the figure appears to be absent, this work begins to oblige the body by, again, insinuating passage. The comfort zone of golden light leaks from beneath closed doors, but what appears possible is a descent into the void. Here the draped canopy, suggesting a womb-like surrogacy personifies the body. As a further anointment, the stone seraphs are actually a replication from Bernini's baptism font in St Peter's Basilica. It became obvious by the beginning of "*Gates to Paradise 3*" (Fig. 58), (2002) that there was a critical need to return to the original space and extensively re-document it. As the images had already been chosen, this would allow for more intense detail to be amassed. Returning to the Napoleon Apartments was an eminently hallucinogenic experience. The intense engagement required to execute these works had nurtured

a precious relationship with every square centimetre of their surface. As The Grand Salon is infinitely more overwhelming than plastic replications could ever be, walking back into the space was a profoundly emotional experience. The familiarity of subject was there, but there was a ravine between the conjured and the actual. The work appeared to be a merely a biopsy, a scraping or puncture of the chamber. As I had only just commenced the third painting before my departure, saturation documentation would at least eliminate some of the vague properties of the first two. This would move the work further from an indeterminate analogy to an actual facsimile. "*Gates to Paradise 3*" was completed with the full chronicle. In this respect, it emerges with a greater sense of depth and clarity than the previous work. The fabrication of the golden light is subsumed by natural light and, as the observer, you have a sense of the beckoning world beyond. As it commands a more convincing sense of space, so too does the furniture. They emanate the reasoning of the physique, and an association with it.



Fig. 58, Wayne Brookes, *Gates to Paradise III*, 2002.

The conclusive painting condenses the entire project. "*Gates to Paradise 4*" (Fig. 59), (2003) pushes the spectacle away from the veneer surface and creates a balance between real space and the articulated space of the image. Here the furniture has adopted a conversational demeanour, intensifying human personification. The external world, and the cascade of light emanating from it, is no longer a mere implication, instead it asserts itself as an integral feature within the work. The galvanising focal point is the mirror, which not only identifies and thus references the world beyond, it acts both as a convention of the 'portal' and places the observer within the space in much the same way as Velazquez does in "*Las Meninas*" (1656, Prado, Madrid). We see a greater expanse of furious opulence beyond the condensed post-card constraints of the photograph. But unlike Velazquez, we are denied an actual position within the mirror's embodiment because the reflected world is absolutely above us. In this respect, the painting creates a multi-dimensional narrative that encompasses the plastic emulsive surface of the photograph, the illusion of passage into real space and the conundrum of the mirror, which takes us beyond the realm of the painting.



Fig. 59, Wayne Brookes, *Gates to Paradise IV*, 2003.

Conclusion

The project has evolved from a preliminary speculation of the spectacular to encompass ardent concerns of portraiture. The initial conjecture and its association with the fervent desire to realise virtuosity as a zealous mechanism, was subjugated by the more personally biased aspiration to reconcile my identity. The issues of illusionism, realism and the subject of prodigy appear to have become a form of objective subterfuge. This was the central nucleus of the project. The virtuosity of objects is an undeniable pivot within the appreciation of both *Quadratura* and *trompe l'oeil* painting. It signalled a desire to aspire to that elevated sanctum of the maestro and, through a filter of technical proficiency, it homogenised the intention for outcome. Within the early phases of the project this ambition was the mentor and proved to be all pervasive. You attempt to adopt this historical context as your peerage and attempt to compete openly with the achievements of these champions. The encounter with the Napoleonic suite was a significant transmutation of this objective simply because it defined the symbolic acumen of an enclosure as a metaphor for the body and its persona. Self-image therefore came from the language of virtuosity rather than the historic conventions of the portrait as either a likeness or a proponent of counterfeit truth.

Although the Napoleon III Apartments may be seen as further surrogacy, the body of work derived from this space represents the absolute distillation of my practice. These works delineate the ocular gush associated with visual splendour and consequentially attempt to resonate some shadow of the overwhelming awe I experienced during my first contact with the Grand Salon. In this respect, they attempt to facilitate facets of personal nostalgia by granting a second-hand experience to a widespread audience. This immediately implies the 'post card' legacy because of a secondary conception of 'association after the fact'. As adaptations of this notion, the work fulfils the literal translation of "*Quadratura*" as 'tourist pictures'. The very basis of this premise is the acceptance that my primary experience of this space was as a tourist and my depictions or echoes of this encounter have been abstractions from this foundation. Many of the motifs and decorative embellishments have been imported as a pastiche from art history as a deliberate Mannerist gesture. As the entire concept of the 'witness' pertains to the retelling of an account, it often arouses some suspicion of integrity because a statement of 'fact' is often a paraphrase. Regardless of any forensic evidence or the collection of the scene's 'fingerprint', the interpretation of this visual affidavit can be misleading or completely subjective. The photograph becomes a mapping tool of conjecture allowing the painter to verify the possible validity of the experience. It has been within this

parenthesis that the "*Gates to Paradise*" have been developed. They represent both an unmitigated impersonation of corporeal space and an articulate anthology of personal obsession. Here the contrivance of a room, which began as observed verity, supplants the body.

Collectively, these issues postulate a personal stratum of portraiture in a manner that is denied within the traditional image of the genre. Clearly the work has not come from within the pedantic historical context of portraiture; rather it represents an elliptical surge from within the effusive jet stream of virtuosity. Any conjecture within the modum of portraiture would have altered the considerations of this venture because the oeuvre of 'The Portrait' is another research project. Inevitably the conception of virtuosity also implies examination at a more concentrated level of extrapolation.

The template of the figure as a harbinger of guise, has only had a slim connection with eloquent replication prior to the nineteenth century because of its immersion in issues of vanity and idealism. The notion of the portrait as superlative duplication is possibly the legacy of the photographic absolute. I cannot expose or catalogue the frontiers of my existence within this format. The skin is armature and the body is a shallow receptacle for containment. The physical imprint of this is the usual agency for the portrait. Aside from those painters who have attempted to address deeper psychological implications, the nature of 'truth' has usually referenced the 'surface' as an accessible ideal. The discussion concerning the search for this exterior truth, as recognised by the Naturalists, identified this as a clearly observed fact, free from the bequest of idealism.

What I have recognised as a painter is that within my primary rummage for an understanding of the definition of the 'real' is a more authoritative facility for the facsimile. The significant revolution of the entire project has to be an acceptance that the portrait cannot be restricted within the visage. This was the flawed beginning of this project's scheme. The model of substitution and the technical task of being convincing were the instigating platform. It was as if the technical qualities became subordinate to the greater desire to persuade. To induce the fabric of 'the genuine' is to deliberately conjure the illusion. The physical attributes of "*Paradise*" recognise these constraints because they introduce a pristine submission to the genre of portraiture. The notion of the 'gush' that instigated everything in terms of my impetus now recognises a model of metaphor. As the shallow receptacle of portraiture maintains a suspension of belief within the veneer of likeness, the compacted depth of field within the 'Paradise' model articulates this convention by challenging intrusion beyond their surface.

The body of work is therefore another vehicle for containment. As a receptacle, it houses a nomenclature of memorandums, a filing system for fixation. The visual irony refers to the shallowness of space within the paintings, suggesting that, as canisters, they have the capacity to be as slight as the traditional portrait. The counteraction of this is the hallucinogenic screen that shields the audience from deeper encounters. This is the plastic surgeon surface, the barrier of my guise, virtually flayed within the rectangle. In respect of the journey through the matrix of the project, "*The Gates to Paradise*" represent the clearest definition of a program of a new approach to the definition of portraiture.

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