



Art against the Wall

Third Early Modern Symposium

10.00 – 17.30, Saturday 19 November 2011 (with registration from 9.30am)

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

ABSTRACTS

Rodrigo Cañete (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

Velazquez's Wall Hermeneutics or How Only His Role as Palace Superintendent Can Allow Us to Unlock The Meaning of His Paintings

This paper will discuss Velazquez's mythological paintings, taking issue with the way in which previous scholarship has neglected their historical context and the political needs of their patron, Philip IV. By portraying Velazquez as a genius who transformed painting into a noble endeavour, scholars have tended to ignore the part that Philip – in his dual role as patron and beholder – played in the construction of these paintings' meaning. Often consigned to the (autonomous and ahistorical) realm of Art, Velazquez's mythologies must also be understood as functioning within the fabric of everydayness and history; indeed, the functional interplay between art and its context is thematised in these paintings. It is significant in this context that Jonathan Brown, echoing a comment by Palomino, has characterised Velazquez's appointment in 1652 as *apostentador mayor de palacio* as a duty thrust upon the artist by a spoilt King which prevented him from using his God-given gift to the full. But what if the 1652 appointment is interpreted, not as a punishment or a reward, but as a logical continuance of Velazquez's lifelong interest in the articulation of meaning – outside as well as inside the work of art? Might it not be that for Velazquez the space where a painting was placed, as well as its political function within the King's household, were the elements that gave meaning to an image which is not just objectual but experiential. Accordingly, this paper argues that any interpretation of *Los Borrachos* and *Mercury and Argus* must take into account their original display context and the beholder's many phenomenologies.

Dario Donetti (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa)

'Quattordici cappelle a canto al muro': Some Architectural Issues Concerning Santa Croce in Florence under Cosimo I de Medici

In the 1568 edition of *The Lives*, Giorgio Vasari describes the architectural device used for the renovation of Santa Croce as 'quattordici cappelle a canto al muro'. These words unambiguously define the *status* of the new tabernacles, built along the monumental walls bounding the aisles of the church: they are not simple altars, but real chapels, with their own patronages and endowments, though limited to the thickness of the wall. In the years following the Council of Trent, between 1565 and 1575, Santa Croce was renovated by Vasari himself with Francesco da Sangallo. The intervention enhanced the monumental empty space, destroyed the choir, the rood screen and other medieval structures, and completely reconfigured the two walls. A long sequence of shrines – with an alternating *all'antica* rhythm, as in the Pantheon or in the Temple of Diana at Nîmes – stressed the perspective and transformed both the aesthetic and the meaning of the architecture. The fourteen tabernacles changed Santa Croce into a space *à la Renaissance* and, simultaneously, defined one of the first counter-reformed churches. This subtle operation of conservation and renewal was commissioned by Cosimo I, and it demonstrated the absolutist nature of his government. Documents from the legal actions brought against the Operai of Santa Croce testify to the prolonged conflict between the Duke and the old Florentine aristocracy, who still controlled the church, including the patronage of altars and chapels.

Catherine McCormack (UCL)

Caravaggio's Madonna of the Pilgrims or Just Another Brick in the Wall?

In his book *The Self-Aware Image*, Victor Stoichita suggests that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was a time of 'paintings whose theme is painting' either by means of reinforcing boundaries, or by acting as a 'living painting'. This paper will readdress Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Pilgrims* as a 'meta-painting' which concerns such themes and boundaries, by looking more closely at the patch of painted wall that seeps into the image, apparently bringing the profane world of the street into the sacred space of the Cavaletti chapel. In so doing this paper hopes to move away from orthodox narratives concerning Caravaggio and realism, and instead consider the work as an interplay of represented space, the space of vision and the 'real space'. The wall, painted in mimetic detail, will also open a debate as to the illusory capabilities of oil paint as a medium, in opposition to the hierarchical claims of fresco painting and so engage with contemporary debates of the period.

Adriano Aymonino (independent scholar)

The Integration of the Arts in British Neoclassical Interiors: Aesthetics and Meaning

In British interiors of the eighteenth century, the integration of architectural space with the works of art on display in it was a key element that dictated the choices of architects and patrons. Particularly in Neoclassical interiors, the organic relationship between architecture, decorative elements, sculptures and paintings was intended to create a system of classical references easily recognisable by the educated eye. To satisfy this demand, a constant stream of works of art was channelled from Italy to Britain, where the objects acquired new contexts and meanings in purpose-built palaces or country houses. Along with the objects, classical subjects and iconographies also migrated from Rome to the northern shores, where they were readapted in panels and wall decorations to reinforce the antiquarian coherency of the whole. However, the thematic consistency of many British Neoclassical interiors has not often been considered in the numerous studies devoted to them. Even fewer studies have examined which antiquarian sources were used to substantiate iconographical choices or the new meanings assigned to imported works of art. As a result, the logic and ideological intentions of many decorative schemes and cycles remain veiled and obscure to eyes that overlook them as purely ornamental. This paper will focus on a selection of key examples

taken from British Neoclassical interiors. It will analyze how objects and themes were chosen, reinterpreted, and integrated to their supporting walls to create spaces that were meant to be understood as a whole.

Susannah Brooke (Queens' College, Cambridge)

Issues of Display: a Private Picture Collection in London, c. 1795-1820

This paper will study the display of Viscount Lascelles's picture collection throughout his house on the north side of Hanover Square, London. Number 12 Hanover Square had been rebuilt by Robert Adam between 1776 and 1778 for the Earl of Roxburghe and was purchased by Edward Lascelles in 1795, the same year he inherited the family fortune. The house latterly became known as Harewood House and was used by Edward's eldest son, also called Edward (colloquially known as 'Beau' Lascelles). With an avant-garde taste in pictures Beau famously patronised and supported Turner and Girtin very early on in their careers. Watercolours which had been produced by artists as results of sojourns at Harewood House near Leeds were sent to London to be displayed in Hanover Square. Using a manuscript catalogue of pictures for the town house (compiled on the occasion of Lascelles's death in 1814) along with his accounts books, it is possible to recreate the picture hang. What type of pictures did Lascelles choose for the rooms of his London house? How was the presence of and connection with the family country seat manifested in the town? This paper will investigate the organisation and methods of display used in the London house during a time when watercolour 'drawings' were being transferred from the portfolio to the wall.

Gerry Alabone (Tate)

Painting, Frame and Setting

In *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida articulated the complex relationship between painting, frame and setting. Of this relationship the frame is, as an essentially architectonic border, key for the viewer in relating the painting to the wall and the hierarchy of things within a given place. Throughout all periods, people have had to reconcile these fundamental aesthetic and practical issues to create a powerful interior scheme. The various manners in which paintings have been physically applied to walls, e.g. directly, indirectly, inset, flush or canted, were in use throughout the early modern period. Many variables make discerning long-term trends difficult. The paper concentrates on analysing the evolution of easel paintings' frames in England, from the turn of the seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, and considers how they have helped the viewer relate painting and setting. It focuses on how physical characteristics of frame styles such as the dimensions of each member, profile, ornament, finish and overall outline all work to impart aesthetic meaning and value, as supplementary objects, to their paintings and settings. Surveying the varied and evolving relationships between individual and groups of paintings, frames and settings across three centuries, the paper examines three London houses, Ham, Osterley and Apsley as case studies of historical hangs on walls ranging from wainscot panelling to Robert Adam's plaster Classicism to the Salon style. Then, as now, these interior schemes of bordered pictures and spaces create an enigmatically-powerful sense of place for the viewer.

Meriel May Geolot (independent scholar)

Unravelling the Tapestries: The Gobelin's Tentures de Boucher in the Late Georgian English Country Home

The *Tentures de Boucher* is a French tapestry set that appears in several English country homes in the late Georgian era. These Gobelin manufactured tapestries boast the designs of François Boucher, one of the most highly celebrated artists in France – even though the English received his works less favourably. Despite the political and cultural tension between the French and English at this time, several English gentlemen clamoured to display these

tapestries in their grand country estates. George William Coventry of Croome Court, William Weddell of Newby Hall, and Robert Child of Osterley Park were three of the men eager to introduce the French tapestries into their homes. The gentlemen that commissioned these tapestries worked in tandem with Robert Adam, one of the most renowned designers of the eighteenth century. Adam's wary reception of the tapestries reflects the seemingly discordant style of the tapestries with the English artistic style of the time. The tapestries are installed in the room as a complete wall covering instead of being a mobile work of art, which made these rooms innovative and eye-catching. The tapestries occupy a prominent space in each home as a symbol of cultural power and wealth. The Boucher designs play with the theme of nature through classical mythology and pastoral imagery. The country home served as a stage to display drama and nature, and the tapestries embody this play between artifice and nature. The tapestry rooms offer an opportunity to examine the shifting cultural and artistic climate in England that resulted, ultimately, in the articulation of a truly 'English' style.

Marika T. Knowles (Yale University)

Pierrot and the Wall-Mask, or How the Wall Became a Character

This paper begins with the observation that Watteau's *Pierrot, dit Gilles* (1716-1719, Musée du Louvre) portrays a figure that in size and shape very much resembles the boiseries of Regency and Rococo interiors, in which a roughly symmetrical linear outline is constructed of C-curves whose density increases at the top, bottom, and sides. Pierrot, as well as the boiserie, is an iterative figure, composed of a single repeated shape, the C-curve, whose repetition is choreographed to the wall as a surface over which figures spread, rather than a window to be looked through. This paper will argue that the conflation of the wall and the theatrical personage as rendered in paint references theatre's scenic transformations during the seventeenth century, in which an architectural wall enclosing the stage – the Vitruvian scene – was replaced by a canvas *toile du fond* painted in illusionistic perspective. This substitution, however, only tended to emphasize the similarities between the wall and the painted canvas, both of which functioned equally efficiently to establish the limit of the physical scene. In *Pierrot, dit Gilles*, Watteau explores the relationship of the canvas wall to the representation of character, discovering the potential of an iterative figure to make the wall of a salon into a theatrical expression of character that serves – just as Pierrot the valet serves his master – the dominant character of the room's occupant.

Kristina Kleutghen (Washington University, St Louis)

Contradictions of Illusion and Immateriality: Psycho-Pictorial Disjunctions in Early Modern Chinese Wall Paintings

Although illusionistic paintings transformed walls into art in early modern Europe, in China such paintings had very different effects. 'Scenic illusion paintings' (*tong jing hua*), centered at the eighteenth-century Chinese court, were inspired by monumental *trompe-l'oeil* and produced by European missionary painters together with Chinese imperial artists. Composed and sized to completely cover the walls of imperial architectural sites, scenic illusions first integrated the architecture into the works, and then eliminated it to deceive the viewer into misperceiving the boundaries of reality. As traditional Chinese architecture employed walls merely as partitioning screens rather than load-bearing structures, scenic illusions sublimated these surfaces into groundbreaking works of art that are today considered masterpieces. While the *trompe-l'oeil* techniques of illusion and immateriality are legible as 'painting' in European contexts, these same elements contradicted the traditional Chinese definition of the term. Painting as 'art' was classically defined by expressive ink abstraction and scroll formats, while accurate/illusionistic representation and wall mounting indicated 'craft'. Although viewers marvelled at scenic illusions' visual effects, and lamented their lack in China's pictorial past, none were willing to characterize the works as true art – including the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1795), who commissioned hundreds of these paintings for his imperial spaces. This paper therefore seeks to conceptualize this tension between perception and painting that resulted from early modern Sino-European artistic exchange.

How did the unprecedented epiphanic experience of a perceived space, revealed as European-inspired illusionistic paintings superimposed upon Chinese walls, impugn the cultural identity of these masterworks as 'art'?

Kevin Childs (British School at Rome)

'...piena di grazia, di bellissime fantasie e di molte capricciose...' Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling and the Wall that is no Wall in Late Sixteenth-Century Roman Fresco Decoration

Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling was praised in the sixteenth century for its use of particular pictorial effects: foreshortening and other illusionary techniques combined to create a fictive space that appeared to defy the actual architecture of the chapel's ceiling. In the first few decades of the century the influence of these frescoes may have been refracted through the example of Raphael's Vatican Stanze, but by 1550 a new generation of artists was looking to the original source in Michelangelo's work for inspiration. Daniele da Volterra and Francesco Salviati were crucial to the development of a style of decoration which elaborated on the example of the Sistine Ceiling. Both explored the relationship between the structure of a wall and the various elements of fictive architecture, tapestries and statues as well as the visual meaning of narrative scenes, playing with its function in defining the physical limits of a room. Succeeding generations working both on palace decoration and in a sacred context on the walls of the Oratorio del Gonfalone and the Oratorio del Santissimo Crocifisso continued to explore these themes, often consciously challenging contemporary notions of the suitability of style to content or purpose. This paper will argue that Michelangelo had fundamentally altered the viewers' understanding of the representation of ceilings and walls to create an entirely new concept of space. The attraction of this approach to the wall not as a wall will be discussed through analysis of these late decorative cycles, which consciously emulate not only the idea of the Ceiling but other aspects of Michelangelo's style of painting and composition.

Francesco Freddolini (Getty Research Institute)

The Eloquent Walls: Stucco Decoration and Display of Art in Seventeenth-Century Rome

This paper explores the relations between stucco wall decoration and the display of art in seventeenth-century Roman Palaces. The walls of Annibale Carracci's *Galleria Farnese*, only rarely included in the analysis of the room, were modeled under the painter's direction and after his design. It will be argued that these walls not only created a consistent setting for the display of antique sculpture by adopting a classicizing decorative vocabulary, but also included the works on display within a wider system of relations to the frescoes on the walls and the ceiling itself, hence unifying the whole architectural space. Other examples will show how stucco decoration articulated the meaning, structure and function of the walls by establishing relations among the architectural surface, its decoration and the works on display. The tridimensional decoration of the walls – for example in the Pamphilj and Borghese galleries, or in some rooms of the still little-known stuccoes in Palazzo Altieri – not only created relations between the surface of the wall and the works against the wall itself, but also included such works within a complex iconographical and narrative discourse conveying heraldic messages of personal and familial power and identity, or alluding to gestures of display (the putti lifting stucco curtains to unveil a portrait of Clemens X Altieri). By exploring such relations between tridimensional wall decoration and the works on display, this paper aims at recuperating the original, unified relations that created articulated displays of art and identity within Roman palaces.

Friederike Drinkuth (Stately Palaces and Gardens Mecklenburg) and Tobias Locker (Technische Universität, Berlin)

Reconsidering the Frederician Rococo: The Discovery of Mirow Palace

In Mirow Palace, 79 miles north of Berlin, Queen consort Charlotte, wife of George III, passed part of her childhood. One of the palace's main treasures is the state apartment that the Queen's widowed mother Duchess Elizabeth Albertine of Mecklenburg-Strelitz had refurbished in Rococo style during the Seven Year's War. As the most elaborate sculptural carvings of its interior decorations were executed by famous Prussian court artists, this until-now unexamined ensemble of exceptional artistic quality is stylistically and personally linked to the interiors of the royal palaces at Potsdam and Berlin, which are built in a continental interior style called Frederician Rococo. Essential for the recent reconstruction of the apartment are several contemporary sketches, owned by the Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor. Within the research process, historical documents were found that allow us for the first time to retrace the provenance of these important sketches and to discover a highly likely royal provenance. Furthermore, they shed new light on the artistic process and illustrate the major role of Johann Melchior Kambly, who is known for his creation of the famous tortoiseshell-furniture for the Prussian King Frederick II. The splendid interiors at Mirow do not only contest the notion that the impact of Frederician Rococo was 'geographically very limited', but also offer new perspectives on this interior style. By giving an historically contextualised picture of the wall-mounted decorations and by identifying their creator, the paper will argue that this gem could be seen as a link between the early and late phases of Frederician Rococo decoration. This rarely-considered example has to be taken into account in future research.