



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

An introduction to the next British Art Network seminar by Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, Pre-1800 British Art, Tate Britain

There are many familiar theoretical prompts to questioning the relevance, reliability and legibility of biography as a way of framing bodies of artworks, from the *Art History without Names* envisioned by Heinrich Wölfflin to Roland Barthes' *Death of the Author*. If hardly unique to British art history, these questions may have special significance given the enduring influence of a national mythology based around individualism. Typically, the influential print publisher John Boydell claimed in 1804 that 'every Artist, partaking of the freedom of his country, and endowed with that originality of thinking, so peculiar to its natives, has chosen his own road, to what he conceived to be excellence, unshackled by the slavish imitation and uniformity that pervade all the foreign schools'. So the single-artist collection, defined by the authorship and life story of an individual and often claiming to represent that life story through scores, hundreds or even thousands of artworks and other items, might look from some perspectives an awkward, even anachronistic, entity. It might evoke simplistic methodologies, uncritical hero-worship, a fixed and nationalistic canon, while promising little in the way of diversity and contemporary engagement. Yet the monographic format persists in the form of exhibitions, books and their marketing: as we all know, names sell shows.



In this newsletter, Nicholas Tromans suggests that the artist's house museum may actually be entering a moment of new currency and importance. For mixed collections, discussed below by Alex Kidson, single-artist collections may be the anomalous outcomes of historical accidents or curatorial whims as much as the legitimate embodiment of historical reputations. As the national collection of British art, the Tate has several such collections – Turner most obviously, but also Henry Moore, William Blake, Thomas Gainsborough. How do we care for, present and make meaningful such extensive bodies of work given all the familiar pressures on space and resources? Beyond the metropolis, the single-artist collection may represent a singular asset, one of the ways that the much-vaunted 'dispersed' national collection may properly be manifested. The collection of Wright of Derby at Derby, for instance, is of international importance, and in this raises an array of important – even urgent – questions, about the distribution of expertise and resources, about the relationship between national and regional institutions, about our collecting histories and futures. We hope that the next British Art Network seminar in Derby, details below, will provide an opportunity to explore these issues in greater depth.

JOSEPH WRIGHT OF DERBY AND SINGLE ARTIST COLLECTIONS

Next British Art Network event

Museum and Art Gallery, Derby
 Monday 30 June 2014, 11.00-17.00

This seminar will explore questions and issues around 'single artist collections' - the in-depth holdings of key individual artists which can be found in many museums and galleries across the UK. Often of international importance, these collections are major assets and a focus for public and scholarly interest. Some of these collections can rightly be considered as the foundation of world-class centres for the study and appreciation of key figures from art history. But these collections also bring challenges, in terms of presentation, administration, interpretation and research. Using the collection of

Joseph Wright's work at Derby Museums as a starting point, the day will explore these questions and challenges and offer the chance to share experiences and insights.

Confirmed speakers include those from Gainsborough's House, Watts Gallery, York Art Gallery, The Hepworth Wakefield, Nottingham University/Derby Museums and University of Exeter. In addition, there will be an opportunity to visit the exhibition *Joseph Wright in Bath*, on show at the Museum and Art Gallery, Derby, from 25 May to 30 August 2014, produced in partnership with The Holburne Museum, Bath.

The seminar is programmed by Lucy Bamford, Keeper of Art, Derby Museums, in collaboration with Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, Pre-1800 British Art, Tate Britain.

To reserve your place to request travel funds please contact [Helen Woodfield](#), Network Coordinator for British Art.

For further information please visit the [British Art Network events webpage](#).

THE ARTIST'S HOUSE AS A MUSEUM

Dr. Nicholas Tromans, Watts Gallery

The time of the artist's house or studio as a museum seems to have come. At the Villa Stuck in Munich there is currently an original exhibition devoted to the recreation of a sequence of rooms from artists' houses. In September the Museums and Galleries History Group will be holding their annual conference on the theme of *Museums as Houses / Houses as Museums*. We at Watts Gallery made our contribution last November when we hosted a colloquium on the theme of Studio Museums, based around a series of presentations by curators of examples of this special class of art-spaces from around Europe. The event was held in what had been the studio of George Frederic Watts at Limmerslease, his house across the lane from the Gallery building. This part of the house will open to the public next year as part of Watts Studios, a new element of the Watts Gallery estate inspired by the lives and working practices of Watts and his wife, the designer Mary Seton Watts.

Artists' studios and houses, at their best, can offer visitors experiences which they risk missing at the major national museums in the great cities. Their most obvious advantage is their rootedness in a place which enhances the art itself. They are often places which were independent, rural or suburban sites of the international interchange of ideas, networks and objects. As miniature Artists' Colonies they present a dynamic personalised alternative to the 'survey' model of museum displays curated by behind-the-scenes experts in large institutions. That nineteenth-century model of the comprehensive collection is not something any of us would want to abandon. But the Artist's House, having long seemed a hobbyist's backwater, now seems poised to give our museum scene a shot in the arm.

SINGLE ARTIST COLLECTIONS

Alex Kidson

'Single artist collections' appear to fall broadly into two categories: one where the artist's current standing is exceptional and the museum concerned is the *fons et origo* of all serious research, its *raison d'être* scarcely questioned. One thinks of Van Gogh in Amsterdam, Dali in St. Petersburg (Picasso so huge he has two...). The second is where a group of important works lie within a larger collection and raises awkward questions of balancing and proportioning resources. A good example of this is Abbot Hall in Kendal, where successive directors have chosen diametrically contrasted policies of 'strengthening' the collection, towards and away from George Romney.

Derby Art Gallery is an interesting case because it combines elements of both models. Veering towards the first has been an option because Joseph Wright's association with the town is unusually well-defined and because his artistic reputation has risen exponentially in the museum age. If the museum has remained closer to the second model, that is partly because it needs to highlight its region's cultural richness and diversity, partly because many of Wright's most seminal paintings are in other collections, and partly a matter of simple financial muscle.

Although it's useful to examine parallels between 'single artist collections', each is subtly different and unique, the product of random factors. The contribution of individual collectors and their personal tastes is often critical. A century ago, the Walker Art Gallery owned three good paintings by a local sporting artist of the early nineteenth



century which were satisfactorily embedded within a general representation of the 'Liverpool school'. Today, thanks to the bequests of two separate fanatical collectors, it owns ninety-eight. Even though it is the place where any serious study of the painter concerned begins, nobody would know, as ninety-six are permanently in store.

AUDIO RECORDINGS OF THE OVERLOOKED VICTORIAN ARTISTS SEMINAR **Past British Art Network event**

The British Art Network's third seminar on *Overlooked Victorian Artists* took place at Manchester Art Gallery on the 16 January 2014, programmed by Rebecca Milner, Curator of Fine Art, Manchester City Art Gallery, Liz Prettjohn, Professor of Art History at the University of York, in collaboration with Alison Smith, Lead Curator, 19th-Century British Art, Tate Britain. The seminar considered examples of both male and female Victorian artists, who although well known in their day, have since come to occupy marginal positions in the history of British art. The day explored the museological and historiographic reasons for their neglect and considered how new approaches to curating and research could help to rehabilitate reputations.

Presentations were made by Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash, Research Curator, National Gallery; Christiana Payne, Professor of Art History, Oxford Brookes University; Dr. Katie Tyreman, University of York; Dr. Patricia de Montfort, Lecturer in Art History, University of Glasgow; Simon Toll, Deputy Director, Sotheby's; Dr. Laura MacCulloch, College Curator, Royal Holloway, University of London; Henrietta Ward, Art Historian; Prof. Liz Prettjohn, Professor of History of Art and Head of History of Art, University of York and Alison Smith, Lead Curator, 19th-Century British Art, Tate Britain.

Audio recordings of the day's presentations can be found on the [British Art Network webpages](#)



OTHER BRITISH ART RELATED EXHIBITIONS & EVENTS

Beyond the British Art Network

Joseph Wright of Derby: Bath and Beyond

Until 5 May 2014

The Holburne Museum, Bath

Joseph Wright 'of Derby' (1734-1797) lived and worked in Bath between November 1775 and June 1777. This brief and little-known episode in Wright's life marked a crossroads in his career, yet it has never been explored in detail.

This exhibition will place Wright in the context of the many artists, musicians, writers, business people and scientists living and working in the Georgian spa and present for the first time a comprehensive view of his life and work during those eighteen months and beyond.

For further details, including how to book your ticket, please visit the [The Holburne Museum website](#).

Study Day: Constable Inspires

10 May 2014

A day of talks, opinions and new perspectives from the experts, inspired by John Constable's painting.

Part of the Aspire programme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund.

For further details, including how to book your ticket, please visit the [National Museum Wales Website](#).



In focus: Albert Wainwright

Until 18 May 2014

The Hepworth Wakefield

The Hepworth Wakefield is home to the largest public collection of artist and designer Albert Wainwright's work. Born in Castleford in 1898, Wainwright was a childhood friend of Henry Moore but only achieved a fraction of Moore's acclaim during his lifetime. In Focus: Albert Wainwright is the first exhibition of the artist's work in his home county in over 30 years since the last exhibition at Wakefield Art Gallery in 1980.

For further details please visit [The Hepworth Wakefield Website](#).

John Ruskin: Photographer and Draughtsman

Until 1 June 2014
Watts Gallery

John Ruskin: Photographer and Draughtsman is the first museum exhibition to explore how the new medium of photography played a pivotal role in the evolution of this leading Victorian's influential thinking. Bringing together daguerreotypes (unique copper photographic plates) –rarely on public display – with related drawings and watercolours, the exhibition shows how Ruskin used photography to build his understanding of landscape and architecture. This exhibition showcases many of the important works held in the Ruskin Library collection at Lancaster University.

For further details please visit the [Watts Gallery Website](#).

Constable: Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows

Until 7 September 2014
National Museum Cardiff

John Constable's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 is considered one of his most famous landscapes. National Museum Cardiff is the first of five venues to display this important 'six footer' which was recently purchased by Tate. The painting will be accompanied by other works by Constable, as well as by artists who inspired and revered him. The display will be complemented by a series of events and learning activities.

Aspire is a partnership programme enabling audiences of all ages to enjoy and learn more about the work of John Constable by touring *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* 1831 to five UK institutions. Aspire is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund.

For more information about the display and related events visit the [National Museum Wales website](#).

Houses as museums / museums as houses

Museums and Galleries History Group
12 – 13 September 2014

The 2014 MGHG conference will seek to understand the historical development of the relationship between museums and domestic spaces by investigating the ways in which museums have acted as houses, and houses have acted as museums. It will also explore the ways in which house-museums/museum-houses have been positioned in boundary zones of space and time, and what effect they have had on those boundaries.

The conference will take place at the Wallace Collection, London, itself an illustration of the ways in which houses may become museums, or are (re)designed as museums by their owner, as Hertford House was by Sir Richard Wallace.

For more information please visit the [Museums and Galleries History Group Website](#).

THE LAUNCH OF ART DETECTIVE AND AN INVITATION TO JOIN AS A 'GROUP LEADER' **Andrew Greg, University of Glasgow**

Featured in previous newsletters, [Art Detective](#) provides a public forum for discussions around publically owned paintings in the UK. This exciting and innovative online initiative was 'soft' launched on 13 March 2014. Specifically, Art Detective helps curators seek missing knowledge about their collections and engages outside expertise and the informed public in providing this knowledge. Discussions on Art Detective are carefully selected and edited from contributions made via the Art Detective link on the individual painting pages on [Your Paintings](#).

Discussions are linked to relevant specialist interest groups, such as British Portraits, Military History, Scottish Artists and Subjects. Each group has a group leader who monitors the public discussions in their group and brings them to a conclusion. Art Detective was launched with six pilot groups. We are now keenly seeking leaders for the 'British 18th century except portraits' and 'British 19th century except portraits' groups (the British Portraits group has its own leader). A number of the UK regional groups also require leaders. These roles



are pro bono. If you are interested in these roles, or know anyone who might be, and would like more information please contact [Andrew Greg](#) or [Alice Payne](#).

Should you have any comments or wish to contribute to the content of the next newsletter please email BritishArtNetwork@tate.org.uk.

The British Art Network is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.



If you have any questions or want to update your contact details please contact [Helen Woodfield](#), Network Coordinator for British Art, via Helen.Woodfield@tate.org.uk.

Top image: Joseph Wright of Derby, Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples c.1776-80, Oil paint on canvas, support: 1220 x 1764 mm frame: 1461 x 1941 x 95 mm, Purchased with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, Friends of the Tate Gallery, and Mr John Ritblat 1990 © Tate

Second image: Joseph Wright of Derby, Thomas Staniforth of Darnall, Co. York 1769, Oil paint on canvas, support: 930 x 775 mm frame: 1100 x 935 x 75 mm, Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1965, © Tate

Third image: George Frederic Watts and Assistants, Hope 1886, Oil paint on canvas, support: 1422 x 1118 mm frame: 1740 x 1425 x 105 mm, Presented by George Frederic Watts 1897 © Tate

Fourth image: George Romney, Emma Hart as Circe c.1782, Oil paint on canvas, support: 533 x 495 mm, Bequeathed by Lady Wharton 1945 © Tate

Fifth image: John Brett, Lady with a Dove: Madame Loeser 1864, Oil paint on canvas, support: 610 x 457 mm frame: 785 x 632 x 80 mm, Presented by Lady Holroyd in accordance with the wishes of the late Sir Charles Holroyd 1919 © Tate

Sixth image: John Ruskin, The North-West Angle of the Facade of St Mark's, Venice, Watercolour and graphite on paper, support: 940 x 610 mm, Presented by the Art Fund 1914 © Tate

Last image: Richard Wilson, Llyn-y-Cau, Cader Idris ? exhibited 1774 Richard Wilson, Oil paint on canvas, support: 511 x 730 mm frame: 670 x 895 x 73 mm, Presented by Sir Edward Marsh 1945 © Tate

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