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## At the Galleries

AMONG THE MOST NOTABLE OF THE PAST SEASON'S exhibitions were revelations of studio practice in early twentieth-century Paris, the Dutch Golden Age, and seventeenth-century Spain. In London, for example, "Rodin and Dance: The Essence of Movement," at the Courtauld Gallery, organized in collaboration with the Musée Rodin, Paris, surveyed the French master's compelling late images of dancers. Made in the 1890s, when Auguste Rodin was in his 50s and 60s, these radically simplified drawings and sculptures bear witness to a private side of the celebrated artist. Exhibited with photographs that provided context, they documented Rodin's delight in vanguard dance, from a Cambodian troupe to Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller. Rodin attended performances and had dancers pose for him in the studio (one acrobatic model with an exceptionally flexible spine was a favorite), responding with rapid pencil drawings, many made, as was his frequent practice, without taking his eyes off the model to glance at the page. Some of these vigorous, pared-down images were embellished with watercolor, while others remained untouched—evidence of both Rodin's methods and his ability to distill perception into economical, evocative shapes.

His quest, however, was to re-create movement through space in sculptural terms. The small, spatially articulate, experimental sculptures that translated those shapes into three dimensions were the core of the show. We followed Rodin's startlingly modern process of casting multiple heads, torsos, and limbs, in various positions, in clay, and then combining these elements in different ways, like a kit of parts, ignoring anatomical accuracy in favor of expression. Rodin's lifelong emphasis on the way limb thrusts against limb or projects against torso ultimately derives from Michelangelo, but his way of assembling near-abstract bodies from discrete elements points ahead to Pablo Picasso's and Juli González's pioneering constructions in steel, and to the startling innovations of David Smith and Anthony Caro. But Rodin had no single approach. A small, full-length bronze portrait of Vaslav Nijinsky, in full flight, bending forward, poised on one thickly muscled leg, was totally unlike the slender, experimental clay works. Even the clay original of the piece risked being a kitsch figurine but somehow read as a metaphor for the legendary dancer's powerful attack.

Rodin's dancers fascinate, in part, because, with the exception of Nijinsky's full-length portrait, they lack definitive orientation. Their

small size suggests that they were to be held in the hand and turned for viewing, defying traditional notions of stability and weight transfer. Poses are ambiguous. Is this dancer reaching forward, in an extreme *arabesque*, or supporting herself on two outstretched arms and one leg, with the other extended upward? The agile little figures were suspended from gravity-defying metal brackets, emphasizing their contingency and permitting us to study Rodin's audacious ways of evoking gesture and movement from many angles. Like Edgar Degas's urgently worked wax dancers, bathers, and horses, these remarkable sculptures were originally seen only by the artist's closest circle. "Rodin and Dance" allowed us to join that exclusive group and discover his extraordinary, vital ways of reinventing what sculpture could be, even after he had become a national institution. No wonder Henri Matisse admired him so.

Another intimate view was provided by "Drawings for Paintings in the Age of Rembrandt," at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., a glimpse into the studios of such seventeenth-century Dutch masters as Hendrick Avercamp, Jan van Goyen, Jan Lievens, Paulus Potter, Rembrandt, and Pieter Jansz Saenredam, among others. The show's thesis was illustrated by Michiel van Musscher's *An Artist in His Studio with His Drawings* (mid-1660s). A black-clad painter, holding his palette, with a canvas in work on his easel, stares down at a spill of drawings of ships, spread at his feet. These useful images were almost certainly made from life and carefully saved to be used, as we are shown, as models for paintings made in the studio, perhaps transferred to the canvas as under-drawing. Seventeenth-century writers on art practice suggested that in addition to drawings "from life," a painter's stock of images should include those made "from memory" or "from imagination."

Only a fraction of what must have been an enormous number of these fragile, utilitarian works on paper has survived, but the Washington show provided a rich selection of many types, with many uses—everything from meticulously finished preparatory studies to rough sketches of first thoughts, often combined with related paintings. In the "from life" category, we encountered sheets with several versions of the same figure and one with multiple legs, studies of alternative footwear. We discovered careful notations of architecture, landscape, animals, and ships, and drawings of studio models, including a pair showing the same woman, from slightly different viewpoints, drawn by two different artists, working side by side. Representing "from memory" and "from imagination" were rapid sketches and preliminary compositional experiments, including various possibilities for a crowded multi-figure official portrait and for a more casual family group. Construction drawings and drawings squared for transfer to the canvas made us think about method, as did a single elegant drawing made as a record of a finished painting. Often, we could compare drawings to the resulting paintings—photographs substituted for absent canvases—and we sometimes noted reuses of stock material. A section on technical examination helped us to understand further the seventeenth-century Dutch artist's process through revelations of under-drawing and other hidden details. For sheer power, it was hard to beat Rembrandt's red

chalk *Old Man Seated* (1631), with its delicately smudged head, broadly rendered drapery, fiercely scrawled chair, and some hasty corrections in black chalk, but the entire exhibition was dazzling. We'll never look at Golden Age Dutch paintings the same way again.

In the same vein, "Velázquez Portraits: Truth in Painting," a miniature exhibition in the Spanish permanent collection galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, presented the informal side of the Spanish court painter's work, in contrast to his well-known official portraits and large, ambitious canvases. The installation was anchored by the Met's great *Juan de Pareja* (1650), the portrait of his assistant, made and exhibited by Velázquez to demonstrate his ability to capture a penetrating likeness with bravura brushwork when he was in Rome awaiting a commission to paint Pope Innocent X—the acclaimed portrait in Palazzo Doria-Pamphili. The installation's head of the newly appointed Cardinal Camillo Astalli-Pamphili, the pope's nephew, a tour de force of economy and gorgeous red, was painted at the end of that stay. Just cleaned and placed in a period frame, the arresting painting was on loan from the too-little visited Hispanic Society of America, now undergoing renovation. So was the enchanting, also newly cleaned and reframed *Portrait of a Young Girl* (c. 1640), a picture of striking informality. The solemn, dark-eyed girl is Velázquez's only portrait of a female child not a princess, an image made even more immediate by the sketchy, unfinished dress; the Met's close-up study of the Infanta Maria Teresa, with her extravagant wig covered with translucent bows and her unmistakable Habsburg jaw, provided contrast. The installation's other works—a workshop piece, a possible self-portrait, and a bold portrait of a peasant girl—were similarly notable for their directness and freshness. If we spent enough time with "Velázquez and Portraits," we started to feel that we'd been privileged to visit his studio.

At the Frick Collection, Guido Cagnacci's *Repentant Magdalene* (c. 1660–1663), on loan from the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, presented yet another less than familiar aspect of the seventeenth century. Cagnacci, acclaimed in his day for his sensuous interpretations and virtuoso technique (and notorious for his behavior), was largely forgotten until the 1950s and is still little known in this country. The enormous canvas shows us the Magdalene at the moment she renounced sin in favor of a virtuous Christian life, after encountering Christ. An athletic angel, stripped to the waist, chases the devil off the premises, while the heroine's soberly dressed sister, kneeling beside her, points to Virtue's triumph over Vice. A couple of servants, one weeping, hover behind. Mary Magdalene herself may have opted for virtue, but she has done so in a way that can only be called lascivious. She's stripped off all her finery, filling a corner of the canvas with her discarded luxurious clothing, cast-off jewelry, and absolutely stunning shoes, all ravishingly rendered. Clad only in a provisionally draped sheet, crumpled between her legs, she lies prone, propped on her elbows, coyly half-concealing her charms. The paint handling is gorgeous, the image equivocal. To find out more, we can visit the Met for its seductive, recently acquired *Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1645–55)—asp as deadly necklace, against pale



flesh—and the Italian Cultural Institute, a few blocks south of the Frick, where the even more seductive *Dying Cleopatra* (1660)—nude torso, minimal snake, undefended pose—is visiting from the Brera, Milan. And we can read the just-published, informative *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, the first book in English on the artist in three decades, by the Frick's chief curator, Xavier F. Salomon.

*The Repentant Magdalene*, one of Cagnacci's most important works, hasn't left California since the Norton Simon acquired it in 1982. From 1711 until 1981, it belonged to the Bentinck family and hung in a great English country house. At the Frick, the painting is installed in the large East Gallery, among paintings by Anthony Van Dyck, William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds, and John Constable, among other works typical of English collections. *The Repentant Magdalene* should feel right at home.

For a broader view of the seventeenth century, a trip to England was required, to see “Beyond Caravaggio,” the first major exhibition in the UK devoted to the pervasive influence of the bad boy of Baroque Rome, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. The show is a joint project of the National Gallery, London, its initial venue; the National Gallery of Ireland; and the National Galleries of Scotland. When Caravaggio's first major commission, the monumental images of the life and martyrdom of St. Matthew, in Rome's San Luigi dei Francesi, was unveiled in 1600, Rome was electrified. The dramatically lit, expressively staged scenes, shown in fierce close-up, enacted by figures depicted with astonishing realism, combined with the radical method of painting directly from the model, without preparatory studies, horrified traditionalists and enthralled younger artists. A host of Rome's seventeenth-century population of international artists adopted Caravaggio's direct method, along with his “cinematic” compositions and lighting, his take-no-prisoners realism, and his cast of characters. With varying degrees of success, they approximated his theatrically conceived, “spot-lit” religious and genre scenes, and populated them with versions of his bald-headed old men, cardsharps and rowdies in plumed hats, nubile boys, and peasant women, presenting them, as Caravaggio did, as if they were about to escape the confines of the canvas and enter our own space. Even after Caravaggio fled Rome permanently, in 1606, to escape punishment for killing a man, and after his death, age 39, in 1610, his influence persisted and spread, reaching artists who had never seen his work firsthand. Eventually, the intensity physicality of Caravaggio's approach was replaced by Nicolas Poussin's cool, cerebral Classicism, but for a good part of the seventeenth century, Caravaggism dominated.

“Beyond Caravaggio” traced that dominance among Caravaggio's contemporaries and colleagues, such as Orazio Gentileschi and his daughter Artemisia, Jusepe de Ribera, and Bartolomeo Manfredi, and among younger and/or more far-flung painters, such as Valentin de Boulogne (the subject of a stunning, concurrent monographic show at the Metropolitan), Hendrick ter Brugghen, and Georges de la Tour. Illuminating comparisons were encouraged by an impressive number of works by Caravaggio himself, such as the National Gallery's three examples, including the early *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (1594–98), one of the



depictions of curly-haired street boys with which Caravaggio initially attracted attention, and the brutal, late *Salome Receiving the Head of John the Baptist* (1609–10). They were joined by the recently rediscovered *Taking of Christ* (1602, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland), and *St John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (1603–04, Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas City), another sulky, curly-haired adolescent. Not all of the Caravaggeschi survived the confrontation, but many did. A few, notably Orazio Gentileschi, Valentin, and de la Tour, turned the idiom into something more personal and compelling. “Beyond Caravaggio” was an informative show that tested our critical faculties, for once quite well installed, even in the National Gallery’s rather cramped temporary exhibition spaces. If you missed it London, you can catch it in Dublin or Edinburgh.

Fast-forward to the twentieth century and this year’s installation at New York’s Center for Italian Modern Art. CIMA’s first two-person exhibition pairs the Metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico with the contemporary conceptual artist Giulio Paolini, who has described de Chirico as an “illustrious model” and has incorporated overt and coded images and references to de Chirico in his work for years. A selection of Paolini’s sculpture, photographs, and drawings makes the relationship clear, if not always convincing. (Even when we are engaged by Paolini’s work for its own merits, the nagging question “Why de Chirico?” sometimes intrudes.)

De Chirico steals the show, yet the presence of Paolini’s riffs on his chosen mentor’s work changes our responses to his “illustrious model.” Prompted by Paolini, we begin to see de Chirico not only as a proto-Surrealist, as he is usually designated, but also as a post-modernist *avant la lettre*, someone who copied his own earlier work and posited notions of doubling and repetition. We can, of course, concentrate on de Chirico without such ruminations, confronted by an exemplary selection that tracks much of his career, unlike the last “retrospective” at the Museum of Modern Art, which cut off after the 1920s. At CIMA, an economical but comprehensive group of mostly fine works encompasses everything from textbook Surrealizing images to problematic late works; there are metaphysical paintings of uncommunicative mannequins; haunting, perhaps haunted streets and piazzas; beefy nude *Gladiatori*, and a self-portrait of the artist, with his fleshy features and unfortunate chin. Yet even if we try to focus primarily on de Chirico’s images, we soon realize that they reverberate in Paolini’s works. Visiting CIMA requires an appointment, but their thought-provoking annual shows, such as this one, make the effort worthwhile. Plus you get an informative tour from one of their fellows and excellent espresso.

Uptown, at Mnuchin Gallery, “Sean Scully: The Eighties” revisited some of this powerful abstract painter’s formative works—essentially the foundation of his preoccupations to date. The exhibited paintings, begun when Scully had definitively established himself in New York, after emigrating from England, are early manifestations of his now familiar vocabulary of blocks and bands of mysterious, unnameable color, applied with rough, deliberate strokes. Constructed in sections,

with projecting elements, these robust paintings are ferociously present, with an implicit rough-hewn character that enters into a struggle with the subtly modulated, layered color—an invigorating contradiction rather like the artist himself, a big, fiercely intelligent, much-traveled guy who likes to present himself as tough and truculent. A few small, alluring paintings on board suggested the origins of the series. As we expect from Scully, the works on view insisted that we spend time to discover their nuances—of relationships, proportions, surface, and hue—and rewarded that attention. We noticed complex repetitions and variations; off-whites began to blush; blacks and deep blues entered into a conversation. And more. Since the '80s, Scully has rung seemingly endless changes on his block and band motif, making consistently expressive, rigorous, eye-testing paintings. It was good to see the ancestors of his recent work once again. And for context, there's the newly published *Inner: The Collected Writings and Selected Interviews of Sean Scully*, edited by Kelly Grovier, a handsomely produced compendium of just about everything you might want to know.

“Fairfield Porter: Things as They Are,” at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, offered a welcome opportunity to see the work of our quintessentially American master of the apparently inconsequential.<sup>1</sup> Porter's deceptively straightforward, seemingly artless paintings attract us with the familiarity of their nominal subject matter: a dapple of sunlight on a field, two little girls sitting on a sofa, a corner of an aggressively ordinary bedroom, an unremarkable view of distant islands across water. Then he sandbags us with the freshness (and sometimes aggression) of his paint handling, his delicately orchestrated color, and his ability to construct firm, harmonious compositions with the most unprepossessing of subjects. Porter celebrates a particular kind of all-American domesticity but does so without sentimentality or nostalgia. It's the world he and his family inhabited, equal parts suburban Long Island (before it became chic) and rural, coastal Maine, all of it bathed in cool, seaside light. Plainspoken, elegant, and often startlingly unexpected, all at the same time, Porter's scenes of an apparently sheltered, tranquil existence often reverberate with strangeness—like an Emily Dickinson poem. It comes as no surprise to learn that some of his closest friends were poets. There's another kind of strangeness, as well, a kind of stubbornness and singleness of purpose. Then we remember that Porter was painting in the 1950s and '60s and realize that this uncompromising realist was a contemporary and friend of the Abstract Expressionists. We remember, too, that he began as an abstract painter and deliberately chose to work in a way deemed outmoded and “impossible” for someone of his generation. The rather casual assortment of Porter's paintings at Tibor de Nagy—portraits, landscapes, still lifes, domestic interiors—made us very glad he did.

<sup>1</sup> A note of shameless self-promotion: a monograph, *Fairfield Porter*, with essays by John Wilmerding and Karen Wilkin was published by Rizzoli in November. K.W.