Oenach: Journal of the Forum for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Ireland

Call for Submissions

Oenach: JFMRSI invites submissions for its first issue, to be published online in the summer of 2009. We welcome shorter articles on any topic Medieval and/or Renaissance, as well as new translations, and editions, manuscript descriptions, and other new findings, discoveries, and rediscoveries. The terms "Medieval" and "Renaissance" are intended in their broadest and most inclusive sense; that is:

- from the Late Antique to the Early Modern periods (roughly 4th - early 17th centuries CE/AD);
- in all parts of the world;
- including other cultures’ equivalents to a “Medieval,” “Renaissance,” or “post-Classical and pre-Modern” period (if this happens to fall outside the aforementioned chronological period);
- including comparative work, especially work crossing traditional boundaries between “Medieval” and “Renaissance,” and work discussing - and indeed questioning - the very terms themselves;

To combat our field’s (broadly speaking) characteristic slow turn-around time and consequent slowness in pace, and in the interests of intellectual re-invigoration, Oenach is a digital journal and specializes in shorter articles, of two types:

- 2,500-4,000 words: most of our articles will be in the form of “notes”: building, for example, on material presented recently at colloquia and conferences, or as postgraduate course-work;
- 6,000-7,500 words: we will publish at most two or three such medium-length articles per issue.

For further details and a style sheet see: http://oenach.wordpress.com/ or contact the editors at oenach.journal@gmail.com.
Exhibition Review: Van Dyck and Britain

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) was the principal portrait painter at the court of Charles I and the greatest painter in seventeenth century Britain. Born in the major art centre of Antwerp in 1599, and baptised a Catholic in the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, van Dyck was trained in the most efficient and well-organised studio in Europe: by 1615 it is believed that the young apprentice was working for Sir Peter Paul Rubens, who had returned to Antwerp from Italy in 1608 and had established a workshop that attracted a plethora of young artists. Van Dyck was the most diligent of them all, imitating Rubens’ style with magnificent virtuosity and technical dexterity, leading Rubens to refer to him as ‘the best of [his] pupils’. Steeped in the European tradition, particularly in the work of Tiziano and Veronese, his impact on British cultural and artistic life is unparalleled, and his enduring legacy is given a fresh perspective in Tate Britain’s visually sumptuous Van Dyck and Britain.

Van Dyck revolutionised the course of British art and transformed the portrait, in particular, into something more than just a painted face. His portraits are not merely the products of a commissioned artist: they represent the political ideologies of a lavish and ostentatious court that was to be swept away within a year of the artist’s death on 9 December 1641. During a period of intense political fervour, during which Charles made an unpopular peace settlement with Spain, dissolved parliament, and implemented his Personal Rule (1629-40), van Dyck single-handedly created a visual language for his foremost patron that helped him to refashion himself and his court in ways that would authorise his new pacifism, his isolation, and his commitments to spiritual reform. Van Dyck and Britain is also a testament to the achievement of the artist whose attempts to capture Britain, and specifically the British aristocracy, fundamentally changed how the British saw themselves by introducing an unprecedented level of glamour, bravura, and sophistication into British art.

The exhibition gives the spectator a fabulous sense of chronological and artistic development: it begins with painting in England before van Dyck’s arrival and the artist’s first brief visit to England in 1620 (Room 1), while the exhibition closes with his impact on other artists, such as Peter Lely and Robert Walker, during the seventeenth century (Room 7), and his continuing influence and legacy right into the twentieth century (Room 8). The most impressive works are exhibited in between: van Dyck’s return to England and the royal portraits (Room 2) are nothing short of spectacular. In hindsight, one cannot help but get a sense that some of the works exhibited in Room 1, such as Robert Peake’s Henry, Prince of Wales, and Sir John Harrington in the Hunting Field (1603) and his Portrait of Princess Elizabeth (c.1606), although beautiful in their own right, are merely on display to highlight the blandness and lifelessness of early seventeenth-century British painting in comparison to the vibrancy and opulence of van Dyck’s portraits. Similarly, some good Netherlandish painters were working at the English court when van Dyck first arrived, chief among them Daniel Mytens, Abraham van Blijenberch, and Paul van Somer (Room 1), but their paintings appear rigid and dull when juxtaposed with van Dyck’s fluid, energetic, and sensual portraits.

The second room also displays the magnificent seated portrait of Charles I and Henrietta Maria and their two eldest children, or ‘The Greate Peece’ (1632), which portrays a loving and harmonious scene representing the ‘closed domesticated nuclear family’. Our eyes are immediately drawn to Charles and his regal, calm, authoritative posture, while his French Catholic queen Henrietta Maria, holding the young Princess Mary as a babe in arms – an image that resonates with the conventional artistic image of the Madonna with Jesus – glances affectionately at her beloved husband. The future King Charles II stands to the left of the king touching his father’s leg, while the king’s right arm protectively arches over the young boy’s head and is delicately placed upon a table that displays the accoutrements and symbols of royal authority and power in the form of the orb, the sceptre, and the imperial crown. The Parliament House and Westminster Hall can be seen across the River Thames in the left-background of the painting. The scene, therefore, is a valorisation of the Stuart dynasty, which had been given vitality in the person of the healthy two-year-old prince. The future of the monarchy appears secure, but history tells a different story, and the absolute royal authority that this painting represents, emphasised in particular by the vast column that rises behind the monarch, was one of the major contributing factors that cost the king his head in January 1649.
The room, however, is dominated by another masterpiece: *Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine* (1633), which was especially commissioned by the king to hang in the Gallery of St. James’ Palace alongside Tiziano’s equestrian portraits of the Roman emperors. The message is profound: Charles is portrayed as a monarch in the tradition of the great Caesars, while van Dyck himself is represented as a great artist whose work is worthy enough to be placed alongside the work of Tiziano. The vast portrait shows the king wearing English tournament armour that was forged at Greenwich (c.1610-20), while in his right hand he holds a baton of command. He is perched on top of a magnificent white horse that he is riding through a classical arch, and van Dyck’s legerdemain makes it appear that the king is emerging out of the painting towards the spectator. The celebrated French equerry and riding-master, the Seigneur de St. Antoine, who had been sent to England by Henri IV of France to teach *haute école* to the late Henry Prince of Wales, and who later taught the young Charles too, can be seen to the right of the king’s horse, holding the king’s helmet and gazing up at him in admiration.

The sheer size of the painting (368 x 269.9), and the way one approaches it, means that the spectator is forced to look up toward the imperator. Charles also wears the gold medallion of St. George and the Dragon suspended from a blue sash that is draped across his breastplate. This appurtenance, which Charles wore constantly and which was with him on the day he died, identifies the king as Garter Sovereign. In a profound sense, the wearing of this medallion in such elegant and regal portraits serves the king’s agenda to fashion himself and his court in chivalric terms, while concomitantly acting as a visual statement of his assertion of Divine Kingship. Charles’ head is brilliantly modelled and very carefully finished, which is particularly noticeable because of its relative proximity to the roughly finished head of the equerry. The painting also demonstrates how van Dyck brought the baroque of Rubens to British royal portraiture: the green silk curtain which is lusciously draped across the classical arch, and the wealth of colour and brush strokes, add to the depiction of a monarch who is effortlessly in control of the powerful horse that is about to perform a *passage* – a particularly refined dressage movement. His control of the horse is a visual metaphor for his control over his kingdom, and the great shield that leans against the foot of the left-hand column – adorned with the arms that were adopted by the sitter’s father, James I, and upon which rests the imperial crown – is an explicit reminder of Charles’ authority over the kingdom that was formed under the first Stuart who came to the English throne, and who united, in name at least, the kingdoms of England and Scotland.

These two paintings, in particular, representing the king’s absolute authority, make clear that Charles’ patronage of van Dyck served a more political than aesthetic agenda: to Charles, van Dyck was a valuable political tool to be deployed strategically. Charles treated his ‘principalle Paynter in Ordinary’ accordingly: he paid for van Dyck to live in a waterside house in Blackfriars, with a garden, and a jetty where the royal barge could be moored whenever the king got an urge to visit the artist’s studio. He also provided him with rooms at the royal palace of Eltham, Kent, paid him an annual pension of £200, and had him knighted at St James’ Palace on 5 July 1632. Charles spent more on fine clothes and haberdashers’ fees in one year than he paid van Dyck throughout his time in England. Portraiture, therefore, was a relatively cheap way of maintaining the royal image. The royal portraits were hung in the palaces of Whitehall, St. James’, and Hampton Court, where only courtiers, dignitaries, foreign ambassadors, and distinguished guests could see them. However, van Dyck’s studio was constantly producing replicas that were distributed as royal gifts to friends and foreign rulers.

It is worth going to Van Dyck and Britain just to see the only one of the artist’s English paintings on a mythological subject that has survived: *Cupid and Psyche* (c.1638-9). The painting was commissioned by Charles and is one of van Dyck’s most alluring works. Indeed, when looking at this painting, it is obvious where van Dyck’s talents lay, and the fact that Charles did not commission him to execute an abundance of similar paintings is indicative of the fact that the king was more interested in the promotion and appearance of his self-fashioned image. The scene is a pastoral one, and the semi-naked Psyche, whose modesty is barely concealed by a blue robe and a white piece of fabric held in her left hand, has just fallen into a deep sleep. According to mythology, this is her punishment for disobeying the goddess Venus,
who set for Psyche a series of tasks, one of which was to descend to Dis and fill an empty box with the secret of beauty. Although warned not to open the box, the curious Psyche could not resist temptation, and so she was cast into a deep slumber by Venus. Here the open box is empty and turned upside down in the right hand of the sleeping Psyche, who is draped elegantly and erotically against the bottom of a knoll. The winged Cupid approaches her from the left of the painting, with his right hand, barely finished by the artist, outstretched in an attempt to revive her to consciousness. The painting is clearly influenced by Tiziano, whom van Dyck studied in great detail, particularly during the time he spent travelling in Italy (1622-27). The image is representative of the neoplatonic tenet that existed at the heart of the Caroline court, and which defined love as desire aroused by beauty. Here, Cupid represents divine desire while Psyche represents earthly beauty. The narrative was familiar to the court and had been, for example, the subject of Shackerley Marmion’s *Cupid and Psyche, An Epic Poem*, performed before Charles’ nephew, Charles Louis, Elector Palatine, eldest son of Elizabeth of Bohemia, on his visit to London in 1637.

Two men who wielded existent power are exhibited, amongst others, in the third room, which displays those portraits that were commissioned by van Dyck’s other patrons and sitters: William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (c.1638) and Thomas, Viscount Wentworth, later 1st Earl of Strafford, with a Dog (c.1635-6). The unadorned portrait of Laud is the only one by van Dyck of an English prelate in Convocation dress. The most popular and recognisable image of him, it shows the Archbishop at the height of his powers, with his right arm, casually relaxed at the wrist, leaning on the pedestal of a column, while his red face with its arched eyebrows reveals an air of impatience. The portrait exudes the authority of the prelate, most noticeable in the commanding stare of his dark eyes. Laud’s powerful position at court, his close relationship to the king, and his devotion to reforms within the Church, including the enforcement of ceremonial conformity, made him a controversial figure. The portrait by van Dyck is the one that fell from the wall of Laud’s own study in October 1640, prompting the diary entry: ‘God grant this be no omen’. Unfortunately for him, it was a presage of what was to come, for two months later he was impeached, imprisoned, and in 1645, executed. The portrait of Thomas Wentworth, inspired by Tiziano’s portrait of the Hapsburg Emperor, *Charles V with a Hound* (1533, Museo del Prado, Madrid) is another display of authority. He is seen in full chivalric armour, with his helmet placed on a ledge behind him. His left hand firmly grips a baton of command while his right hand is gently placed on the head of a submissive Irish wolfhound that looks up at his master. Wentworth was known for his autocratic rule in Ireland, and the portrait, alluding to his recent military activities there as Lord Deputy, acts as a visual metaphor for his absolute authority in that country.

Van Dyck also introduced a new genre into British art in the form of the double or ‘friendship’ portrait, which depicts a pair of sitters who are not necessarily connected through family or marriage, and are of the same gender. The *Self Portrait: Van Dyck with Endymion Porter* (c.1633) is a fine example of this type of portraiture, and a selection of those portraits that were executed by the artist in this style during the 1630s is on display at this exhibition (Rooms 3-5). It is the only self-portrait of the artist in which he depicts himself with another person. Porter’s role in establishing and advancing van Dyck’s artistic career cannot be underestimated, as it was Porter who brought the artist’s work to the attention of Charles I. This work is a declaration of an important friendship, symbolised by the left hands of the sitters resting on a rock in the lower-foreground, thus emphasising the solidity and stability of their relationship. *Thomas Killigrew and another Gentleman* (1638); *Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford, with Sir Philip Mainwaring* (c.1639-40); and Mountjoy Blount, 1st Earl of Newport, and George, Lord Goring (c.1639) are other examples of the double portraits that are on display at Tate Britain. The influence of van Dyck’s friendship portraits on other seventeenth-century artists is most palpable in Peter Lely’s *Portrait of the Artist with Hugh May* (c.1675-6), for example (Room 7).

Van Dyck is renowned as a portrait painter, but he also made studies of the natural world, including studies of the landscape, botany, trees, animals, and the human form (Room 6). His animal studies are particularly fascinating, and *Studies of a Horse* (1633) shows the model that van Dyck used for his great equestrian portrait of the king with his equerry. The woman who is thought to be the model for van Dyck’s sleeping Psyche in the beautiful Cupid and Psyche can also be seen here in the form of *A Woman, presumed to be Margaret Lemon* (c.1637), who was van Dyck’s mistress in London.
Van Dyck’s largest and most important oil sketch is also exhibited in this room: Charles I and the Knights of the Garter in Procession (c.1639-40) is painted in grisaille style and grants the spectator a glimpse of what might have been: the sketch is the only remaining physical record of an important royal commission of a series of tapestries which were to embellish the walls of Inigo Jones’ Banqueting House at Whitehall, beneath the great painted ceiling by Rubens. Sadly, the commission was never completed, but this very sketch was in Charles’ own private collection, and it is branded with the king’s ‘CR’ on the back of each of the two oak support panels.

Van Dyck and Britain reveals that the artist’s stylish and innovative approach to portraiture had a considerable impact on seventeenth-century British art, while also having a noticeable influence on British art in subsequent centuries. Van Dyck’s images of the regal and authoritative Charles did not save him or his regime and, in fact, many of the royal portraits were probably counterproductive. However, they formed the foundations for the cult of Charles the Martyr. In an intensely visual and emblematic culture, the Commonwealth government needed to supplant the image of monarchy and construct effective representations of its authority: it failed to do just that because it failed to produce a visual language of its own. On the contrary, the new government merely appropriated the iconography of the monarchy that it had fought for so long to remove. The visual representations of Cromwell, for example, are unequivocally regal, and some of them are on display here. Pierre Lombart’s appropriation of van Dyck’s artistic portrayal of the monarch is profound: the engraving of Oliver Cromwell on Horseback, with a Page (c.1655), depicting ‘Oliverius Magnae Britanniae Hiberniae’, bears a striking resemblance to Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine, and the sixth state of the engraving was later converted to Charles I on Horseback with a Page. Similarly, Robert Walker became, in effect, the principal painter to the new regime under Cromwell and the Parliamentarians in the late 1640s and early 1650s. Walker was not just influenced by van Dyck; he appropriated his artistic style and actively recycled his compositions. Walker’s Self-Portrait (c.1640-5) is a testament to this. However, his debt to van Dyck can also be seen in his portrait of Oliver Cromwell (1649): the page tying the sash at Cromwell’s side is taken from van Dyck’s double portrait of Mountjoy Blount and Lord Goring, and indeed the pose of Cromwell himself is lifted from van Dyck’s half-length portrait of Thomas Wentworth.

Van Dyck’s remarkable influence on British art continued throughout the late seventeenth century in works by Charles II’s court painter Peter Lely, amongst others. Lely reshaped the imagery that van Dyck had used before the Civil War. He also painted women in loose ‘Vandyke’ dress with low-cut bodices and shimmering material, and his portraits of Arabella Bankes, Mrs Gilly (c.1660) and Mary of Modena (c.1674-5) are splendid examples of this. His double portraits, such as The Ladies of the Lake Family (c.1660) and the aforementioned Portrait of the Artist with Hugh May, are further evidence of van Dyck’s influence. Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries van Dyck remained the single most influential painter in Britain – despite the fact that interest in his work waned during the reign of Queen Victoria, who appeared to be fundamentally at odds with what was perceived as the sensuousness and flamboyance of seventeenth-century court painting – and artists such as Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Pompeo Batoni, Philip de László, and John Singer Sargent blatantly replicated his costumes, poses, and compositions.

Van Dyck and Britain achieves its main objective to place more of an emphasis on the sheer impact of the artist’s work in both the seventeenth century, and in the three centuries thereafter. However, the real treat that this exhibition grants the spectator is the work of the master himself: one leaves Tate Britain with the images of Charles I, the royal family, Cupid and Psyche, and other patrons and sitters etched in one’s mind. That is not to say that the exhibited works by other artists are not worth seeing; they most certainly are, and they do a fine job in contextualising British portraiture over a period of four centuries.

contd.
They are also an essential component of this exhibition because they demonstrate the scope of van Dyck’s influence. Alas, two of van Dyck’s greatest portraits of Charles I are not exhibited here, namely, Charles I on Horseback (c.1637-8), and the misleadingly titled Le Roi à la Chasse (1635). While in London, a trip to the National Gallery to see the former is absolutely necessary, but to see the latter, one will just have to make a weekend of it at the Louvre in Paris.

Van Dyck and Britain is at Tate Britain, Millbank, London SW1P 4RG, until 17 May 2009. Admission is £12.20 (£10.30 concessions); open every day 10:00-17:50, and until 22:00 on the first Friday of the month. Details: www.tate.org.uk/britain. For tickets visit www.tate.org.uk/tickets or call 020 7887 8888.

- Colin Lahive, School of English, University College Cork

![Charles I with M. de St Antoine (1633). Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.](image-url)
Maynooth Medieval and Renaissance Forum

The next session of the Maynooth Medieval and Renaissance Forum will take place on Wednesday 8th April, at 6pm. FMRSI’s Dr Juliet O’Brien, Dept of French, UCD, will deliver a talk entitled: “Courtly Love and Chrétien de Troyes’s Lancelot”. Dr O’ Brien’s seminar will focus on the “truth about courtly love”: re-examining “courtly love” in Chrétien de Troyes’s Lancelot, as illuminated by the contemporary literary context (especially Occitan poetry), and re-reading Gaston Paris’s work thereon. The seminar will take place in the Computer Science Theatre 1, Callan Building, North Campus. All welcome. Details at: http://www.nuim.ie/medievalforum/index.shtml

Review for Cuttings?

We welcome reviews of the following exhibitions for publication in Cuttings. If you are interested, please contact editor Carrie Griffin (carrie.griffin@ucc.ie). We also welcome suggestions for review, or reviews of exhibitions not listed here:

- Medieval and Renaissance Highlights: Makers and Markers, Victoria and Albert Museum, until April 27;
- The Medieval and Renaissance Art Exhibitions, Utrecht, Spring-Summer 2009 (see www.hollandartcities.com);
- Current and forthcoming European Exhibitions of Netherlandish Art: http://www.hnanews.org/hna/exhibitions/europe.html;
- Dorestad. Wereldstad in de Middeleeuwen; Leiden, 17 April - 1 November 2009.

Online Resources: Medieval Manuscripts

Siân Echart at the University of British Columbia maintains an excellent list of online resources: Medieval Manuscripts Online.

New Publications: Medieval Ireland

Please see: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2009/03/29/newrecent-publications-medieval-ireland/

The Latest Medieval & Renaissance Jobs Digest


FMRSI: New Member

We are delighted to welcome new member James P. Miller to the Forum. James is a graduate student at University College Cork, and you can see his profile page here: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2008/05/20/james-p-miller/
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CALLS FOR PAPERS & PUBLICATIONS


CFP: GENDER (e-pisteme). A postgraduate electronic journal based in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Newcastle University. Submissions invited for the latest issue. See: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/2009/03/31/cfp-gender-e-pisteme/


EVENTS


NEWS


FMRSI MEMBERSHIP

We are delighted to announce that FMRSI currently has 81 members and that our site has had a total of 49,219 views! All member profiles can now be viewed at: http://fmrsi.wordpress.com/category/members-profiles/

However we continue to encourage and invite new members, particularly graduate students and researchers. Please spread the word; membership details can be found on our homepage. The form can be submitted to medrenforum@nuim.ie. We are also happy to update and refresh members’ profiles as necessary; just drop us a line!

FMRSI: Forum for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Ireland
http://fmrsi.wordpress.com
medrenforum@nuim.ie

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