

William Hogarth's Triptych for St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol: How to deal with enormous artworks in public collections British Art Network Seminar

10 October 2014, 11.00 – 16.45

St Nicholas Church and Bristol Museum and Art Gallery



Triptych for St Mary Redcliffe, William Hogarth, 1755-1756 © Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

This seminar will focus on the prevailing challenges that exceptionally large artworks in public collections pose for conservation, display and interpretation.

The event will take its starting point from William Hogarth's Triptych for St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, and the mismatch between its great art historical relevance and almost complete absence from public and even academic consciousness. Hogarth's popularity as a painter, printmaker and satirist has never ceased, but rests almost entirely on his 'gallery-sized' work. Yet, reintegrating the altar into the canon by at least including it in temporary exhibitions has turned out to be too great a challenge in terms of finance and logistics and prevented any such project from getting beyond proposal stage. What can be done?

In the afternoon session speakers will introduce a number of case studies, ranging from the Rijksmuseum's highly successful new displays of seventeenth-century Dutch masterpieces, such as Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, to the National Trust's recent conservation of painted ceilings in Kingston Lacy and Ightham Mote.

Programmed by Dr Jenny Gaschke, Curator of Fine Art, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in collaboration with Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, pre-1800 British Art, Tate.

We will select a number of attendees to complete evaluation forms following the seminar. Once you have completed an evaluation form you will not be asked again at future British Art Network events.

Programme

- 10.30- 11.00 Welcome tea and coffee at St Nicholas Church, Bristol
- 11.00- 11.10 Welcome and introduction to the seminar by Ray Barnett, Head of Collections, Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives
- 11.10– 12.45 **Session 1: Hogarth’s Triptych and its place in British Art History**
- 11.10– 11.40 Michael Liversidge
“...desirous of appearing in the more eligible light of a history painter...”
Situating William Hogarth’s St Mary Redcliffe Altarpiece
- This talk will consider the altarpiece’s context within Hogarth’s *oeuvre* and its relationship to how he perceived himself, and will review how its reception and subsequent critical fortunes may account for its relative invisibility in Hogarth studies and the history of British art today. By situating Hogarth’s Bristol altarpiece in the context of early- and mid-eighteenth century English history painting, the paper offers an assessment of its significance for the wider history of British art.
- 11.40– 11.50 Jenny Gaschke
What Future for the St Mary Redcliffe Altarpiece?
- This talk will briefly examine previous attempts to 'resolve' the Hogarth issue, which repeatedly failed to navigate successfully a complex web of demands on space, money, conservation needs and public commitment. Jenny Gaschke will attempt to explain why the altarpiece is currently 'in limbo' and raise the question if there is any way at all to bring Hogarth's masterpiece back into the public domain.
- 11.50– 12.15 Followed by discussion chaired by Jenny Gaschke
- 12.15– 12.45 Walk from St Nicholas to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
- 12.45– 13.45 Lunch will be served at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and opportunity to view the Old Master Gallery
- 13.45– 15.00 **Session 2: The Conservation and Display of Large Paintings**
- 13.45– 13.55 Introduction to session two by Martin Myrone
Lead Curator, pre-1800 British Art, Tate
- 13.55– 14.10 Carolyn Lamb
Touring Large Canvases: A Conservation Challenge

Drawing on examples of large works from the Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives collection including the recently acquired *Delhi Durbar* by Roderick Mackenzie, (12ft x 20ft), *Noahs Ark* by Jan Griffier (13ft x 13ft) and the *Betrayal of Christ* by Van Dyck, this talk looks at conservation challenges for moving, travelling and installing large canvases, the steps involved in the process, the stresses that are put on the paintings and the aftermath. The recently acquired 'State Entry into Delhi, 1903' by Roderick Mackenzie demonstrates the process and issues involved when it was delivered as component frame sections, stretcher bars and rolled painting then installed in Bristol Museum and Art Gallery front hall in 2013 after a 5 venue international tour with the V&A *Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* exhibition

14.10– 14.25

Pieter Roelofs

Rembrandt's 'Nightwatch': Beating heart of the Rijksmuseum's displays

With the reopening of the Rijksmuseum in 2013 Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* returned to its appointed place at the very heart of the museum. This homecoming was an ambitious and carefully organized operation, moving the enormous picture through two exclusively made portals from the Philips Wing into the Gallery of Honor, witnessed by numerous representatives of the international press. The installation of Jan Willem Pieneman's 1824 *Battle at Waterloo*, the largest picture in the Rijksmuseum, attracted less attention. To accommodate this painting, measuring about six by eight meters, into the new display it had to be adapted slightly to the size of the gallery, a carefully planned procedure for which an innovative aluminum stretcher was designed. In his talk Pieter Roelofs will discuss the challenges and precautions that were taken to make these paintings visible again.

14.25- 14.40

Christine Sitwell

The Unloved Painting: 'The Separation of Day and Night' by Guido Reni

Between 1569 and 1604, Guido Reni painted the *Separation of Day and Night* on the ceiling of main Salon in the Palazzo Zani in Bologna, Italy. By 1840, the painting was in poor condition and was removed from the ceiling, adhered to a canvas support and subsequently purchased by William John Bankes (1786-1855) of Kingston Lacy. The exact location of the original hang is unknown but a *Country Life* photograph of 1904 shows it on the library ceiling. When Kingston Lacy was bequeathed to the National Trust in 1981, it was once again removed due to its poor condition. In 2006, it was decided to conserve the painting and re-instate it on the Library ceiling. This paper describes the difficulties and challenges in the removal and re-instatement as well the conservation treatment and the issues related to its display.

14.40- 15.00

Tea and Coffee will be served

- 15.00 – 16.45 **Session 3: Discussion and Walking Tour to St Mary Redcliffe**
- 15.00 – 15.45 Final group discussion chaired by Jenny Gaschke
- 15.45 Event closes at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
- 15.45 – 16.45 Francis Greenacre
Second City Commissions: a short walk from Queen Square to St Mary Redcliffe
- Rysbrack's William III, 'the finest equestrian monument in northern Europe, 1736; the Hogarth altarpiece and other Georgian masterpieces in St Mary Redcliffe and its restoration and de-Georgianisation