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British Sporting Art Seminar British Art Network

Friday 6 February 2015, 10.15 – 16.45
Seminar Venue: Palace House Mews, Newmarket

The British Art Network brings together professionals working with British art from the 16th century to the present day. The aim of the network is to contribute to the sharing of expertise, research and ideas across cultural organisations; to enable improvements in curatorial skills and collection knowledge; and to foster greater collaboration between partners leading to enriched understanding and enjoyment of British art for audiences across the UK.



George Stubbs (1724–1806)
Otho, with John Larkin up 1768
Oil paint on canvas
Presented by Paul Mellon through the British Sporting
Art Trust 1979
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For decades, the genre of British sporting art has existed on the periphery of modern art historical discourse. To coincide with the development of a National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art, due to open in Newmarket in spring 2016, this British Art Network seminar is dedicated to the examination of what seems to have become a marginalised genre of British art. It is hoped that this day of short presentations and roundtable discussion will provoke new interest and highlight the rich research potential that this area of British Art can offer.

Programmed by Dr Cicely Robinson, Assistant Curator (British Sporting Art), National Horseracing Museum, in collaboration with Tabitha Barber, Curator, British Art 1550-1750, Tate.

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

Programme

10.15-10.45 Welcome tea and coffee on arrival.

10.45-11.15 Welcome to the seminar and introduction to *Palace House, Newmarket: The National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art*, Christopher Garibaldi, Director, The National Horseracing Museum.

11.15-12.30 **Session One: Traditional Definitions of Sporting Art**

11.15-11.25 Nicholas Price
British Sporting Art and its place in the commercial art world

An overview of how the art market defines the genre of sporting art and how sporting art sits within the larger commercial art sector. This talk will briefly examine the interaction between auctioneers, galleries and collectors of sporting art and how the British Sporting Art Trust defined the genre when it was first founded.

11.25-11.35 Alison Wright
'Animal Painting' and 'Sporting Art'

While it is easy to see that 'sporting' and 'animal' art are not interchangeable terms it can be harder to draw a clear distinction between the two: a problem that has certainly concerned historians of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in which many of the leading painters of sporting subjects, such as Stubbs, Marshall, Ferneley and Cooper, specialised to a considerable extent in animal form. This presentation will consider some of the implications of this specialisation, examining contemporary definitions and artistic practice, and suggesting some of the advantages of a renewed look at this classic period of sporting art from the 'animal' perspective.

11.35-11.45 Hannah Clarke
Traditional Past-time or Modern Sport? Re-evaluating Early Nineteenth Century Depictions of Fox-hunting in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire

This talk challenges the veracity of traditional interpretations of early nineteenth-century depictions of fox-hunting in the sporting capital of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. Rather than depicting a timeless and unchanging sport, it argues that artists such as Henry Alken were in fact recording a highly contemporary and modern activity encompassing new ideas of athleticism, fashionability and masculinity. In particular, it argues that this art often illustrated new urban ideals of masculinity shaped in the Metropolis, rather than the countryside.

11.45-11.55 Anne Massey
Twentieth Century British Sporting Art

Sporting art, at least in the twentieth century is often overlooked and marginalised, given the predominance of a modernist, avant garde discourse. Sporting artists such as Tom Carr, Lionel Edwards, Gilbert Holiday and Edward Munnings, do not fit the ways in which twentieth century, British art is currently conceptualised. It is still dominated by a modernist paradigm, rather than what might be popular and meaningful art for a sizeable minority. Anne Massey would like to briefly introduce the work of these leading British artists, and offer a new, more inclusive, paradigm for the history of British art.

11.55-12.30 Q&A and group discussion chaired by Cicely Robinson.

12.30-14.00 Lunch will be served.

The group will be split into small groups during the lunch break and offered short tours of the Palace House site

14.00-15.00 **Session Two: Controversy and Sporting Art**

14.00-14.15 Hannah Williamson
The display of Richard Ansdell's The Chase at Manchester Art Gallery

In a stately home branch gallery for many years, and then unfortunately placed underneath a leaking pipe, Richard Ansdell's enormous painting *The Chase* was consigned to storage in terrible condition. Now conserved, this once-unloved work has become a key piece in a small but popular display at Manchester, *A Highland Romance: Victorian Views of Scottishness*. Hannah will introduce the picture and its current context as a case study in displaying a vast and detailed depiction of a violent sport.

14.15-14.30 Cicely Robinson
'What a baying and writhing and struggling and brawling is here!' - Negotiating the reception of Edwin Landseer's The Otter Speared.

In 1844, Edwin Landseer exhibited a notably violent depiction of an otter hunt at the Royal Academy's Annual Exhibition. While most reviews acknowledged the brutality of the scene, in which an otter is raised upon a spear above a pack of baying hounds, not all were necessarily critical of this display of violence. The *Illustrated London News* praised the artistic execution of the work: a 'marvellous picture, painted in the rich, splashing, but most graphic style of Snyders'. In contrast, John Ruskin criticised this depiction of sporting triumph 'over a poor little fish-catching creature, a foot long'. The *Otter Speared* has spent much of its subsequent life resigned to museum storage - a decision that has surely to some extent been influence by the controversial subject matter. With the creation of a new sporting art gallery currently underway in Newmarket, an examination of

Landseer's *Otter Speared* allows us to explore how challenging sporting subjects might be made accessible (and acceptable) for display in the twenty-first century.

14.30-15.00 Q&A and group discussion chaired by Cicely Robinson and Tabitha Barber.

15.00-15.30 Tea and coffee will be served.

15.30-16.45 **Session Three: Categories of Sporting Art**

15.30-15.40 Sarah Turner
Fighting talk: the Place of Combat Sports in British Art

British artists have long been fascinated by the visceral aesthetics of the fight. The large body of images made by British artists representing combat sports has, however, remained firmly within the realm of the specialist collector, on the pages of the sales catalogues of the "Gentleman's Library", and often in the museum store. As well as interrogating the status of "fighting art" within histories of British art, this talk will examine the ways in which boxing, wrestling and British art have frequently come together to produce representations of animated physicality, athleticism and strength. Such scenes depicting the boxing match or wrestling bout often referred to the world beyond the ring, connecting to ideas about masculinity, the representation of the ideal body, race, class and morality. Using examples from the eighteenth century through to today, this presentation will explore the "fighting talk" of British art.

15.40-15.50 Adam Chadwick
A Portrait of Lord's: 150 years of collecting and commissioning the art of cricket

A potted history of the wealth of art, objects and memorabilia gathered by Marylebone Cricket Club at Lord's Ground, exploring the changing attitudes of its audiences and the consequences for its display.

15.50-16.00 Dana Arnold
Gift Horse: The Equestrian Monument in London

In March 2015 Hans Haacke's *Gift Horse* will stand on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. Haacke's skeletal bronze horse makes reference to the anatomical drawings of George Stubbs, most notably his seminal study *The Anatomy of the Horse* (1766), and to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1766), where the phrase 'to look a gift horse in the mouth' came in to common parlance. Dana's interest lies both in the ways in which *Gift Horse* mirrors and inverts the traditional equestrian sculptural portrait that has been deployed in the projection of identity, authority and commemoration in London from the eighteenth-century to the present day and the ways in which this

specific genre relates to and differs from other aspects of British sporting art.

- 16.00-16.30 Q&A and group discussion chaired by Tabitha Barber.
- 16.30-16.45 Final comments and concluding remarks by Tabitha Barber, Curator, British Art 1550 – 1750, Tate.
- 16.45 Event closes at the Palace House Mews.
- 17.00-18.00 Drinks Reception at The Jockey Club, Newmarket.