Stone into silver: Piranesi and the Buckingham Vases

Van Dyck, James Stuart and Proust | Francis Bacon’s rugs | The influence of the ‘Manchester Madonna’

The Leonardo anniversary in retrospect | Bill Brandt and Henry Moore in Wakefield
Contents
Volume 162 | Number 1407 | June 2020

Review article
312 The Leonardo anniversary: a retrospective
by MICHAEL COLE

Exhibitions
320 Bill Brandt / Henry Moore
by MARTIN HARRISON
324 Cranach: Artist and Innovator
by ROSSIN WATSON
326 Titian: Love, Desire, Death
by GIORGIO TAGLIAFERRO
329 Titian and Caravaggio in Peterzano
by LUCIA TANTARDINI
331 Caravaggio – Bernini: Baroque in Rome
by TOBIAS KÄMPF
334 Jean-Marie Delapalcher: An Artist
Facing the Torments of History
by ISABELLE MAYER-MICHALON
337 Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist
by ANNE SWARTZ
339 Judd
by DAVID RASKIN

Editorial
471 Tate Modern at twenty, ‘Burlington Contemporary’ at one

Articles
472 Francis Bacon and the Wilton Royal Carpet Factory
by REBECCA DANIELS
480 The ‘Manchester Madonna’ and its influence on Granacci and Raphael
by JAMES HALL
492 Fruit of love: Van Dyck’s ‘James Stuart, Duke of Richmond’ in the Louvre and its afterlife
by JAHEL SANZ-SALAZAR
502 Piranesi, the Stowe Vase and the silver Buckingham Vases
by ROSIE CHAMBERS MILLS

Books
542 A Soul’s Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the ‘Supplicaciones variæ’, A. Neff
by JOHN RENNER
by ALISON WRIGHT
546 Ivories and Narwhal Tusks at Rosenborg Castle: Catalogue of Carved and Turned Ivories and Narwhal Tusks in the Royal Danish Collection 1600-1875, J. Hein
by JEREMY WARREN
547 The Lost Library of the King of Portugal, A. Delafosse
by MARK PURCELL
547 Velázquez: su mundo y el nuestro. Estudios dispersos, J. Portús
by XANTHE BROOKE
549 Picturing the Pacific: Joseph Banks and the Shipboard Artists of Cook and Flinders, J. Taylor
by GAUVIN ALEXANDER BAILEY
549 Thomas Jefferson, Architect: Palladian Models, Democratic Principles, and the Conflict of Ideals, L. DeWit and C. Piper, eds
by PETER MENOSH
by MARK STOCKER
552 Roger Fry and Italian Art, C. Elam
by SAM ROSE
553 Graphic Assembly: Montage, Media, and Experimental Architecture in the 1960s C. Buckley
by SIMON SADLER

Obituary
354 Hester Diamond (1928–2020)
by NICHOLAS PENNY
356 AMONG THIS MONTH’S CONTRIBUTORS
Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
13th March–28th June

by ANNE SWARTZ

The American artist Agnes Pelton (1881–1961) joins the small pantheon of modern women artists who used abstraction to mine a personal spirituality. She found inspiration in Wassily Kandinsky’s On the Spiritual in Art (1910) and his espousal of transcendence through the embrace of the ‘vital impulse’. Art could offer harmony, mirroring the immensity of both the universe and the individual. Whereas these tendencies were long disdained in art history, as the art critic Eleanor Heartney notes, ‘today it could not be more au courant’.1 Alongside last year’s exhibition of Hilma Af Klint’s art in New York, and the compelling and equally mesmerising exhibitions of Georgiana Houghton (2016) and Emma Kunz (2019) in London,2 this show hopes to enchant audiences with the artist’s esoteric abstractions and bohemian biography. The exhibition, which opened to the public on 13th March, was on view for only one day before the museum closed its doors because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Curated by Gilbert Vicario with Barbara Haskell, the show combines an impressive group of works with a compelling story and a scholarly catalogue.1 Essays by specialists on the artist and the period contextualise Pelton’s biography within developments in American art in the early to mid-twentieth century and frame her contributions to its histories. In terms of museology, the exhibition places Pelton alongside her international comrades, fitting into a trend of establishing new narratives of art history through monographic presentations at major institutions. Through forty-five canvases, it presents the abstract concerns of an artist to which a New York-centred art world had mainly become indifferent.

The visual appeal of Pelton’s abstractions lie in their beauty and her virtuosity in handling paint.

Further, her paintings give the viewer exposure to an alternate worldview not codified into a moralistic dogma, thus appealing to cultures in upheaval. In a painting such as Orbits (cat. p.12; Fig.20), Pelton paints a fantastic cosmology that speaks to the visual culture of the day. There are elements of Surrealism in this composition, with its rich black central core, deep midnight background and lavender-capped clouds. The landscape below is composed of similar pastel hues but the night sky is more vibrant, as it traces the movement of the stars and their trajectories. The animation of this mid-section recalls the playful, stylised animations of Oskar Fischinger (1900–67), who favoured bright colours, clean lines and heavily saturated grounds. The accompanying catalogue includes a preparatory sketch that shows Pelton meditating on the visual forms of veils and rays, faint and distant (p.202).

In her catalogue essay, Erika Doss illuminates aspects of Pelton’s early biography, outlining how she became a seer/seeker personality to counter the severity of her Christian religious upbringing, and the other factors that would inform her bohemian outlook: the artist was connected to first-wave feminism through her grandmother Elizabeth Richards Tilton (1834–97), a
renowned suffragist, and she studied in New York with Arthur Wesley Dow (also the progressive teacher of Georgia O’Keeffe) at the Pratt Institute. Pelton continued developing her art in New York – where she participated in the famed Armory Show, exhibited to support suffrage, and joined the Society of Independent Artists – until 1919, when Mabel Dodge Sterne invited her to Taos, New Mexico. There Pelton made paintings of Native Americans and the desert landscape, even exhibiting at the museum. She returned to New York in April 1919 but left again when her mother died in 1920 to live in relative isolation on Long Island in a windmill. There she dedicated herself to painting and studying astrology for a decade, propelled by her fascination with Kandinsky’s spiritualism.

Pelton shifted to an intense interest in mysticism and the occult, stemming from the relationship between art and music and her study of astrology and Agni Yoga, which was closely connected to Theosophy. In 1932 Pelton moved from Long Island to Cathedral City, California, where she formed the Transcendental Painting Group with the artists Emil Bisttram (1895–1976) and Raymond Jonson (1890–1982), who were based in New Mexico. Elizabeth Armstrong’s essay considers how Pelton lived as an outsider in California and sought financial independence through her art, which she achieved by selling local landscape paintings to tourists. Susan Aberth’s essay contextualising Pelton within esoteric trends among modern women artists connects her art and her theosophical beliefs, and Michael Zakian, the curator of an important exhibition of Pelton’s art in 1995, discusses the way her abstractions are grounded in nature. He contends that her art promotes animistic views of life, contrary to the pictorial explorations of her generation’s avant-garde painters.

Exhibitions


Judd
Museum of Modern Art, New York
1st March–11th July

by DAVID RASKIN

The retrospective devoted to Donald Judd, shown only at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, has a Judd for everyone, from Instagrammers delighting in the play of reflections in his mirrored surfaces to his most dedicated historians. It is organised chronologically across four large galleries, with an antechamber displaying a Judd-designed daybed, two desks and ten chairs. The final room brings together two of Judd’s benches with six open-faced Corten steel units from 1962 with inserts of green, yellow, purple, ivory, orange and black acrylic sheets that climb...