



# The 2010 Courtauld Institute of Art Postgraduate Symposium

## *Identities in Time*

12.00 - 17.40, Thursday 4 March 2010

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, The Courtauld Institute of Art  
Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

### **ABSTRACTS**

#### **Benedict Burbridge**

##### *Exacting Photography*

In this paper, Burbridge examines the use of exacting conditions to frustrate efforts at self-presentation in a number of contemporary photographic portraits. He argues that, through these strategies of distraction, recent artists have deliberately worked against the conventions traditionally defining the portrait as a genre, bringing their work much closer to the experimental techniques encountered in early scientific photography, particularly in the work of Duchenne de Boulogne and Jean Martin Charcot. Burbridge goes on to propose such links as far from incidental, identifying a shared distrust of the subject as an uncontrolled performative presence as the key factor informing the deployment of these exacting conditions in both contemporary art and nineteenth-century science. He concludes by considering the shifted role for the portrait these recent projects seem to recommend: the authority of such work no longer determined by the artful consolidation of a projected self-image, but in photographing aspects of behaviour that lie beyond the subject's conscious control.

#### **Martina Caruso**

##### *Fascist Legacies in Italian Humanist Photography*

Although they may appear to be antithetical, fascist and humanist photography in Italy share common aspects. While traditional academic approaches to the history of Italian photography create a distinct 'before' and 'after' 1945 regarding photographic practices, this presentation seeks to re-create the connections between fascist and post-war photographic culture by exploring the international photographic context of the 1930s.

Practices belonging to international photography movements such as Soviet factography or German Neue Sachlichkeit filtered into Italian photographic conventions before World War II and ultimately influenced Italy's post-war photographic culture. Grounded in a left-wing, social democratic vision, these practices paradoxically affected the extreme right-wing iconographic culture in 1930s Italy in overt and covert ways, a problematic reflecting the contradictions inherent within the fascist system.

Looking at censored photographs and periodicals that were banned from circulation as well as photographs produced by the Istituto Luce, the main propaganda machine of Mussolini's regime, this presentation analyses fascist, antifascist and war photography. By drawing out the ways in which post-war photography changed yet preserved specific photographic styles and contents elaborated before 1945, Italian humanist photography is repositioned in a more ambiguous historical context in order to open up new and complex interpretations of this important photographic production.

### **Samantha Darell**

#### *The Pax of Pere d'Urgell and Problems of Mother of Pearl*

The pax of Pere d'Urgell is an important piece of Parisian gold work from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Its theft from the Museu Nacional d'Art in Barcelona in the early 1990's meant it could not be included in the Paris 1400 Exhibition in 2004 and it has received little scholarly attention. The surviving photographs are, at least, a good visual record. This paper will seek to examine the use of mother of pearl in the pax, demonstrating that the piece was designed around the materials physical qualities and frailties. Comparison with other surviving pieces of mother of pearl of the fifteenth century will show this piece's sophistication. The paper will further illustrate the pax's close stylistic affinities with the Goldene Rössl and an examination of the pointillé will show that it may be possible to reconstruct some information about the original owner of the pax.

### **Anna Marie Kirk**

#### *Shared Identities: Patterns of Sartorial Doubling and the Spectacle of Two Royal Sisters' Like-Dressing in 1873 and 1874*

Clothing's power to construct identity, indicate status and define the individual was clearly understood by the Victorians. This paper will address the subject of 'Identities in Time' by exploring a significant, but under considered, dress practice of Victorian Britain, the wearing of identical dress by young adult women. Though seemingly at odds with defining individual identity, and able to be understood as dressing according to prescriptive familial stricture, this mode could, it is argued, afford unity and collective subjectivity. 'Identity' can be defined as being about both individuality and sameness.

This paper will explore the identical dressing of Alexandra, the Princess of Wales and her sister Dagmar (later Queen Alexandra and Tsarina Maria Feodorovna) in 1873 and 1874, as extensively chronicled in newspapers and periodicals, in graphic illustrations, personal accounts and photographs. This case is seen as one among a number of socially confirmative appearances of sartorial doubles in studio photographs, illustrated journals, genre paintings, portraiture and fiction. Evidence in life-writings and extant garments confirm that middle and upper class adult sisters commonly dressed alike. This shared sartorial identity was predominantly seen by

contemporary onlookers as evidence of the sororal bond made manifest in the sartorial. However, the royal sisters were conspicuous in their choice of attire and practiced in the politics of display. Enthusiastic for an Anglo-Russian alliance, their like-dressing was arguably used to signify national allegiances. The rapid and widespread dissemination of their double portraits and the spectacle they presented impacted upon dress practices and the visual arts.

### **Michela Pittaluga**

*Genoa and Venetian Paintings during the "Golden Age": Gio. Filippo Spinola, Veronese's Supper at Simon's House and its Genoese Copy Painted by David Corte.*

During "El Siglo de los Genoese", i.e. 1528-1656/57, the members of the Genoese nobility tended to grant their preference, in collecting matters, to Venetian paintings. This inclination towards Venetian painters of the Cinquecento could be interpreted as the consequence of the need of self-representation through art collections in order to efficiently convey the power, economic stability and the recently acquired social status of the Genoese nobility within the Hapsburg-Spain Empire. Following the theories of Pierre Bourdieu on collecting and social history, Pittaluga presents the case-study of Gio. Filippo Spinola's acquisition of the *Supper at Simon's House* by Veronese. The episode allows to be interpreted as a paradigm for the sociology of taste and consumption, because the ownership of that painting by Veronese, which is considered by scholars, even today, the finest version of Veronese's Suppers, legitimised the social and cultural position of the Genoese nobleman.

Pittaluga analyses the event in regards to the complicated history of the painting and its numerous copies (with more focus on the Genoese copy painted by David Corte) and its link with the moulding of identities of the Genoese nobility during the "Golden Century".

### **Per Rumberg**

*Saint Thomas and the Pazzi Conspiracy*

Verrocchio's Doubting Thomas raises a number of intriguing questions. One of them is the choice of subject matter. The monumental bronze group was commissioned by the Mercanzia, the merchant's court of Florence. The episode of Saint Thomas, asking for proof of Christ's resurrection, seems an appropriate choice for a tribunal, addressing, as it does, the paradigm of statutory justice: the search for truth on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

In 1478, only a few years before Verrocchio's sculpture was unveiled, the motif appeared in another context, the statutes of the Otto di Guardia. Curiously, the writing of these statutes coincided with the Pazzi Conspiracy, an event that changed the political climate of Florence for years to come. The attempt on the life of Lorenzo de' Medici led to brutal retributions without precedent. The Otto di Guardia, a potent magistracy responsible for public order, played a crucial role in the aftermath following 26 April 1478. The statutes established that the Otto could prosecute without formal trial and without even justifying their actions, thus marking the highly problematic transition from statutory to summary justice. This paper discusses the frontispiece of the statutes in relation to its context in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted connotation associated with the episode of Saint Thomas at the time Verrocchio was devising his ensemble.

**Maria Starkova-Vindman**

*Erasing Identities: Faceless Imagery in the Times of Collectivisation and the Great Purges*

Representation of the newly devised national identity, known as the 'New Soviet Person', in the first decades of the USSR has received considerable attention among scholars of Soviet visual culture. This paper focuses on the visual production of the late 1920s - 1930s which was not created for official state commissions. It examines the intentional avoidance and conversion of facial representation as a response to manipulation of individual and social identities. Working on various fronts, official Soviet art was meant both to celebrate the birth of the new Soviet state, promote the virtues of the New Soviet heroes and persuade the masses to adapt to the new existence. Inevitably, the problem of those who did not fit into the paradigm of the 'new time' and failed to 'convert' arose in political debates throughout the 1920s, as well as in the literary production of the time. This presentation draws on comparable visual material and examines how devices of 'facelessness' are applied in both images of the so-called 'superfluous people', as well as in alternative portrayals of the young generation of Soviet citizens.

Organised by the Research Forum Postgraduate Advisory Group and PhD students