



**TRAIL OF
THOUGHT**

FORTY-FOUR WORDS



Édouard Manet (1832-1883), *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882.
The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)
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Dear **SPECTATOR**,

I hope this letter finds you in a state of curiosity and openness. If not, perhaps return to it when such a moment arises.

I'm Amanda, a bookmaker, thinker, and founder of **Forty-Four Words** — Britain's first Black-owned publisher to specialise in limited handmade-to-order books and creative products. Through Forty-Four Words, I seek to bring more play and experimentation into how we engage with the world around us through words. So, I present Trail of Thought.

Trail of Thought brings the inner dialogue I experience when contemplating art — with life — into the physical. Thoughts are beautiful things, no? I must admit; there is little that pleases me more than thinking. *Trail of Thought* invites you to indulge in that pleasure — to think (more). And, if you're already somewhat of a philosopher, perhaps to think differently.

Trail of Thought centres on four works within The Courtauld's walls and you. For each work, I have devised four questions. This trail, simple and straightforward, will move you from mere observation to active contemplation.

Trail of Thought positions art as a tool for self-discovery. Baggage, belonging and desire are among the ideas you will contemplate to consider your human condition: the role(s) you play, the burden(s) you carry, and the instinct(s) that guide you. All that is required of you is: find the art, read my thoughts and think up your own.

Safe travels,
AMANDA BOACHIE

1

THE COURTAULD BAG

Location

Medieval & Early Renaissance

First Floor

2

FOX MASK STIRRUP CUP

Location

European Art 1400-1800

Second Floor

3

GAÎTÉ MONTPARNASSE: LAST BALCONY ON THE RIGHT

Location

Weston Gallery

Third Floor

4

A CONVERSATION

Location

The Bloomsbury Group

Third Floor

Please note that The Courtauld rotates the works on display to ensure the collection is preserved for future generations.

If the work is not on the wall, please visit

<https://gallerycollections.courtauld.ac.uk>

Bags are baggage.

Baggage is weight.

And weight, whether imposed by circumstance or choice, reveals much about what we value.

The Courtauld Bag is an intricately crafted metalwork that prompts us to reflect on the good and the burdens that we carry through life — whether they are beliefs, people or possessions. Perhaps it's time to lighten your load.

AMANDA x



THE COURTAULD BAG

1300-30

Location

Medieval & Early Renaissance
First Floor

Bag, known as The Courtauld Bag, Mosul, Iraq
(Ilkhanid dynasty, 1256–1353) 1300–30, Brass,
hammered, chased and inlaid with silver and gold.
The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust)
© The Courtauld

What's in your bag?

The Courtauld Bag serves as a symbol of how we belong in life. It invites us to explore the deeper meaning behind the contents of our life and what they reveal about our self-awareness. What do you carry with you daily? Is it expectations, memories, or regrets? Your bag tells a story – what does yours say about you?

What's in your bag that no longer serves you?

Not everything we carry is worth keeping. *The Courtauld Bag*, once adorned with a strap and fabric lining, has shed parts of itself through time. This reminds us that we, too, must decide what to leave behind. What are you carrying that no longer serves a purpose in your life? What will you choose to unpack?

How much of what you carry truly belongs to you?

Not all burdens are chosen; some are imposed. Look closely at the lid of *The Courtauld Bag*. A court scene depicts a personal attendant wearing a similar bag across his chest, offering a mirror to a noblewoman. Reflect on the responsibilities you hold – are they truly yours to carry, or are they simply what has been placed upon you?

What do you wish for?

The Courtauld Bag features an Arabic inscription of well-wishes to bless its noble owner's life. You might struggle to identify it among the patterns:

Glory and prosperity and God's grace and eminence and fulfilment of wishes and prudence in deeds.

What do you hope for yourself?

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FOX MASK STIRRUP CUP

1773-74

Louisa Courtauld and George Coules

Location

European Art 1400-1800

Second Floor

Louisa Perina Courtauld (1729 - 1807) and George Cowles (died 1811),
Fox Mask stirrup (used before the hunt), 1773-74. Akzo Nobel.
On long-term loan to The Courtauld Gallery, London

Every pursuit begins with desire, and every desire carries a residual farewell.

The Fox Mask Stirrup Cup, used for a final toast before the hunt, embodies the fluidity of power. Depicting the cunning fox — a hunter and the hunted — it captures the natural cycle of dominance and vulnerability that exists among living things. This cup prompts us to reflect on the dual nature of our pursuits: what we chase and what we (un)willingly leave behind.

AMANDA x

What do you desire?

To desire is to be human. There is something we all want, even if that something be nothing. The hunt mirrors our own quests for fulfilment - whether through attainment of a tangible goal or abstract ideal. So, what are you searching for?

Are you predator or prey?

The duality of predator and prey is natural order. We may find ourselves asserting control as predators or reacting as prey. It is not a question of strength. Rather, it is a question of whether we are seeking out what we desire or whether we have fallen victim to the desires of others. Are you leading your path, or are you being led?

What are you leaving behind?

Farewells mark a transition - the closing of one chapter and the start of another. *The Fox Mask Stirrup Cup* underscores the significance of goodbyes in rituals of transition. Think about your own experiences with farewells. What have these goodbyes taught you about closure, loss, and moving forward?

What is the cost of your pursuits?

The price to pay for desire is more than change. Desire goes beyond the surface to encompass the unseen - choices, sacrifices and sense of self. Desire equally determines what you gain and what you must lose along the way. Assess what you are (willingly) giving up in the hunt for what you seek. What is the true price of your journey, and is it worth paying?

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GAÎTÉ MONTPARNASSE: LAST BALCONY ON THE RIGHT

1907
Walter Sickert

Location
Weston Gallery
Third Floor

Walter Richard Sickert (1860 -1942), *Gaité Montparnasse: Dernière Galerie de Droite*, 1907. Private Collection.
On long-term loan to The Courtauld Gallery, London

There is a delicate interplay between observation and performance.

In *Gaité Montparnasse: Last Balcony on the Right*, Walter Sickert captures a moment of elevated gaze and staged spectacle. He blurs the lines between the observed and the observer while continuing the cycle through us. Looking up to the audience, we are invited to consider our own roles on the stage of life.

AMANDA x

Who do you look up to?

To revere is to love. To revere is to obsess. But, above all, to revere is to idolise. Sickert has us looking up at an elevated audience member on a balcony — a perspective that hints at a hierarchy. Sickert places the music halls on the same pedestal he once stood on as a performer. Who do you place on a pedestal in your own life?

For how long have you been a passive spectator?

Sickert's work invites us to consider our role as onlookers — both in art and life. Just as the subject of the painting watches the performance, how often do you find yourself merely observing rather than actively participating?

Who are you when there's no audience?

Gaité Montparnasse is a nod to observation as a social act. We all engage in (un)conscious performances daily. But how do you perform when no one is watching? Reflect on the ways you shape your identity for others, and what remains when the curtain falls.

How do you cling to the familiar?

You can either be tempted or terrified by the unknown. While the familiar may be safe(r), how do you respond to the unknown? Sickert's depiction of Parisian life as a British artist prompts us to reflect on our own willingness to embrace the unfamiliar. What does your response to the unknown reveal about your sense of adventure — or your resistance to change?

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A CONVERSATION

1913-16

Vanessa Bell

Location

The Bloomsbury Group

Third Floor

Vanessa Bell (1879 - 1961), *A Conversation*, 1913-16.

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Dialogue is at the heart of all things human.

Vanessa Bell's piece mimics the exchange we've engaged in through this trail which nicely draws it to a close. Lastly, I invite you to ponder communication. The meaningful hellos and goodbyes of things - the beginnings and the ends.

AMANDA x

Why are you eavesdropping?

Imagine yourself as the fourth member of *A Conversation*, an invisible participant who has stumbled upon this scene. Silent observation holds a quiet power — how often do you find yourself on the periphery, quietly absorbing the dynamics around you? What does this reveal about your desire to see without being seen?

Does human connection often hinder your clarity of sight?

In a letter to Leonard Woolf (1913), Bell writes "*I often look at a picture... without seeing in the least what things are*". The three women stand before a window, partially blocking the outside view. Their presence distorts your ability to see beyond them, much like how human connections can cloud perception of the world. How do your relationships obscure how you navigate clarity in your life?

Where do your emotions hide?

Human emotion often remains hidden beneath layers of non-verbal cues. In *A Conversation*, the closed fist of one speaker suggests reserved tension, while the slightly upturned noses and narrowed eyes of the others hint at a sceptical judgement. These gestures reveal what words can't, highlighting the pull of unspoken emotions. Reflect on where your own emotions hide when you are on display — whether in gestures, silence, or other habits.

What is the subject of a great artist?

Art should convey feelings over facts, as Bell expresses in a letter to Leonard Woolf (1913): "It can't be the subject of a great artist to tell you facts at the cost of telling you what he feels about them." What, then, *should* great artists make the focal point of their work? And, as a parting gift, I leave you to consider how you exist within that focal point.

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Trail of Thought is in collaboration with The Courtauld Research Forum

