

Influences from Elsewhere on British Art: Introductory Seminar

Background Notes

Dr Katie Faulkner - 4 September 2019



The Westminster Retable, 1259-69, multimedia panel painting in gesso, gilding, imitation painted enamels and cameos, glass tesserae and oil paint on a frame of English and German oak, Westminster Abbey.



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International Taste in the English Court

The Westminster Retable is the earliest complete wooden altarpiece surviving in England. In its original complete state, the retable featured a central panel of Christ, with St John and the Virgin Mary. On either side of the central section were two panels formed of eight-pointed stars, containing images of the Miracles of Christ. On the very end of the retable are canopied paintings of St Peter, gesturing towards Christ and St Paul.

Stylistically, the retable is close to the work of French painters employed at Westminster Abbey and Palace during the reign of Henry III. The French style of the retable is indicative of the international tastes of Henry III's court. Comparisons can be drawn between the Westminster Retable and the architecture of Notre-Dame, for example. The eight-pointed star frames, also show the influence of Islamic and Byzantine Art.



Regimus Van Leemput, *Henry VII, Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII and Jane Seymour*, 1667, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 99.2 cm. Royal Collection.

The Flemish artist Regimus van Leemput painted this copy of the life-size mural on the wall of the Privy Chamber in Whitehall, painted by Hans Holbein for Henry VIII in 1537. The wall-painting was destroyed in the Whitehall Palace fire in 1698, and this painting is now the only complete record. Holbein's cartoon, showing Henry VII and Henry VIII is now in the National Portrait Gallery.

Two generations of the Tudor dynasty are grouped in a gorgeously decorated Renaissance interior. Henry VII and Henry VIII stand adjacent to the central sarcophagus with Latin verses celebrating their achievements and virtues. The Whitehall mural was painted during Holbein's second visit to England and found himself negotiating his position as the 'King's Painter' at a time when Henry VIII was breaking away from the Catholic Church and establishing new relationships with Europe.

Empires old and new

Angelica Kauffmann was born in Switzerland in 1741, but much of her life was spent amongst the artistic community of Rome, painting portraits for English gentlemen on the Grand Tour. She lived in England from 1766 until 1781, mainly earning a living from decorative commissions for stately homes. She was one of the founder members of the Royal Academy in 1768.

Kauffmann's portrait of Cornelia Knight demonstrates the continuing influence of classical Greece and Rome on British art and culture more widely. Knight was herself a talented artist and writer, from a naval family. Knight sat for Kauffmann during a family visit to Rome, the portrait was a gift from her mother. Knight is shown holding her brush, with her historical novel, *Marcus Flaminus*, set in ancient Rome, placed conspicuously on the table. She is dressed in the fashionable neo-classical style, in a white muslin dress, gathered together with a girdle, which is adorned with a cameo, which originally showed Minerva, Roman goddess of Wisdom. Knight later asked Kauffmann to paint a self-portrait in profile in the girdle, as a mark of their friendship and mutual respect as artists.



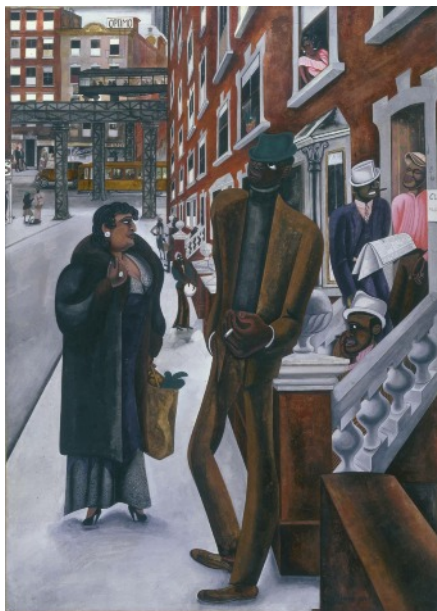
**Angelica Kauffmann, *Ellis Cornelia Knight*, 1793, oil on canvas,
96 x 80 cm. Manchester City Art Gallery.**



Franz Xavier Winterhalter, *Maharaja Duleep Singh*, 1854, oil on canvas, 204.0 x 110 cm. Royal Collection.

The German artist Winterhalter painted many portraits for Queen Victoria and the Royal Family, first coming to London in 1842. The portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh was painted in 1854, the year he first arrived in London after surrendering his sovereignty of the Punjab in 1849. Winterhalter's romanticised and exotic portrait of the young Duleep Singh reflects Victoria's fascination with India. Duleep Singh's gradually diminishing position within the British court, however, is more indicative of British colonial attitudes to India and its people. When he first came to England, Duleep Singh was a frequent visitor to the royal residences, such as Osborne House, where this portrait now hangs. Later, however, he suffered financial difficulties and became more vocal on British politics and foreign policy. Keen to regain his throne, he became involved in intrigues against the British Empire and eventually died in exile in Paris in 1893.

Shifting Powers and Peoples



Edward Burra, *Harlem*, 1934, ink and gouache on paper, 794 x 571 mm. Tate, London.

In the 1930s and 1940s, New York began to emerge as an international art centre to rival Paris. Edward Burra's trip to North America, from October 1933 until March 1934, was prompted by social connections, but also his interest in North American magazines, music and film. Burra was loved jazz music and begun his visit in Harlem, New York, a centre of African-American politics and culture.

During his stay in Harlem, Burra created a series of scenes set in the street or in bars and music halls. In this painting 1934, New York is recognisable by the wide sidewalks, Brown Stone steps, and the yellow bus and tram in the background. The figures are grouped to suggest the street as a site of social interaction, while signs such as 'McIlroy's Grill' and the Spanish language newspaper allude to the diversity of the area.



Lubaina Himid, *A Fashionable Marriage*, 1986, installation.
Collection of the Artist.

A Fashionable Marriage formed the centrepiece of Lubaina Himid's solo exhibition at Tate Liverpool in 2017, which won the artist the Turner Prize that year. Himid explains that she found, 'London in the 1980s a frustrating and infuriating place', in the midst of, 'hedonistic, greedy, self-serving, go-getting opportunistic mayhem.' She was

drawn to Hogarth's satires of eighteenth-century manners and hypocrisies when creating her own work skewering Britain in the 1980s. Most importantly for Himid, 'Hogarth ... used the black person to expose the shady morals of the white main protagonists.'

Himid was born in Zanzibar and is the first black woman to win the Turner Prize. Since the 1980s, she has been a key figure amongst Black British artists, organizing exhibitions and writing alongside her own practice. She is now Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Central Lancashire.

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