



GIVE & TAKE

A Speculative Introduction to a Speculative Exhibition

GIVE & TAKE

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We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

William Shakespeare *The Tempest* IV.i.148

What is a museum collection? Embodied time. The stuff of human life laid to rest in a glass coffin for perpetuity. Stuff that is ordered by categories determined by curators or the bequests of private collectors. Stuff collected because a person or institution has decided that it should be preserved, studied, displayed. Stuff that expresses values most dear to those who have shaped the museum over its lifetime.

There are many ways to think about the stuff of collections. We may consider it according to its function or its significance within social or art history. We may examine it for its workmanship or for qualities that, depending upon the time in which we live, are deemed 'beautiful' or of the highest standard. The taxonomic system of classification used to form and to organise collections explicitly reflects a museum's history and its acquisitions policy, that is to say, the history of its ideological underpinnings. Thus museum collections, although they may appear orderly and monumental, are far from static. Often, how a museum looked one hundred years ago bears little resemblance to how it appears today. Museums evolve with the culture around them. They exist in a constant state of flux, whether or not this is repressed. If they do not continue to evolve they,

too, become stuff – embalmed artefacts manifesting past sensibilities.

In order for museums to be contemporary, or better still contemporaneous, that is to say, of the present and the future, as well as of the past, they must be transparent regarding this changing and open-ended nature.¹ This may sound disconcerting, perhaps even frightening, when it is to museums that we so often look to find continuities and to affirm our values and assumptions about the world in which we live. However, I would like to suggest that the role of museums is in fact to provoke us to question our assumptions, to discover continuities running parallel to fissures and contradictions. If museums can offer any reassurances at all, it is that the shifting nature of reality is the only given. It is a fundamental law of nature that organisms that do not remain in motion perish. Museums are like organisms, for them to remain vital and relevant they, too, must acknowledge this basic principle. Would not a paradigm that paralleled this principle, perhaps, be more reassuring than the tidy, visual sound-bite-on-a-plinth that characterises how many museums present artefacts? By continually rethinking the display of its collections, a museum demonstrates that it is open to fresh investigations and insights shaped by ongoing cultural transitions.

The scale and density alone of the Victoria and Albert Museum create fascinating frictions resulting in a paradoxical and polyglot institution that cannot help but speak in what

the German conceptual artist Hans Haacke has called 'Mixed Messages', and the American artist Fred Wilson has called 'Mixed Metaphors'.² This idiosyncratic character may either be seen as limiting or as offering endless possibilities. Since its founding as the South Kensington Museum in 1857, the V&A has been many museums rolled into one.³ Visitors could once see patented machinery exhibited alongside the raw materials for manufacture. Under the same roof, a Museum of Construction featured food and animal-products: silkworms at work, sheepskins awaiting the tanning process, and feathers plucked for fashionable hats. An Educational Museum displayed schoolroom accessories, such as blackboards, and objects, including the birch and the cane, for administering student punishment. In the very same institution visitors could also view paintings, decorative arts, architecture and building materials, and a plaster cast of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*.

The V&A's system of categorising objects remains perplexingly inconsistent and deliriously (and deliciously!) eccentric to the contemporary sensibility. Some of the collection is exhibited solely according to the material – porcelain, metal or textile, to cite just three – from which an object is constructed, regardless of its function. Other objects are categorised according to their cultural origin – the arts of Islam, Japan and China, for example, – and this year sees the re-opening of the newly installed British Galleries. However, the V&A's continued expansion, including the addition of new exhibition spaces such as the Henry Cole Wing (created from a neighbouring, existing building and opened to the public as part of the V&A in 1983), and the proposed Spiral Project, has ensured that the paradigms that once shaped the overwhelming cacophony of objects packed into thousands of vitrines lining miles of galleries, will invariably be overlaid with others. Indeed, the V&A is like a vast archaeological site of

cultural concepts, of potential ways of understanding the contemporary world and its historical roots.

Taxonomy, manufactured in the eighteenth-century, is today widely accepted as a useful, albeit artificial, tool. Although it may aid us in organising disparate objects, it orders history in a way that denies how often human events, activities, behaviours and attitudes are unresolved, and far from homogeneous. Which is not to say that taxonomy falsifies 'reality' exactly, but that like any other system it only partly accounts for the complexity of our lives and our histories. In addition, by amputating the limb of contemporary culture from the 'main body' of history, museums can forever sever the present from the events that might enrich our understanding of why it is what it is.

Thus the territory marked by museums, and governed by their own ordering systems, creates a very specific kind of disjunctive and disconnected reality. Within this context, temporary exhibitions can offer an unusual opportunity to reflect on that reality, to disturb productively its 'tidiness', to raise questions and to suggest the complex nature of human experience. If anything, the stuff of human experience is its unruliness: a resistance to containment within a glass vitrine.

Current art practice acknowledges this restlessness of meaning, and many artists have made it the subject of their work. In so doing, they have put considerable pressure on the paradigms that hold sway in most museums and public art galleries. Today's art actively challenges the definitions of art, artist, viewer, gallery, critic and even curator. Artists continue to expand our understanding of genres such as landscape or the nude. Moreover, they do not rigorously adhere to categories such as 'high' or 'low' culture but, rather, deliberately conflate or erode them so

that it is often difficult to classify their work along conventional lines. In addition, although artists may use paint and canvas as their 'raw materials', they have also adopted the Internet and other communications technologies. Artistic media thus often elude easy definition as 'painting' or 'sculpture'. This is also true of how an artist defines his or her role. For example, it is not unusual for an artist to assume the role of curator, creating exhibitions or content-rich installations that reinterpret artefacts from a vantage point wholly distinct from that of the scholar or keeper of collections.⁴ Because so much of contemporary art takes as its starting point a self-consciousness that everything is connected to everything else, we might well ask whether by imprisoning it in the gilded and hygienically sealed cage of the modern art gallery, we drain it of its power, of the holistic intelligence that makes it so much of this time and so 'radical', if that word can indeed still be used.

The implications for museums like the V&A, as well as venues like the Serpentine Gallery, of approaches to visual art-making that are resistant to the modernist paradigm of the museum, are enormous. This is a remarkable time of transformation as artists and curators alike profoundly rethink their practices and the ways in which art is made, presented and discussed. It is also one of the most exciting moments for working with museum collections. If they are to truly be institutions of the twenty-first century, the new Tate Modern as well as the Serpentine Gallery, with its remit to show modern and contemporary art, will remain porous to the challenging insights of artists and scholars of visual culture who no longer accept a disembodied view of contemporary art. That is to say, a view which removes art from the world of other kinds of stuff and from the interdisciplinary, polysemous and multivalent perspective that currently defines the critical study of history.

GIVE & TAKE is a speculative, contemporaneous response to the considerable challenges posed by these developments. Although it resonates with the particular character of the V&A, it is not intended to be an exhibition about the V&A, like the recent *A Grand Design* (1998, travelling).⁵ Nor is it an explicit critique of the Museum or its practices as is often the case with collection-based interventions such as Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, which dealt with racism and the formation of the Society's collection. Unlike the recent *Encounters* at London's National Gallery (2000) in which twenty-four artists were invited to make works in response to paintings in the collection, the works in *GIVE & TAKE* were, with four notable exceptions (Serpentine Gallery commissioned works by Ken Aptekar, Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, Hans Haacke and J. Morgan Puett and Suzanne Bocanegra) selected by a curator from outside the V&A in response to the Museum's collections. The project is more closely related to those integrating contemporary art with collections of which two come readily to mind. Firstly, *Private View* (1996) at The Bowes Museum in County Durham, which presented one hundred works by thirty-five living artists integrated with the Bowes's collections. And secondly, *Going for Baroque* (1995) at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, which featured works by eighteen artists with an abiding interest in the Baroque and Rococo assimilated into the Walters's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century galleries.⁶ In a similar way, *GIVE & TAKE* inserts divergent narratives into the V&A's presentation of its precious stuff and yields to other voices, including that of the artist, in generating the meaning of cultural artefacts.

GIVE & TAKE is conceived as a two-site exhibition comprising visual dialogues in which the stuff of the present made by contemporary artists and the stuff of the past are

placed in proximity to disturb intentionally the reality that is conventionally posited by museums and galleries. The exhibition's success will reside in whether objects that are chronologically, materially and conceptually disparate have been brought into a constructive disjunction.

Ambling through the V&A and thinking of it as a mind-numbing treasure-trove best experienced on roller blades and with a portable CD player, I observed that visitors seemed to opt for one of two potential routes through its galleries. They either selected a particular medium to study, and looked long and hard at one portion of the collection. Or they jogged past the entire collections, gaining an impression that the museum had managed to get its hands on one of everything, and the best one of everything at that, but without looking at anything in particular. How would it be possible to stop visitors in their tracks, to encourage them to look not only at the works of contemporary art, but, equally, to look back upon the collections? And how would it be possible to engage visitors to both the Serpentine Gallery and the V&A in forms of contemporary art through a simultaneous act of re-contextualisation?

The 'giving and taking' in this project has included not only the exchange of perspectives between the two institutions but also a literal exchange of objects. At the same time that the V&A is playing host to the work of fifteen international contemporary artists, the Serpentine is presenting over two-hundred objects from across the Museum's collections selected by the artist Hans Haacke for his installation artwork *Mixed Messages*. Most significantly, *GIVE & TAKE* refers to the exchange and expansion of meaning that invariably takes place between objects wrenched from their more usual contexts and placed in relation to one another; regardless of who has orchestrated

the arrangements. How will we feel about Canova's *Three Graces* as the ultimate representation of feminine beauty when viewed in proximity to Marc Quinn's *Group Portrait* of individuals born without limbs, or having lost them through illness or accident, whose poses echo the heroic compositions of so many classical nudes? Similarly, in the domed north gallery of the Serpentine, Hans Haacke, in parodying the stylised, often excessively elegant installations of contemporary art galleries, accentuates the worn polychrome wood surfaces, simplified sculptural form and emotive quality of a thirteenth-century crucifix. This profoundly moving object is usually displayed in a dimly-lit niche in the V&A's sculpture galleries, lost amongst a plethora of religious objects. At the Serpentine, isolated on a large white wall, the haggard figure of Christ seems almost ready to ascend. It faces a standing, eighteenth-century gilt wood Burmese Buddha who seems at peace in this 'mixed company'. During the installation, one of the V&A's curators of Asian art and I agreed that it was remarkable that god-heads across cultures are exhibited separately from one another when showing them together would say so much more about the human need for spirituality and our quest for faith. The stirring photographs of Andres Serrano installed in *GIVE & TAKE* amongst the chalices, portable altars and reliquaries at the V&A, are witness to another way of thinking about our emotional relationship to religious imagery. Viewers often find Serrano's graphic and confrontational images shocking. But can his work really be classified as excessive when seen in comparison to the equally gruesome scenes of saints being flayed, burned, crucified and dismembered or the golden boxes that once contained relics of their violently ravaged bodies? The impact of the objects at both sites is intended to work subliminally, fluidly, and dare I say, poetically. Moving from Haacke's work to the V&A and back again, 'giving' and 'taking', means traversing time, space

and cultural windows, stepping outside the conceptual boxes we, and our institutions, have built and that circumscribe the vision of our mind's eye, the connections we might make between objects and, by extension, between human experiences.

Although the exhibition is not explicitly about the V&A, the visual dialogues at both sites could only make sense if they were keyed to resonate with the Museum's collecting principles, its architecture and its history. It was decided at an early stage that few objects from the collection would be moved since one of the exhibition's main intentions was to encourage visitors to re-focus on the permanent displays in order to 'take in the view', as it were, of the new context created by the juxtapositions with contemporary art.⁷ In many cases, the arrangements have resulted in a visual and conceptual double take. A Hiroshi Sugimoto photograph representing Queen Victoria is composed to resemble a painted prototype recalling the portraits of Rembrandt. In the foyer of the V&A, it also functions as a patron portrait. In fact, the sitter is not Queen Victoria, but a wax effigy. In the re-located boudoir of Madame de S  rilly, two busts of women, one a highly polished 'silver', the other 'marble', seem to breathe the air of the eighteenth century, but are copies in stainless steel (by Jeff Koons) and plaster (a turn-of-the-century cast of an original in London's Wallace Collection). A richly carved teak sculpture with lions' heads and elaborate floral motifs is not an example of Dutch Baroque virtuosity, but Wim Delvoye's mock cement mixer carved by Indonesian craftsmen in 1991. In *Mixed Messages*, a chain-mail couture dress by Gianni Versace echoes a sixteenth-century suit of Saracen armour, and a punk boot seems like it could have been worn by 'Goths' of the late Middle Ages or the late twentieth century.

The artists in the exhibition speak the same conceptual language. Their works do not fit easily into any rigorously imposed categories of artistic media. These 'genre-benders' manipulate whatever medium provides the most expeditious vehicle for communicating their ideas and cut a wide swathe across a range of both traditional and more recent innovations in sculpture (Wim Delvoye, Jeff Koons, Roxy Paine, Marc Quinn), painting (Philip Taaffe), community-based collaborations (Ken Aptekar), publicly-sited work (Xu Bing), installation (Liza Lou), textile art (J. Morgan Puett and Suzanne Bocanegra, Yinka Shonibare), site-specific art (Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska), context-specific installation (Hans Haacke) and photography (Andres Serrano, Hiroshi Sugimoto). Their work also reflects upon, refers to, or reinterprets, past visual traditions and cultural attitudes. Placing it in the context of the V&A's collections highlights these references and encourages us to look again at both from a fresh and often surprising perspective while still preserving the integrity of each artist's individual sensibility. In the microcosm of the Serpentine Gallery, the small sampling of the V&A's collections, isolated from the macrocosm of its abundant displays, takes on its own weighty and individual presence, and an entirely different aura.

The exhibition also highlights a cross-section of themes engaging contemporary artists and uses what, for many visitors, is the more familiar – the objects in the V&A – to serve as a conduit for the less familiar – the subject matter of postmodern art. The juxtapositions of past and present are intended to inflect questions regarding categories of thinking around visual culture that often are taken for granted within the Museum's displays. These include 'ideal beauty' (Marc Quinn) and 'the original' (Roxy Paine), the distinction between art and craft (Wim Delvoye, Liza Lou), the complex power of religious symbolism (Andres

Serrano), the formation of cultural identity (Ken Apter, J. Morgan Puett and Suzanne Bocanegra, Yinka Shonibare), the deceptiveness of images (Hiroshi Sugimoto), the complex relations between Western and non-Western cultures (Xu Bing, Philip Taaffe), and the role of the museum as an arbiter of taste and values (Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, Hans Haacke, Jeff Koons). These categories have metamorphosed and, in some cases, been critiqued and discarded by artists over the past two decades.

GIVE & TAKE is intended to proffer new ways of thinking about what artists are doing today as well as about what they did in the past. The dialogues are intended to be open-ended and we hope visitors will take up the gauntlet to become collaborators or partners in considering the questions raised by the conjunctions that are formed like 'tableaux', to look around them and to see what discoveries they might make. It is important to emphasise that the answers to the questions raised by the juxtapositions have always been less certain than the authoritative voice of the museum can sometimes lead us to believe.

That the installations at both sites break down the artificial boundaries imposed on objects is especially obvious in Hans Haacke's *Mixed Messages*, which opens with a mirror displayed four inches off centre, disturbing the usual will to symmetry that dominates the curatorial eye. Haacke's installation opens with yet another gesture that links both institutions. For the focal wall of what he has come to refer to as his 'manifesto gallery' he selected an imposing gilt mirror flanked by two vases. Made for the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in 1851, these are the first objects acquired by the V&A for its collections. On one side of each vase is an image of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert respectively. On the

other, depictions of Joseph Paxton's glass pavilion, the 'crystal palace' that housed the Great Exhibition. Objects acquired through this precursor of the World Fair became the core of the V&A when it was founded shortly thereafter. A landmark event of the Victorian era in Britain, the Great Exhibition encapsulated the spirit of its age. It was an attempt both to entertain and educate the general public and to expose the populace to wonders in art and technology from around the empire, but also to reinforce Britain's position as a dominant world power. As such, the Great Exhibition was, in its time, the greatest summary of the state of contemporary culture the world had ever seen. Its sensibility permeated the mission of the V&A.

The Great Exhibition was sited not far from the present location of the Serpentine Gallery. Indeed, it would have been visible from its lawn, had it not moved from Hyde Park to Sydenham, soon after the Great Exhibition closed, where it stood until it was destroyed by fire in 1936. Its presence is felt, however, throughout Haacke's installation – on a souvenir fan or a commemorative painting by Henry Courtney Selous, in the placement of an exotic palm tree in a Victorian jardinière in the centre of the first gallery, in imitation of the oak tree surrounded by palms behind the royal entourage in Selous's picture. The fragrance of this monument to the Victorian Age wafts through *Mixed Messages*, in the, albeit cockeyed, salon-style hang of the flanking galleries, the Queen Victoria dolls and the unsentimental photographs of the 'real' Victorian England – its factories, shipyards and working-class seaside resorts, and also in the Serpentine's west gallery where countless images of cultural 'Others' from Africa, India and Asia, many seen from a colonial perspective, remind us of the ideology of Empire which informed the Great Exhibition. This insatiable and even erotic impulse to see foreign land as virgin territory to be conquered, is embodied in Haacke's siting

of Canova's languid *Sleeping Nymph* 'ruled' by the imperial figure (a Chinese silk robe) standing on a balcony, its arms outstretched.

Yet, despite this preponderance of Victoriana, Haacke does not altogether erase the streamlined modernity of the Serpentine. Indeed his skewed positioning of a seventeenth-century Torah mantle in its heavy mock-gothic case, like the off-centre looking glass, calls attention to the Gallery's classical, clean and perfectly balanced architecture by obstinately contradicting it. In so doing, Haacke reminds us that the Serpentine, built in 1934 as a tea pavilion, and launched as an art gallery in 1970, is also the offspring of the Great Exhibition. Like its neighbour, the V&A, it is also an artefact of modernist thinking about objects that links it to the nineteenth century, specifically the marriage between commerce, spectacle and the transmission of cultural values through the institution of the museum and the public art gallery.

But *GIVE & TAKE* was not conceived to wag a moralistic finger and Haacke, in particular, has been at pains to say

that his combinations, while they can be read literally, are also a form of serious play as in the Surrealist game of the *cadavre exquis* (or exquisite corpse). In fact, the exhibition is intended to offer up speculative meanings. The following anecdote concisely captures its goals. In preparation for this catalogue, a photographer was commissioned to document the installations at both sites. One of his photographs (shown opposite) shows Andres Serrano's *White Christ* (1989) seen through a vitrine of V&A objects, with a large jewelled cross in the foreground. Instead of isolating the objects and making the display cases invisible, the photograph emphasises their presence, exploiting the reflective nature of the glass. There, as in a mirror, the collection and the contemporary art merge into one impression. As this photograph reveals, despite the museum's mediation of culture through its necessary security and conservation devices, it still has the capacity to transform objects into 'the stuff of dreams'. The museum can function as a cultural unconscious where objects, the flotsam and jetsam of our lives, continually reorganise themselves according to our hidden desires rather than its own.

Notes

1 This argument was first developed in this author's essay, 'The Contemporaneous Museum', published in *Conversations at the Castle*, ed. Michael Brenson and Mary Jane Jacob, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1998.

2 The title of a museumist installation by Fred Wilson in 1993 using the collection of the Seattle Art Museum.

3 The most authoritative source on the Museum's history is Anthony Burton, *Vision and Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: V&A Publications, 1999. See also Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, eds., *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: V&A Publications, 1997. On the subject of the V&A's origins in the Great Exhibition of 1851, see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.

4 The literature on this subject is considerable. Amongst the most well documented examples are Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox* (1970), using the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1992) using the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992), a collaboration between The Contemporary Museum, Baltimore and the Maryland Historical Society, and Hans Haacke's *Ansichtsachen/ViewingMatters* at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1996). All four of these exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues. The installation and audience response to *Mining*

the Museum was documented in a post-exhibition book published by The New Press in 1994. The Kosuth was documented in a post-exhibition publication also published by The New Press in 1992. The Haacke was documented in a post-exhibition publication published by Richter Verlag in 1999.

5 An innovative example of an exhibition about the museum in which it was presented and which also included interventions by contemporary artists is *A Museum Looks at Itself: Mapping Past and Present* at the Parrish Art Museum, 1992. A post-exhibition publication was released by The New Press in 1993.

6 Both exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues. *Going for Baroque*, curated by this author, was also the starting point for Mieke Bal's study, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. *Retrace your Steps: Remember Tomorrow* at the Sir John Soane Museum in London was also a notable exhibition featuring interventions by approximately twenty-six contemporary artists amongst the historic artifacts of this museum which was Soane's former home. The works of art were intended to be installed as personally as Soane's own idiosyncratic arrangements.

7 Moreover, Hans Haacke, after spending one year studying the collections, would, ultimately, request that nearly two hundred objects be taken off display in order to be moved to the Serpentine for his specially commissioned installation.

15
Contemporary
Artists
at the
Victoria
and
Albert
Museum



Ken Aptekar

b.1950 Detroit, Michigan. Lives and works in New York City and Paris.

Q&A, V&A 2000. Installation. (Commissioned by the Serpentine Gallery for *GIVE & TAKE*.) All paintings by Ken Aptekar are oil on wood, with bolts and sandblasted glass. All paintings by Ken Aptekar, unless otherwise stated, appear courtesy of the artist.

European Painting, Rooms 403 and 421:

Room 403 a: Landscapes Short on Land

I ask questions 2000
76.2 x 76.2 cm

Private collection, courtesy of the artist

What's beyond the horizon? 2000
76.2 x 152.4 cm (2 panels)

I am drawn to the Courbet 2000
76.2 x 76.2 cm

What John Shoy doesn't like 2000
152.4 x 76.2 cm (2 panels)

Blue with a bit of interest 2000
152.4 x 76.2 cm (2 panels)

If there was one 2000
76.2 x 76.2 cm

Works from the V&A's collection of European Painting include:

Gustave Courbet (1819–77)
L'immensité 1869
Oil on canvas; 60 x 82.2 cm
Ionides Bequest CA1.59

James Francis Danby (1816–75)
Houses of Parliament from the River 1864
Oil on canvas; 44.4 x 74.9 cm
Dixon Bequest (Bethnal Green Museum) 1013-1886

Georg Emil Libert (1820–1908)
Snow Scene: The Haunted House 1847
Oil on canvas; 24.1 x 33.7 cm
Townshend Bequest 1571-1869

Andreas Schelfhout (1787–1870)
Landscape Near Haarlem 1839
Oil on oak panel; 29.2 x 41.3 cm
Townshend Bequest 1576-1869

Clarkson Standfield RA (1793–1867)
On the Dogger Ban 1846
Oil on canvas; 76.2 x 69.8 cm
Jones Bequest 486-1882

Room 403 b: The Thing About Tea

Made to copy 2000
Both 152.4 x 76.2 cm
(2 panels each)

Get Outta That House! 2000
152.4 x 152.4 cm (4 panels)

Works from the V&A's collection of European Painting include:

Michael Mulready (c.1808–89)
Study of a Hand Against a Mossy Wall 1863
Oil on canvas; 35.6 x 33 cm
9112-1863

Michael Mulready (c.1808–89)
Study of a Hand Holding a Cup (n.d.)
Oil on canvas; 40 x 35.6 cm
9111-1863

William Mulready RA (1786–1863)
An Interior Including a Portrait of John Sheepshanks (1787–1863) at his Residence in Old Bond Street
Oil on panel; 50.8 x 40 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.142

Follower of Pieter Roestraten (1627–98)
Teapot, Ginger Jar & Slave Candlestick
Oil on canvas; 68.6 x 54.6 cm
P2-1939

Ascribed to Nicolaes Verkolje (1673–1746)
Two Ladies and an Officer Seated at Tea (n.d.)
Oil on canvas; 63.5 x 76.2 cm
Rotch Bequest P51-1962

English c.1770
Tea Service on a Tray
Oil on canvas; 65.1 x 101.3 cm
P1-1939

Room 403 c: Man's Best Friend

A little profile portrait 2000
152.4 x 76.2 cm (2 panels)

Mouayed Edeaan wants the face of the chicken 2000
152.4 x 152.4 cm (4 panels)

Works from the V&A's collections of European Painting include:

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
Suspense 1834
Oil on panel; 69.8 x 90.8 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.99

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
The Two Dogs 1822
Oil on canvas; 43.2 x 54 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.92

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
The Dog and the Shadow 1822
Oil on panel; 38.1 x 55.9 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.89

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner 1837
Oil on panel; 45.7 x 61 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.93

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
There's No Place Like Home 1842
Oil on canvas; 63.5 x 75.6 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA.91

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
Comical Dogs 1836
Oil on panel; 69.8 x 76.2 cm
Sheepshanks Gift FA100

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
Lady Blessington's Dog – The Barrier 1832
 Oil on panel; 29.2 x 38.1 cm
 Jones Bequest 535-1882

Sir Edwin Landseer RA (1802–73)
A Fireside Party (n.d.)
 Oil on panel; 25.4 x 35.6 cm
 Sheepshanks Gift FA.90

William Mulready
John Sheepshanks 1832
 Oil on paper on panel;
 16.5 x 13.3 cm
 Sheepshanks Gift FA.152

Jan Weenix (c.1642–1719)
The Intruder: Dead Game, Live Poultry and Dog 1710
 Oil on canvas; 122.6 x 103.5 cm
 Jones Bequest 603-1882

Room 421: Who's Who

Disappointed Love 2000
 152.4 x 152.4 cm (4 panels)

Loved 2000
 76.2 x 304.8 cm (4 panels)

The sitter was thought to be...
 2000
 152.4 x 152.4 cm (4 panels)
 [Illustrated on p. 17]

Olga rules 2000
 304.8 x 76.2 cm (4 panels)

Works from the V&A's collection of European Painting include:

Anonymous
Edward VI (1537–53)
 Oil on panel; 113.7 x 63.5 cm
 Forster Bequest F.47

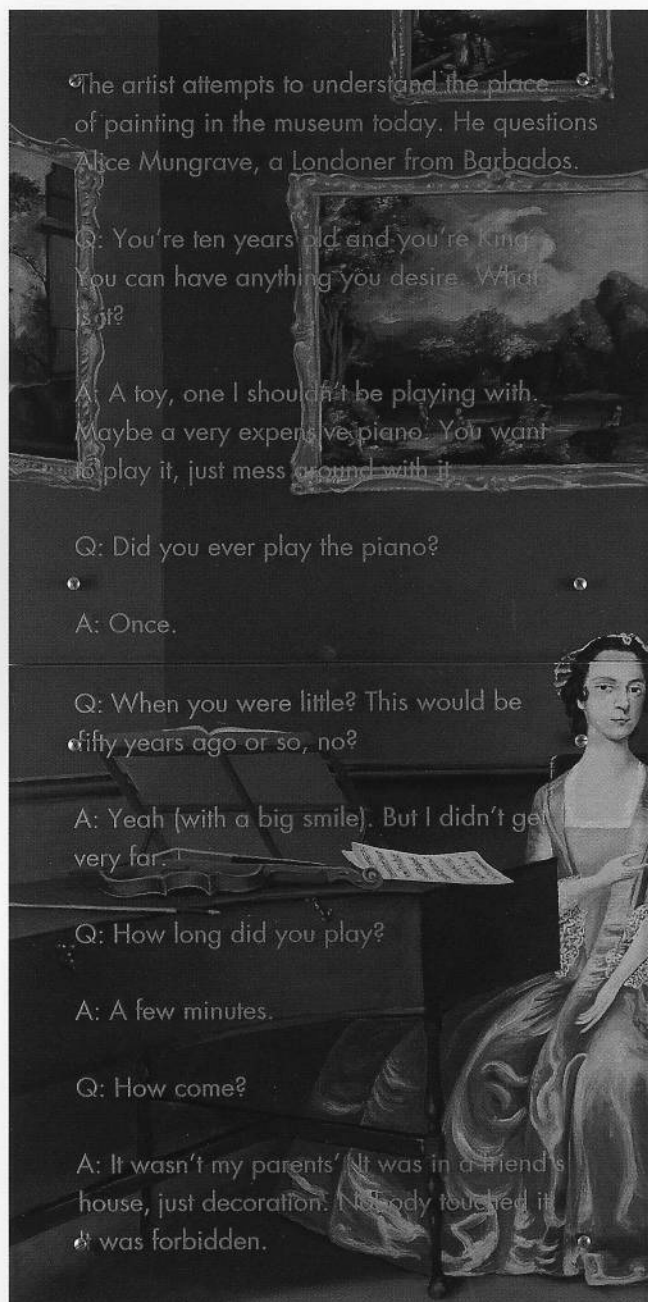
Thomas Gainsborough, RA
 (1727–88)
The Painter's Two Daughters, afterwards Mrs. Fischer and Margaret ('Peggy') (n.d.)
 Oil on canvas
 Forster Bequest, F.9
 [Illustrated on p. 17]

Francis Danby, ARA
 (1793–1861)
Disappointed Love 1821
 Oil on panel; 62.9 x 81.3 cm
 Sheepshanks Gift FA.65

Madame Pierre Paul Darbois
 née Boilie (worked 1834–43)
Henry Rosales, 1843
 Watercolour on ivory;
 7.6 x 6.2 cm
 P20-1909

Hans Holbein (1497–1543)
Mrs. Jane Small (n.d.)
 Watercolour on vellum; 5.2 cm
 in diameter
 P.40-1935

Exhibition Road Entrance:
The artist attempts to understand 2000
 152.4 x 76.2 cm (2 panels)
 [Illustrated right]



Ken Aptekar appropriates – borrows – imagery from historic works of art to form the basis of his paintings. He transforms the original images by, for example, reducing them to fragments or depicting them in brown or grey tones to suggest faded reproductions. He paints the final works on wood panels in the manner of the 'old masters'. Aptekar's own painting style is not intended as a direct copy of the originals, but rather strives to evoke or refer to them.

Aptekar's paintings also include texts about the artist's life or derived from discussions with museum visitors invited by Aptekar to respond to historic paintings. These responses, which often reveal deeply personal aspects of the participants' identities, are sandblasted onto glass panels, which are bolted to the surface of his paintings. In this way the verbal responses of the viewer and the visual responses of the artist are brought together.

For Q&A, V&A, Aptekar organised group discussion sessions with individuals reflecting the cultural diversity of the V&A's visitors, for example Art School Graduates and Afro-Caribbean Senior Citizens. The paintings discussed were selected by the Aptekar from those usually on display in the Henry Cole Wing, together with other paintings from the collection, some previously in store. Aptekar creates his pictures by first making studies on a computer, manipulating scanned images of the original paintings and overlaying the edited texts.

For the installation of his work Aptekar has chosen to maintain the historic style of display of the European Galleries in the Henry Cole Wing in which the paintings are hung in a pattern to articulate much of the wall space (the fixing holes still visible in the walls are the ghostly traces of the paintings that normally hang here). He has placed his works alongside most of the original paintings

that were his sources. As was once common, each gallery is organised according to subject matter such as landscapes, animal paintings, literary themes or portraits. Aptekar titled the four galleries displaying his work: *Landscapes Short on Land*, *The Thing About Tea*, *Man's Best Friend* and *Who's Who* – categories that directly relate to perceived foreign stereotypes of British culture as an insular, tea-drinking nation preferring animal to human company, and entrenched in the hierarchies of the class system.

Aptekar's categories also draw attention to the fact that the collections of the V&A are grouped according to country of origin, thus segregating objects of British manufacture from those made by 'foreigners', many from British colonies. Examples of non-British objects are generally seen in relation to British examples that form centrepieces of the collections. This method of presenting cultural artefacts no longer reflects the evolving demographics of post-colonial Britain. The texts included in Aptekar's paintings underscore the rich cultural difference that characterise British identity today.

Ken Aptekar wishes to thank those who met with him in the Museum and from whose responses to paintings he formulated this exhibition:

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