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EN

History Tales Fact and Fiction in History Painting

HISTORY TALES
Fact and Fiction in History Painting
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Edited by Sabine Folie

History Tales

Fact and Fiction in History Painting

History Tales retraces the career of a pictorial genre, the history painting, telling stories of history in which the past figures as an invitation for identification or a source of ethical guidance. Its focus is not so much on an objective historiography as rather on how the past is interpreted as a horizon within which we make sense of the present and an image in whose likeness we conceive a possible future. Emphasizing nuance over argument and form over format, the exhibition recounts *facts and fictions in history painting*, showcasing anecdotes, inventions, and glorifications, but also criticism, variances, and alternative narratives countering the history of official representation.

History Tales also explores the history of identities and nations. Which paradoxes of isolation and peacekeeping emerge in processes of nation building? How are the rise and fall of what are called civilisations depicted? How is the hubris of humankind allegorised? How do the representations of myths, heroes and heroines, rulers, and historic events change over the centuries – and which transformations are prompted by the inventions of photography and film?

At a time when the talk everywhere is of a *Zeitenwende*, a ‘turning point’, and new nationalisms and wars threaten to rip apart the political fabric, both in Europe and globally, the exhibition questions and challenges the understanding of history implicit in depictions while analysing how myths and historical events are always subject to interpretations shaped by the age in which they are revisited.

History Tales tells the story of such revisionary movements in the interpretation of history paintings, in which images of the past can become oblique commentaries on the present.

History painting has gone in and out of fashion ever since the humanist scholar, architect, and theorist Leon Battista Alberti (*On Painting*, 1435) proclaimed it the highest-ranking pictorial genre. At the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, founded under the Sun King Louis XIV in 1648, the historiographer André Félibien championed history painting’s value as a medium for the transmission of doctrines of virtue in the example of major events, heroes and heroines, and rulers, but also laid the theoretical foundations for its use as a propaganda machine. The genre flourished until the early years of the nineteenth century. Then its

particular virtues in the presentation of great and exemplary deeds and heroic figures faded as bourgeois taste and the more ephemeral media of popular illustration, graphic art in periodicals, and the newly invented photography took the lead.

Industrialisation, social unrest, societal upheavals, the aftershocks of the French Revolution impacting the political structure of Europe and the rest of the world, and the self-image of a new middle class were the catalysts of a chequered process of transformation. The taste of this new class tended to manifest itself in the salons as a platform of bourgeois self-representation rather than in the morally didactic history painting taught at the academies. Nonetheless, throughout the nineteenth century, history painting retained a particular merit: it increasingly turned its attention to historicity itself. The fixation on specific historical events gradually yielded to an interest in history as such, history as a philosophical model, one that must be conceived as a process – and so can be interpreted both as cyclical and as evolutionary. Still, the reasons for the growing demand for room for the bourgeois individual's sentiments in a new European culture of nation states whose guiding idea was that of freedom and the interest in a contemporary historiography defying heroic stylization are extraordinarily complex.

The exhibition *History Tales. Fact and Fiction in History Painting* proposes to examine these diverse facets in a tour of thirteen sceneries that ranges through the centuries down to the present.

Scrutinizing history painting as reflected in the Academy's historical collections – Paintings Gallery, Graphic Collection, Plaster Cast Collection – and prominent loans from museums as well as works by contemporary artists, the exhibition sheds light in a contemporary perspective on how the genre and its mass-media derivatives deftly alternate between fact and fiction and make historicity itself the object of representation.

Sabine Folie

Curator

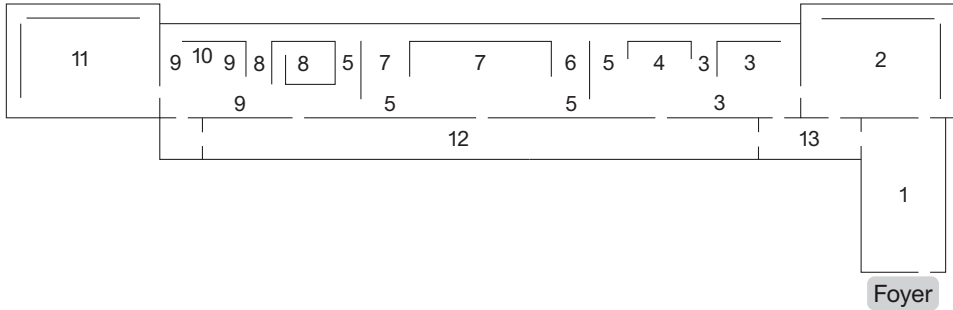
Director, Art Collections of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

For conservation reasons, the drawings and prints will be replaced by alternates starting in February 2024. Please note that the following notes accordingly mention some works that will only be on view in the second hanging or, conversely, do not mention works in the second hanging.

History on Trial

Substance and Shadow

Cartoon No. 1



There are many silly, dissatisfied people in this country, who are continually urging upon Ministers the propriety of considering the wants of the pauper population, under the impression that it is as laudable to feed men as to shelter horses.

To meet the views of such unreasonable people, the Government would have to put its hand into the Treasury money-box. We would ask how the Chancellor of the Exchequer can be required to commit such an act of folly, knowing, as we do, that the balance of the budget was triflingly against him, and that he has such righteous and paramount claims upon him as the Duke of Cumberland's income, the Duchess of Mecklenburg Strelitz's pin-money, and the builder's little account for the Royal stables.

We conceive that Ministers have adopted the very best means to silence this unwarrantable outcry. They have considerably determined that as they cannot afford to give hungry nakedness the substance which it covets, at least it shall have the shadow.

The poor ask for bread, and the philanthropy of the State accords – an exhibition.

These remarks by John Leech accompanied his *Cartoon No. 1*, titled *Substance and Shadow*, in the July 15, 1843 edition of London's *Punch* magazine. Leech was a caricaturist, and *Punch* was the most influential British satirical magazine of its day. Founded in 1841, it established the term 'cartoon' for witty illustrations. Leech's

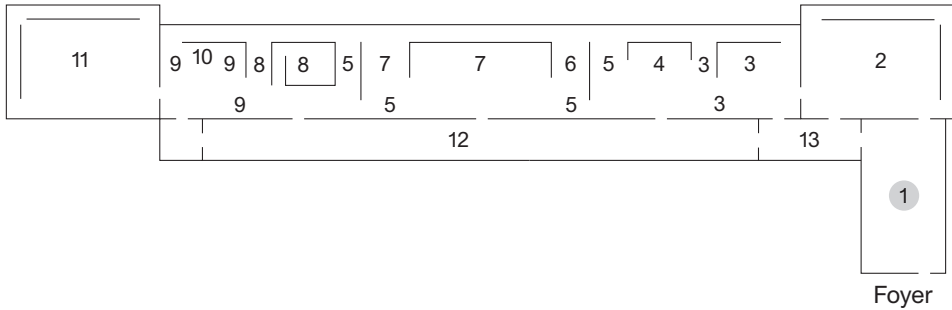
Cartoon No. 1 pinpoints the social disequilibrium and unbalanced representation in the art of the time with mordant humour. 'The *Lumpenproletariat* who turned up as visitors of the wall painting competition exhibition for the new Houses of Parliament at Westminster Hall are mere shadows of the exalted subjects featured on the exhibition walls', Alexander Roob writes in his essay in the catalogue accompanying this exhibition.

The term 'cartoon' originated as an ironic allusion to the *cartoni* or preliminary drawings the Nazarene artists made for their large and representative fresco paintings, which the caricaturists felt to be indicative of an excessive exaltation of the past. In 1845, John Tenniel, Leech's successor at *Punch*, submitted a 16-foot *cartone* of a cartoon titled *The Spirit of Justice* to a competition for designs for the new parliament building in London. Tenniel had studied with the Nazarene Peter von Cornelius, through whose influence the drawing and hence the line, which had been fundamental to the Nazarenes' works, became central to the art of the editorial cartoon as well.

So why not open an exhibition on history painting with an oversized cartoon?

1

Temple-Building and Ruins The Rise and Fall of Civilisations



In 1825, the Prussian architect, painter, and master builder Karl Friedrich Schinkel creates a painting that bears the programmatic title *A View of Greece in Its Prime*. Executed in an unusual panorama format (a nineteenth-century cinemascope), the work is designed to champion the idea of an Athens on the Spree. The historical backdrop to its genesis includes the ongoing wars of liberation in Greece, which is still under Ottoman rule, and the age of Metternich in Germany, which, in the period of post-Napoleonic restoration, is casting about for a new identity. This prevailing mood is represented by the temple under construction in Schinkel's painting: a labour of 'building civilisation', erecting a democratic polis that may usher in a new Golden Age for an independent liberal confederation of German states. The picture foregrounds the long and sometimes arduous process of 'construction' – in the Masonic sense of history as process and 'labour' – rather than presenting the finished temple.

The painting was destroyed in the Second World War, but several early copies are extant, including one made by Wilhelm Ahlborn in 1836 (Nationalgalerie Berlin), on view in the exhibition as a replica in a different medium – a transparency on a light box. The composition reflects several strands of the seventeenth-century tradition of Arcadian-ideal heroic landscape painting, a genre that took inspiration from classical antiquity; Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, in particular, were emulated by entire generations of artists.

They, too – and after them, in the final third of the eighteenth century, painters like Jakob Philipp Hackert, Michael Wutky, and Josef Anton Koch – spent time in Rome and Naples to study ancient ruins as the elegiacally yearned-for idea of the perfection and wholeness of a distant era. They pinned their hopes on the idea of a present reborn from the ruins of the past.

Around the same time, in c. 1787 – on the eve of the French Revolution – Hubert Robert anticipated the future by making a study of the ruins of the Louvre, the august temple of civilisation, letting it fall apart even before Napoleon will garnish the *Grande Nation's Grande Galerie* with the looted art from his campaigns of conquest.

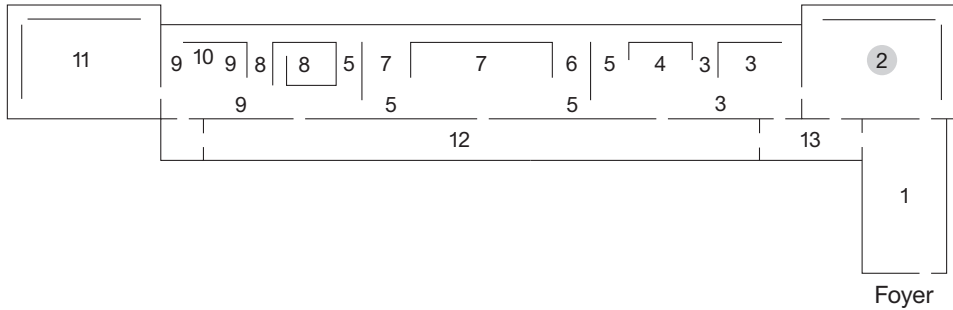
Danica Dakić avails herself of the same *Grande Galerie* as a backdrop before which she stages the ruinous homelessness of the Roma during the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001).

A quarter-century after Schinkel, Theophil von Hansen builds the Academy of Sciences in Athens (1856–1887); like Schinkel, whom he reveres, he also designs buildings for Berlin's Museum Island, including the Pergamon Museum, drawing up an ideal and bold design in which the Pergamon Altar sits atop the building. The Academy of Sciences, too, is a 'temple' designed to house a cultural heritage preserved for constant reference.* The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and especially the Paintings Gallery, clearly suggests the Pompeian model – the palette, the murals – that Hansen took inspiration from. It is one of the themes in the scenery *Interludium II: Eruption* in this exhibition, which turns the spotlight on the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius and the eighteenth-century efforts to excavate Pompeii.

* See also René Schober's essay "'Partiality of Stylistic Tendency Was Alien to Hansen" – Stylistic Pluralism in the Work of Theophil von Hansen' in the exhibition catalogue.

2

The Immaculate Body (Politic) The Virgin as an Instrument of Military Strategy



Women may not or only rarely see action in military operations, but myth, history, and especially the Christian doctrine of salvation at least allow for them to be cast as victims and martyrs: denounced or abducted, defiled, murdered or sacrificed. Art history and history teem with their stories: Lucretia, Helena, Virginia, Fredegunda, Europa, Oreithya, Iphigeneia, Alcestis, Joan of Arc, and countless saints. Many of them sacrificed themselves for a higher idea or the honour of an ancestral line (or nation). They are fixtures of historiography and nation building and counterparts to the sacrificial deaths and self-sacrifices of the male heroes and martyrs (Cato, Marcus Curtius, Brutus). In this way, woman becomes a *res publica*, a public 'matter', and the object of a debate among men.* The 'pure' female body figures as synonymous with the inviolability of the law and as such is sacrosanct, untouchable, (virginally) sealed – like the law of the body politic. Then again, as this 'sacred body', it can be sacrificed and killed.**

Functioning as a vignette or commentary, Ana Torfs's work *La Narration (une histoire extraordinaire)* (2000) might be about such stories of women: different historical eras and different generations of women come together, women who read (hi)stories and think about them – perhaps pondering the project of rewriting (the) history (of women).

The *Sibyl* of Cumae, the priestess with the nine books of

prophecies in Francesco Solimena's painting (c. 1730), looks up toward the heavens – disconnected from earthly reality yet possessed of a clear 'vision' what is to come. Among the events she foresees is the calamity that Paris will bring upon the Trojan people. Zeus, meanwhile, is appointing none other than Paris to end the strife that *Eris* – painted by Karel du Jardin – has sown with her 'apple for the fairest one' and the ensuing quarrel among the other goddesses. He assigns him the task of deciding who is most beautiful: Hera, Athena, or Aphrodite. The *Judgement of Paris* is the subject of paintings by Artemisia Gentileschi (attributed), Rubens, and Luca Giordano. Paris, we all know, chooses Aphrodite because she promises him the fairest woman in the world, Helen, who, unfortunately, is the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. As Homer's *Iliad* recounts, the abduction of beautiful Helen is the cause of the Trojan War.

In Eleanor Antin's *Constructing Helen from 'Helen's Odyssey'* (2007), the eponymous heroine's fate is the pivot of the Trojan Odyssey: absurdly diminutive sculptors are busily chiselling away at an outsized and contentious myth of Helen.

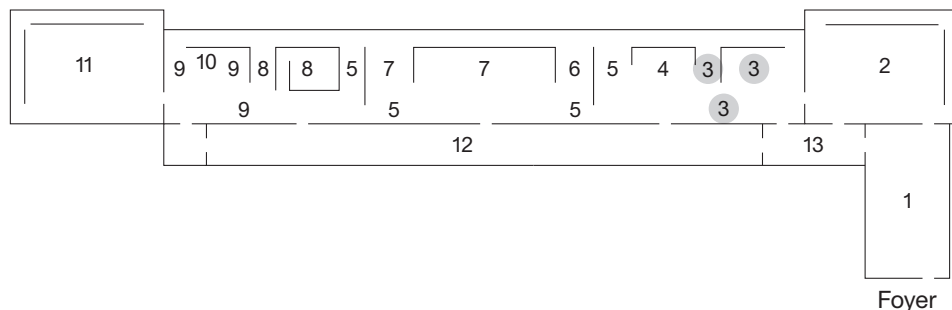
Lucretia, depicted by Lucas Cranach and Titian, sacrifices herself for the Roman Republic: she escapes the ignominy of being denounced as an adulteress only by consenting to her rape and then chooses to take her own life.

* See Maha El Hissy's contribution 'The Virgin as Aesthetic Figure of the Political' in the exhibition catalogue.

** Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

3

Rulers, Heroes and Heroines, and their Antagonists Empires Large and Small



Sometimes history painting pays homage to events that are of great significance to nations, but it often also serves to apotheosize individual rulers. In most instances, it is men who are – or have themselves – exalted.

Women (artists), by contrast, often resort to camouflage, travesty, and biting satire to protest war and imperialism. That is what Eleanor Antin does with her transformation by degrees, in hours of patient labour on a new self, into the *King of Solana Beach* (1972). No king without a kingdom: this one's realm is of modest dimensions, just as much as he can pace out in a single day. It consists of wasteland, however, ravaged by real estate speculators' machinations.

Something similar is going on in Marcel Broodthaers's miniature atlas *La Conquête de l'espace. Atlas à l'usage des artistes et des militaires* (1976), a tiny atlas that represents the world's countries in alphabetical order and all in the same size. The slyly humorous work is not just a gibe against the great conquerors' claims to hegemony, it also pokes fun at the vanity of some of the 'major' artists of his time.

Rulers like Emperors Maximilian I and Charles V, King Henry IV of France, Emperor Joseph II, Frederick the Great, or Napoleon, to name only a few whom the exhibition follows up on, typically retained the best painters of their time to celebrate their grandeur and successes. And their nineteenth-century successors, too, looked back to their era – with some qualifications and, sometimes,

distortions – as a glorious past. Fantasies of the ruler as saviour are unmistakable in Jacques-Louis David's idolatrous depictions of Bonaparte and especially in post-mortem hagiographies in which Napoleon appears as a 'benefactor of the poor' or resurrected Messiah, as in the paintings of Claude Joseph Vernet and Paul Delaroche. For especially imposing stagecraft, consider the transfer of his body from Saint Helena to the Dôme des Invalides in Paris in prints by Henri Durand-Brager and Charles-Nicolas Lemercier. Emperors and military leaders like Napoleon saw themselves as the descendants of a sublime lineage, from Hannibal (who crossed the Alps) to Charlemagne and on to Frederick the Great, whose disciplined cultivation and dressage of the horse, the army, and his own (sensitive) self – rendered in pictures by Johann Elias Ridinger, Daniel Chodowiecki, Adolph Menzel, and others – the French emperor admired.

What would remain if one were to efface this meticulously scored concert of forces from the image, as in Ulrike Grossarth's *Parcours* (1988)? And what would happen if the private self and a self of the *raison d'état* were melded by AI, as in Alexander Kluge's interpretation of Frederick's persona?

In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of the French, and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation went to its final demise less than two years later, when Emperor Francis II laid down the imperial crown. The idea of the grand empire was difficult to say goodbye to, as the exhibition illustrates with selected highlights of the emperor cult such as the grand processions celebrating a ruler's entry into a city. Several elements of the decorations honouring Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand upon his arrival in Antwerp (1635) are now in the Paintings Gallery, including paintings by Rubens and Cornelis de Vos for the triumphal Arch of Philip depicting Maximilian and Charles V. In the exhibition, they are 'montaged' into a monumental recreation of the Arch of Philip based on Theodoor van Thulden's 1642 copperplate engraving for the commemorative tome.*

Also on display is a modello of the Arch of Philip's front view by van Thulden after Rubens from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp and the oil sketch for the painting *The Entry of Charles V into Antwerp* (1875) by Hans Makart. The finished painting at the Hamburger Kunsthalle based on the sketch from the Belvedere in Vienna represents a historicist 'reanimation' of the event in 1520 on a canvas of positively cinematographic dimensions. After the death of Maximilian I, Charles V was on his way to his coronation as emperor in Aachen, and the episode in Antwerp was actually only

of peripheral significance. No less gargantuan is Rubens's *Entry of Henry IV into Paris* at the Uffizi, which Alexander Kluge subjects to a 'reanimation' by means of AI that is on view in the exhibition. A shift of format, in the opposite direction, also occurs in his interpretation of Rubens's monumental painting. It turns the picture into a dramatic narrative that already appears to prefigure the dark end, the murder of Henry IV.

The copy of Rubens's design drawings for the Arch of Philip and a comparison with van Thulden's modello for the 'Allegory of the Request for Admission' (c. 1646) to the Protestant northern Netherlands, the Union of Utrecht, at the city hall in 's-Hertogenbosch reveal the profound influence of Flemish painting, and Rubens in particular, on van Thulden even as he deftly mastered a change of political sides necessitated by his relocation – from painter of imperial apotheoses in Antwerp to supporter of independence in 's-Hertogenbosch. He had envisioned a large format, at least 13 feet tall and 26 feet wide, which proved unrealisable for a variety of reasons; in the end, the Vienna design was divided into multiple paintings for different rooms. In the exhibition, the placement of Henry IV between the *Entry of Charles V* and van Thulden's allegory of independence is a nod to Henry's conversion to Catholicism and his attempt to contain the House of Habsburg by supporting Dutch independence.

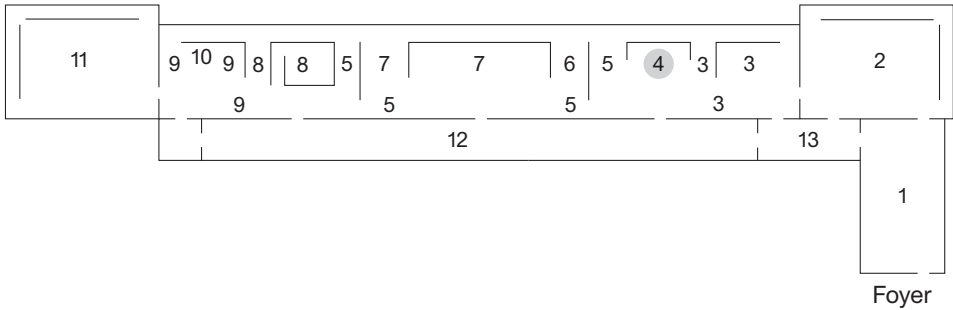
The nineteenth century in particular seemed to be obsessed with breathing new life into the apogees of history: the French, bourgeois, and industrial revolutions were heralding an era that would deal the final blows to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and subsequently to the *Grande Nation*. The general tendency was clear: humanity was headed for a confusing and conflict-ridding 'headless' modernity that would need to replace the 'decapitated' king with a new model of the polity – the nation state.

Ana Torfs's *Le Faux Pas* (2003) is an apt 'commentary' on this development: Louis XVI, Marie-Antoinette, and their children try to escape their arrest at the hands of the revolutionaries of 1789 by disguising themselves as – domestic servants.

* For details see Claudia Koch's essay 'Impermanent Yet Forever Remembered: On the Lasting Renown of Ephemeral Art, or Festive Processions as a Burgundian Heritage' in the exhibition catalogue.

4

Out with History, Give Us the Present! Revolution, the Commune, and Contemporary History in Press Graphics



Once the Napoleon was defeated and Restoration ensued, history painting was at an impasse, and artists needed to find a place for themselves between the Louvre, the museum of high art, and the salon as the scene of bourgeois taste. Battle scenes and hero worship were out, but what did the present have to offer?

On the one hand, there was the party of the bourgeois salon; on the other hand, the Louvre, home to the stalwart Old Masters, whose admirers, lacking for exciting subjects, now set course for a painted art history, recreating the lives of the great artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo or Tintoretto. A third faction championed the exact opposite approach: its adherents proposed to give current events in radically unvarnished form in 'cartoons' – a term chosen in sarcastic allusion to the big *cartoni* for the grand wall paintings – that transported caustically critical observations on stark social divisions through their aesthetic equivalent, the contrast between 'high' and 'low' genres and styles. 'It was about nothing less than asserting press graphics as a new, critical form of democratic historical art by means of mockery and the re-evaluation of feudal symbols and insignia of power'.*

Most of the caricaturists, 'special artists', or 'reporter artists' who covered real life in the slums of the cities, the halls of political power, or on the frontlines were trained history painters whose subjects were fading into oblivion as ill-matched to the taste of the time and an ever

more fast-paced need for information, to which the mass medium newspaper catered. Joseph Keppler and Johann Schönberg, for example, were graduates of the Vienna Academy, but their reportorial work did not strike a chord with Austrian audiences. They emigrated and went on to successful careers in the U.S. and England, respectively.**

Decades earlier, Napoleon himself had pushed for more research and development to improve lithography, an indispensable part of his propaganda machinery designed to broadcast his successes as widely as possible. After 1840, he figured in lithographs after works by Horace Vernet, Paul Delaroche, or Hippolyte Bellangé, depictions so hagiographic that today one might mistake them for parodies even though they were designed to posthumously rehabilitate the great emperor.

Adolph Menzel also tried his talented hand at illustration, producing plates, for example, for Franz Kugler's biography of Frederick the Great (1842) or Heinrich von Kleist's *Broken Jug* (1808), released with his illustrations in 1877. Kleist's subject is the seventeenth-century Dutch liberation movement, with recognisable parallels in the budding bourgeois anti-restoration movement of his time: the past is narrated in a perspective informed by a comparable conflict in the present. Menzel's gusto for illustration is arguably still palpable in the penchant for overdrawn features in the paintings he subsequently executed. Consider his monumental *The Meeting of Frederick II and Joseph II in Neisse in 1769* (1857, Nationalgalerie Berlin), a peculiar variant of the 'encounter' between rulers, an established format, that captures an almost grotesque instant just before their embrace; or the rather anecdotal illustration of Frederick's meeting with the blindsided Austrians at Lissa Palace, whom the king is said to have greeted with a deadpan 'Bonsoir, messieurs. I dare say you did not expect me here. Can one get a night's lodging along with you?' Both events more or less took place as depicted and were already the subjects, over half a century earlier, of copperplates by Daniel Chodowiecki, on display in the exhibition.

Édouard Manet and Adolph Menzel, who, though they had one foot in modernism, sometimes painted history, channelled the zeitgeist, albeit camouflaged it under German 'myths' (Frederick the Great) or political art history: Manet's *Execution of Maximilian* (1868), for instance, is modelled on Francisco de Goya's *Execution of the Rebels* (1814), which commemorates an 1808 uprising against Napoleonic rule. Half a century later, Manet inverts the roles, repurposing the template of the shooting of rebels against Napoleon

for the overthrow of the widely loathed Mexican emperor: history, he seems to say, strikes back. Additional iconographic adaptations of the same motif may be found in Manet's depictions of the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune such as *The Barricade* (1871).

In today's contemporary art, this kind of re-enactment, the reprise of a motif in very different circumstances, is common practice.

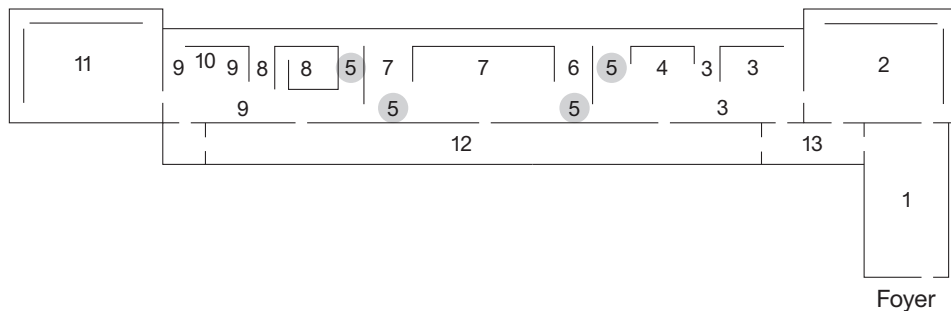
In Ana Torfs's diptych *Révolution* (2003), the man posing as John Wilkes – an allusion to William Hogarth's caricature of Wilkes, a notorious contrarian and radical champion of freedom – holds up a bucket inscribed with the words *Refusé* and *Refuser*, guidons of sorts for those who are being rejected or, on the other hand, refuse to conform. The painters of the period, too, rebelled against the rules and their exclusion from the Salons and, beginning around 1840, branded themselves the *Refusés*. The inaugural Salon des Refusés, marketed as a counter-event to the Salon de Paris, was held in 1863.

* See Alexander Roob's essay 'Substance and Shadow: History Painting and Journalism in Graphic Form, in Four Scenes' in the exhibition catalogue.

** See *ibid.* Works by Keppler and Schönberg are on view in Scenery 9 of the exhibition.

5

The Great Battle



To be mounted is already to be a master, a knight. To represent the noble (in the ethical as well as the social sense). To vanquish. To feature, however modestly, in the annals of battle. Honour begins with a man and a horse.

(John Berger, *G.*, 1972)

Competing territorial claims, imperialism, and religious wars: the battlefield cannot but be one of the main subjects of history painting. Over the centuries, it has been depicted, depending on an artist's perspective, as a scene of triumph or defeat or of pure carnage, as in Jacques Callot or Salvator Rosa. Meanwhile, others, like the painters Johann Peter Krafft, Charles André Vanloo, and Nicolaes Maes, infused the battle with allegorical significance. Most of the military engagements in the paintings of the Paintings Gallery and the prints in the Graphic Collection are conceived as genre scenes rather than depictions of specific events. Entire generations of battle painters took guidance from Leonardo da Vinci's descriptions in his *Treatise on Painting* (1480–1516):

Make a horse dragging the dead body of his master, and leaving behind him in the dust and mud the track where the body was dragged along. Make the conquered and beaten pale, with brows raised and knit, and the skin above their brows furrowed with pain; the sides of the nose with wrinkles going in an arch from the nostrils

and ending where the eye begins; the nostrils drawn high up – which is the cause of these lines; the lips arched displaying the upper teeth; and the teeth apart as with crying out in lamentation. Show someone using one hand as a shield for his terrified eyes with the palm turned towards the enemy; while the other rests on the ground to support his half-raised body ...*

Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* (1505) as the paradigm for the suitable depiction of a battle was copied by several artists, and elements from it surface in many works, including in the *Battle of the Milvian Bridge* (1520–1524), executed in the Vatican by Giulio Romano after designs by Raphael, on view in the exhibition in copperplate reproductions. The Art Collections of the Academy have a valuable copy of the Leonardo painted by Rubens in 1630 and a copperplate print of the same motif after Rubens after Leonardo that dates from 1707.

The recommendations in Leonardo's *Treatise* presumably also influenced Salvator Rosa, whose imposing *Roman Battle* (1645) from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna unrolls a monumental panorama of hand-to-hand combat.** Like his older contemporary Jacques Callot, who also spent time in Florence, he had a knack for representing the horrors of war to drastic effect. In particular, Rosa was likely familiar with Callot's series of etchings *The Great Miseries of War* (1633), which would have made a lasting impression on him. Jacques Courtois, who had fled the devastations of the Thirty Years' War for Rome, likewise drew on personal experience in his depictions of warfare. These artists' works together with those of Antonio Calza, Pietro Graziani, and the circle of Luca Giordano as well as a number of Dutch artists like Herman van Lin and Philips Wouwerman and the Frenchman Charles André Vanloo make for a sweeping portrait of an era of wars.

Allegories of war and death are a frequent subject, including of the deaths of horses, the faithful servants of soldiers and commanders. For a striking example, consider Paolo Veronese's monumental ceiling painting *Sacrificial Death of Marcus Curtius* (c. 1550/1552). A fully armed Curtius plunges his horse and himself into the abyss that has opened up in the Roman Forum – allegorically speaking, a rupture that divides the republic – to close it. The artist's pictorial rhetoric is ingenious, creating a maximum of illusionism: the horse and rider leap toward the beholders, who, though outside the pictorial space, feel like they are looking up from the bottom of the chasm.

During the Battle of the Berezina, fought as Napoleon's *Grand Armée* was forced to retreat, a Polish non-commissioned officer,

blinded by the emperor's presence and trying to demonstrate his unqualified devotion and courage in the face of death, chased his soldiers with their horses into the raging river and certain death – a case of the 'collateral damage of charisma', as Alexander Kluge puts it.

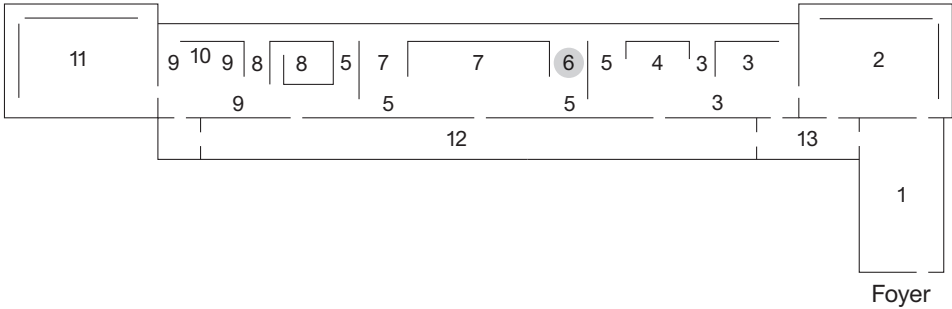
The realistic depiction of the heads of dead horses in Adolph Menzel, meanwhile, is so jarring as to be more than a mere study, becoming a universal memento mori of the defenceless creature. In the exhibition's second hanging, they will be on view in the form of a contemporary re-enactment by Megan Francis Sullivan.

* See Gudrun Swoboda's contribution 'The Hero's Inversion: On a Rediscovered Battle Painting by Salvador Rosa' in the exhibition catalogue.

** Leonardo da Vinci, *Notebooks, A Treatise on Painting*, selected by Irma A. Richter, ed. with an introduction and notes by Thereza Wells, preface by Martin Kemp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175.

6

INTERLUDIUM I: ET IN ARCADIA EGO History as Elegy



History and elegy are akin.
(Anne Carson, *NOX*, 2010)

History is what makes elegy possible. The latter mourns what is happening, what has happened and will have happened. A proleptic lament for the dead.

In John Murphy's *O Egypt ...* (1979–1981/2023), the exclamation 'O' is a rhetorical formula that does double duty: the curt invocation gestures in several directions while also denoting grief as such. The work's starting point is a found postcard that shows the Luxor Obelisk on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, the square where the execution of Louis XVI was held. Nearby, across the Seine, stands the Dôme des Invalides, which was converted into a monumental shrine above the tomb of Napoleon after the spectacular repatriation of the emperor's body from Saint Helena to Paris in 1840. The obelisk was a gift of the viceroy of Egypt to King Louis-Philippe and brought to Paris by the decipherer of hieroglyphs Jean-François Champollion, but in light of Napoleon's looting of the cultural treasures of Europe and Egypt, this act of 'transfer' symbolizes the exploitative imperialism of the 'First World'. The legendary discovery of the Rosetta Stone in the Nile Delta – Murphy's subject in *Picture. Word. Notion. Figure. Device. Sign.* (1977) – enabled Champollion to decode the symbols, opening the door to a hitherto uncharted universe.

The *Five Sculptures* in Hannes Boeck's film likewise point to a 'dislocation' of Egyptian cultural assets – in this instance, to southern Italy –, which Napoleon may well in fact have been instrumental in rehabilitating vis-à-vis the Roman-Greek origin myth favoured by the Enlightenment. In paintings by Antoine-Jean Gros and Jacques-Louis David that show Bonaparte in the saddle, the emperor typically appears on a white horse rearing up, as reproduced by Peter Johann Nepomuk Geiger in his drawing *Bonaparte's Address in Front of the Pyramids (1789)*, one of his illustrations for the *Vaterländische Immortellen* (1830–1840).

Murphy's 'O' is an elegiac exclamation of pain over a loss due to spoliation that must be grieved. Rooted in the same tradition of mourning is the trope of *Et in Arcadia ego*, the consciousness that death is omnipresent even in paradise, as compellingly analysed by the art historian Erwin Panofsky. Two artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stand out here for their very different interpretations of a theme that has engaged artists since antiquity: Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806).

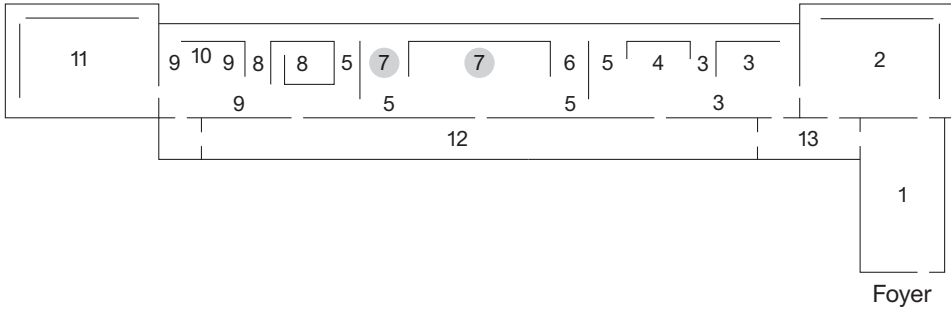
The ancient Greek historian Polybius portrays Arcadia, an area of the Peloponnese, as a desolate wasteland that cannot even feed its population of skinny goats. For the Roman poet Virgil, by contrast, Arcadia signified the promise of a blissful sojourn amid Sicilian pastures, combining an overabundance of natural resources with the amenities of civilisation at the highest level of sophistication. In 1630, not long after arriving in Rome, Nicolas Poussin painted a first version of the motif in his painting *Et in Arcadia ego*, reprising a work of Guercino, another painter living in Rome (*Et in Arcadia ego*, 1621 or 1623), in which the shepherds come upon a skull, a personification of death. Clearly springing from the moralistic tradition of the *memento mori*, the earlier picture suggests the correct interpretation of the Latin phrase: 'Even in Arcadia am I' – that is, death. Poussin softens the blow of the encounter a bit with a much smaller skull and a sarcophagus that now bears the ominous inscription, which the shepherds try to make out. The shepherdess adds a motif from Arcadian love poetry. In Poussin's second version (1640–1645), now at the Louvre, the theme shifts from a warning that 'you, too, will inevitably die one day' to an elegiac remembrance of the dead and hence a reflection on life as such. In Fragonard's *Allégorie où l'on remarque l'Amour s'élançant avec son Flambeau vers deux Amants couchés dans les bras l'un de l'autre au milieu d'un Tombeau brisé*

(*Allegory with Love Rushing with His Torch to Two Lovers Lying in One Another's Arms amid a Shattered Tomb*; c. 1775), the introduction of the cupids, who indicate that the lovers are embracing even in death, considerably dilutes the *memento mori* motif – and even turns it on its head: ‘To Guercino’s “Even in Arcady, there is death” Fragonard’s drawing replies: “Even in death, there may be Arcady.”’*

* Erwin Panofsky, ‘*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition’ [1955], in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 262.

7

INTERLUDIUM II: ERUPTION Volcanoes – Cataclysms and the ‘Age of Iron’



The decisive battle and the great ruler are not the only subjects fit for history paintings; so are disasters such as volcanic eruptions. They are of outsize significance because, allegorically speaking, they fire up a mythical account of the origin of occidental civilisation – Aeneas comes ashore at Cumae, in the Phlegraean Fields, and founds Rome – while also demonstrating the menace of the sudden onset of an Iron Age of austerity and wars such as follows with a certain regularity upon the Golden Age with its opulence and prosperity as well as its hubris. At the same time, the Iron Age represents the era of early industry, the world of furnaces and the explosive energy of revolutions.

The major volcanic eruptions – above all that of Mount Vesuvius in 79 BCE, which destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum – are natural cataclysms that became subjects of extensive scientific research and made the area an attraction on the so-called Grand Tour completed by many tourists travelling in Italy, especially after Pompeii was discovered and excavations began around 1748 and a new series of volcanic outbursts started around 1780. In a similarly eruptive development in the political world, the French Revolution broke out in 1789; its earth-shattering impact would be felt throughout Europe.

Once the medium of photography was available, which is to say, since the 1860s, events were also documented in salt paper and albumen prints that conveyed even more forcefully an impression of a chronicle of events.

The eighteenth century produced countless spectacular sketches and paintings showing these eruptions, by Michael Wutky, Jakob Philipp Hackert, Jacques-Antoine Volaire, Joseph Wright of Derby, that show a striking resemblance to the 'fire' of early capitalist industry, which appears as a pictorial motif in the oeuvres of Wright and Philip James de Loutherbourg. Many of these works are in the Vienna Academy's Graphic Collection.

Sir William Hamilton was British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples from 1764 until 1799. He collected Pompeian vases and wrote various treatises for the Royal Society in London on the excavations in the Phlegraean Fields and Pompeii (*Campi Phlegraei*, 1776–1779). He also hired Peter Fabris to make many drawings of the sites of archaeological discoveries and the geological structure of the various layers of volcanic material.

The excavations in Pompeii not only influenced fashions and the work of an entire generation of nineteenth-century architects, they also supplied Lady Hamilton with material for her *Attitudes*, pantomimic recreations of ancient statues and paintings. The resemblance of her performances to the dances of the airy maenads in the Pompeian murals is not difficult to see. An acclaimed beauty and the mistress of a series of wealthy men, Emma Hamilton ensconced herself in a *ménage à trois* with her husband Sir William and her lover Lord Nelson, who vanquished Napoleon in the Battle of the Nile (1798) and the Battle of Trafalgar (1805).

In her verse novel *Autobiography of Red* (1998), the classicist and writer Anne Carson reinterprets Geryon, a red-winged monstrous creature of Greek myth with an affinity for the volcanic, for all that is red and hot, as Hercules's lover. In the original myth, one of Hercules's labours is to steal Geryon's herd of red cattle, which he can only accomplish by killing Geryon:

XXXII. KISS

A healthy volcano is an exercise in the uses of pressure.

Geryon sat on his bed in the hotel room pondering the cracks and fissures
of his inner life. It may happen
that the exit of the volcanic vent is blocked by a plug of rock, forcing
molten matter sideways along
lateral fissures called fire lips by volcanologists. Yet Geryon did not
want

to become one of those people
who think of nothing but their stores of pain. He bent over the book on
his knees.

Philosophic Problems.

'... I will never know how you see red and you will never know how I
see it.

But this separation of consciousness
is recognized only after a failure of communication, and our first
movement is

to believe in an undivided being between us ...'

As he read Geryon could feel something like tons of black magma
boiling up
from the deeper regions of him.

[...]

A sound caught him.

Like kissing. He looked around. A workman stood halfway up a ladder
outside

the front window of the shop.

Some dark-colored bird was swooping at him and each time the bird
came near

the man made a kissing noise with his mouth –

the bird somersaulted upwards then dove again with a little swagger
and a cry.

Kissing makes them happy, thought Geryon

and a sense of fruitlessness pierced him. He turned to go and
bumped hard

into the shoulder of a man

standing next to him – *Oh!* The stale black taste of leather filled his
nose and lips.

I'm sorry –

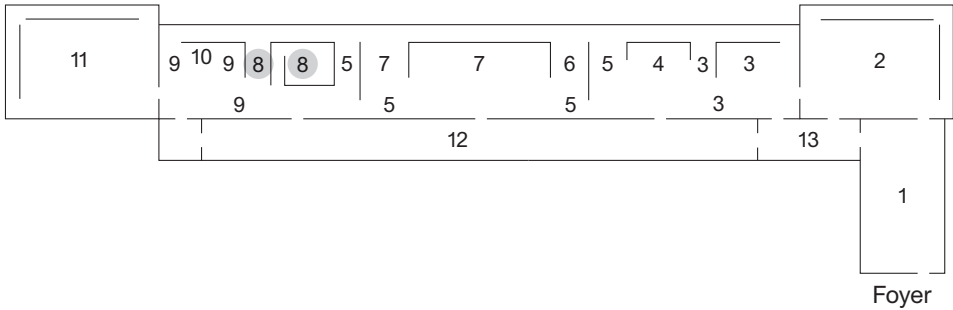
Geryon's heart stopped. The man was Herakles. After all these years
– he picks

a day when my face is puffy!*

*Anne Carson, *The Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 105–7.

8

Bringing History Back for an Encore The Truth of Re-enactment



In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, history painting is reactivated in the form of the re-enactment: a historic event is restaged or revisited and, in the process of this empathetic doubling, undergoes deliberate reinterpretation. The goal is a kind of heightened awareness in which the participants and audience understand historical processes out of the spirit of the present and become alert to the contradictions or discontinuities in their perception of reality, which is revealed to be multiple.

In *Respite* (2007), Harun Farocki works with raw historic footage that was recorded by the concentration camp inmate Rudolf Breslauer. In 1944, the SS had ordered Breslauer to document the life of the detainees at the Westerbork transit camp in the German-occupied Netherlands. Farocki edited and montaged the footage and inserted title cards that act as unobtrusive pointers. They lend the film an elegiac quality, subtly conveying to the viewers that they are watching people whose time in the camp was a mere respite – their stories ended in the death camps.

Omer Fast's video *Continuity* (2012) grapples with the subject of soldiers who do not return from war, taking the perspective of the parents waiting for them. Scenes of a merely imagined homecoming are enacted in variants, as though such repetition would make it the desired reality. The scenes turn out to be roleplay, and it dawns on us that there has never been and never will be a return. The film ends

with an apocalyptic scenario unfolding in a clearing in a forest: the dead soldiers lie in a crater. That scene is a kind of re-enactment in turn, a reinterpretation of Jeff Wall's monumental colour transparency in a light box *Dead Troops Talk* (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986) (1992), which for its part may be read as a re-enactment of the genre of history painting in the post-painterly era.

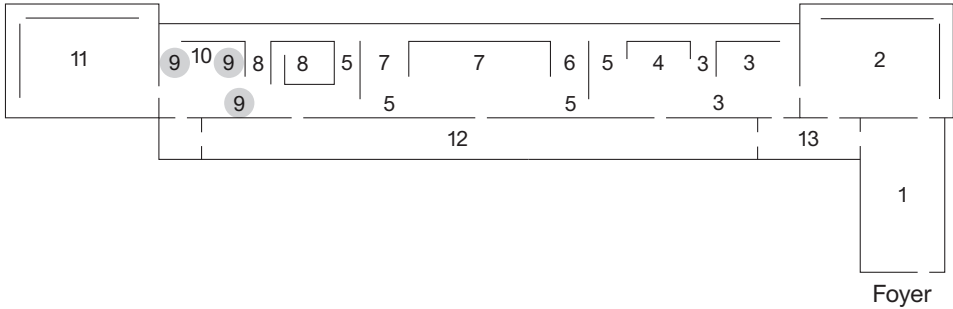
Flashback to the nineteenth century: Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld and his student Moritz von Schwind were members of the Nazarene movement, which got started at the Academy in Vienna in 1804, sparked by opposition to the classicist ideal championed by Heinrich Friedrich Füger, then the dominant figure at the school. Spurning present-day realities and hoping to elude the constraints of academicism and the dictates of the Metternich era as well the taste of the bourgeois salons, they took a reflective historicist detour, finding inspiration in the abstract linearism of the tradition of the trecento and quattrocento and old German painting. The post-Napoleonic era in its political disorientation sought renewal in a romantic-religious ideal of refined sentiment. In a certain sense, the Nazarenes' retrovision amounted to a re-enactment of what they thought of as a lost Christian spiritualism in painting. Hence the elegiac undertone, not at all unlike that of Omer Fast's film, in motifs such as the "Farewell" and "Homecoming" of the knight.

Akram Zaatari's *Beirut Darkroom Logbook*, by contrast, is effectively a kind of diary of the Lebanese Civil War between 1979 and 1990, a history of Beirut as a city divided by a demarcation line running between Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods. Other works by Zaatari often address the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis and the visual archive of a country whose memory, whose very history has repeatedly been destroyed and lost in wars. In 1997, he joined Fouad Elkoury and Samer Mohdad to found the Arab Image Foundation, which has made it its mission to salvage and animate the scattered private as well as professional archives in order to reactivate history.

9

VÉRITÉ

How Photography Dethrones Painting In the Intermediate Realm of (Printed) Reproduction



As the newly invented photography is put to use in the mass medium of the illustrated magazine in the mid-nineteenth century, a lively debate over realism ensues, throwing the power to define the concept of reality into contention. Photography is capable of recording the historic instant, a segment from an event, though in its infancy in the 1850s, taking a picture requires endlessly long exposures. The authenticity of what photography is capable of rendering, that is to say, is subject to considerable qualification given the need to assemble the snippets of reality it captures in a narrative.

Painters, for their part, find employment in two lines of work, as war reporters and as history painters. For their war coverage, they record the events in drawings that they supply to the magazines, while also being on the lookout for motifs that stand for an event in a way that renders it worthy of a history painting, as the continuum of historical processes as a whole plays an ever more important part. The 'home artist' is sitting in his studio and wondering how he can cast his reporting from the field (Wilhelm Camphausen, *Ein Maler auf dem Kriegsfelde: Illustriertes Tagebuch / A Painter on the Battlefield. Illustrated Diary*, 1864) into paintings that might attain to the genre's grandeur. Meanwhile, the idea gains currency that 'history increasingly serves the present as "evidence of contingency"',* which is to say, as the medium of both its re-presentation and its intangibility – the picture suggests the authenticity and current relevance of

an event but is, by the same token, already history, a fragment, an excerpt from a continuum of events – and as such, more than anything, in the past.

In the field, then, artists make sketches of the battles to be reproduced in illustrated magazines; in other instances, photographs serve as sources for paintings. At the same time, history painters are increasingly confronted with the comparison of their work to photography and its claim to the ‘reality effect’, to the documentary register, to the ‘this-has-been’.** In response, painters like Ernest Meissonier revisit battles of the past – in some instances, of a lifetime ago – with a more realistic approach, paying greater attention to detail so as to stay abreast of the emerging new regime of the gaze.

The aloof heroism of the ‘great moment’ in the classic history painting gives way to a more empathetic conception that involves the beholders, conveying a sense of what it must have been like to be there, and often records the hardly spectacular ‘crucial instant’ that freezes the present in the photographic image in order to rescue it from passing into oblivion.

Johann Schönberg and Joseph Keppler, whom we encountered earlier, were among the ‘reporter artists’ trained at the Vienna Academy – they emigrated to England and the U.S., respectively –; so, arguably, were Fritz L’Allemand and his nephew Siegmund, both of whom subsequently also taught at the Vienna Academy. The engraver Johannes Klaus made lithographs after paintings by Siegmund L’Allemand such as a depiction of the *Battle of Custoza* (1868) in the Third Italian War of Independence against the Austrian Empire in 1866. In this instance, the difference between graphic art and photography almost vanishes, while the artist’s striving to approximate the ‘reality effect’ of photography is on full display. A similar example is a lithograph from the Crimean War (*Siège de Sébastopol, Vue de Kamiesch*, 1855) by Henri Durand-Brager, who experimented with photography early on. Fritz L’Allemand’s paintings of contemporary battles are very reminiscent of Meissonier’s no-frills realism, but he also produced renderings of major events of his time – associated, for example, with the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 – that reveal his talent for engaging stagecraft: a highly dramatic picture from 1851 shows Colonel Allnoch of the Imperial-Royal Army setting off a mine on Budapest’s Chain Bridge, sacrificing his life in an attempt to defeat the Hungarian uprising against the Habsburg Empire.

The dramatism of an explosion is also harnessed by Cyprien Gaillard for his fake re-enactment of *Real Remnants of Fictive Wars V* (2002–2004).

Fought between 1853 and 1856 – which is to say, just as photography was coming of age – the Crimean War was the first modern ‘industrial’ conflict, with trench warfare and high losses due to novel armaments as well as its extended duration and various epidemics. Waged by Russia against the Ottoman Empire, which eventually prevailed thanks to support from its allies, France, the United Kingdom, and the Kingdom of Sardinia, this war, too, was widely recorded in diaries and reports in the form of illustrated volumes with graphic art by William Simpson, Charles Stewart Hardinge, and Lady A.B. alias Alicia Blackwood. The latter was an associate of Florence Nightingale, whose pioneering achievement during the war was to set up a modern military hospital system. A daughter of the upper classes just like Nightingale, Blackwood had offered to assist with her mentor’s charitable work behind the frontlines. She later composed *A Narrative of Personal Experiences & Impressions during a Residence on the Bosphorus throughout the Crimean War* (1881) and produced an edition of lithographs in a naïve style representing scenes from the war in Crimea.

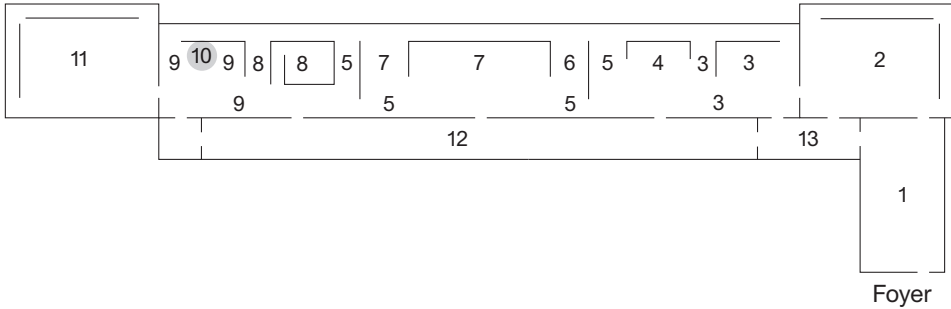
In Eleanor Antin’s performance *The Angel of Mercy* (1977), a travesty featuring cardboard figures, the artist appears as ‘Eleanor Nightingale’ to probe such representations, subjecting England’s role in the Crimean War to critical scrutiny and pointing up the perversity of war: women are employed as nurses to treat soldiers so that they can return to the theatre of war, once again expose themselves to mortal danger, and kill other soldiers.

* Peter Geimer, *Die Farben der Vergangenheit: Wie Geschichte zu Bildern wird* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2022).

** Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 79.

10

INTERLUDIUM III: FICTION OF REALITY The Work of Mourning History 'Truthful' Accounts – Intertextual Evidence



To which extent is photography – or, for that matter, historiography – proof of reality, of its authentic rendition? Are (photographic) images, is reality itself not always already interfused with fictions? The truth of photography is called in question; but its purport is relevant not only when its evidentiary character is certain, on the contrary: the ambiguity of the information encoded in pictures and the excess of meaning contained in them fuel the work of writers, filmmakers, and visual artists like W. G. Sebald, Alexander Kluge, John Berger, and Ana Torfs in productions that set text and image in interrelation.

When Alexander Kluge's book *Schlachtbeschreibung* (*The Battle*) first comes out in 1964, his subject, as so often, is history, and in particular the cataclysmic history of the Second World War. He has personally experienced its ravages as a thirteen-year-old, as recounted in *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945* (*The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8 April 1945*, 1977). Kluge proposes a 'dialectic of realism': reality is real in that it oppresses people, while people rebel against the realities in which they exist, adopting an 'anti-realist posture' that is informed by feelings and ultimately by their instincts of survival. His objective is to unearth these antithetical strata of the real: the ostensibly factual and the consequences of oppression, the exclusion of the 'subdominant consciousness', which has a marked influence on the courses of history. His poetological meditation on history intercuts the perspectives of the official history 'from above' (of

the assailants) and 'from below' (of the victims of assault). Similarly, Kluge's *Schlachtbeschreibung*, which comes out in an illustrated version in 1978, interweaves documentary material with commentary around the disaster of Stalingrad. Fiction and reality continually intermingle, foiling any attempt at objective historiography.

Kluge's and W. G. Sebald's techniques of the bricolage and montage of text and photography or film, respectively, are akin; in particular, both seek to subject the subliminal currents and catalysts of accepted historical realities to forensic as well as experimental study, to inject possible sub-histories beneath the narratives of representative and official historiography, to uncover invisible (hi) stories and subjective traumas. They pick apart the "corsages" of the great military leaders and the architectures of power associated with the Holocaust, and the image, the sense of vision, is central in both.

The title of Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* refers not only to the book's protagonist, who goes in search of traces of the life of his father, who died in the Holocaust, but also for the Gare d'Austerlitz, a railway station that in turn figures both as a central scene of the deportations from Paris to Auschwitz and a reference to the Battle of Austerlitz in 1806, a decisive engagement during the Napoleonic Wars, and hence to Napoleon's policy of expansion and its determinative influence over the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, railway stations like the one in Antwerp with their oversized architectures were hubs of the trade in and enslavement of animals and humans as well as the accumulation of commodities and profits extracted from the colonies. The building, whose design emulates the Pantheon, also stands for Belgian imperialism and colonialism and the horrors perpetrated by Belgian authorities in the Congo.

Ana Torfs's *Elective Affinities* (2002) invokes similarly ramified interconnections across large distances in time; the interplay of events, shaped in part by coincidences, is represented on the formal level by a network of palimpsestic superimpositions of lines, texts, and images. Historical processes come into view as communicating vessels between past, present, and future. All these events are imprinted upon the body of collective memory and remain operative for generations, whether in deliberate references or subliminally and subconsciously. Torfs exemplarily stages the programme of literature (including ideological literature) that shapes entire cultures and, perhaps more importantly, for centuries shored up the hegemony of the Western intellectual horizon.

Three historical movements that occurred at the same time but in different locations converge in John Berger's postmodern novel

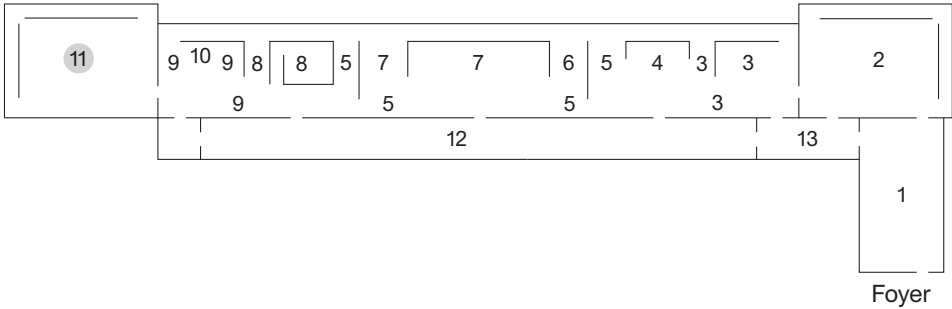
G. (1972). Historical events and fictions blend into each other in an intertextual fabric: the aftermath of the Risorgimento, the labour unrest in Milan in 1898, the Boer War (1899–1902), and the run-up to the First World War in Italy. In an experimental construction, the text alternates between different writing styles: novel, news coverage, history book. Past, present, and future interpenetrate. In the 1970s, the structuralist movement in philosophy reassesses the idea of 'historical truth', drawing novel connections, and techniques of fiction guide a multiperspectival framing of history, giving rise to a new form: *faction*. Just as reality consists in part of fictions, and vice versa.

11

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

Noah's Flood, Inferno, and Paradise

Abysses at the End of Time and the Labour on Justice



... vous êtes embarqué.
(Pascal)

Where war, violence, and destruction are at work, the vision of Inferno cannot be far. The gallery in which Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Last Judgement* (1490–1505) is traditionally on permanent display unfolds a dystopian scene of miry waters. Here swim the “sinners” from Dante's *Divine Comedy* and struggle to clamber aboard the boat to Paradise. Victims of a shipwreck fight for their lives in a roiling sea. Noah's Flood meets the subject of the raft of the Medusa (after the famous painting by Théodore Géricault), an alarmingly contemporary metaphor: survival after the sinking of a ship. And Joseph Conrad's Captain Charles Marlow, as interpreted by John Murphy in *The Joseph Conrad Series* (2003), endlessly plies the same seas on the same ship, THE JOSEPH CONRAD, travelling up and down the coasts of the African continent that Conrad describes in the novella *The Heart of Darkness* (1899). Conrad's own experiences and others' reports on the unprecedented cruelty visited upon the indigenous people of the Congo led him to doubt the European 'mission' of colonisation and plunged him into a profound moral conflict. Under Leopold I's rule, the Belgian authorities in the Congo continued their policy of exploitation and torture until 1908. Dante's descent into Hell is a metaphor that unmistakably underlies the novella.

Herman Melville's *Las Encantadas* (1854), a novella in several

sketches, portrays the unsheltered life on the remote and desolate Galapagos Islands as a hell of loneliness. Hannes Boeck reinterprets the text in his 16-mm film of the same title (2012), intertwining an exploration of 'landscapes determined by European colonizing scientific and touristic discourses' with the search for a female Robinson Crusoe character who, in Melville, declines to share what has happened to her on the island with the inquisitive traveller: 'Señor, ask me not.' The line echoes another Melvillean character, Bartleby, whose phrase 'I prefer not to' encapsulates refusal as a programmatic choice. Both Melville and Conrad had been seafarers themselves, and by framing their experiences in a fictional historiography, they harness them as a metaphor for the 'Other'.

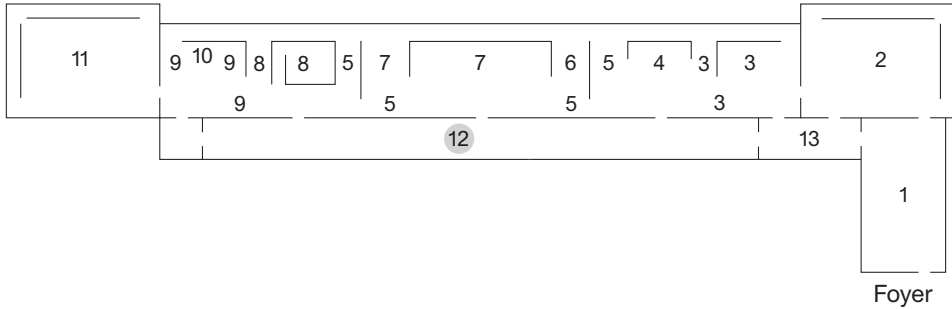
Everyone in this room has embarked on an uncertain voyage, like Dante and Virgil, who entered through the gate of Hell, crossed the river Styx, where the angry and sullen are punished, and traversed Purgatory, at long last to reach Paradise. Hans Makart's *Dante and Virgil in Hell* (1863–1865) is clearly modelled on Delacroix's *The Barque of Dante* (1822), a painting that sparked a furore when it was displayed at the Paris Salon of the same year and that in turn borrowed from the colossal figures of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel (1536–1541) and the paintings in Rubens's *Medici Cycle* (1621–1625) as well as Théodore Géricault's abovementioned *Raft of the Medusa* (1818–1819), which was based on an actual event and caused an enormous stir. It is not hard to see that the latter picture was also the inspiration for Eduard von Engerth's *Scene from the Flood* (1852) in the collection of the Paintings Gallery. The vision of Hell is here firmly linked to the image of the shipwreck, which has been associated with human hubris since antiquity – in Lucretius, for instance –: man risks death in the attempt to take possession of a land that is not rightfully his. The beholder observes the castaways from the safe distance of the shore's firm ground, just as the philosopher (or God) eyes reality or world affairs with reflective (or impassive) aloofness. In the Romantics, especially since Herder's *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793–1797), the *Shipwreck with Spectator* (Hans Blumenberg, 1979) emerges as an allegory of the French Revolution, which the Germans, by nature subservient to authority, observe from what they believe is a safe distance, though it may arrive on their doorstep soon enough.

Josef Anton Koch and his student Johann Michael Wittmer subsequently also contribute to the Dante Renaissance that begins in Romanticism. Years later, Honoré de Balzac will invoke the model of

Dante's *Divine Comedy* in his multivolume *Comédie humaine* (1830–1856). Dante already compared Hell to a city. Paris, the megalopolis, the capital of the nineteenth century, is the contemporary hell, a city of contrasts and class wars fanned by the logic of industrial capitalism. Its exiles, walking in Dante's footsteps, are the supporters of the republic and the revolution of 1830, including Balzac himself.

12

History Painting around 1800 Classicism at the Vienna Academy



Johann Joachim Winckelmann's vision, in his *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755), of 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' – of an art in ancient garb, of a heroism of self-command bridling considerable passions – caught on at the Vienna Academy as elsewhere. Although its spiritus rector, State Chancellor Count Kaunitz, failed in his attempt to recruit Winckelmann himself for the Academy, he successfully promoted Heinrich Friedrich Füger (1751–1818), who, after his appointment as director of the school of painting and sculpture in 1795, brought his influence to bear in favour of an art of august history. With support from Joseph II, a number of artists from the first and second generations of graduates of the Academy set out for Rome to work in the orbit of Anton Raphael Mengs and learn the trade of idealising and moralising history: Füger himself, Anton Zauner, Hubert Maurer, Josef Abel, and others.*

When in Rome: the circle's output is a gallery of the heroes and heroines of Roman history, including republicans like Cato and Brutus, military men like Germanicus, and women who sacrificed themselves for their husbands and the nation like Alcestis and Verginia. The avowed objective was to derive from antiquity an ethos that would bring stability to a society rattled by political unrest and continual wars against France, and perhaps gather the strength to manage the profound social upheaval at a critical moment when a reorganisation of the continent was imminent.

The Vienna Academy was first founded by the painter to the Imperial Court Peter Strudel in 1692 and, after a cessation of its activities following his death, re-established by the Dutchman Jacob van Schuppen (1670–1751) in 1726. Schuppen had studied at the Académie Royale in Paris, the foremost institution of its kind, whose leading lights – like Nicolas Poussin before them – had trained their eyes on the surviving art of antiquity in Rome. Yet the difference between the expressive gestures and pathos formulas in Vienna from those of Poussin’s classicism were impossible to miss. The Austrians foregrounded the *pathos* in those pathos formulas – the art historian Aby Warburg had coined the concept in his studies into the afterlife of antiquity – rather than *sophrosyne*, temperance and the command over the passions. In Füger, at least, the agitation of (moral) passions and the theatrical affects appeared to prevail. He had been to Naples as well, working for Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, and had probably witnessed Lady Hamilton’s *Attitudes* at Sir William’s residence.

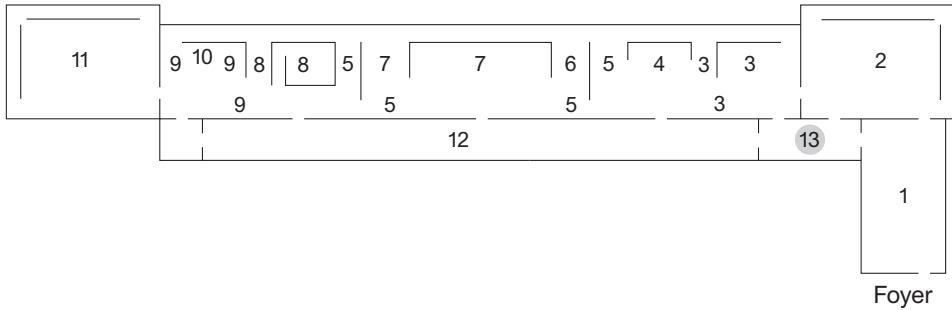
Those *tableaux vivants* flourished amid the historicism of the nineteenth century, at a time when Austrians engaged in a kind of retrovision to forge a new national identity, alternately in the republican and imperial moulds. The great empire had fallen apart, the imperial crown had been shelved, the country was exhausted by twenty-three years of war since the French Revolution, and a newly minted bourgeoisie was in the ascendant. Eschewing grand gestures that had lost their credibility, these new tastemakers focused on sentiment, on private feelings. Their support nurtured resistance to the somewhat anaemic Academicism, and so, soon after 1800, a group of painters trained at the Academy led by Friedrich Overbeck and Franz Pforr seceded to form an association they called the Brotherhood of Saint Luke: the Nazarenes, which later also counted Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Moritz von Schwind among their ranks, emphasized the national roots of their art in a distant past (Scenery 8 in the exhibition). The Christian world of medieval Germany, they hoped, would be a wellspring of ascetic *sophrosyne* and a cathartic experience they sought in a subjective spiritualism sustained by romantic sensibility.

* See Eva Kernbauer’s essay ‘Body, Affect, Drama: Heinrich Füger’s History Paintings’ in the exhibition catalogue.

13

L'AVENIR

Who Are We? Where Are We Going? The Future in Limbo



We enter an allegorical room, largely in black and white. A white sculpture, black-and-white photographs. The exceptions are the aficionado's cabinet of Pierre Subleyras's *The Artist in His Studio* (c. 1749) – the recto of a two-sided painting on permanent view in the Paintings Gallery, it is itself a work of allegory – and an elegiac tableau by Eleanor Antin: *Who are we? Where are we going? from 'Roman Allegories'* (2004). The dominant element is the black garb worn in mourning over what has been lost, though the luminous orange fruits being passed from hand to hand seem to suggest a tentative hope.

Black-and-white is the tone of early photography – if we disregard experiments with colourizing it, an effort to bring it closer to painting as well as the colours of reality, a bit of pandering, we might say. By contrast, black-and-white is a mode of distancing from reality, of focusing on what truly matters, a shift toward *disegno*, toward the line, the contour, the signifier, and away from the hues of complexion. In a paradoxical effect, far from attenuating reality by draining it of colour, it heightens a picture's evidentiary appeal.

This room ventures a look back at the stations we have passed through, a voyage across centuries of references, the centuries of events, wars, battles won and lost, negotiations successfully concluded or aborted, wars of liberation, history written and lost and history reread and rethought against the grain.

The photographs in Ana Torfs's series *à ... à ... aaah!* (2003),

subtitled *Écrans, Dark Pictures, Redites, Essais de frontispice et autres vignettes*, which have appeared in almost all rooms and chapters, function in this exhibition as vignettes or comments of sorts – especially in this final room: *À venir* – what may come.

It is a room that abides in a peculiar limbo, one in which past, present, and future meet: the blind seer Homer, the fool, the blank white canvas as a space full of possibilities, the book whose pages are covered with writing, the sources of history to be studied, children as protagonists who are as yet unspoilt by ‘experience’ and hence by history and eagerly absorb all that is new. It is about ‘canvases’, about screens awaiting projections, about black humour, reiterations, and food for thought in the form of frontispieces – in short, of vignettes that precede a possible book of history.

The term *redite* – repetition or redundancy – may also be read to refer to a re-enactment or re-staging, a reprisal and alteration or transformation of motifs that Torfs, a meticulous researcher, unearths in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and connects to the question of what repeats itself in history and what we might draw lessons from – for example, in which ways the Enlightenment paved the way for the rising nineteenth century: in *Anagrams* (2003), W. Hogarth, H. Fantin-Latour, É. Manet, F. de Goya, J. Callot, H. Daumier, Rembrandt figure as authorities who are planted into flowerpots and watered so their ideas can be reactivated, so that we can learn from them. Then again, the gardener who tends to them is an ape. Perhaps we must rethink everything from the ground up, reconfigure it in ‘anagrammatic’ and ‘instinctive’ fashion?

We are groping in the dark, feeling our way into an uncertain future. What is going to happen?

The titles of the works *À venir, Anagrams, Retour aux sources*, back to the sources or origins, to the first sound a child makes, the ‘à ...’ that leads to an ‘aaah!’, an eventual moment of insight? Of vision?

Will the groping blind man or the blind seer – Homer – help us? Or should we adopt the role of the ‘fool’, a woman who, unprejudiced, cunning and innocent at once, risks everything, gambles everything (away), negotiates everything?

Does history stand in the way of our present, or does it teach us how to live the future, the future that will one day be past? Does it leave us prejudiced, or alert to the mistakes of the past?

The exhibition raises questions and, here and there, offers pointers to possible answers.

Sources for the citations in the exhibition space

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René Schober, Head of the Graphic Collection

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