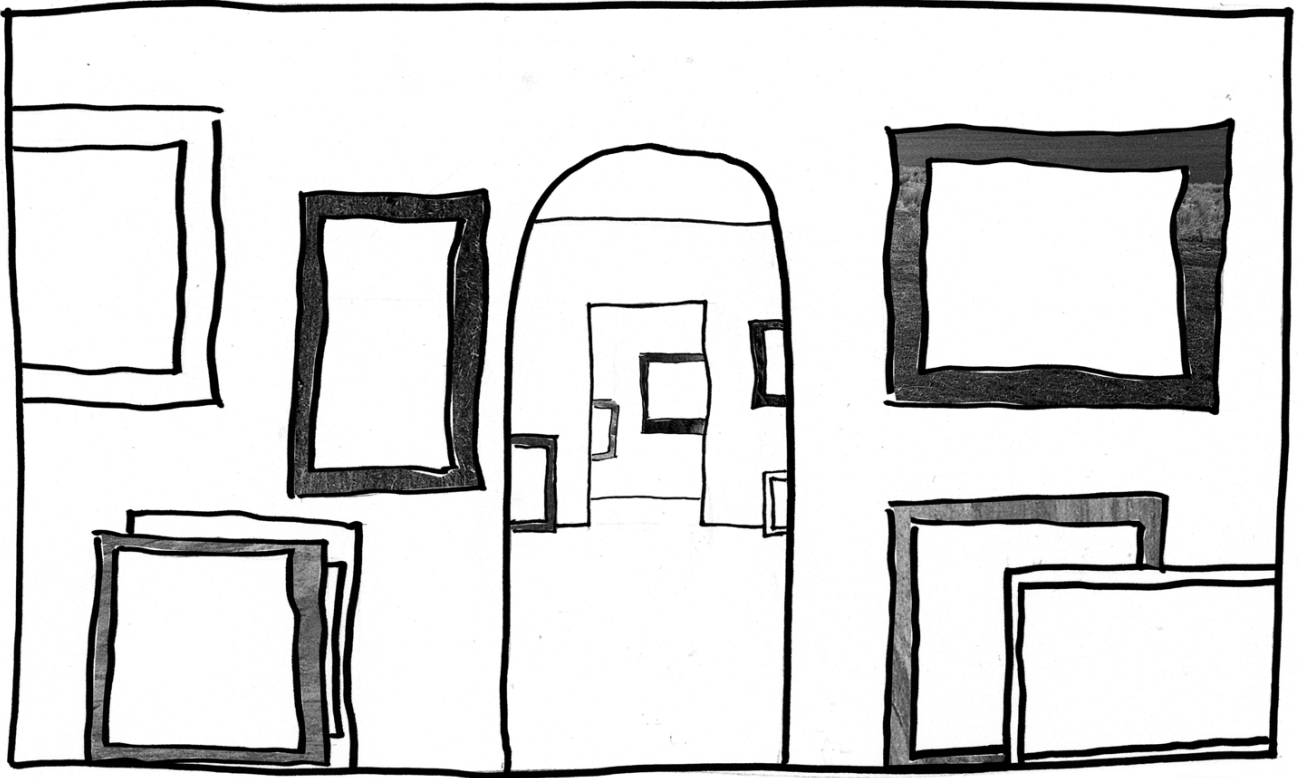


THE BACK ROOM 22nd March - 30th March



SPRING EXHIBITION 2022

THE BACK ROOM 22nd March - 30th March

A commercial exhibition pairing nineteenth and eighteenth-century oil paintings collected in Italy and France this summer with contemporary art from students at the Universities of Cambridge and Durham.

'The Back Room' is the culmination of an ambitious project that started in summer 2021. It is a commercial exhibition that pairs five antique paintings purchased abroad during the summer with contemporary works of art. The exhibition sparks dynamic conversations between the old and the new, building a space where aesthetic and thematic links weave together works of art from a diverse range of time-periods, genres, and media. It vitalises old master paintings whilst supporting the new art of young, contemporary artists.

'The Back Room' exhibits five, beautiful, eighteenth and nineteenth-century oil paintings that were found in the dusty back rooms of galleries in Italy and France. These paintings were brought back to London from the small antique galleries, local art fairs and auction houses of cities like Arezzo and Annecy for cleaning and appropriate restorations and reframing. The five paintings present a beautiful spread of eighteenth and nineteenth-century art: from Neapolitan rococo and Venetian pastoral to decadent, French still-life and sublime, marine views off the coast of Belgium.

'The Back Room' is held in the back room of McMillan Fine Art, a commercial art gallery open for more than twenty-five years in the heart of South Kensington, specialising in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European oil paintings. The small and nostalgic space fosters a close intimacy between the viewer and the works of art, and between the works of art themselves.

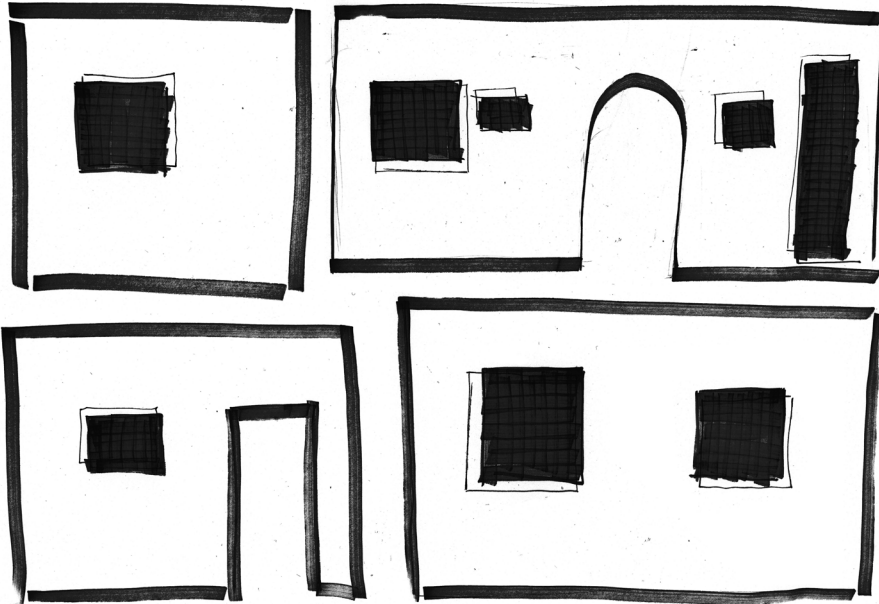
'The Back Room' brings to the front the cluttered back rooms of shops, libraries, and museums where artifacts converge and divisions collapse. It is in these confused and hidden spaces where ideas merge in new and vital ways. Placing contemporary art alongside old master paintings in a commercial exhibition breaks down traditional boundaries of genre and period. Hanging on the wall next to each other, antique paintings that were stale and unapproachable become fresh and interesting when in aesthetic conversations with a more familiar, modern style. 'The Back Room' brings a philosophy of curated eclecticism and chaotic joy to the art of collecting.

See you at 'The Back Room' in March.



Jean-Michaël Maugué
Founder and Curator

The Space



*McMillan Fine Art
26 Bute St, South Kensington, London, SW7 3EX*

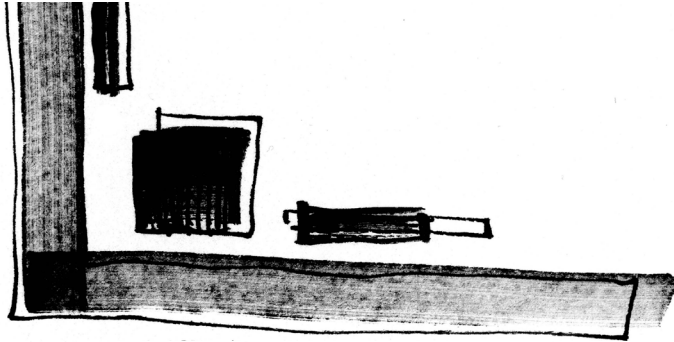
Welcome to McMillan Fine Art, a commercial art gallery at the heart of South Kensington in London.

The owners at McMillan Fine Art hang their gallery in the old, salon style. Paintings are stacked against one another and crowd the walls in rows of threes and fours. Although commercial galleries and museums today have adopted a cleaner, modern aesthetic of balancing paintings on the walls in isolated symmetries, the McMillan rooms still exhibit in the same chaotic, cluttered space as when they first opened. After twenty-five years, the McMillan galleries have a nostalgic atmosphere and charm that is hard to find in other contemporary, thriving, commercial counterparts.

The gallery also works very closely with its restorer, Carlos Salvador Mira, whose restoration studio is just across the road. The close collaboration between dealer and restorer means that all the paintings and the frames in the McMillan galleries are in excellent condition.

Walking into these rooms is a very special experience. Frames gleam off the crowded walls as gold and paint catch the eye in a confused, delightful chaos. Paintings are stacked atop one another on and against the walls, inviting the viewer to get up close and fish out what he or she wants to look at, all whilst gingerly navigating the maze of frames, canvases and antique furniture. Art in the McMillan galleries, as it should be for a private collector, is a tactile, involved experience.

Walking into McMillan and Son's is like entering a gilded, golden salon from the past: a space of joyful chaos and curated eclecticism that leads into 'The Back Room'.



Old Master Paintings

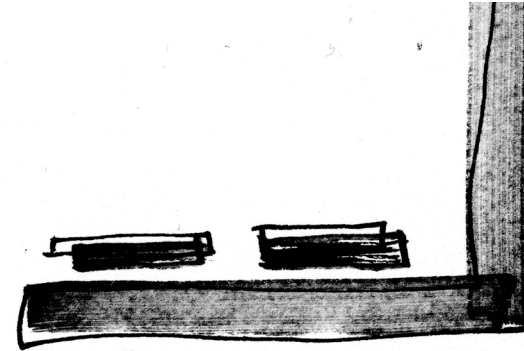
School of Giuseppe Zais (Forno di Canale, 1709 – Treviso, 1781)
Paesaggio Veneto del Settecento
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 110cm x 133cm (frame).....8

Theodor Weber (Leipzig, 1838 – Paris, 1907)
Marine – Scène de Gros Temps dans un Port
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 55cm x 33cm (canvas); 86cm x 61cm (frame)
 Signed.....10

Eugène-Henri Cauchois (Rouen, 1850 – Paris, 1911)
Nature Morte à la Brioches
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 60.5cm x 45.5cm (canvas)
 Signed.....14

Jules Bahieu (Dour, 1860 - ?)
Intérieur de Poulailles
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 54cm x 65cm (canvas); 69cm x 79cm (frame)
 Signed.....20

Attributed to Fedele Fischetti (Napoli, 1732 – 1792)
The Rape of Europa (Ratto di Europa)
 Oil on wood panel with gold leaf
 Size: 53.5cm x 45.5cm (panel); 60.5cm x 53.5cm (frame).....28



Contemporary Art

Angelica Hopton Echenique (b. 2000)
Looking West off Baratti
 Acrylic on canvas
 Size: 40cm x 50cm (canvas); 43cm x 53cm (frame)
 Signed.....12

Gabriel Lewis (b. 1999)
Satyr Outside a City
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 56cm x 74cm (canvas)
 Signed.....16

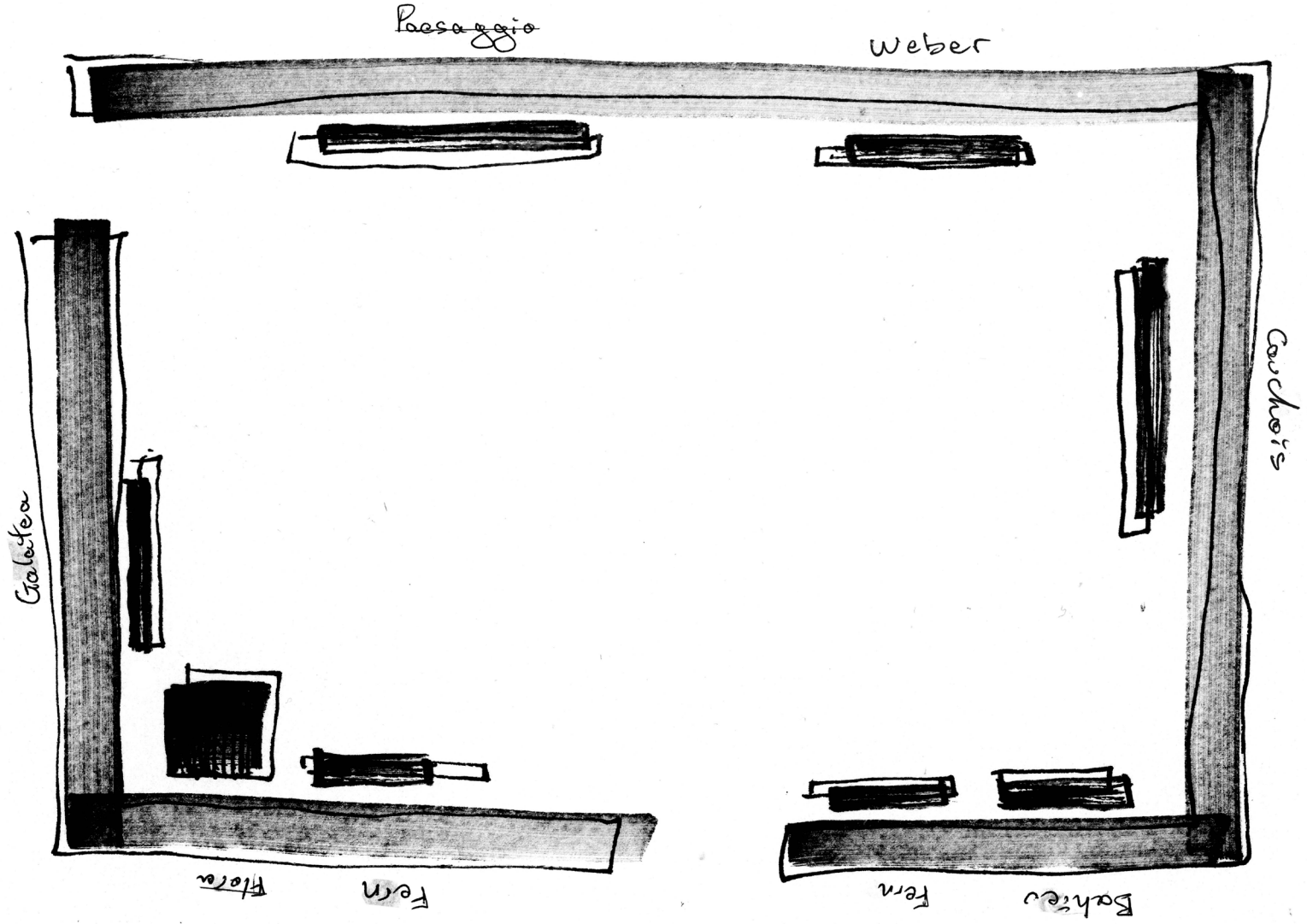
Gabriel Lewis (b. 1999)
Venetian Still-Life
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 34cm x 38cm (canvas)
 Signed.....18

Fern Acheson (b. 2000)
Dancing Orange Figures
 Watercolour and gouache on paper
 Size: 40.6cm x 30.5cm (paper); 50cm x 40cm (frame)
 Signed.....22

Fern Acheson (b. 2000)
Dancing Blue Figures
 Watercolour and gouache on paper
 Size: 40.6cm x 30.5cm (paper); 55.5cm x 45.5cm (frame)
 Signed.....24

Flora Mae (b. 2000)
A Siren in Silk
 Repurposed textiles
 Size: radius of 35cm; height of 160cm.....26

Angelica Hopton Echenique (b. 2000)
Lemons
 Acrylic on canvas
 Size: 36cm x 50cm (canvas); 38.5cm x 53cm (frame)
 Signed.....30



This eighteenth-century Venetian landscape is monumental. Stretching 1.10 metres high and 1.33 metres across, it can easily fill an entire wall in the gallery. And yet, the individual elements of the painting are meticulously rendered: heavy, swift brushstrokes shape the streaming foam around the rocks and down the river whilst airy, thin paint infuses the foliage in the leaves. There is a carefully balanced, aestheticised arrangement of nature: two grand, framing trees dwarf a central group of three rustic figures - a peasant woman, a fisherman, and a seated figure - in an open clearing in the surrounding woods. These anonymous figures (staffage) are typical of the Arcadian landscape as man harmoniously exists with nature in an aesthetic whole. The vision of nature here is self-consciously 'artistic'; this is a pastoral world suffused with a charming, idyllic atmosphere.

The picture shares that thin wash of light (in the muted clouds to the gentle shades of the wood) distinctive to the veduti (landscapes) from the eighteenth-century Veneto, epitomised by Venetian masters such as Marco Ricci (Belluno, 1676 - Venice, 1730) and Francesco Zuccarelli (Pitigliano, 1702 - Florence, 1788). But the thick, wiry brushstrokes (moving up the tree trunks, down the cascading stream) are more typical of the latter half of the eighteenth century. The picture has many stylistic similarities with the work of Giuseppe Zais (Forno di Canale, 1709 - Treviso, 1781), another landscape painter active in Venice in the later-eighteenth century. The colourfully-dressed, peasant figures (especially the yellow-vested fisherman) - rendered with only a few, quick brushstrokes - look distinctively familiar (c.f. Zais's *Landscape with a Ruined Tower* in the National Gallery or his *Italianate Wooded Landscape* in the Bridport Museum). This use of quick, controlled brushwork and impasto lends the painting an especially decorative and affected texture.

Provenance and Condition:

The landscape, in its period frame, is in excellent condition. The picture also has an interesting provenance. From the Florentine dealer's information as well as the 'Gerini' chalk marking on the back of the stretcher, the painting can be traced back to the Villa Gerini in the Tuscan hills to the North of Florence. This Villa dates back to the fourteenth century and has been home to prominent Italian noble families: from the Cappelli family until 1654, to the del Benino family until 1860, and finally passing on to the Gerini family. The Gerini owners are also connected to Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) from the Pacelli family. Upon the death of the Marquis Piero Gerini in 1939, the Villa passed to his wife, the Marquess Maria Teresa Pacelli, who was the cousin of the late Pacelli Pope. The Pope is even recorded to have visited the Villa (albeit when he was still a Cardinal) in 1938 for the Gerini-Dufour Berté wedding.

The presence of the painting in the Gerini collection accounts for its virtually untouched condition: the picture is on its original canvas and stretcher and has undergone almost no restoration. Its beautiful, eighteenth-century frame is likely the picture's original. The landscape was probably bought by one of the eminent Gerini collectors in the nineteenth or early-twentieth centuries and left hanging in place in the Villa undisturbed. The picture's distinguished provenance confirms its status as a fine, original work of eighteenth-century Venetian landscape.

Attribution and Biographical Information:

Giuseppe Zais was an Italian painter of landscapes (vedutisti) working mostly in Venice. He was born in Forno di Canale in 1709, a town to the north of Venice in the Veneto, and he moved to Venice in 1725. Studying under Venetian landscape masters like Francesco Zuccarelli (1702-1788), he quickly established himself as one of the pre-eminent painters of landscape in Venice for the next 50 years. His later work (1770/80s) is stylistically characterised by thicker, heavier brushstrokes of rich colour.

The similarities between some of Zais's paintings and our *Venetian Landscape* clearly evidence the influence of Zais's late work. Not only are the stylistic elements similar (heavy texture of paint, thick brushstrokes and rich colours), but other elements of the painting seem directly taken from Zais's stock-figure models of staffage. Compare the leaning peasant in the yellow vest: repeated in *Landscape with River and Bridge* in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice; in *Italian Wooded Landscape* in the Bridgeport Museum; and in our own landscape's central figure holding the fishing rod.

Bibliography:

Wittkower, Rudolf, *Art and Architecture Italy, 1600-1750* (London: Penguin Books, 1980)



School of Giuseppe Zais (Forno di Canale, 1709 – Treviso, 1781)

Paesaggio Veneto del Settecento
Oil on canvas
Size: 110cm x 133cm (frame)



Theodor Weber (Leipzig, 1838 – Paris, 1907)

Marine – Scène de Gros Temps dans un Port
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 55cm x 33cm (canvas); 86cm x 61cm (frame)
 Signed

Weber's painting presents a distinctly nineteenth-century marine, updating the traditional scenes associated with the 'marine' genre. These usually recall the majestic seascapes of the Dutch masters – the van de Veldes, Jan Porcellis (Ghent, 1583 – Zoeterwoude, 1632) – with the calm composure of the white sails towering over the powerful galleys and cannon smoke; or the sublime seascapes of Turner with tempestuous waves dwarfing the masts of a steadfast but teetering ship. Instead, Weber's picture depicts a more industrial subject. A dirty trail of smoke floats off from a factory port and there is even a company stamp imprinted on one of the sails. This is a marine fit for an age of manufactured industry.

But despite its smoggy, industrial atmosphere, the oils in Weber's picture glow with a vital freshness. Under a bright light, the colours begin to shine in brilliant and playful balances. Flecks of pink dance around the canvas: reflecting off the clouds, onto that thin strip of wood visible from the shed on the pontoon, and then into the top sail of the ship in the centre background. This play of dappled colours finds its way into the waves which shine in brilliant, speckled crests. Weber's marine is just as meticulous in its detail as it is masterful in its distribution of colour; the seascape is aglow with this dynamic spread of colour across the canvas. The dawning auroras of pinks, light-blues, and whites filter any sense of smoggy dirt suggested by the industrial subjects; the human endeavour amongst the waves is here bathed with a sublime beauty. The scene shines as if the salt spray itself were shooting up, dashing specks of refracted colour across our view of the harbour.

Biographical Information

Originally a German born in Leipzig in 1838, Theodor Weber made his career in France. He specialised in marines and seascapes and was a regular exhibitor at the Salon de Paris from 1858 until his death in 1907, earning numerous accolades during his career. In 1886, he was promoted to the prestigious position of official painter of the French navy: 'peintre officiel de la Marine et du ministère des Colonies'. His scenes are mostly views off the coasts of la Manche and Belgium.

Catalogue Raisonné of works in Museums:

- Cologne: *Flessingue*
- Dijon: *Naufrage de l'Euphémie*
- Leipzig: *Après L'orage*
- Melbourne: *Barques de pêcheurs partant de Boulogne*
- Mulhouse: *En rade de Boulogne; Journée de pluie au Tréport*
- Nice: *Clair de lune à Gravelingue*
- Nottingham: *Bateaux de pêcheurs en mer*
- Rio de Janeiro: *Naufrage*
- Sydney: *Ostende*

Bibliography:

Bénézit, Emmanuel et Busse, Jacques, *Dictionnaire Critique et Documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs de Tous les Temps et de Tous les Pays, 1854-1920*, 14 vols (Paris: Gründ, 1999), XIV
 Schurr, Gérald and Cabanne, Pierre, *Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres de la Peinture, 1820-1920*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions de l'Amateur, 1996), IV



Angelica Hopton Echenique (b. 2000)

Looking West off Baratti
Acrylic on canvas
Size: 40cm x 50cm (canvas); 43cm x 53cm (frame)
Signed

Angelica Hopton's *Looking West off Baratti* is a beautifully elusive work of art: the sea is at once present and undefined; the horizon-line both distinct and imperceptible; the sky receding out from and into the ocean below. A sense of spatial depth is only faintly hinted as blushes of pink and light-blue fuse into the greyish tones of the painting, blurring perspectival distances. Instead, sky and sea are subtly differentiated through faint and delicate gradations of colour and texture, from the crusts of dry acrylic paint at the bottom to the light wash of pink at the top. Angelica's seascape has a distinctly 'modern' feel. The heavy acrylics add a gritty texture to a natural world that is at once more aestheticized and abstract but also more direct and physical. The sublime is here that of an awesome indistinction, foreboding in dark, stark modulations of tone and hue.

Angelica's striking seascape will be hanging alongside the eighteenth-century, *Venetian Landscape* (School of Giuseppe Zais, 1709-1781) and the nineteenth-century *Marine off the coast of La Manche* (Theodore Weber, 1838-1907). Exhibited together, these three paintings encompass more than two centuries of aesthetic representations of nature. Angelica's dark, steely sea captures some of the dramatic sublimity of Weber's tossing waves, whilst her sky of hazy pinks and glowing yellows creates an idyllic, romantic tone that plays off the fantasy of the eighteenth-century, Venetian pastoral.

Angelica is a very talented artist; although she is mostly commissioned for her portraiture, we are extremely excited for the opportunity to exhibit one of her seascapes in the gallery! For information on her biography, please go to p. 31.



Eugène-Henri Cauchois (Rouen, 1850 – Paris, 1911)

Nature Morte à la Brioche
Oil on canvas
Size: 60.5cm x 45.5cm (canvas)
Signed

Cauchois's still-life glows with an austere, amber and rust-brown colour pallet. From these sombre shades, the titanic subjects of Cauchois's still life slowly emerge: the remnants of a discarded breakfast. The painting enacts a drama of juxtapositions: the brioche in its crusty ambers against the dark mauve of the pressed grapes; the jam's sticky cherry against the flaxen beige of the slice of bread; those rusting yellows at once sticky and muted of some desert wine; that shock of delicate blue on porcelain-white in the knife.

Cauchois's painting enshrines both the decadence of a Dutch banquet (à la de Heem) and the sombre austerity of Chardin's (Paris, 1669-1779) pallet and forms. The composition and thick impasto overwhelm the space with heavy paint and cluttered shapes. Diagonals cross the canvas creating imbalanced tensions: the porcelain knife draws a line that clashes against the conch-shaped pastry, further clashing with the group of vertical lines in the glass and desert flask. This cluttering is made even thicker by the heavy impasto layer of paint (look at the texture of that brioche!). Chardin's balance of light foreground/dark background is here reversed; Cauchois gradates a program of dark on dark (left) to light on light (right). The result is a wonderfully heavy sense of decomposition in the brioche and grapes with a matching, thick stickiness to the desert-wine and glasses, knife, and spoons.

Still life in French is 'nature morte' – dead nature – a reminder of the transient in the beautiful. That sense of futile decadence emerges from Cauchois's hazy, amber shades. The breakfast is discarded, half-finished, even rotting. Yet it is beautiful too in its austere grandeur: the crumbling, rich brioche; the empty glass of dessert wine; that beautifully rendered, delicate, blue porcelain on the knife. The ornately carved, French, nineteenth-century pierced and swept frame only enhances the sense of wonderfully heavy decadence.

Biographical Information

Cauchois was an extremely accomplished painter, the best known out of the three French artists in the exhibition. Born in 1850 in Rouen, he received a prestigious position at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris to study under Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889), one of the most successful and recognised academic painters of the Second Empire. He exhibited repeatedly at the Salon de Paris from 1874, receiving numerous accolades and prestigious commissions (i.e. the floral 'seasons' panels that he painted for a school in the VIIIth arrondissement of Paris).

More known as a painter of floral still-lives, Cauchois regularly fetches important sums at auctions around Europe. His distinctive style of heavy brushstrokes, thick impastos, and ample compositions make his still-lives veritable cornucopias of varying tones and atmospheres: from his gloriously majestic floral bouquets to his more austere and rich dining scenes.

Notable Catalogued Sales:

- GBP 10,580 – London, 12 June 1997: *Anémones dans une corbeille; Anémones et bleuets dans une corbeille*, Pair (38.5x46cm).
- USD 29,900 – New York, 22 October 1997: *Jeté de roses; Panier de fleurs*, Pair (54x64.1cm).

Catalogue Raisonné of works in Museums:

- Louviers: *Chez le jardinier; Aux halles*
- Louviers (Galerie Roussel): *Fruits; Animaux; Nature Morte; Chrysanthèmes*
- Perpignan: *Marine*
- Rouen: *Collection d'horlogerie; La Porte rose*

Bibliography:

Bénézit, Emmanuel et Busse, Jacques, *Dictionnaire Critique et Documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs de Tous les Temps et de Tous les Pays, 1854-1920*, 14 vols (Paris: Gründ, 1999), XIV
Schurr, Gérald and Cabanne, Pierre, *Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres de la Peinture, 1820-1920*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions de l'Amateur, 1996), IV



Gabriel Lewis (b. 1999)

Satyr Outside a City
Oil on canvas
Size: 56cm x 74cm (canvas)
Signed

Gabriel Lewis's *Satyr Outside a City* is a masterful treatment of a traditional subject in the classical manner. Yet the hues of Gabriel's oils glow with a radioactive vigour that is distinctly modern: the intense reds and yellows from the fiery background radiate across the canvas, shining off the satyr's chest with an almost fluorescent luminosity. One of Gabriel's newly completed pieces, the painting demonstrates his high accomplishment in a variety of genres. Elements of still-life, landscape, and portraiture form a composite whole that attests to Gabriel's creative aptitude for composition and his extensive experience working in these traditional genres.

The Bacchic atmosphere and strong, bodily dominance of the satyr call on Rubens's (1577-1640) baroque tradition of fleshy bodies, evocative landscapes, and fluid, drunken bacchanals. But Lewis's satyr is more individually distinct than Rubens's bacchic figures: the intensity of the satyr's gaze and his jutting, foreshortened elbow demand the psychological weight of an individual portrait, recalling the portrait traditions of Van Dyck (1599-1641) or Titian (1488-1576). The foray into still-life, with a crowded ledge of grapes, chalice, and tipping wine glass (a cheekily anachronistic touch), further brings a subtle realism to the painting. But those tantalisingly luscious grapes, almost as enticing as Caravaggio's (1571-1610) in his *Supper at Emmaus* (1601), are there to heighten that sense of delicious abandon and (glass-tipping) disorientation that comes from wine.

For Gabriel's *Satyr* explores the dichotomies inherent in the Dionysiac. The red-hot glow toning the satyr's muscular body hints at an indomitable strength; but as the satyr points towards the burning background, the fiery landscape shows how danger and intemperate destruction are not too far away. The satyr, a disciple of the ancient Greek god of wine, is a figure of reckless abandon and heightened, religious lucidity; it relishes in cheeky play but often descends into a terrifying violence. The satyr's eye in the painting sparkles with this whimsical ambiguity: a playful brilliance that is piercingly intense; a magical knowledge that is unrevealing. Euripides summarises the dualistic qualities of Dionysus best in his *Bacchae*:

Διόνυσον, ὃς πέφυκεν ἐν τέλει θεός,
δεινότατος, ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἠπιώτατος.
(Euripides, *Bacchae*, 860-861)

[Dionysus, son of Zeus, is by turns a god most terrible and most gracious to mankind]
(trans. by John Davie (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 150)

Gabriel's *Satyr Outside a City* is hanging next to Cauchoi's (1850-1911) *Nature Morte à la Brioche*, itself a study in the decadence and vanities of indulgence. The two paintings aesthetically (in their sombre, rich pallets) and thematically complement one another across the wall. We are extremely excited to show Gabriel's new painting in the gallery!



Gabriel Lewis (b. 1999)

Venetian Still-Life
 Oil on canvas
 Size: 34cm x 38cm (canvas)
 Signed

There is an atmospheric eeriness to Gabriel Lewis's *Venetian Still-Life*. The moon, shrouded in a veil of clouds and half-hidden by the blue curtain, provides a stark backlight for the famous dome of Venice's Santa Maria della Salute. The dark church peeking out from the curtain sits in sharp contrast to the brightly lit skull in the foreground; it is rather appropriate that Santa Maria della Salute was built as a votive offering of thanks to Our Lady of Health (Santa Maria della Salute) for the deliverance from a devastating outbreak of plague in the 1630s. The church, quietly sitting above the waters of the Grand Canal, parallels the skull as symbol of human fragility and transience.

But Santa Maria della Salute, with its curvaceous buttresses, bulging dome, and strange octagonal shape is equally a symbol of baroque excess and the decadence of the Venetian carnival. The festival was at its most raucous during the seventeenth century; the baroque carnival began to supersede Venice's maritime, military, and economic reputation and became the new symbol of a city increasingly notorious for its extravagant festivities. Placing the carnival mask besides the skull in the painting links festive excess with the recognisable *memento-mori*. The mask, with its empty eyes, sits hollow on the table; human vivacity is undivorceable here with a looming, inescapable futility. The mask's curved beak recalls the famous Venetian costume of *Medico della Pesta* (plague doctor) or the Zanni of the theatrical *Commedia dell'Arte*: the *Zanni*, with a low forehead, bulging eyebrows, and long nose is the 'Fool' character whose stupidity is a source of laughter for the other characters and the audience.

Gabriel's *Venetian Still-Life* fuses the traditional themes of human transience, futility, and vanity with a distinctly Venetian atmosphere. The modelling of the various shapes with careful shading is masterfully executed: particularly impressive is the detailed wrinkles along the tablecloth, streaking down in small creases of shade and stark white paint. Hanging next to Cauchoi's (1855-1910) *Nature Morte à la Brioche*, Gabriel's *Still-Life* continues the themes of *memento-mori* so key to the genre of still-life whilst staking a claim for the continued prevalence of meticulous technique in the modern age. Still-life may deal with mortal transience, but after nearly two centuries, the classical style in paint is certainly not dead.

Biographical Information

Gabriel Lewis is a 22-year-old classical painter from England. In 2019, he studied under the world-renowned Norwegian master, Odd Nerdrum, from whom he learnt about traditional painting techniques and spent the summer of the same year attending the New York Academy of Art Summer Residency Programme with a scholarship. He focuses on classical genres of painting – in particular still-life, portraiture, and landscapes – and his main influences are old masters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well as nineteenth-century English painters, such as Leighton, Turner, and the Pre-Raphaelites. He has exhibited his paintings in international portrait competitions and multiple galleries around the UK, earning high commendations and prestigious awards. You can view more of his work on his instagram page (@gabriel.j.lewis).

Exhibitions, Commissions, and Commendations

- 2021/22, Russell Gallery Christmas Exhibition
- 2021, Paintings made for Mustafa Hulusi (artist) exhibited in London
- 2021, Royal Society of Portrait Painters Annual Exhibition – received 'Highly Commended' award from the De Laszlo Foundation.
- 2020, ModPortrait Special Catalogue
- 2020, Russell Gallery Summer Exhibition
- 2019, Russell Gallery Summer Exhibition
- 2018/19, Russell Gallery Christmas Exhibition
- 2018, Invited to appear on Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year Award 2019
- 2017, BP Portrait Award: Next Generation



Jules Bahieu (Dour, 1860 – ?)

Intérieur de Poulailles

Oil on canvas

Size: 54cm x 65cm (canvas); 69cm x 79cm (frame)

Signed

This romanticised genre painting has a great deal of charm. The chickens fill the canvas on multiple vertical levels, climbing up and jumping down the stone and wooden platforms as if on a carefully plotted theatre stage. These chicken-actors congregate in curious groups, bumbling about their business and chirp-chatting in a veritable fowlopolis.

But even more amazing is how Bahieu captures the rustic nostalgia of the farm grange: through the textures of his paint. To replicate the old, mud-brick walls, dilapidated over decades of weathering and usage, Bahieu lathers the wet paint thickly onto the canvas. This impasto layer then dries unevenly; as the canvas ages, it is the natural craquelure in the paint that enhances the crumbling texture of the wall. When it comes to the picture's main actors (our chickens), Bahieu employs deft, swift strokes. The individual feathers move with a composite dynamism that breathes life and energy into these birds; Bahieu's expertise in drawing fowl shines through. Finally, most astonishing is how the artist renders the straw: thick drops of paint flicked off the brush! These strings of golden paint cover the canvas in erratic splays. Bahieu's surprisingly modern technique evokes a bed of straw that feels both thick and brittle, random and pervasive. Almost like the splashes of paint in a Pollock painting!

That atmosphere of romanticised, rural life typical of academic genre painting is here amplified by a playful diversity. The birds, the walls, the straw are all painted very differently, yet masterfully come together to give a sense of dynamic space and texture.

Biographical Information

Bahieu was particularly known for genre paintings of country life. Originally from Belgium (he was born in Dour in 1860), he set up his studio in Champigny and exhibited at the Paris Salon from 1885 to 1895. His scenes typically depict farm granges and rustic backyards with an atmosphere of affect and sensibility; he also notably painted views of Granville, Dieppe, and the Norman coastline.

Catalogue Raisonné of works in Museums:

· Louviers: *Port*

Bibliography:

Bénézit, Emmanuel et Busse, Jacques, *Dictionnaire Critique et Documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs et Graveurs de Tous les Temps et de Tous les Pays, 1854-1920*, 14 vols (Paris: Gründ, 1999), XIV

Schurr, Gérald and Cabanne, Pierre, *Dictionnaire des Petits Maîtres de la Peinture, 1820-1920*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions de l'Amateur, 1996), IV



Fern Acheson (b. 2000)

Dancing Orange Figures
Watercolour and gouache on paper
Size: 40.5cm x 30.5cm (paper); 50cm x 40cm (frame)
Signed

Fern Acheson's *Dancing Orange Figures* has a warmer sense of weight than its lighter *Blue Figures* counterpart. With the analogous shades of orange superimposed over the pitch-black background, there is a strong chiaroscuro contrast that emboldens the oranges with a radiant energy. The colours here vitalise the figures with fiery tones; the complementary, blue highlights provide a defining contrast that only incenses the warmth of the main pallet.

In Fern's characteristic style, the figures emerge from pairings of colour along the traced delimitations of a flowing line. Yet here, distinct shape is harder to discriminate. Bodies instead merge in a more cacophonous haze: making out the distinctions between bold crimsons and burning oranges is a more stimulating, even anxiety-inducing endeavour (especially over the impenetrable black of the background) than marking the blue shapes filling smooth, curved delineations in Fern's other painting. But alongside this sense of urgent energy is a playful harmony. The overall, flowing shape created by the fluttering convergence of bodies sits with an aesthetic balance over the midnight background. There is a harmonious sense to the flaming glows over the darkness; the overall effect again is one of dancing light in beautiful balance.

Whether the strong gouache colours induce a sense of fiery warmth or melancholic anxiety, the autumnal shades pair markedly well with Jules Bahieu's (1860 - ?) *Intérieur de Poulailles*. As Bahieu's chickens fill the canvas in playful, theatrical groups, Fern's *Orange Figures* dance with the playful elegance of sweeping lines and harmonies of colour – both exult in the warm pallets of rusty reds, oranges, and beiges.

Biographical Information

Fern is in her final year studying Architecture at The University of Cambridge. Outside of her studies, she has developed a fine skill for painting in gouache and watercolour. She has worked extensively in gouache and achieves particularly striking effects. The medium dominates her canvases; the opacity of gouache allows her to capture detail with meticulous precision and intensity.

Inspired by the energy of everyday life in public spaces such as beaches and parks, Fern's paintings make visible the positive and negative spaces made by the moving body. Her work embodies these movements and their nuances as they form a narrative of the endlessly changing interaction between people, time, and space.



Fern Acheson (b. 2000)

Dancing Blue Figures

Watercolour and gouache on paper

Size: 40.5cm x 30.5cm (paper); 55.5cm x 45.5cm (frame)

Signed

There is a music to Fern's *Dancing Blue Figures*. With a seemingly uninterrupted line sweeping across the paper, bodies begin to emerge from and merge into one another. The scene evokes a day at the beach: lounging figures recline in various relaxed positions, from the intimacy of a hand gently resting on a knee in the top right corner to the subtle detail of a figure cantering on a horse in the left. Although in poses of lounging relaxation, the dynamic draftsmanship of Fern's lines creates a fluid sense of movement and dance: hers is the vitality of the human body in ensemble. Her lines trace out the music in and between the shapes and forms of the body.

This vibrant sense of movement equally comes from the symphonic plays of colour. As line discriminates contours, colour fills out shape: analogous shades of blue harmoniously pair alongside one another, creating a fluid but balanced conversation between the base blue and modulated aquamarines, navies, and baby-blues. The use of white also contributes to this sense of balance; the spaces of white paper become solid shapes of blank colour that complement the shaped, blue figures. It is as if the human body fills even empty space with its movement. As Fern describes it, her 'paintings make visible the positive and negative spaces made by the human body'.

A clear inspiration is Matisse's sculptural yet soft and dynamic figures. The cut-outs from his later period, particularly *Nu Bleu IV*, come to mind. Matisse described how he wanted to 'cut directly into vivid colour' in his preferred medium of 'gouaches découpés'. Fern's *Dancing Figures* similarly exploit the powerful colour and opacities of gouache; in the same spirit of Matisse's cut-outs, they are experimental, aesthetically considered compositions of colour and shape. Hanging close to Fischetti's *Ratto di Europa*, Fern's *Dancing Blue Figures* pares down the elaborate playfulness of Fischetti's rococo panel with a modern simplicity. The human body in movement is shown to be ultimately enlivened by the fundamentals: the harmonic interplay of analogous colour and simplified shape.

Exhibitions and Commissions

- 2021, *The Good Taste Debate*, Cambridge Union Art Exhibition
- 2021, *The Cambridge Review of Books*, Illustrator
- 2021, *Eliot's Face*, Jesus College Arts Magazine, Illustrator
- 2020, John Hughes Art Festival, Five exhibited works
- 2020, 'Love and Connection in Isolation', Poster project, Exhibited print
- 2020, Painting Commissions (12 completed paintings over 3 months during the summer)



Flora Mae (b. 2000)

A Siren in Silk
 Repurposed textiles
 Size: radius of 35cm; height of 160cm

Made using upcycled curtain fabric, *A Siren in Silk* is a cream damask corset embellished with two chains of gold and blue hanging beads. The beads are hand-sewn to the corset and delicately complement the subtle patterning found in the corset's fabric; the effect is to focus attention on the feminine bustline. The corset elegantly modulates its varying textures. With a neutral colour palette, there is an enhanced, visual sensitivity to the nuances of the fabric. The corset brings together silky fabrics, organza ribbon, metal beading, pearls, knitwork and lacing in a delicate, balanced whole.

Taking inspiration from the entrancing beauty of sirens and boat figureheads, Flora styles the corset with a distressed knit dress, lace underskirt, and a pearl necklace to give the impression of a figure emerging from the water.

Biographical Information

Working with repurposed textiles and upholstery fabrics, Flora Mae creates dreamy bespoke handmade corsets. Her designs blend historical dress with contemporary fashions, incorporating beads, textures and patterns for a luxury feel which gives every piece a uniquely curated look.

Made using second-hand materials with a focus on waste-reduction, sustainability is a large part of Flora's ethos. When she first started sewing in April 2020, Flora started developing corset patterns using her grandmother's curtain fabric and she hasn't stopped since. Using a range of materials from curtains, cushion covers, dresses or table cloths, she transforms these household objects into luxury made-to-measure garments.

You can view her corsets and order a custom-made corset via her instagram account (@floramaeart).

Exhibitions and Commissions

- November 2021, Exhibited corsets at *The Good Taste Debate*, The Cambridge Union
- August 2021, Costume design for *Dangerous Liaisons* by *Fireside Theatre*, Upstairs at the Gatehouse, London
- August 2021, Costume design for *Omphalos* by *Wringing Metamorphosis*, Peckham Theatre
- August-September 2021, *Corsets of Cambridge*, Collaboration with Mark Box, Humans of Cambridge
- June 2021, Handmade corsets selling at *By Liv Handmade*, Brooklyn, New York
- June 2021, Handmade garments charity fashion show, Hatfield College, Durham

Featured Articles

- Varsity Fashion interview, 'Something Old, Something New: Corsets for the 21st Century', *Varsity*, 13 November 2020
- Sophie Carlin, 'Creative Spotlight: Flora Sharp on Sewing Handmade Corsets', *The Cambridge Tab*, March 2021



Attributed to Fedele Fischetti (Napoli, 1732 – 1792)

The Rape of Europa (Ratto di Europa)
 Oil on wood panel with gold leaf
 Size: 53.5cm x 45.5cm (panel); 60.5cm x 53.5cm (frame)

This picture is a beautiful work of eighteenth-century, Neapolitan rococo art: a testament to an age of decorative refinement, ornate elegance, and playful classicism. The mythical (and racy) subject – the abduction and subsequent rape of Europa by Zeus disguised as a bull – is offset by a burnished, gilt background. The gold-leaf dominates the picture with a tone of celebratory richness; it is decorative even to the point of distraction. Yet Europa's abduction is shrouded with this playful ambiguity too; her maiden-attendants agitate their arms with dramatic alarm, but Europa's singular, raised hand is more of a composed wave (a resigned goodbye or a desperate grasp towards the receding shore?). Not to mention how Europa and the bull are crowned with garlands that suggest a celebratory frivolity – like a newlywed couple prancing away during Mayday festivities rather than the despairing, ravished maiden of Titian's famous exemplar. And where Titian has his Europa frantically wave a blood-red scarf in the air, our Europa's sky-blue shawl elegantly unfurls into the gold-leaf background, creating a beautiful, decorative contrast of rich colours. The emphasis here is on elegant play.

The gallerist in Florence is adamant in his attribution of the painting to Fedele Fischetti (Naples, 1732 - 1792). The picture does certainly share many similarities with Fischetti's work and is distinctly from the golden age of neoclassical rococo in eighteenth-century Naples. Paintings in this period were intimately linked with material decoration: *The Rape of Europa* likely adorned the gilded, wooden panels on a piece of furniture such as a room screen, a cabinet, a sedan chair, or even a chariot door.

Provenance and Condition:

Fischetti's originally decorative purpose here finds new life when repurposed in a framed setting. That dichotomy between serious, thematic subject and trivial ornamentation so inherent to the rococo ethos is now thrown in even sharper relief. And although the wooden panel has suffered significant deterioration, the dotted flecks of crumbling gold-leaf add an element of nostalgic charm to the picture: there is a delicate airiness to the foliage permeated by the craquelure of the gilding; the vibrancy of the colours are only enhanced by the visibly sandy texture of the gold-leaf.

The picture also originates from the Gerini Villa, though it is in worse condition than the *Venetian Landscape* and must have travelled more in its past. Yet this beat-up quality does not occlude the brilliance of the painting's composition and design; part of the attractiveness of this painting is its physical materiality. What remains is a work of art that exists somewhere between an object as decorative ornament and a painting as aesthetic study.

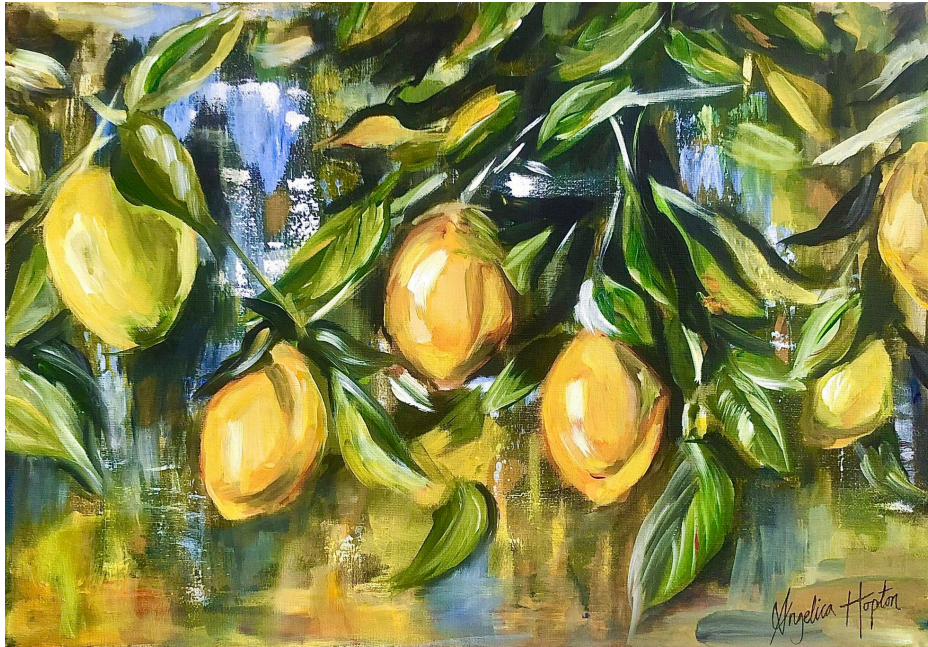
Attribution and Biographical Information

Fedele Fischetti was a Neapolitan painter of the Neoclassical period. He studied under Giuseppe Bonito (1707-1789) and other mid-eighteenth-century masters of the *barocchetto* (a softer, more tender and graceful evolution from the baroque art of the seventeenth century, much closer to rococo). As the eighteenth-century progressed, Fischetti adopted a more classical style, following the trend towards Neoclassicism in Rome from artists like Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) and Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807).

Fischetti received many prestigious commissions throughout his career in Naples. He is famous for his grand frescoes adorning many Neapolitan palazzos: graceful treatments of mythological subjects such as his *Summer with Ceres and Proserpine* and *Winter with Boreas Abducting Orithyia* in the Royal Palace of Caserta. But Fischetti was also a master of small-scale, decorative works on gilded wood, depicting mythological subjects in an elegant neoclassicism (*Eros Defeating War*, *Mercury and Psyche*, *The Toilet of Venus*). These paintings usually adorned the gilded, wooden panels on furnitures such as room screens, cabinets, sedan chairs, or even chariots. Our *Rape of Europa* shares many similarities with these decorative pictures: in delicate style and ornate elegance as well as in the playful treatment of mythological subjects.

Bibliography:

Bertozzi, Francesca, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ed. by A. M. Ghisalberti and M. Pavan, 100 vols (Roma, 1960), XLVIII
 Spinosa, Nicola, *Pittura Napoletana del Settecento: dal Rococò al Classicismo* (Napoli: Electa, 1987)



Angelica Hopton Echenique (b. 2000)

Lemons
Acrylic on canvas
Size: 36cm x 50cm (canvas); 38.5cm x 53cm (frame)
Signed

Angelica Hopton's *Lemons* is a beautiful still-life depicting a group of fresh, ripe lemons hanging amongst the thick leaves of a lemon tree. Painted in Tuscany over the summer, the bright light of the Italian country fuses into the painting's colours with a warmth that is fresh and vitalising. The yellows vie against the greens in a playful contest of mutual triumph: assertive strokes of acrylic paint brush yellows into the leaves and greens into the lemons. The painting is aglow with such a warmth that colours bounce and reflect off different shapes across the canvas.

Angelica's *Lemons* boldly fills the entire canvas in a flat strip; here, it is colour and shape rather than perspectival depth that mould the lemons into three-dimensional, heavy bodies. Reminiscent of Paul Cézanne's (1839-1906) innovative still-lives, Angelica builds her still-life from careful yet distinct brushstrokes of paint. These 'constructive brushstrokes', as Cézanne calls them, give a sculptural dimensionality to the lemons and leaves. Set above a thin background of blended acrylics, the lemons and leaves pop out with a heavy prominence that can only be described as a triumph of vitality and colour.

Angelica here turns the 'nature morte' (still-life) into a 'nature vivante': brushwork, tone, and colour all contribute to a sense of indomitable life within her lemons. Hanging opposite from Cauchoi's (1850-1911) *Nature Morte à la Brioché*, *Lemons* strikes an interesting challenge to the history of vanity, decadence and death within the genre. Paired with Fischetti's (1732-1792) *Ratto di Europa*, the two pictures exchange a story of playfulness in bright yellow that spans almost three centuries, from ornate gold-leaf to energised acrylic.

Biographical Information

Angelica Hopton is an Anglo-Chilean artist who mainly specialises in portraiture. Through her portraits, she aims to 'capture the subject's individual essence and soul' by harmonising expressive brushstrokes with a minute precision in technique.

Angelica has recently trained at the Angel Academy of Art in Florence, learning traditional, realist techniques. In 2018, she studied fine art at Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London. Angelica is currently studying Natural Sciences at Durham University, with a particular interest in psychology. She brings psychological theory into her portraiture, developing layered character-studies in paint with a critical, psychoanalytical lens. Alongside her academic degree, Angelica is a fully commissioned artist, completing 15 commissions over the last year. She uses her Instagram page (@angelica_hopton_art) as a platform to share her work with others.

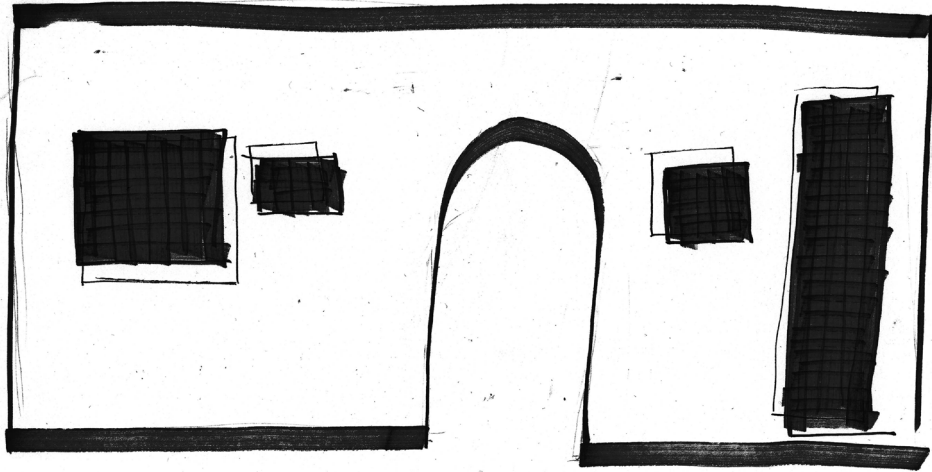
Angelica's work is greatly influenced by her experiences of different cultures abroad. She is an avid traveller and often incorporates local styles into her painting in thematically relevant ways. Time spent in Qatar and Iran, for instance, inspired a series of portraits exploring the empowerment, freedom, and oppression of women. Extensive time spent in Tuscany has been particularly influential in the creation of her more recent landscape pieces, including *Looking West off Baratti* and *Lemons* – two paintings that feature in 'The Back Room'!

Exhibitions and Commissions

- November 2021, Exhibition at Scoop, Durham
- January-October 2021, 7 paintings completed for The Galaxy Hotel, Oxford
- October 2019-August 2021, 10 completed commissions for private clients

Scheduled Commissions

- *Carlos y Luz* - Carlos Holzmann
- *Bertie; Leopold; Gigi* - Lady Nicholas Windsor
- Illustrations for *Maremma Mia*, novel by Nicholas Hopton



The Team

Jean-Michaël Maugüé

Founder and Curator

Jean-Michaël is the curator of the artworks in 'The Back Room'. Over the summer of 2021, he spent two months travelling around Italy and France to source the paintings for the exhibition. He is passionate about old master paintings and has undertaken this project to make the old masters more accessible to those who would not traditionally collect them. He also hopes to support and promote the work of his young, artist friends by representing them in the exhibition. This is his first foray as an art dealer.

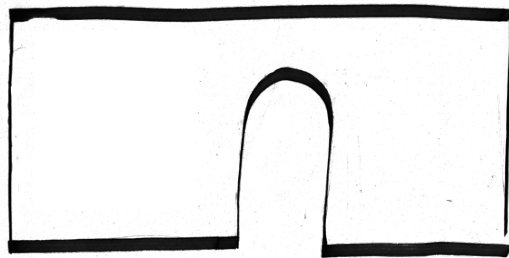
He is in his final year of reading English Literature (BA) at Christ's College, University of Cambridge. His article 'Art in Exile at Home: The National Palace Museum, Taiwanese Identity, and "China's" Imperial Collection' is published in *The Cambridge Journal of Law, Politics, and Art* (2021).

Mary Holmes

Designer and Graphics

Mary Holmes is the graphic designer for the Back Room. Taking inspiration from the work of Aldo Giannotti, her simple and paired back designs articulate the process of putting together this exhibition. From sketched floor plans to reworked wall configurations, they find joy in the messiness behind elegant curation.

She is currently in her final year of reading Architecture at Christ's College, University of Cambridge. An interdisciplinary artist, her other design work encompasses film photography, zine making and illustration. You can find her work @__m_eh_ on Instagram.



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