

Some Key Examples of the Fine Arts in England

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Introduction

Even before the 11th century, the arts in what is now called the United Kingdom, were influenced by styles and skills brought in by waves of invaders. After the Norman conquest of 1066, and the later political links with the emerging European states, these cultural influences grew stronger especially in England. However, this course attempts to identify artists and artworks that developed a particular and special quality of “Englishness”. It is interesting to compare this local “style” with equivalent examples elsewhere in Europe.

The artworks selected from the Michelangelo Portal are drawn from a range of media - from painting, printmaking, architecture and sculpture – but are looked at in terms of 4 specific topics. These are “Narrative”, “Pattern and Form”, “Landscape”, “Figure and Portrait”.

Whilst not unique to England, the 4 topics chosen as the focus of this course are nevertheless seen as important and typical aspects of some of the key achievements of English fine art.

Part 1 Content and Function in English Fine Arts

Chapter 1: Narrative in English Art

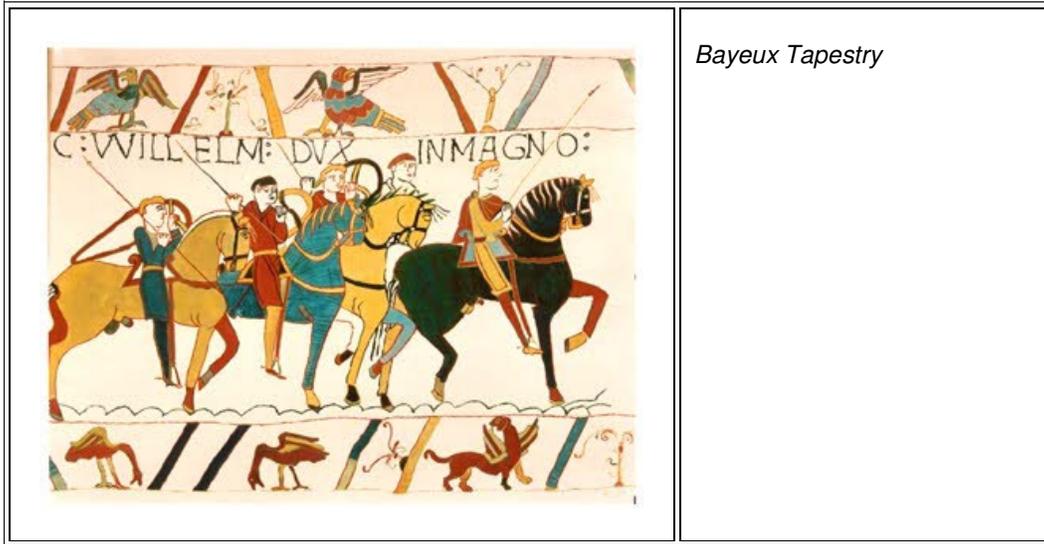
Introduction: the beginnings of the narrative tradition in English Religious Art.

Anglo Saxon art developed from the meeting of the traditions of Celtic and Germanic art from the North of Europe with those from the Roman Mediterranean. These different styles and functions came together in the court of the Emperor Charlemagne in the 8th and 9th centuries and enabled Christian art to be produced, as St Gregory had encouraged, so “that those who are unlettered may learn by gazing at what they cannot read in books”. Gradually the power of religious imagery to tell stories, in manuscripts, carvings and paintings, produced in Medieval Britain was recognised by feudal lords and leaders and also developed as a way of chronicling history.

What is special about the Bayeux Tapestry

The story shown in the Bayeux Tapestry is in the tradition of images of battles, conquests and victories in ancient Roman and Assyrian art. It shows the unfolding of events in England and France leading up to 1066 and William of Normandy’s invasion and defeat of the army of King Harold. These are shown in 72 scenes with over 500 figures, horses, dogs, trees, buildings, ships and, in the borders, dragons, birds and grotesque animals. There are over 50 inscriptions

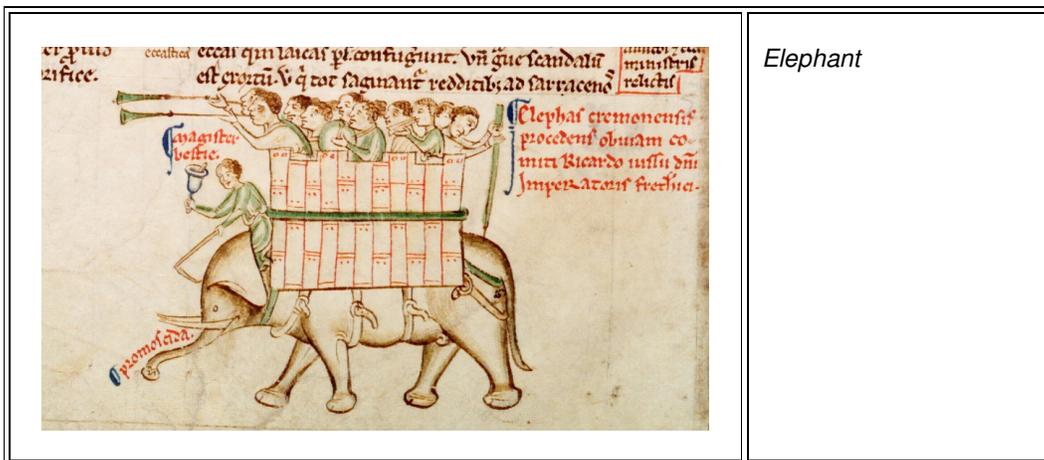
in Latin to help translate the narrative. However, it is also a dramatic story of treachery and the breaking of oaths, of the virtues of feudal society and of bravery in battle. It shows gory realism with headless bodies and the arrow in King Harold's eye. Where, when and by whom the tapestry was made is not certain but it has a liveliness and simple drama that combines the decorative movement of religious art with an intimacy that brings the story to life. The tapestry heralds the new language, the new arts and architecture of the Normans that became the basis for English art in the next century and beyond.



Bayeux Tapestry

The Work of the Chronicler Matthew Paris.

By the 13th century, religious and secular imagery was becoming enlivened by the more independent vision of artists like the English churchman and historian Matthew Paris. The structure of Norman art was being tempered by the dynamic line and movement inherited from the Saxons. In Matthew Paris's manuscripts there is a sense of human emotion and individuality that marks the beginning of the English Gothic style. Decorative qualities are now more firmly rooted in the world of observation than the Byzantine illumination style of figurative art, where drapery resembled the clinging folds of wet cloth. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the linear art of this period heralds the most typically English style of Nicholas Hilliard in the 16th century or, later, William Morris.



Elephant

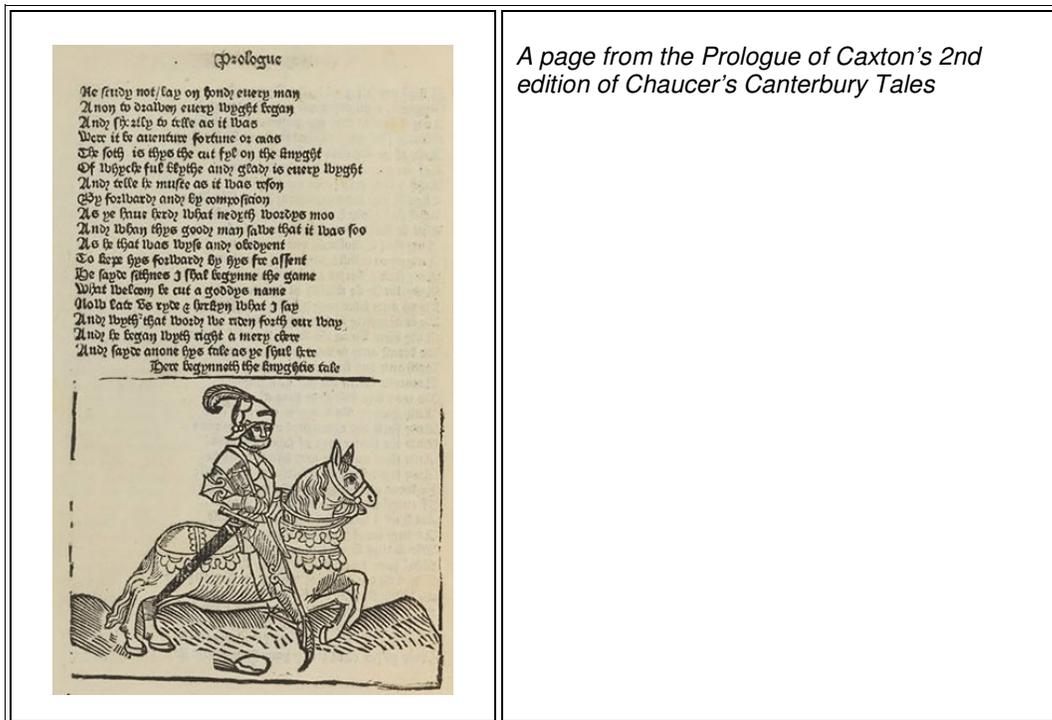
The Luttrell Psalter: Pictures of Everyday Life.

The consequences of the Black Death epidemics and foreign wars dominated English society in the mid 14th century. This world was reflected in the epic poem "Vision of Piers Plowman" by William Langland in 1352. But some of the most graphic horrors and hardships of Medieval life had been illustrated a few years earlier in the Luttrell Psalter where fantastic monsters and everyday scenes are drawn in beautiful detail in the book's margins. In its carefully observed detail of rural life, this manuscript is the culmination of the traditions of rich illumination in English religious art combined with the dramatic historical story-telling of the Bayeux Tapestry.



William Caxton and the Beginning of Printing.

In the middle of the 15th century the technical invention of printing in Germany led to an enormous leap forward in the development of visual narratives. Images could now be made that enabled stories to be told chapter by chapter or frame by frame. Furthermore, printing allowed for the production of multiple copies in relatively cheap, easily transportable form. In about 1474 William Caxton returned to England from Cologne where he had learned printing techniques from Johann Guttenberg. He set up his own press and began publication of books printed in English and with woodcut illustrations of stories like Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales".



A page from the Prologue of Caxton's 2nd edition of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

William Hogarth: Politics and Satire.

The history of narrative in English art is taken one stage further in the work of William Hogarth in the 18th century. The function of many of his paintings is simply to tell stories with a political or social purpose. To this end he used humour, caricature and moral preaching to comment on and try to reform society. The works are within the English tradition of observed detail but with a sharper edge than anything that has gone before. He encouraged a whole movement of British narrative artists and cartoonists who flourished during the next two centuries – artists like Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray, and George Cruikshank.

Satire and Caricature in 20th Century England.

The work of two 20th century painters in particular has continued to investigate the human condition in a way that has been inspired by William Hogarth. David Hockney has re-worked directly the story of the 'Rakes' Progress' in an autobiographical context, whilst Paula Rega, who lives and works in England, has explored some of the darker issues of today's society with often sinister reference to family and children's stories. Alongside this personal narrative style has run the other very English preoccupation with satirical caricature and humour in the work of cartoonists like Gerald Scarfe and the animated puppets of Spitting Image.

Chapter 2: Pattern and Form in English Art

Introduction: the mixing of the Celtic and Classical tradition.

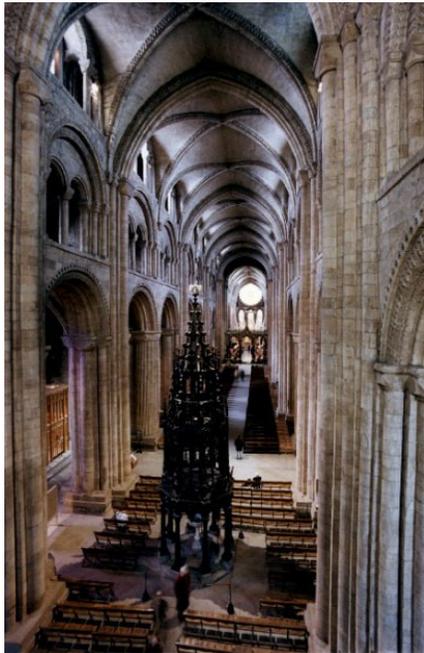
Before 1000 AC the most powerful Celtic and Germanic decorative elements in the arts of Northern Europe were spirals, zigzags, simplified animal forms and interlaced patterns. These can be found typically in the stone carving of Christian crosses, wood and ivory carvings, metal work, jewellery and early manuscripts. Gradually in the 11th century, the linear vitality of these traditional styles began to combine in many arforms with the more sculptural Classical and Byzantine influences at work in Rome and Constantinople.

The Flourishing of Manuscript Art

The artist's special delight in ornament in medieval England predominates in the writing of books. The decorated initials in the 12th century manuscripts of monasteries in St Albans, Bury St Edmunds and Christ Church Canterbury combined human figures and scenes with interlaced pattern and decoration. The meaning of some of these images is not always clear but they often show the very English characteristics of humour, fantasy and caricature, which re-emerge in the later work of Matthew Paris, the Luttrell Psalter, William Hogarth and Gerald Scarfe.

Pattern and space in Norman architecture: Durham Cathedral

The essential building style known as Romanesque (or Norman) is based on simple geometric forms – the cube, the pyramid or partial cone, the cylinder or vault. This can clearly be seen in the nave of Durham Cathedral with its massive pillars, decorated with simple criss-cross and zigzag pattern, and rounded arches. However, in the slender shafts, rib vaulting and pointed arches of the Chapel of Nine Altars in the same building, which was finished in the 1250s, we can see an early example of the change of style from Romanesque to what became known across Europe as the Gothic style.



Durham Cathedral

Elizabethan Pattern

Early Gothic architecture in England gave way to the more flamboyant delicate tracery and fan-vaulting of cathedrals like Wells, Ely, Lincoln and Gloucester. This joy in the use of pattern, often based on plant and natural forms, continued throughout Tudor England in woodcarving, tapestry and painting. It can be seen in the decorative quality of Nicolas Hilliard's 'Portrait of a Young Man' and many Tudor portraits and buildings.

William Morris and Art Nouveau

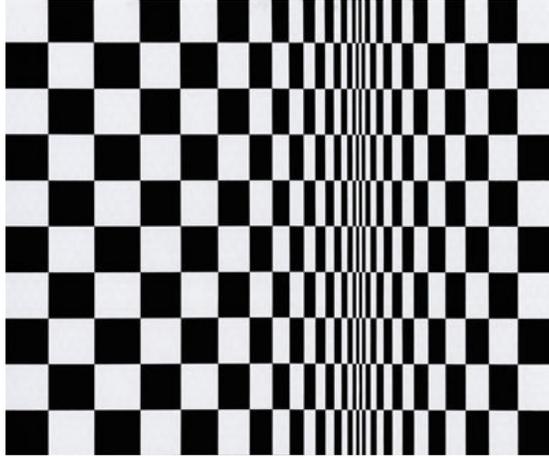
In the 19th century the Arts and Crafts movement in England, led by designers like William Morris, revived an interest in the medieval style of pattern based on observation of natural forms. They also blended the very English plants and animals with a more simplified Japanese approach to colour, shape and space. In various forms an eclectic decorative style – often known as 'Art Nouveau' or 'Jugendstil' - spread across Europe.



Artichoke wallpaper (1897)

Geometric and illusionist Pattern and the Work of Bridget Riley

Pattern moved briefly from the applied arts to fine art in the mid 20th century with the work of Bridget Riley and the so-called 'Op artists'. The linear patterns and geometric forms they used created optical illusions and 3-dimensional effects on the flat surface of their paintings.



Movement in Squares, 1961

Barbara Hepworth and abstract 3D form

Barbara Hepworth was an English sculptor who simplified natural form in her 3-dimensional work. She developed ideas from other European artists like Brancusi and Arp to explore shape, space and the surface of materials to create pure abstract forms.



*Sphere with Inner Form, at
Trewyn Garden, St Ives*

Chapter 3: Landscape in English Art

Introduction: landscape in illuminated manuscripts

Painting in medieval England mainly consisted of religious wall painting or illuminated manuscripts. The most important characters in the stories they told were the rulers or the evangelists. These figures were sometimes placed in simple architectural or landscape settings with only symbolic importance. Even in the 13th and 14th century (see the work of Matthew Paris and the Luttrell Psalter), landscape remained a type of stage set used by artists to represent the context of rural scenes.

The Dutch Influence

It was not until the 15th century in both Flanders and parts of Italy that landscape painting appeared that created a sense of space and light in a natural setting. These scenes were still essentially decorative backgrounds to religious story-telling but they paved the way for the more secular and factual landscapes of 17th century Holland. European nature was now largely a tamed, cultivated possession and landowners wanted to celebrate this and show what it looked like. These were the artists who brought what we now think of as landscape art to England.

Wilson Gainsborough and the Painting of “Landskips”

Throughout the 17th century in European landscape painting there were two different forces at work - the classical ordered views of artists like Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorraine and the observed realism of Jacob van Ruysdael and Jan Vermeer. In England the work of Richard Wilson and Thomas Gainsborough, with their eclectic and fresh vision, brought together these apparently opposing perspectives and heralded the great English landscape tradition of the 19th century. Until then, however, it was not possible to earn a satisfactory living by the painting of ‘landskips’ alone.

Portraiture, religious and historical subjects were still the dominant forms.

Constable

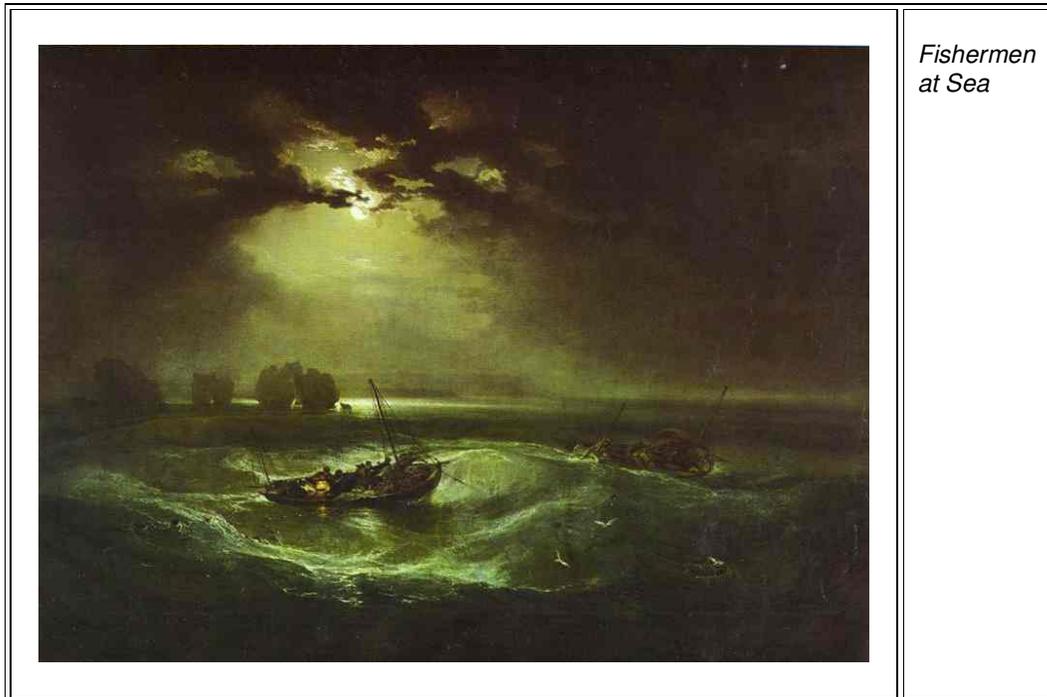
John Constable developed the essential ‘Englishness’ of landscape in his paintings – the somewhat muted, watery, transitory quality of light and colour. His choice of subject appears simple too but often the paintings contain detail that emphasises change – change in the weather, in the seasons and in people’s relationship with the land. This energy is beautifully controlled with his subtle use of light and shade and the freshness of his brushstrokes and the spontaneous application of paint in both his watercolour and oil painting.



Hay Wagon

Turner

Another 19th century painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner, provided England with a more dramatic response to landscape than Constable's rural scenes. Turner painted the heroic, the extreme, the atmospheric. He moved from the classical tradition of Claude's Italianate landscapes to produce many vast romantic canvases of historic deeds and contemporary events. However, he was as accomplished at sharing his vision and ideas in small watercolours as in large-scale oil paintings.



Landscape in England in the 20th century

Landscape art in 20th century England, despite the influences of Cubism and Expressionism from Europe and, later, Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art from USA, retained a rather romantic and peculiarly lyrical view of the English countryside. Artists like David Bomberg, Peter Lanyon, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland and others, responded to a landscape whose surface was subject to the constant changing effects of weather and the marks of human intervention. Its patterns and stories continued to inspire urban landscape painters and the so-called 'land artists' like Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy.

Chapter 4: The Figure and Portrait in English Art

Introduction: early Figurative Art in England

The figurative art of medieval England consisted mainly of pictures of the characters in religious stories. They were illustrated in wall paintings and manuscripts. Although several were of high quality and some native artists emerged, the history of painting in 15th and 16th century England is one long procession of foreign artists, from the Netherlands, Germany and France, who were largely employed to make portraits. The outbreaks of plague, foreign and internal

wars and the Reformation all conspired to prevent the development of a truly English school of painters at this time.

Nicholas Hilliard and the Elizabethan Portrait

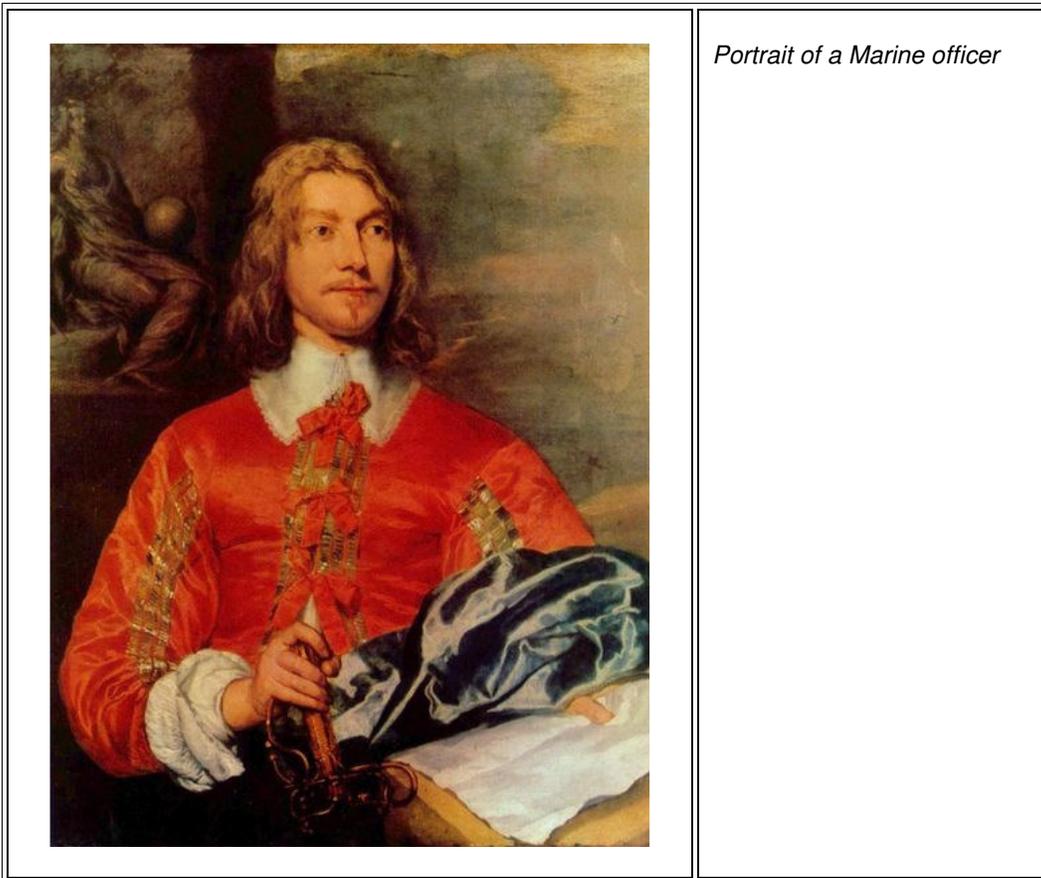
It was during the reign of Henry VIII that the Flemish artist Hans Holbein the Younger visited and worked in London. His detailed realist portraits appear to have influenced a few fledgling English painters who developed, especially as miniaturists, during the time of Queen Elizabeth I. They met the increasing demand, by members of the court, aristocracy and guilds, for portraits often with symbolic or allegorical attachments. Nicholas Hilliard was undoubtedly the most accomplished of these painters.



*Pelican Portrait" of
Queen Elizabeth 1
c.1575*

William Dobson and Joseph Wright in the 17th century

Despite the emergence of miniaturist painters like Hilliard, the art world of 17th century England was still dominated by the work of artists from abroad - Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck, Peter Lely Godfrey Kneller and others. However, they began to train followers like the Englishman William Dobson, who worked in van Dyck's studio, and the Scotsman Joseph Michael Wright, who was a follower of Lely. Dobson flourished as a portraitist among the flamboyant atmosphere of the Royalist Cavaliers. Wright found regular portrait commissions, despite the austerity of the Civil War and the Commonwealth, throughout the second half of the century and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.



Reynolds and Gainsborough

The true flowering of English figurative and portrait art came in the 18th century and was supported by the foundation of Academies of Drawing and Painting. By the middle of the century, as well as the social commentary and story-telling of William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough had emerged as key artists in Georgian history painting and portraiture. Reynolds exhibited that eclectic English nature that combined classical elements from the Italian Renaissance with the romantic spirit of Rembrandt and Rubens. His rival Gainsborough was more 'home-grown' with a fresher, rather informal style and an almost 'impressionistic' use of paint. As already mentioned (chapter 3, para 3) his real love was landscape and sometimes the figure takes almost second place in Gainsborough's portraits (eg 'Mr and Mrs Andrews').

The Move toward Abstraction: Henry Moore

In the 20th century, an English Sculptor, Henry Moore, moved the representation of the human figure beyond its function as a religious or historical image and beyond the immediacy and limitation of the portrait. His work in wood, stone and bronze was part of an international movement toward abstraction that combined the schematised head and bird forms of Brancusi with a fascination for the simplicity and symbolism of the so-called 'primitive' art of Europe, Egypt, Africa, and South America. For Moore, combining symbol and form allowed the human body to become free to be itself or become, another natural form like a pebble, a bone or a landscape.



Figurative art in the 20th century: Francis Bacon

Out of the social and political upheaval and despair of the two World Wars in Europe, there came a reassessment of both the content and style of figurative art in the 20th century. With echoes of Grunewald's Isenheim Crucifixion or Bosch's scenes of Hell, emerged 20th century secular equivalents depicted in the violence of Expressionism, the madness of Surrealism, or the fragmentation of Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica'.

In England a more personal and painterly solution was found in the portraits and figurative paintings of Francis Bacon. His distorted, almost melting, figures appear confined or trapped in an anonymous internal space.

Part 2 Exploring Content Through Media and Process

Chapter 1: Telling stories in pictures

Introduction: different Function, different Media

The telling of stories pictorially was part of the artistic tradition of many cultures that shaped the visual arts of Medieval Europe. Large stone carved sculptures or relief panels, wall painting, vase decoration and mosaics were the preferred media of well-established or powerfully ruled states like Egypt, Assyria, Greece and Rome. They told tales of heroes, victories, leaders and gods. They were mostly celebratory and often selected only the important or key moments in the story. However, at times of unrest, invasion, change or poverty, the media that were used to tell stories were usually limited to the small scale and portable – for example, books, ivories, textiles and metalwork. As Christianity started to dominate Europe, stories were used to illustrate lessons to be learned, often through parables, and art practices that could more easily serve this purpose came to dominate the visual story-telling tradition. Although there were some earlier examples of continuous narrative divided into well defined scenes, like Trajan's Column of 113 AC, it was the simpler more immediate processes involved in book illustration, wall

painting or tapestry that offered Medieval artists greater opportunity to develop narrative purpose.

The making of the Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry is really an embroidery rather than a woven textile. Tapestries were not rare in the time of William but the size and detail of this particular tapestry is an indication that it was a special piece of work telling an important story. It is made out of linen (eight bands sewn together) and is about 70 metres long and about half a metre wide. The writing on the tapestry which helps tell the story is in Latin. The main stitches used are stem stitching and laid-and-couched stitching.

Eight different colours, made from vegetable dyes, were used in the making of the Tapestry:

dark blue, blue-green, grey-blue, light green, dark green, tan, buff and yellow. The colour of skin has been left as the colour of the linen. No-one is completely sure where the Bayeux Tapestry was made but one theory is that it was done by women in Canterbury, Kent, where there was thought to be a school of textiles which used a style of work very similar to that found on the tapestry itself. This style resembles that of the illuminated manuscripts of the time.

Illuminated Manuscripts

Illuminated Manuscripts were a particular strength of the arts in the British isles throughout the early middle ages and into the 15th century. The artists in their manuscripts (from Latin meaning 'manu', by hand, 'scriptus', written) showed exquisite skills in calligraphy (from Greek meaning 'kallos', beautiful, and 'graphe' to write). Most monasteries had a 'scriptorium', a place devoted to the copying of religious texts for use in the monastery and for distribution to others. The talented scribes and illuminators were highly esteemed and often rewarded with ecclesiastical rank. They drew and wrote on parchment, also known as vellum, which was made from stretched and treated animal skins. These handwritten books were expensive items – a large book would need a small herd of sheep or cows to make enough vellum to make the cover and pages. The inks too might include colours that required careful processing from plants, berries, earth, ash, minerals or even semi-precious stones. It was applied with hollow quills or reed pens and the pages sometimes further enriched with gold-leaf and jewels.

Cinnabar, the pigment obtained from red lead, was often used in the initial letters of the text in a manuscript or page decoration. The word miniature comes from the Latin word for cinnabar, 'minium'. The person skilled in working with minium was called a 'miniator' and the works he produced were called miniatures.

The Development of Printing

During the Middle Ages, the use of art to tell stories largely remained in the hands of the church. Whilst the purpose was religious, all books remained very expensive to produce and only a limited number of people were able to read them. But gradually books were introduced from Byzantium, often by returning crusaders, which contained texts from Greek and Roman times that were about the observable world and not simply Christian teachings. The rise of universities, spreading from Italy across Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries, also hastened the demand for secular texts. New technologies, at the same time, revolutionised the graphic arts of Europe. Firstly, the manufacture of paper, cheaper and easier to produce than vellum. Secondly, the development of oil-based paint and inks that slowed down the drying time of egg-based tempera and media used in manuscripts. Finally, the wine and olive oil press had been adapted, by the mid 15th century, to print moveable wooden blocks that could depict a letter or image over and over again. The printed book quickly became a regular object in the world. It is estimated that by 1501 there were 1000 printing shops in Europe, which had produced 35,000 titles and 20 million copies. (blockprinting.pdf)(paper making pdf)

Caricature, Satire and Comics

Within the Bayeux Tapestry, the work of Matthew Paris, the Luttrell Psalter, other illuminated manuscripts and medieval sculptures like gargoyles, there was often a place in the narrative for some humorous or fantastic detail. These were almost like small sub plots or asides in a play. Later, during the early Renaissance, painters of religious stories sometimes depicted multiple events within one scene, and in some cases used scrolls of text to suggest words or thoughts that characters might be using. These were the origin of speech balloons. But wit, satire and caricature really became an important aspect of the art of the 17th century when English society settled down into a more bourgeois existence. Mass printing techniques now allowed for religious propaganda and political broadsheets to mix text and image and show a story frame by frame. By the 18th century artists like Hogarth, Cruikshank, Gillray and Rowlandson developed the art of satire and visual story telling to exceptional levels in their episodic strip drawings and prints. These were the precursors to the popular broadsheets and prints (like Images d'Epinal) that spread across Europe in the 19th century, with their flat primary colours and simplified linear figures, and ultimately to the popular comics of the USA and 'mangas' of Japan in the 20th century. <http://www.comicsuk.co.uk/History>

Chapter 2: Making Patterns and Using Shapes

Introduction: Origins and Purpose of Pattern

Many antecedents to European art of the 10th century, used pattern and decoration as a way of embellishing or enlivening a surface or introducing symbolic meaning. This was also true in other cultures from around the world. For example, the use of geometric or linear forms that curve, spiral or meander (from the shape of the Turkish river that the ancient Greeks called 'Meander'), could produce a repeat pattern like the Greek key pattern or a labyrinth or maze shape. They could suggest waves or snakes or might also symbolise bonds of love, friendship and devotion, eternal life, the four cardinal points, the four seasons, or even the journey through life. In contrast, zoomorphic (based on animal shapes) and natural shapes were also developed as decorative features, from the floral borders on Greek vases to friezes of plants in Roman stone relief carving and mosaics. Because of the nature of the materials and processes used in works of art like this, such forms appear stylised. However, greater naturalism may well have been attempted in media like painting and textiles that are less permanent and have not survived. Animal and plant forms too could be used to have a symbolic meaning. (see para 2) The fusion of the classical pattern traditions of Southern Europe and Byzantium met the stylised Celtic art of the North within the beautiful pages of illuminated manuscripts.

Pattern and Illuminated Manuscripts

In an illuminated manuscript, the skills and craftsmanship of the scribes and artists supported the sacred quality of the book itself. Manuscripts were adorned and precious because they were the word of God. The complexity of the decoration was intended to mirror the richness of biblical meanings contained and meditated upon in the text. To this end, borders, initial letters and title pages (called 'carpet' pages because of their rich patterns) often contained the most complex woven interlaced designs. These interlacings consisted of zoomorphic and abstract elements including scrolls, knots, vines, and creatures including, snakes lions, rabbits, fish, cats and birds.

Such images were not intended to be a naturalistic representation of the existing world. They were schematic and symbolic elements chosen from a repertoire of marks and usable images and themes. Usually the iconography represented some aspect of Christ's life: the snake representing rebirth (because it sheds its skin) and also the notion of Original Sin; the peacock representing the incorruptibility of Christ (a reflection of the ancient belief that the flesh of a peacock is incorruptible). Whatever the image or motif, they were drawn with an outline that resulted in a very linear style with separate areas of colour. This 'cloissone' (enclosed) effect

was in part inspired by the process used in Celtic metalwork and partly to do with understanding the long-lasting effects of certain chemicals in the coloured inks. If some pigments combined they could have a corrosive effect over time. Therefore, inks that would have an adverse reaction on each other were often separated by a fine line of a 'safe' colour.

Space and Pattern in English Architecture

Pattern in Romanesque architecture was largely applied on the surface of buildings, as in the geometric decoration of the massive pillars of Durham Cathedral; on carved stone capitals; in the use of contrasting colour in stone work; or built into the tessellation of brickwork and other building materials. In addition, other decoration might appear in wall-paintings, mosaics, tapestries and stained glass. However, as the barrel vault and rounded arch of Norman architecture gave way to the pointed arch and ogival vault, Gothic buildings developed a logical, more dynamic and lively quality. Lighter weight materials were used to infill between the load bearing stone ribs of the vaults. Gothic cathedrals lead our eyes upward, toward heaven, with their more delicate and stressed vertical lines. And there, in the roof space, began to appear lighter networks of ribs and, eventually, the almost organic fan vaulting. This English Gothic style is typified in the so-called 'Decorated' style of Wells Cathedral and then in the remarkable and slightly later 'Perpendicular' style of King's College Chapel, Cambridge. The elaborate decorative plaster-work and patterns of timber framing in Elizabethan houses represents the vernacular example of this love of ornament.

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement

By the start of the 19th century in England, after the classicism that had gripped European architecture and decoration for over 100 years, the ornament and excess of the Gothic style was revived in a frenzy of public buildings and arts. Advances in print and paint technology, industrialised manufacture and increased travel, fuelled this eclectic hotch-potch of poor design, excessive decoration and cheap production. Artists and thinkers like William Morris and John Ruskin, rejected the Gothic Revival and looked back to Medieval art, a simpler truth to materials and the reinstatement of the importance of handicrafts. Their new movement was labelled the Arts and Crafts movement, and whilst some of the methods and processes that they advocated - block printing, bookbinding, hand made furnishings, metalwork – were anachronistic, they had a refreshing influence on pattern and design standards at many levels. Everything from the paintings of Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Holman Hunt to Sanderson's and Liberty's wall papers and textiles, the architecture and furnishings of Charles Voysey and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, formed part of this search for a 'new art'. The movement spread across Europe in the pattern and styles of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil.

Abstract shape and form in the 20th Century

Pattern and decoration are formed by line, shape, colour, tone and texture. In addition, materials have an intrinsic quality over and above any representative form or object that they may be fashioned into. Many artists of the early 20th century in Europe drew attention to these principles. They elevated form, material and even process as the central meaning of art. The objects that were produced by sculptors like Barbara Hepworth allowed for the possibility of chance to play a part in process; for the negative to have as much meaning as the positive; for the bringing together of disparate materials and for a work of art to have an expressive or spiritual meaning without direct reference to the visible world. In proposing this, she and other artists, challenged the dominance of figurative representation and confirmed the notion of abstraction. Other artists, like Bridget Riley, working in paint with limited use of colour and with reference to mechanical processes, attempted to destroy the flat surface of a painting with patterns that created an illusion of 3D space. Some artists explored abstraction further with notions of chance, accident and mark making itself.

Chapter 3: Looking at the Environment

Introduction: Development of Landscape Art

Medieval artists used the environment as a backdrop for their story-telling or as a symbolic addition to the representation of a religious figure or secular ruler. Therefore, basic landscape or architectural elements are found as peripheral to stories, events and figures in English art. (eg in the Bayeux Tapestry, Illuminated Manuscripts, stained-glass windows and frescoes.) It was not until political and socio-economic conditions became more settled, until nature had been tamed, and until land owning was more democratic, that background landscape became more important. Gradually the setting in some paintings became dominant and, eventually, the subject of the work itself. This began to happen across Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries but in different ways in the North and South. However, in both cases, the type of art we now call 'Landscape' came into being largely as a result of changes in the medieval mind-set. The previous fear of nature was replaced by a more objective curiosity, a scientific interest and quest for knowledge. In Flanders, Holland and Germany this was as a result of intensive but intuitive observation which gave rise, in the representation of the world, to what has become known as 'aerial perspective' – an understanding of how tone and colour change with distance. In Italy, on the other hand, scientific enquiry encouraged comparison of scale, detailed measurement and exploration of relationships through what is called 'linear perspective'.

Oil Painting and Landscape Art

The development of images of landscape was also supported by significant technical advances in paint which began to appear in the early 15th century in the paintings of North European artists like Jan van Eyck, Robert Campin, Konrad Witz and spread south through the work of Giovanni Bellini in Venice later that century. By adding certain natural oils to paint, these artists made it slower drying and could show colour and light on surfaces with increased detail. The use of small amounts of linseed oil, mixed with the colour ('pigment'), also gave an artist a much wider range from the opaque to the transparent. The 'drier' egg-based tempera paint, used in fresco (wall painting on 'fresh' plaster) and gesso (plaster panels) painting, led to a very flat linear style of painting where brush strokes can be clearly seen. When an amount of oil was added transparent layers of paint ('glazes') could be applied on top of each other and over an under-painting. This led to a depth and richness of colour that was almost jewel-like and allowed for subtle changes of tone to show distance and space in a picture. It produced an even glossy surface with no sign of brushstrokes. Such methods of oil painting were challenged by a freer approach to rendering landscape developed in Holland in the 17th century in the work of Rembrandt, Rubens and Ruysdael. By the 19th century English landscape artists like Turner and Constable, and then the French Impressionists, used combinations of thick ('impasto') and thin oil paint to introduce movement or spontaneity of observation to their paintings.

Perspective and Landscape Art

During the 15th century in Italy, painters began to organise their view of narrative in an environment according to mathematical rules.

A system of drawing was described in 1435 by the Florentine architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti called the 'Costruzione Legittima' and practiced in the paintings of Paolo Uccello and by Piero della Francesca who was not only Court Painter but also Mathematician to the Duke of Urbino. Initially this way of drawing involved representing 3-dimensional shape on a flat surface by means of a single 'vanishing point' where receding parallel lines appear to converge. As the artists of the Renaissance in Italy developed these rules they began to master a representation of landscape that suggested distance through this use of 'perspective'. Alongside this, they also established principles of 'proportion' which not only referred to the relative size of objects in space but also dictated the layout of a painting. This law, known as the 'Golden Section', was used throughout subsequent European art to divide the picture surface into areas

of particular interest. It was based on a unifying mathematical notion of numbers derived from proportions seen in nature and brought to Italy from Islam in the 13th century. (see the 'Fibonacci series' of numbers and the 'Rule of Three')

Machines and Stations

As landscape became a more important genre in European art, artists used machines and methods that would help them in their selection and drawing in order to construct ideal images. Alberti (see para 3) had invented a device – a sort of camera obscura – to help an artist see and focus on a background landscape. Such panoramas showed topographic detail but had difficulty linking foreground and distance. Often, Florentine landscapes of this time show a view from a high vantage point to avoid the problem of middle distance.

It was only through the careful accuracy of observation in Flemish and then Venetian painting that this problem was solved. However, using the camera obscura (from the Latin meaning 'dark chamber') became a well-established practice from the 16th century on. It was a tent-like structure, or even a room, with a small aperture that projected an image of the outside rather like a pinhole camera. During the 17th century and the time of optical discoveries, lenses and mirrors refined the machine and enabled it to become more portable and have a small screen to trace the landscape onto. By the 19th century this had given way to the use of an adjustable prism on a portable frame, the camera lucida, which English artists like John Sell Cotman and John Varley used to frame their landscapes. Also, frequently used by landscape artists, was the 'Claude glass' named after the great 17th century French painter Claude Lorraine. This was a hand-held, tinted, convex mirror which reflected and reduced a large scene into a neat view clarify the tones of a distant landscape. By the early 19th century in England, this was often used in association with 'viewing stations', fixed places selected to enable artists to see especially 'picturesque' landscape. By studying aspects of landscape, the English Romantic poet Wordsworth suggested that:

'One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.'

Chapter 4: Images of People

Introduction to Processes for Figure and Portrait Painting

The realism of figurative art and even portraiture seen in ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman arts had largely disappeared from Europe by the 10th century. It had been replaced by an iconography of Christian signs and symbols. The human figures represented in manuscripts, frescoes, panels, mosaics and tapestries were simple, linear and stylised and only identified by a gesture, name or sign of office. It wasn't until the Gothic sculptors of cathedrals like Strasbourg or Naumburg in the 13th century that more realistic individual likenesses returned. In England, there was a beginning of this observational curiosity in the manuscripts of Matthew Paris (for example his study of an elephant of 1255), but generally it was not until the start of the next century that rounded, individualised figures replaced the copied stylized characters of medieval art.

The Expressive Figure

In painting, 3-dimensional representation of the figure largely started in Italy with Giotto in the 14th century. He developed new techniques that showed the subtleties of rounded forms and implied the movement of figures. His frescoes (eg the Narrative of the Holy Family in the Arena Chapel of 1306) reveal stories with great clarity and drama. Instead of simply painting a fresco

in separate convenient and artificial sections, he worked out a design ('designare', meaning to mark out) with the contours of the figures being used to define what might be painted in a day (the 'giornata' system). This method produced a more natural break up of the composition and allowed more defined characters, modelled with shadow and perspective. Eventually, many Renaissance artists began to make preliminary drawings and designs, sometimes known as 'cartoons', to mark out or show their plans for finished paintings. This became more common as the production of paper increased. At the same time paper meant that artists could record the world directly in sketch-books and replace copying and pattern-books with real life observations. This sense of enquiry and scientific interest also led to artists in both southern and northern Europe, like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Durer, establishing mathematical norms for the proportion of the human body and an understanding of anatomy.

Portraiture

In the Arena Chapel frescoes, Giotto also included a portrait of the patron Scrovegni himself. By the middle of the 14th century portraits of particular people began to emerge, as rich private patrons wanted their likeness to be preserved. Gradually the profile view of heads, as carved on medals and coins, gave way to carefully observed 3 dimensional images. These became more accomplished as the use of oil paint spread and the examples of portraits by artists from Northern Europe, like Jan van Eyck, Robert Campin and Rogier van Der Weyden became known in England and further south.