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Northern European art

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Helena is unlikely to have produced them all singlehandedly. The exhibition includes a letter, written by Lady Wintour after Helena's death, that sheds new light upon their creation by asserting that she (Mary) had worked on an antependium embroidered with 'pearl', and that in England only she and one other were capable of this technique.

Helena lived at a time of great virtuosity in English needlework, evidenced in many surviving embroidered secular objects, particularly caskets and mirrors. These are distinguished by the variety of their stitching, particularly the use of raised, padded work, combined with delicate effects of needle-lace, and ornamentation with spangles (early sequins), pearls, and precious or semi-precious stones. All these techniques were employed on the Wintour vestments, but worked on a grander scale. These different aspects of seventeenth-century embroidery should not, however, be viewed entirely separately because the secular items were frequently decorated with biblical subjects, often carrying covert politico-religious messages, providing an interesting counterpart to the vestments.

The Wintour vestments are strewn with flowers. On the green chasuble, the grapes and individual slips of pomegranates and flowers each carried a spiritual allusion that could be the object of meditation. Sophie Holroyd has demonstrated that Helena took inspiration for her choice of emblems from a Jesuit text: Henry Hawkins's *Parthenia Sacra* ('Sacred Virginity') of 1633, written to honour the Virgin Mary, and addressed to 'the Parthenian Sodality of the Immaculate Conception'.¹ This evokes the Virgin as a *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden), offering meditations upon individual flowers, and also, among other things, the dove, the hen and the pearl. The Wintour embroideries represent flowers traditionally found in Christian art, with some more recently discovered specimens. The passion-flower, found in South America during the sixteenth century, was embraced into the emblematic canon for its perceived evocation of the Crucifixion nails, the Crown of Thorns, the five wounds of Christ and the ten Apostles present at the Crucifixion. Jan Graffius has traced the source of the embroidered passion-flowers to the first printed illustration of this flower, a broadsheet by Simon Parisca (1609). Embroidery designs were often based upon a variety of printed sources, and Helena probably also consulted herbals. The vases on the Stonyhurst cope, containing the passion-flower, iris, tulip, fritillary and both martagon and Crown imperial lilies, recall the arrangements on the frontispiece of John Gerard's *The Herbal or General Historie of Plants* (London 1636).

The exhibition catalogue offers a good introduction to the life of Helena and of her family, to English Catholics and the Gunpowder Plot, to the Bishops of Durham and Catholic recusancy, and to the collections at Douai Abbey and Stonyhurst. The iconography of each vestment is explored in detail, offering fresh insights, although the exquisite embroidery techniques could perhaps have

been given fuller treatment. Catalogue numbers, footnotes and a bibliography would also have been a welcome – in this writer's view essential – addition. There are generous illustrations, but photographs cannot do justice to the intricacy and variety of the embroideries. *Plots and Spangles* is not only well worth seeing for the intrinsic beauty and interest of the individual objects, but also for the insight it provides into the tenacity of recusant Catholicism in England and particularly for its vivid testimonial of Helena Wintour's steadfast devotion to her faith.

¹ Catalogue: *Plots and Spangles: The Embroidered Vestments of Helena Wintour*. Edited by Jan Graffius. 82 pp. incl. 55 col. + 6 b. & w. ill. (Stonyhurst College, St Omers Press, 2015). £10. ISBN 978-0-9553592-5-5.

² G. Scott: *The Guide to an Exhibition of the Wintour Vestments in the Douai Abbey Library 25 May–25 September 2015*. The Weldon Press 2015.

³ S. Holroyd: 'Rich Embroidered Churchstufte', in R. Corthell, F. Dolan, C. Highley and A. Marotti, eds.: *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, Notre Dame IN 2007, pp.73–116, esp. pp.87–103.

David Jones

Chichester and Nottingham; Ditchling

by MARINA VAIZEY

DAVID JONES (1895–1974) described himself as 'a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage, of Protestant upbringing, of Catholic subscription'. His art, not to mention his writing, has long attracted fervent interest. Now two complementary exhibitions offer a rare opportunity to see a robust selection of his drawings, watercolours, paintings and inscriptions: both are emotive for different reasons. *David Jones: Vision and Memory* at Pallant House, Chichester (to 21st February), which later moves to the Djanogly

Gallery, Nottingham (12th March to 5th June), includes letters and ephemera that augment a thoughtful chronological survey of some eighty works dating from all periods, hinged, as it must be with this artist, on his biography.¹ Adjacent to the David Jones anthology there is also a subtle tribute to Jones in the form of works by Edmund de Waal, an admirer from his undergraduate days at Cambridge, where he had access to several of Jones's best works at Kettle's Yard. The charmingly revamped **Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft** (reopened 2013), in the East Sussex village where Jones spent some years in Eric Gill's circle, has an exhibition unified by its subject-matter, *The Animals of David Jones* (to 6th March), which provides an intriguing insight into the ways Jones handled both his preoccupations with myth and his acute observations of the real world. He was a polymath: draughtsman, watercolourist, painter, wood engraver and wood carver. He drew from an early age, and on view at Ditchling is a drawing of surprising substance of a dancing bear, done when he was seven, and kept by Jones all his life. His elephant is anatomically fanciful, yet unmistakably an incisive depiction of the animal (Fig.79).

In recent years Jones, in spite of a devoted following, has rather slipped from view. Of course he has never been wholly absent, but a significant amount of his work remains in private collections. These two exhibitions – the compilation in Chichester is both highly sensitive and major – gives the visitor a sense of discovery as well as rediscovery.

Before World War I, Jones studied at Camberwell; after the War he attended Westminster Art School. His traumatic wartime experiences as a Private cast its shadow over the rest of his life; throughout his three years on the Western Front – he was wounded in the Battle of the Somme – he miraculously continued to draw. Several remarkable drawings of soldiers are on view, and the experiences that lie behind these also inspired his extraor-



79. *Elephant*, by David Jones. 1928. Canvas, 63.4 by 87.6 cm. (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; exh. Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft).

dinary poetry. His highly personal epic poem *In Parenthesis* (1937) about the terrors and pity of war won the Hawthornden Prize. In the 1920s his attachment to Eric Gill and his Guild of St Dominic and St Joseph at both Ditchling and subsequently at Capel-y-ffin in Wales, and his tutelage under Desmond Chute, also a mentor to Stanley Spencer, brought out Jones's extraordinary talent as an engraver on wood and copper. He was engaged to Gill's daughter Petra for three years, and even after the engagement was broken off, Jones remained constant in his gratitude to Gill as his teacher and mentor, and on friendly terms with the family.

Jones's Catholic faith (he converted in 1921), magnificent writing, emotional fears and anxieties – he had serious breakdowns in 1932 and 1947 – and the mystical weavings of varied cultural sources in his art have all contributed to an unusual biography which is in itself mysterious, even legendary. His art drew on Arthurian legend, classical myth and the Bible, as well as the natural world; his engravings were taken up by leading private presses of the day and memorably illustrate many fine publications. Some are on view in Chichester as independent works of art.

From the 1920s there are wonderful, relatively large-scale interiors and landscapes, and extraordinary evocations of the sea, glimpsed from his parents' holiday home; there are landscapes dominated by his passionate love of



81. *Flora in calix light*, by David Jones. 1950. Watercolour and pencil, 62.3 by 50.2 cm. (Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge; exh. Pallant House Gallery, Chichester).

trees, perhaps subliminally influenced by the terrible destruction of trees in the Great War. Animals lurk in these magical woods and forests, and he loved to draw the animals in

London Zoo. In *The artist's worktable* (p.75; Fig.80) everything is tilted at a precarious angle and yet a visual equilibrium is created. By the 1930s Jones had joined the intellectual mainstream: a member of the Seven and Five Society, the leading avant-garde group of its day, he was praised by such luminaries as T.S. Eliot and Kenneth Clark.

In his last three decades, afflicted by agoraphobia, Jones retreated from the world and lived a constricted life in a bedsit in Harrow, yet it did not prohibit him from working – but indoors looking out. There are superb big late works, tangles of pencil, watercolour and ink, showing ordinary objects transfigured by a kind of ecstatic visual appreciation. *Flora in calix light* (p.135; Fig.81) is an image of pure happiness, a surge of emotions, with glass goblets, surely recalling communion cups, placed on table in front of a window sill, the window latch and frame carefully delineated, the whole sheet showered with cascades of delicately coloured flowers. *Mehefin* (1950; p.136) and *Tangled cup* (1951; p.137) deploy variations of the same ingredients: window, table, containers, flowers, and to the same effect, an evocation of euphoria, even ecstasy in a transformation of the ordinary into something expressive of an intense gratitude for the world.

Also characteristic of Jones's late work are the inscriptions in various languages that he described as 'making a shape with words'. The images are a curious combination of the refined and the robust, the energetic and the austere. The inscriptions are highly personal, and the letters – and words – dance. The shapes are persuasively deployed and the rhythms of colours – red, black, some ochre, greenish-blues – entrance and delight. His passionate interest in stories is pared down to

80. *The artist's worktable*, by David Jones. 1929. Watercolour and pencil, 62.3 by 50.2 cm. (Private collection; exh. Pallant House Gallery, Chichester).



succinct phrases, quotations and mottos devoid of plot: letters subsumed into a kind of abstract choreography. Some of Jones's images require the viewer to untangle what he wants to show; others are touchingly straightforward.

The question remains as to whether, interested as the English are in artists who use both word and image (from William Blake to Wyndham Lewis and Michael Ayrton), Jones's images and inscriptions are central to the narrative of twentieth-century British art. Is he an outsider, idiosyncratic, beloved, but nevertheless a minor figure? Or is he to be considered alongside other eccentric figures – say Stanley Spencer or the Surrealist Edward Burra – as indisputably major? Pallant House is an appropriate setting for such speculations given its important permanent collection and its record of holding exhibitions examining British art primarily from the post-War period to the present.

Jones's creative endeavour was sustained throughout his turbulent life, illuminated by friendships or blighted by emotional distress and ill health. His individuality is, paradoxically, characteristic of the English mainstream, in that it was informed and responsive to the past – he was intensely interested in the old masters – rather than by the arbitrary buffeting of contemporary fashion.

¹ Book: *The Art of David Jones*. By Ariane Banks and Paul Hills. 176 pp. incl. 104 col. + 48 b. & w. ill. (Lund Humphries, Farnham, 2015), £40 (HB). ISBN 978-1-848221-60-4; £24.95 (PB). ISBN 978-1-869827-95-3. This is an incisive, clearly written chronological study that embraces Jones's work into the mainstream narrative of twentieth-century art. There are no catalogue entries.

Jean-Etienne Liotard

Edinburgh and London

by ALASTAIR LAING

IN 1743 JEAN-ETIENNE Liotard returned to Europe in the guise of 'Le Peintre Turc', a title which he inscribed in large letters on a self-portrait painted the following year in Vienna for the Uffizi's gallery of self-portraits. All this provoked the scorn of Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1753, when Liotard first arrived in London and caused something of a sensation: 'Those who are not capable of judging for themselves might smell something of the Quack from his appearance – the long beard – Turk's dress – which, as well as his behaviour, is of the very essence of Imposture . . . [An Italian] said he was like Samson: his strength lay in his hair'. It was actually more of an imposture than Reynolds knew, being Turkish only in the sense that Jassy, in Moldavia, where Liotard had spent ten months between 1742 and 1743 at the Phanariot court and had adopted it, fell under Ottoman suzerainty. Nevertheless, it was here he had adopted the dress of the Phanariot court. Had any artist before him so wilfully – not casually or out of eccentricity – adopted a fantastic garb to advertise himself

and his art? Admittedly, Liotard, in the role of artist-as-poseur, certainly has successors – Salvador Dalí, Gilbert & George, Grayson Perry – but he had no need to adopt this role, as he had talents in abundance. 'Talents', in the plural, since one of the revelations of this splendid exhibition was that he excelled in whatever he did: not just in the pastels for which he is best known, but also in oils – in portraiture, Dutch-style genre (Fig. 82), and *trompe-l'œil*; in miniatures, whether in water-colour or enamel, both on a small and on a large scale; in extraordinarily delicate red-and-black chalk drawings; and in mezzotint.

Yet perhaps the guise was necessary. Liotard was a formidably well-travelled artist – more so even than his younger contemporary, Jean-Baptiste Pillement – and too restless to settle in any one place (at least until the latter part of his career). He painted at the courts of Vienna, Versailles and London, yet never became a courtier; and so needed, perhaps, to make an instant impact wherever he went, in order to obtain commissions without delay. Yet it is surely no accident that, the year after he had

shaved off his immensely long and bushy beard following his marriage to the Huguenot Marie Fargues in 1756, he returned to settle in his native Geneva, still continuing to travel, but to a lesser degree, and to places where he was already known.

Such has always been Liotard's fame that, from one point of view, it is surprising there never has been a full-scale exhibition devoted to him until the recent exhibition *Jean-Etienne Liotard*, first shown at the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (4th July to 13th September) and then at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (closed 31st January).¹ Yet since his most striking productions are fragile pastels, it is remarkable that any such exhibition should have been devoted to him at all. Despite significant advances in the packing and transporting of pastels, there is still debate over the moving and exhibiting of them, particularly – and rightly – where the vibrations of air transport are involved. For this reason the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, was unable to lend either their most winning portrait of *Maria Frederica van Reede, Baroness*



82. *A Dutch girl at breakfast*, by Jean-Etienne Liotard. 1756–57. Canvas, 46.8 by 39 cm. (Private collection; exh. Royal Academy of Arts, London).