

# Open Windows 2

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## Open Windows 2

This second issue of *Open Windows* continues with its aim of offering new perspectives on works in the collection. A detailed account of the relationship between Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza and the art dealer Roman Norbert Ketterer reveals a wealth of new information on the former's collecting activities in the field of German Expressionist painting. The meticulous studies on Bronzino's *Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici* and on *Solitude. Recollection of Limousin* by Camille Corot (the latter from the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection) offer new interpretative keys to these works. Finally, this issue includes a fascinating account of the eventful journey through Spain and Portugal of Marc Chagall's painting *The Madonna of the Village* in the company of its creator who was fleeing from the Nazi regime, plus a thought-provoking article on how the links between Italian Futurism and the turbulent political events of the pre-war period gave rise to the powerfully liberating force of this artistic movement.

# Thyssen and Ketterer: two friends and a collection

Marta Ruiz del Árbol



Birthday greetings to the Baron from Norbert Ketterer and his wife

On 13 April 1981 Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza celebrated his 60th birthday, receiving particularly special greetings from his old friend the art dealer Roman Norbert Ketterer<sup>1</sup> and his wife, written in Gothic script on paper imitating parchment.

Just prior to that date, on 10 February of that year, Norbert Ketterer had received the Federal Cross of Merit on the occasion of his 70th birthday. Awarded by the Federal Government of Germany, led by Helmut Schmidt, it was intended as a recognition of Ketterer's contribution to the revival of German Expressionist art during the post-war period and the important role that he had played in its promotion on an international level.<sup>2</sup> The official honour drew attention to a career that had begun as early as 3 May 1945<sup>3</sup> at a time when he was a member of the provisional town council that had replaced the National Socialist one in Eslingen in compliance with orders from the North American forces.<sup>4</sup> At that date Ketterer was director of the Südöl company of that small town near Stuttgart and there was little to indicate that very soon afterwards, in 1946, he and his brother Wolfgang would open the Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett, the auction house that would rapidly become the reference point for the revival and rediscovery of German Expressionist art over the following years.

Ketterer's heirs recount how, after the end of World War II, he was unfamiliar with the German art created prior to the Third Reich and which had been declared "Degenerate" by the Nazis. Soon after seeing some initial examples, Ketterer, however, decided that his mission would be to interest collectors and directors of museums in this field of art through his auctions.<sup>5</sup> In 1947 the Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett held its first auction devoted to the graphic work of Max Slevogt. Contrary to what might have been expected in the context of devastated, post-war Germany where this type of art had been banned for more than twenty years, the event was a great success, encouraging the Ketterer brothers to continue. From that point onwards their activities focused on works by other members of the Die Brücke [the Bridge] group of Expressionist painters, in particular that of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.<sup>6</sup> In 1953 Roman and Wolfgang decided to pursue their business activities separately.

According to Zwirner, "The market for classic modern art [in Germany] was dominated by Roman Norbert Ketterer's successful Stuttgart-based auction house."<sup>7</sup> During those post-war years their auctions acted as a measure for the financial value of works of art that were undergoing a constant process of reassessment. They also became social events attended not only by leading art world and museum figures but also by the principal collectors of the day.

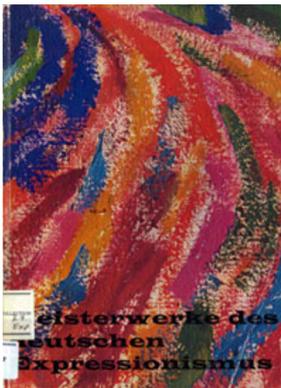
In parallel, Norbert Ketterer built up a private art collection which, by the end of the 1950s, consisted of some of the greatest works by the Die Brücke group. Between March 1960 and June 1961, the high



Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza. Photo, Evelyn Hofer



Roman Norbert Ketterer, 1973



Front cover of the exhibition *Meisterwerke des deutschen Expressionismus* held in 1960-1961

point of his career as an art dealer and auctioneer, he anonymously loaned a selection of these works to an exhibition entitled *Meisterwerke der deutschen Expressionismus* [Masterpieces of German Expressionism] that travelled to Bremen, Hannover, The Hague, Cologne and Zurich,<sup>8</sup> and which is now considered to be one of the key exhibitions in the rediscovery and reassessment of Expressionist art in Central Europe. The exhibition also seems to have been starting point for the close relationship that would develop in later years between Ketterer and Baron Thyssen.<sup>9</sup>

“Gradually I began to think”, the Baron noted, “that every artistic effort that was being done in the first half of this century at a time when major achievements had been made in most major areas could not be totally devoid of interest.”<sup>10</sup> In May 1961, encouraged by David Rockefeller and Stavros Niarchos, the Baron attended one of the famous auctions held by the Stuttgarter Kunstkabinett. His decision to attend may also have been influenced by the interest that the exhibition of Ketterer’s Expressionist art collection had aroused in the media. It is possible that Baron Thyssen had visited the above-mentioned exhibition and that this encouraged him to meet the man who had assembled these works. Whatever the case, the Baron had a copy of the exhibition’s catalogue in his private library.<sup>11</sup>

During this auction, the first devoted to modern art that he attended, Baron Thyssen marked a turning-point in his activities as a collector. Up to this point the acquisitions made by Heini (as he was known to his friends) had been confined to the field of Old Master paintings. Now, however, the fascination that he felt for what he described as the “bold colour and [...] the very particular atmosphere”<sup>12</sup> emanating from *A young Couple* by Emil Nolde encouraged him to take part in a tense bidding war that resulted in the highest price paid to date for a work on paper by that artist.<sup>13</sup> With the acquisition of this watercolour by Nolde, Baron Thyssen broke away from the tradition established by his father, who considered 20th-century art to be of little interest.

From that point onwards Norbert Ketterer became, in the Baron’s words, “a good friend who guided my first steps in the nearly unknown territory that was for me then 20th-century art.”<sup>14</sup> Following the acquisition of the Nolde, the Baron acquired a series of Expressionist masterpieces that entered his collection via Norbert Ketterer. In 1961 alone he acquired *House in Dangast (The White House)* by Erich Heckel, *Horse Fair* and *Summer in Nidden* by Max Pechstein, *Sun over Pine Forest* by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and *Doris with ruff Collar* and *Fränzi in front of a carved Chair* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. With the exception of *Summer in Nidden*, all these paintings had been included in the *Meisterwerke des deutschen Expressionismus* exhibition.



Emil Nolde  
*Young Couple*,  
1931-1935  
Thyssen-Bornemisza  
Collections



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner  
*Fränzi in front of a carved  
Chair*, 1910  
Museo Thyssen-  
Bornemisza, Madrid  
[\[+ info\]](#)



Lyonel Feininger  
*The Lady in Mauve*, 1922  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)

We thus see the Baron initiating his profound interest in 20th-century art through the Die Brücke artists, in a manner comparable to Norbert Ketterer a few years earlier. As the Baron noted on numerous occasions, it was the fact that these works had been declared “Degenerate Art” by the Third Reich that encouraged him to become interested in them and to collect them. The process of rehabilitating artists so disparaged by the Nazi regime had begun shortly after the war ended but it was still ongoing in the early 1960s, and the desire to perpetuate the memory of artists who had been so persecuted must have influenced the Baron’s attitude.<sup>15</sup> This connection with Expressionism, which was widespread among European liberals of the time and which went beyond the merely artistic, was a starting point that led the Baron to alter the course of his family’s collecting tradition and to widen its scope as far as the early 20th century and far beyond. In fact, the very year that he acquired the watercolour by Nolde, Baron Thyssen also purchased a painting by Nicolas de Staël, while in 1963 he acquired a work by Jackson Pollock.

By coincidence, just a year later, in 1962, Roman Norbert Ketterer moved to Campione d’Italia. This small Italian town was located only a few kilometres from the Villa Favorita, the Thyssen family residence in the Swiss canton of Lugano. By that time Ketterer had separated from his first wife and was looking for a new location for his business where he could benefit from lower taxes and extend his contacts.

“We lived so near to each other that we could have shouted across the lake”, Ketterer recalled in his memoirs.<sup>16</sup> Over the course of the following years the relationship between the two men became close and cordial. The Baron’s new neighbour recalled, for example, how this change of residence had resulted in financial problems that obliged him on occasions to “ring the Villa Favorita and announce my willingness to sell something from my private collection” and every time, the Baron chose “the best from my collection, in every case a painting that I was reluctant to sell.”<sup>17</sup> The frequent visits between the two are also recorded in the visitors’ book of Galerie Ketterer: “Expressionism is a drug, here I am again”,<sup>18</sup> the Baron light-heartedly wrote on 14 September 1964 on the occasion of a visit that resulted in the decision to purchase *The Lady in Mauve* by Lyonel Feininger.

Reciprocal admiration is the dominant note in this friendship. On the one hand Baron Thyssen manifested his complete confidence in Ketterer on numerous occasions. The dealer not only became his principal intermediary for the purchase of Expressionist works,<sup>19</sup> but also acted on various occasions as an advisor to the Baron in relation to other matters. In 1973, at the Baron’s request, Ketterer travelled to the Swiss capital Berne in order to acquire at auction a series of lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec. The quality and rarity of these prints meant that there was enormous interest from numerous potential



Pablo Picasso  
*The Frugal Meal*, 1904  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner  
*Curving Bay*, c. 1914  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)

purchasers and Ketterer was thus given *carte blanche* when bidding for them. In conversation with Simon de Pury, who was also present at that auction of 21 June in Berne, Ketterer recalled the anxiety that he felt due to the responsibility of the commission.<sup>20</sup> During the auction Ketterer also acquired Picasso's etching *Le repas frugal* as he was very struck by that particular impression, which was inscribed with a dedication by Picasso himself.

For his part Ketterer more than once praised Baron Thyssen's excellent eye for art that enabled him to know when he had encountered an outstanding work of art. Asked about this by Ketterer and for his definition of quality in a painting, Baron Thyssen said that it was about something that "linked eye and heart".<sup>21</sup> Norbert Ketterer also appreciated the Baron's desire to promote the exhibitions at the Villa Favorita, singling out one held in 1983. On that occasion and as a result of the Baron's diplomatic negotiations it was possible to see a remarkable group of works by Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso loaned from museums in the Soviet Union.

At about the same time, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection had begun to travel and was sent on loan to museums and collections across the globe. Following a number of exhibitions of works from the Old Master holdings, held in leading museums world-wide, the Baron decided to exhibit his recent, 20th-century acquisitions. In order to do so he turned to Ketterer and asked for his help with what would be the first exhibition of Modern Masters from the Collection, held at the Bremen Kunsthalle. On the express wish of Baron Thyssen, Ketterer selected the group of works to be seen and designed the catalogue. Held from February to March 1975, the exhibition highlighted Baron Thyssen's energetic activities as a collector. Among the paintings on display, and in his addition to his beloved Expressionists, were works by the Surrealists including Miró, Dalí, Tanguy and Max Ernst, as well as artists associated with the Informalist trends of the second half of the 20th century, such as Vieira da Silva.

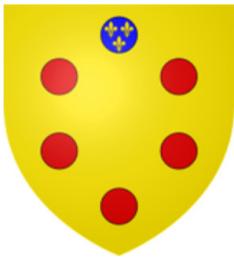
*Curving Bay* by Kirchner, a painter passionately admired by both friends, was the last work that the Baron acquired from Ketterer, entering the collection in 1987. From that point on the Baron's efforts focused on finding a permanent home for his collection, while Ketterer was engaged in the same endeavour in relation to the enormous Kirchner Estate. Thanks to the activities of these two outstanding individuals we are now able to enjoy the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid and the Museum Kirchner in Davos.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Jérôme Faller of Galerie Henze & Ketterer in Wichtrach/Berne for providing information relating to the life of Roman Norbert Ketterer.
- 2 A copy of the document that announces the award of the Cross of Merit is in the Archive of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum. It was sent to the Baron by Ketterer with an accompanying letter, dated 2 April 1981, from Campione d'Italia.
- 3 Germany surrendered four days later on 7 May 1945.
- 4 In Paloma Alarcó: *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza. Pintura Moderna*. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2009, p. 20.
- 5 Ingeborg Henze-Ketterer et al: "In memoriam Roman Norbert Ketterer". In Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. *Der frühe Holzschnitt, 1904 bis 1908*. Wichtrach-Berne, Galerie Henze & Ketterer, 2003, p. 5.
- 6 After the artist's death his artistic estate remained in the house in Frauenkirch that he shared with Erna Schilling. When the latter died in 1945 everything was taken to the Kunstmuseum in Basel where the director, Georg Schmidt, drew up an inventory. The estate stamp dates from this period. When the artist's nephew Walter Kirchner died in 1954 the heirs appointed Ketterer the administrator of the estate.
- 7 Rudolf Zwirner: *Die Entwicklung des Kunsthandels nach 1945*. Teil I. *Der Europäisch-Amerikanische Dialog*. 9 June 2006. At [www.artnet.de/magazine/die-entwicklung-des-kunsthandels-nach-1945-teil-1/](http://www.artnet.de/magazine/die-entwicklung-des-kunsthandels-nach-1945-teil-1/)
- 8 The exhibition was shown in the following venues, in chronological order: the Kunsthalle, Bremen; the Kunstverein, Hannover; the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne; and the Kunsthaus, Zurich. The exhibition comprised 160 works by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, and Otto Müller.
- 9 Javier Arnaldo has stated that: "Knowledge of Roman Norbert Ketterer's collection [...] was crucial for the Baron" in "Reconstructing the artistic experience of Die Brücke". In Aya Soika (ed.): *Expresionismo Brücke*. [Actas symposium, 31 March-2 April 2005]. Madrid, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2005, p. 15.
- 10 Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, "German Expressionism. A Personal Choice", in *Apollo*, vol. CXVIII, no. 257, July 1983, p. 76.
- 11 The library is now on deposit in the Library of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.
- 12 Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, op. cit., p. 76.
- 13 Described in Peter Vergo, *Twentieth-century German Painting. The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*. London, Sotheby's Publications, 1992, p. 316.
- 14 Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, op. cit., p. 76.
- 15 As stated by Paloma Alarcó in op. cit., p. 21.
- 16 Roman Norbert Ketterer, *Legenden am Auktionspult. Die Wiederentdeckung des deutschen Expressionismus*. Gerd Presler (ed.). Munich, Ketterer Kunst Verlag, 1999, p. 244.
- 17 Roman Norbert Ketterer, *Dialoge*. Stuttgart-Zurich, Belsler, 1988, vol. 1, p. 176.
- 18 Roman Norbert Ketterer 1988, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 191.
- 19 Almost half the Expressionist works now on display in the galleries of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza were acquired through Ketterer.
- 20 Roman Norbert Ketterer 1988, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 192-198.
- 21 As stated by Baron Thyssen in Roman Norbert Ketterer, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 180.

# Bronzino and Cosimo I de' Medici. The Power of an Image

María Eugenia Alonso



Coat-of-arms  
of the Medici family

“But let the Medici rest in peace in their marble and porphyry tombs; no one did more for the glory of the world, neither before nor after them, not princes, kings or emperors.”

Alexander Dumas, *The Medici*

Cosimo I de' Medici, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, was born in Florence on 12 June 1519. His father, Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, had been a celebrated condottiere, while his mother, Maria Salviati, was responsible for his education. Cosimo spent his childhood in Mugello, a small town to the north of Florence. He belonged to a lesser branch of the family and there was nothing to indicate that he would become one of the most important figures in that city's history. He was, in fact, destined to restore the Medici dynasty, which would govern the city until the early 18th century.

Events prior to his assumption of the title of Duke of Florence took place rapidly. Alessandro de' Medici, then in power, was assassinated on the orders of Lorenzo de' Medici, a distant cousin, who wished to assume the government of Florence. Cosimo de' Medici, however, entered the city from Mugello with the support of a few followers and took control at the age of only seventeen. He soon assumed absolute power and governed until 1564 when he abdicated in favour of one of his sons, Francesco de' Medici.

Cosimo I was made Duke of Florence by the Emperor Charles V following his first military victory at the Battle of Montemurlo in which he defeated members of the Strozzi dynasty, who had formed an alliance with the French and had entered Tuscany with the aim of seizing power. Over the course of his period of rule, Cosimo undertook numerous politico-military initiatives and achieved ever greater independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

In parallel to his political activities, the Grand Duke was an important patron of the arts. This interest led him to embellish and improve the city of Florence to a significant degree. He created the Uffizi complex with the primary aim of establishing a seat of government that would also in due course become a museum. Having lived first in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, then the Palazzo Vecchio, he moved his residence to the Palazzo Pitti and encouraged the creation of the fine Boboli gardens. The Duke's new residence was connected to the Palazzo Vecchio through the creation of a passageway known as the Vasari Corridor.

Cosimo's patronage of the arts was not confined to architecture and he also supported some of the leading painters of the day. In the late 1530s Cosimo summoned Bronzino to enter his service as official painter. The Grand Duke intended to commission portraits of his family from the artist. Bronzino had trained with Pontormo, who had also been official painter to the Medici, and had worked with him on various important



Fig. 1  
Bronzino  
*Portrait of Leonor de Toledo  
and her Son, Giovanni*, ca. 1545-1546  
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence  
Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo  
Museale Fiorentino

artistic projects. Bronzino executed religious and mythological paintings but was principally celebrated as a great portraitist. Within the context of the prevailing Mannerist style, his portraits are restrained and distant with a marked focus on a description of the objects that accompany the sitter. Particularly outstanding is the artist's ability to convey the textures of cloth, metals and brocades. Bronzino painted numerous members of the Florentine elite but his finest achievements were the official portraits of the ruling family: Cosimo I, his wife and children.

In 1539 Cosimo married Leonor of Toledo, descended from one of the noblest families of Spain. This act further consolidated his power within the context of European politics.

Bronzino depicted Leonor on numerous occasions, both alone and accompanied by her one or more of her eleven children. The most outstanding example is the portrait now in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (fig. 1), considered a masterpiece due to its technical quality and exquisite artistic merit.

Like many political figures of his day, Cosimo I made use of Bronzino's skills as a portraitist, deploying them for the purposes of personal propaganda. The numerous surviving portraits of the Duke by the artist clearly reveal the former's interest in presenting himself before the citizens of Florence and before the other European powers as a solemn figure of authority and one whose rule was fully consolidated. Cosimo was painted by Bronzino at different moments throughout his political life, and these portraits can be categorised as corresponding to two official models: the first, dated to around 1545, in which the Duke is depicted as young and wearing armour; and a second type from the 1560s in which he does not wear armour and is shown as older. These series, executed by Bronzino and his studio, reflect the necessity for the creation of an official image that the Duke himself had called for. However, the first portrait by the artist of his patron, executed immediately after his assumption of power, is remarkable for its conception and iconography. In *Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) (fig. 2), the Duke is presented as Orpheus, a figure from Greek mythology celebrated for his great musical and poetic talents. Cosimo is depicted naked and looking at the viewer, at the moment when, in his personification as Orpheus, he has just calmed Cerberus, the dog-like guardian of Hades. We find no further examples of this type of allegorical portrait over the forthcoming years and this one may have been commissioned by the Duke for his private use. The subject reflects his taste for classical culture, reflected both in his passion for Greco-Roman art, of which he assembled a major collection, and his support of literature and culture through the Accademia Fiorentina, of which Bronzino was also a member as a poet. The present portrait was probably executed on the occasion of the marriage of the Duke to Leonor de Toledo,



Fig. 2  
Bronzino  
*Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus*,  
ca. 1537-1539  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia  
Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen, 1950

Fig. 3  
*Belvedere Torso*, mediados del siglo I a.C.  
Vatican Museums, Ciudad del Vaticano



Fig. 4  
Bronzino  
*Cosimo I de' Medici in  
Armour*, ca. 1545  
Museo Thyssen-  
Bornemisza, Madrid  
[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 5  
Bronzino  
*Cosimo I in Armour*,  
ca. 1545  
Galleria degli Uffizi,  
Firencia  
Soprintendenza  
Speciale per il Polo  
Museale Fiorentino



Fig. 6  
Bronzino  
*Cosimo I de' Medici  
in Armour*, ca. 1545  
Art Gallery of New  
South Wales Foundation  
Purchase 1996, Sidney  
Photograph © AGNSW

although little documentation survives.<sup>1</sup> In addition, numerous scholars agree that Bronzino, who also greatly appreciated classical art, looked to the *Belvedere Torso* (Vatican Museums) for his depiction of the Duke's body (fig. 3).

Around 1543, by which date Cosimo had consolidated his authority in Florence, the need arose for the creation of his official image. In response, Bronzino executed a first portrait of the Duke in armour which would function as a tool of political propaganda both within his own territories and abroad, and from which numerous later versions were produced. This diversity of types of portrait of the Duke has provoked a heated debate among specialists in two regards: firstly, concerning which was the prototype that acted as the model for all the subsequent versions; and secondly, concerning which of the replicas are by Bronzino himself and which by his studio. In the case of most of these images, Cosimo is depicted three-quarter or half-length, while all use the same compositional format of the body turned to the right and the head to the left, with the gaze following the direction of the head and losing itself in the background drapery, thus creating a sense of distance between sitter and viewer, between whom there is no communication of any type.

These portraits conform to a type of image that was being developed in Florence at that period. The Medici presided over a refined, sophisticated court and the visual image that was created of its leading figure was a correspondingly elegant and imposing one. In addition, and conforming to the prevailing Mannerist style of this date, sitters were depicted in artificial poses and in carefully devised settings. The expression of the face, the pose and the setting reflect this quest for sophistication.

The portrait in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (fig. 4) is a version of the same composition in the Galleria degli Uffizi (fig. 5), considered by numerous experts to be the prototype or first version on which all the copies or replicas were based, whether executed by Bronzino himself or by his studio. The version in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, which was previously in the Gonzaga Collection, has been considered an autograph replica by Mina Gregori.<sup>2</sup>

The *Portrait of Cosimo I in Armour* in the Uffizi, identified by Gamba as the first work in this series of official portraits, was very probably painted in the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano around 1545 and is thought to be the work described by Vasari:

“Il signor duca, veduta in queste ed altre opere l'eccellenza di questo pittore, e particolarmente che era suo proprio ritrarre dal naturale quanto con più diligenza si può imaginare, fece ritrarre sè, che allora era giovane, armato tutto d'arme bianche e con una mano sopra l'elmo”.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 7  
Studio of Bronzino  
Cosimo I de' Medici  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York



Fig. 8  
Bronzino  
Cosimo I de' Medici,  
ca. 1546  
Toledo Museum  
of Art, Ohio  
Gift of Edward  
Drummond Libbey



Fig. 9  
Benvenuto Cellini  
Bust of Cosimo I  
de' Medici, 1545-1548  
Museo Nazionale  
del Bargello, Florence  
Soprintendenza  
Speciale per il Polo  
Museale Fiorentino

A version in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sidney, (fig. 6) has an identical composition but includes a background of curtain drapery that modifies the tonalities. In the Sidney version Cosimo is wearing armour and rests his hand on his helmet, which stands on a cylindrical support on which we see the inscription "COSMVS MEDICES. DVX FLOR".

The various versions of the portrait of the Duke all show him wearing the same suit of armour and in the same pose. However, these versions are distinguished by the inclusion of different decorative elements. In the portrait now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 7) the Duke's helmet is resting on a cloth, while the background has a different type of drapery for the curtains, this time with a fringe. In the versions in the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, (fig. 8) and in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, there is an olive branch in the middle-ground on the right. This is the *broncone*, which was a symbol of the Medici family.

Italian political leaders showed a preference for having themselves depicted in the manner of the great heroes and warriors of classical antiquity. Their intention was to exalt their authority both through their military and political deeds and through their own image. Armour thus became the most appropriate accessory for glorifying their figures as powerful rulers. Bronzino depicted Cosimo I in armour, resting one of his elegant hands on the helmet that he has taken off, possibly to indicate that his form of government was also a peaceful one. The armour has besagews<sup>4</sup> on the breastplate just below the gorget,<sup>5</sup> which may indicate that it is foot armour rather than equestrian armour. Depicting the suit of armour allowed Bronzino to offer a minutely detailed description of its decorative elements and to convey the gleam of the polished surface of the metal that contrasts with the texture of the textiles. This type of *all'antica* portrait is also to be found in a series of bust-length sculptures that Cosimo commissioned from the leading sculptors of the day, of which one of the finest examples is the bust by Benvenuto Cellini now in the Museo del Bargello (fig. 9).

Around 1546, Cosimo I de' Medici was awarded the Order of the Golden Fleece, a chivalrous order founded in 1430 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. Under the protection of the Virgin and the Apostle Andrew, this order strove to uphold the faith and the concept of knightly fraternity. It was considered an exceptionally important symbol of authority and its members, who were few in number, were associated with the crown of Spain. Having been awarded it, Cosimo incorporated its emblem into his official image and his portraits, wearing the complete collar over his armour, as we see in the versions of his portrait in the Toledo Museum of Art (fig. 8), the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel, and the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

Despite the limited amount of licence permitted in official depictions, Bronzino was able to move away from the rigidity generally associated with such commissions in order to develop a distinctive idiom which, combined with the elevated technical merits of his painting, made him one of the most outstanding portraitists of his day. His portraits convey a robust, almost sculptural physical presence through their masterly interplay of light and their distinctive chromatic range. The poses are proud and somewhat haughty, and despite the coldness of the almost marmoreal faces, there is an attempt to convey the sitter's psychology. These images undoubtedly influenced the court portrait throughout Europe while simultaneously and convincingly expressing the erudition and tastes of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Above all, however, they are a visual manifestation of his power and authority.

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**Notes**

- 1 See Cropper, Elizabeth: *Pontorno, Bronzino, and The Medici. The Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence*. [Exhib. cat. 2004-2005]. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2004.
- 2 According to a letter of 11 January 1976 in the documentary archive of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Department of Old Master Painting.
- 3 Vasari-Milanesi. *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*. Florence, 1881, vol. VII, pp. 597-98.
- 4 Besagews are circular elements with a spike emerging from the centre. They were located on the armour, one on either side of the breast.
- 5 The gorget is the part of a suit of armour that protects the neck.

# Corot: Solitude

Juan Ángel López-Manzanares



Fig. 1  
Camille Corot  
*Solitude. Recollection of Virgen, Limousin*, 1866  
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection  
on deposit at Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
[\[+ info\]](#)

Camille Corot's painting *Solitude. Recollection of Virgen, Limousin* (fig. 1), acquired by the Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza in 1999, is a celebrated work for having been exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1886<sup>1</sup> and above all for the fact that it was acquired by Napoleon III for the collection of the Empress Eugenia de Montijo for the considerable sum of 18,000 francs. Little more, however, is known about the painting. Its veiled symbolism and the fact that it remained hidden in various private collections until 1999 have contributed to its enigmatic character. The present article will aim to reveal some of its principal features through accounts by the artist himself, others by his biographers and Salon criticisms.

## Picturesque Limousin

Throughout his life Corot travelled extensively in France in order to execute the outdoor studies that he subsequently used as the basis of his landscapes. He visited the Limousin region, located in the west of central France, for the first time around 1849 and subsequently returned on four occasions, the last in 1864. Corot had heard about the region from his friend Auguste Faulte du Puyparlier, who, every two or three years, would spend the late summer months on a farm near Limoges that belonged to his cousin, the industrialist Jules Lacroix. In 1888 Lacroix noted to Alfred Robaut: "On the first occasion he [Corot] limited himself to finding motifs for his studies on my estate and nearby: later, his trips extended towards the river Vienne and the Glane. I would often go with him; we left around five in the morning; and would return every day with a rich booty. The brush had not rested for an instant; we chatted, sang and smoked a small pipe; then we hastened our steps to get back for the tasty cabbage soup that we had so well earned."<sup>2</sup>

Corot appreciated the picturesque nature and the almost virgin landscape of Limousin, devoting a large body of work to its leafy spots and numerous lakes and rivers. With regard to official exhibitions, it is known that in 1849 he sent a painting to the Salon entitled *Landscape in Limousin* (no. 440 in the catalogue), and another in 1859 entitled *Recollection of Limousin* (no. 692), the whereabouts of which are now unknown. In the artist's catalogue raisonné, Robaut refers to further compositions of this type, including *Rustic Interior in Mas-Bilier, near Limoges* of ca. 1850-60,<sup>3</sup> which depicts the kitchen on Jules Lacroix's farm and which was painted on a day of heavy rain according to Lacroix; more typical is *Mas-Bilier, near Limoges. A Path in the Clearing* of ca. 1850,<sup>4</sup> which depicts a peasant woman tending a cow on the edge of a chestnut forest. Close to the latter is also the outdoor study entitled *Forest Clearing in Limousin*, ca. 1845-1850 (fig. 2), recently sold at Sotheby's New York, in which Corot emphasises



Fig. 2  
Camille Corot  
*Forest Clearing in Limousin*, 1845-1850  
Auctioned at Sotheby's, New York,  
10 November 1998, lot 31

Fig. 3  
Camille Corot  
*Solitude. Outdoor Study executed  
in Vigen (Haute-Vienne)*, 1851  
Present location unknown

the density of the forest to create a contrast with the humble labour of the woodcutter and his wife, both collecting firewood and with their backs to the viewer.

With regard to depictions of the region's rivers and lakes, Robaut's catalogue includes a drawing of a village on the banks of a river,<sup>5</sup> as well as the work entitled *Solitude. Outdoor Study executed in Vigen (Haute-Vienne)* (fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> The caption in the catalogue runs: "This is the study that provided the basis for the Salon painting of 1866". Although Robaut refers to an "outdoor study" various features of the work suggested that it may not have been painted from life, including the oval format, the carefully planned composition with the tree in the centre, and in particular the inclusion of the meditative female figure on the bank of the lake. The painting would rather seem to be a close variant of the canvas now in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, although painted prior to it and thus subsequently transposed to a larger format and given a greater degree of finish, as would be appropriate for the Salon.<sup>7</sup>

### Memory as the Basis of Neo-classical Landscape

Corot's intention was certainly not to produce a literal transcription of the Limousin countryside when he painted *Solitude*. This was clearly the opinion of Charles Blanc, Superintendent of Fine Arts, who commented in regard to the artist's canvases exhibited at the 1866 Salon: "*Evening, Solitude* are not landscapes that explicitly imitate one location or another. They are vague but sublime recollections; evocations. As if he had lived thousands of years, the poet recalls ancient lands that he has at some time travelled through, of which he only retain the principal features, the broad tints and the solemn or melancholy character, smiling or serious. He has seen those landscapes in Thracia or Thessaly, on the banks of the Pineios [...]. What would I know? But for a long time now, no detail has remained in the background of his memory. He only gives us his impression, fully conveying to us all the admirable aspects of it without us missing the leaves that are absent on his trees, the roughness or the cracks that are not to be found on his rocks."<sup>8</sup>

Works such as *Solitude* are a poetical version of reality, conforming to a genre known at the time as "heroic landscape". Although Corot was one of the maximum exponents of outdoor painting, his studies from life are all small scale works which were very rarely displayed in public. From the mid-1830s he sent compositions to the Salon that make use of naturalistic landscape settings but depict a biblical or literary event and thus fall within the tradition of heroic landscape. From the late 1840s, however, Corot's repeated failures at the Salon led him to produce works



Fig. 4  
Camille Corot  
*Souvenir of the Environs of Lake Nemi*, 1865  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

that were more poetic in their treatment of light and brushstroke and which involved unspecific literary references. In these works topographical accuracy gives way to an evocation of the emotions experienced before the landscape, an approach that brings the artist closer to the Barbizon School painters.<sup>9</sup>

Memory plays a key role in this process of making the landscape more poetic. It had been praised by theoreticians such as Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, who, in his essay *Éléments de perspective pratique* (1800), advised young landscape painters to make *resouvenir* studies so as not to depend exclusively on the direct contemplation of nature. With Corot, the central role conceded to memory means that in many of his most celebrated landscapes of the 1860s and 1870s present and past are fused or combined, as are the shady forests of France and the tranquil lakes of Italy. One of the clearest examples of this approach is the canvas entitled *Souvenir of the Environs of Lake Nemi*, presented at the Salon (fig. 4). Henri Dumesnil offered an account of this painting that is crucial for an understanding of Corot's work as a whole: "In its first state it was a subject of Ville-d'Avray, where, one evening at home, the master was struck by a vivid impression, which he began to work on the next day. Some time later the canvas was rolled up, taken to Paris and finally forgotten for five years. When he rediscovered it he decided that the effect could be better achieved with a recollection of Italy that he had at that time and so he made what we saw [in the 1865 Salon], a firmly resolved work, fully appropriate to the subject and with a type of execution comparable to that which he generally used in that country".<sup>10</sup> As his contemporaries noted, Corot saw Italy through the mists of the outskirts of Paris. *Solitude* also has something of an evocation of Italy that extends beyond the dress of the Roman peasant woman who is the principal figure in the composition.

### Corot and Photography

In his late works Corot placed more emphasis on tonal harmonies than on colour contrasts, given that for the artist form and values were fundamental. The line must be precisely established and the relationship between the values scrupulously observed. His last works are generally executed in a narrow range of colours with most importance given to the values of light and shade. In fact, having determined the lines, Corot devoted most of his efforts to establishing the tones. He started with the darkest and proceeded in order up to the lightest in a progression that could on occasions involve up to twenty different tonal degrees. Colour and execution came last. As the artist himself noted in 1870: "What is to be seen in painting,



Fig. 5  
Camille Corot  
*Morning, Dance of the Nymphs*, 1850  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Fig. 6  
Adalbert Cuvelier (?)  
*Photograph taken on the Outskirts of Arras (?)*, 1852



Fig. 7  
Camille Corot  
*The Dreamer beneath the great Trees*, 1874  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

or rather what I am looking for, is the form, the whole, the tonal value [...] This is why, for me, colour comes after, as above all I like the whole, the harmony of the tones, while colour produces a certain contrast that I do not like."<sup>11</sup>

This manner of working through tones or values also relates to Corot's involvement in the field of photography, encouraged and instructed by the painter and photographer Constant Dutilleux. A pupil of Delacroix, he had become interested in Corot's work at the 1847 Salon and from that point on they were close friends. Every year from 1851 onwards Corot visited Dutilleux in Arras and together they experimented with new photographic processes.

Corot eventually assembled a collection of more than three hundred photographs, two hundred of which were subjects *d'après nature*. His interest in the new medium, however, went beyond mere collecting. Art historians have associated the evolution evident in his work – from an architectural, colourist style in the 1830s and 1840s to a more vaporous, monochromatic one in the 1850s – with the influence of contemporary photography. Specifically, many of Corot's mature landscapes have features comparable to calotypes such as the brown, grey or greenish tones, the blurry form of the leaves against the sky (the result of lengthy exposure in the case of photography), and the halo of light around some forms (known as halation in photography) (figs. 5 and 6).<sup>12</sup> In addition, alongside Constant Dutilleux, Adalbert Cuvelier and Adolphe Grandguillaume, from 1853 onwards Corot produced *clichés-verres* or "glass images" (fig. 7). Through this new photographic technique<sup>13</sup> the artist was able to experiment with tonal values and with the graphic quality of the line, as can be seen in many of his late compositions, which are structured through screens of back-lit branches and leaves, as can be seen in the painting in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.

### **Solitude as an Image of Melancholy**

Various events in Corot's life may explain the subject depicted in *Solitude*, specifically, the sudden death of Constant Dutilleux on 15 October 1865. As noted above, Corot maintained an almost brotherly relationship with Dutilleux between 1847 and 1865 and his feeling of loss at his death may lie behind the origins of the painting, which he executed just a few months after that event. This seems to be suggested by Corot's biographer, Moreau-Nélaton, who felt that Corot dealt with his feelings of sadness resulting from the death of his best friend through the creation of the work, in the manner of a cathartic process.<sup>14</sup> In addition, in his classic monograph on the artist, Germain Bazin emphasised that the presentation of *Solitude* at the 1866 Salon concealed a veiled allusion to Dutilleux's death.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 8  
Jean-Paul Flandrin  
*Solitude*, n.d.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris

In addition to the painting in the Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, others seem to be associated with the death of individuals close to Corot. The first version of *Solitude* (painted in 1851 according to Robaut) coincides with the death of the artist's mother, Marie-Françoise Oberson at the beginning of that year. Corot, who remained unmarried throughout his life, lived at home with his mother until the year of her death, which profoundly affected him.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond the chronological coincidence between the two versions of *Solitude* and the loss of some of the people closest to Corot, the painting itself has an elegiac tone that has been observed by various critics. It was referred to by the Marquis de Villemer in his account of the 1866 Salon published in *Le Figaro*.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Marc de Montifaud, writing in *L'Artiste*, noted: "All is solemn, all is nascent; everything cries out: it begins. We are pervaded by the glow of this landscape, which subconsciously reminds us of the *Souvenir of Lake Nemi*; our minds set aside their troubles and prepare to experience the effects of this emotion arising from the forest's hidden places; its colour lingers on our gaze and its delightful somnolence lovingly submerges us in a single vague and nebulous mood."<sup>18</sup>

The female figure that is the principal motif in the composition and which looks back into the depths of the pictorial space is the element that seems to suggest this idea most overtly. Throughout his career Corot painted numerous compositions with a single, meditative figure in a virgin landscape (for example, his depictions of Hagar, Saint Jerome, Democritus and Saint Sebastian). This has been interpreted in terms of the artist's admiration for the spiritual fortitude of these figures, rather than as an explicit identification.<sup>19</sup> In the case of *Solitude*, Corot chose an unusual subject but one that had previously been painted by his friend Théodore Cauelle d'Aligny, and by Jean-Paul Flandrin (fig. 8). In both cases the title *Solitude* refers to the physical and mental state of the monks or hermits, secluded in the wildness of nature. Corot shared their approach through his use of a single seated figure before a virgin landscape but depicted a young woman rather than a male figure. By doing so he came close to Neo-classical representations of melancholy, such as the one by the painter Constance-Marie Charpentier (fig. 9), but more fully integrate the psychology of the figure and the shady, silent landscape.<sup>20</sup>

### Epilogue

Corot's late work, which largely comprises pseudo-mythological scenes set in tranquil natural surroundings, falls within the context of the bucolic compositions that first arose in the Renaissance with Giorgione and Titian and whose origins in poetry can be traced back



Fig. 9  
Constance-Marie Charpentier  
*Melancholy*, 1801  
Musée de Picardie, Amiens



Fig. 10  
Nicolas Poussin  
*Et in Arcadia ego*, 1637-1638  
Musée du Louvre, Paris

to Theocritus and Virgil in the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, continuing in the work of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Tasso and Jacopo Sannazaro.<sup>21</sup> Rejection of the urban, civilised work is a standard concept within the bucolic mode, as is the search for harmony in nature, in which shepherds play music on folk instruments and compete in writing poetry. The joyful nature of the theme is almost always accompanied by a melancholy awareness of the loss of the Golden Age or, in some cases, by an explicit allusion to fateful events such as exile or death. Poussin, whom Corot admired, located death at the centre of his reflection on Arcadia in his celebrated painting *Et in Arcadia ego* (fig. 10). With *Solitude*, Corot seems to continue the theme from a less epic, more intimate perspective characteristic of his particular approach.



Series of Lectures Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection

## Notes

- 1 No. 453 in the catalogue. Corot also exhibited *Afternoon* (no. 452) on that occasion, as well as an etching entitled *Environs of Rome* (no. 3116).
- 2 Letter from Jules Lacroix to Alfred Robaut, 25 February 1888, quoted in Étienne Moreau-Nélaton: "L'histoire de Corot et de ses œuvres". In Alfred Robaut : *L'Œuvre de Corot. Catalogue raisonné et illustré*, vol. I, Paris 1905, p. 131.
- 3 Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 1611) [Robaut 824].
- 4 Robaut 843.
- 5 Robaut 2854.
- 6 Robaut 844.
- 7 Corot produced two replicas of *Solitude* in 1867-1868 in which he emphasised its pastoral nature through the inclusion of goats and cows. One of these versions was recently auctioned at Christie's New York on 8 November 1999 (lot 106). The whereabouts of the other, originally owned by Paul Gallimard, is now unknown. See Louis Vauxcelles: "Collection de M. Paul Gallimard", in *Les Arts*. Paris, no. 81, September 1908, p. 10, pl. p. 15; referred to as *Pond at Coubron*.
- 8 Charles Blanc: "Salon de 1866". In *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, vol. XXI, 1 July 1866, p. 38.
- 9 See: Camille Corot: *Carnet 9*, ca. 1855-65; repr. in Camille Corot: *Carnet de Dessins suivis des lettres d'Italie*. Paris, Éditions de l'Amateur, 1996, p. 36.
- 10 Henri Dumesnil: *Corot. Souvenirs intimes*, Paris, Rapilly, 1875, p. 48.
- 11 Statement by the artist recorded by Mme Aviat in Méry-sur-Seine in 1870; published in Germain Bazin, *Corot* (2nd, revised and expanded ed.), Paris, Pierre Tisné, 1951, pp. 91-92.
- 12 Deborah Johnson: "Confluence and Influence: Photography and the Japanese Print in 1850", in *The Rise of Landscape Painting in France. Corot to Monet*. [exhib.cat.]. Manchester (NH), The Currier Gallery of Art, 1991, pp. 78-92. See also: Aaron Scharf: *Arte y fotografía*, Madrid, Alianza, 1994, pp. 93-97.
- 13 Made in the following way: a glass plate is covered with colloidon. On it, the artist makes grooves with a point in the manner of an etching. Paper, made light-sensitive with silver nitrate and gallic acid, is then placed under the plate, and exposed to light. A negative is produced that is fixed with sodium hyposulfite. The negative paper is then soaked in melted wax to make it transparent. It is then exposed to light again to obtain a positive image.
- 14 Moreau-Nélaton, op. cit., pp. 226-227.
- 15 Bazin, op. cit., p. 23.
- 16 Corot noted: "I was prepared for the blow that has befallen me; but it has greatly affected me. From today I return to the studio; work will do me good, I hope." (*Catalogue des autographes de Corot*, no. 26 bis. In Robaut, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 333).
- 17 Marqués de Villemer: "Le Salon". In *Le Figaro*. Paris, 13 May 1866, p. 2.
- 18 Marc de Montifaud: "Salon de 1866". In *L'Artiste. Beaux-Arts et Belles-Lettres*. Paris, 1866, vol. I, 15 May, p. 177.
- 19 Galassi, Peter: *Corot in Italy. Open-Air Painting and the Classical-Landscape Tradition*. New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1991, p. 57.
- 20 *Solitude*, furthermore, differs from other depictions on the theme of melancholy by Corot himself, for example, the painting now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen [Robaut 1267], in which a female figure in contemporary dress looks directly at the viewer.
- 21 In a letter to Abel Osmond of 2 December 1825, Corot noted: "Tell your uncle A[ndré] that I will not abandon Virgil"; repr. in Camille Corot: *Carnet de Dessins...*, op. cit., p. 59. Years later, in a letter to Ernestine Clerc de Landresse of 16 April 1853, Corot referred to the fact that he had lost his trilingual edition (in Greek, Latin and French) of Theocritus' *Idylls*, published by Gail in 1792, and that he intended to acquire another copy (see *Catalogue des autographes de Corot*, no. 46. In Robaut, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 334). With thanks to Guillermo Solana for drawing my attention to this crucial but little studied aspect of Corot's work.

# The Madonna of the Village.

## World War II and the Rescue of Works by Chagall

Clara Marcellán



Fig. 1  
Varian Fry, Marc Chagall, Hiram Bingham IV  
and Bella Chagall. Gordes, 1941  
Ida Chagall Archives



Fig. 2  
Marc Chagall  
*The Madonna of the Village*, 1938-1942  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid  
[\[+ info\]](#)

Fig. 3  
X-ray of *The Madonna of the Village*,  
turned on its left side

Gordes, South of France, 1941 (fig. 1). Chagall's painting *The Madonna of the Village* is to be seen on an easel, located outdoors on a rocky patch of ground near a rural house. Grouped around it are Marc Chagall, the creator of the work; Bella, his wife; Hiram Bingham IV, the US Consul in Marseilles; and Varian Fry, envoy of the Emergency Rescue Committee in France.<sup>1</sup> Fry is the only person who looks at the painting rather than at the camera. He had arrived in Marseilles a few months earlier with a list of two hundred artists and intellectuals persecuted by the Nazis who were to be helped to escape from Europe. Among them was Chagall, who would be accompanied by *The Madonna of the Village* (fig. 2) on his eventful flight to New York, together with the other works that the artist fought to save from confiscation or destruction. If objects could speak, we might ask Chagall's painting about the places it visited, the people it saw and what it heard during the summer of 1941, when, along with a further five hundred works by the artist, it was detained in Spain for five weeks. The following article is an attempt to reconstruct that journey.

### Biography of the *Madonna of the Village*

Marc Chagall added his signature and two dates to the bottom left corner of the painting ("mArc ChAgAll 1938-942"), referring to its starting and completion dates. From x-rays of the painting (fig. 3) we know that the canvas had a previous existence, as the artist had tried out on it at least two other compositions, finally painting *The Madonna of the Village* on top. Between 1938 and 1941, the date of the photograph taken in Gordes, the canvas accompanied Chagall to the various places in which he lived during those years. In 1938 he was in Paris, while also spending various periods on a farm at Villentroy in Indre-et-Loire. In 1939 the artist began to be concerned about his possible arrest and decided to move to Saint-Dyé-sur-Loire. As Meret Meyer noted,<sup>2</sup> Chagall collected his paintings from his Paris studio, removed the stretchers and took the works to Saint-Dyé in a taxi with the help of his daughter Ida.

On 10 May 1940 the family moved to the south of France as a result of the advance of the German troops through the Low Countries and Belgium, which threatened the security of the north of the country. They settled in Gordes in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region where Chagall purchased the house (a former Catholic girls school) that appears in the photograph. Marc, Bella and Ida made a final trip to Saint-Dyé to collect works by the artist and bring them by van to Gordes.

During the winter of 1940-1941 Chagall resumed work on *The Madonna of the Village*. This is evident from the photograph, which also allows us to know the state of progress of the composition at that time and the modifications that it underwent before acquiring its final appearance as we see it today. For example, the canvas was initially



Fig. 4  
 Marc Chagall  
*White Crucifixion*, 1938  
 The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago  
 Gift of Alfred S. Alschuler

around twenty centimetres taller but was cut down at the lower edge. By removing this strip Chagall removed the motif of the cockerel, symbol of sun and fire. From the 1930s this bird is linked in Chagall's work with pairs of lovers and can thus be associated with love. In addition, it could refer to the bird sacrificed on the Day of Atonement in Jewish tradition. The removal of this motif from the composition altered the relative importance of the three layers into which the composition is structured, reducing the earthly zone painted in grey-brown tones at the Virgin's feet and giving more importance to the blue area of the sky and the upper level in yellow that is filled with angels.

The photograph also acts as witness to the painting's "social life". Chagall showed it to Hiram Bingham and Varian Fry during their visit at a particularly tense moment, and the three are portrayed alongside it as if they were guests received by the painting. The ascribed meaning that Christopher Green<sup>3</sup> gives to the canvas takes account of the importance of its creation in the context of Europe at war: the image of the Virgin is notably similar to the votive images of Catholic tradition that were considered to offer protection against catastrophes. Chagall had already made use of Christian iconography on numerous occasions, for example in *White Crucifixion* (fig. 4), a slightly earlier work in which Christ represents the suffering of the Jewish people. This group of works can thus be seen as a response to his own situation as a refugee.

### Rescuing Chagall

In December 1940 the Emergency Rescue Committee located Chagall in Gordes. As a Jew and a "Degenerate" artist he was clearly a target for Nazi persecution. Varian Fry and Hiram Bingham conveyed to the artist the invitation extended by Alfred Barr, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, to exhibit his work in that museum, a fact that would facilitate his departure from France. In addition, mention should be made of the efforts of the Fund for Jewish Refugee Writers, which contacted Barr in the first place and collected the necessary funding for travel and visas.<sup>4</sup> On 7 May 1941 Marc and Bella Chagall left behind their daughter Ida and embarked on their journey, the final destination of which was New York. Both crossed the French-Spanish border by train via Canfranc,<sup>5</sup> then continued on, with a stop in Madrid, to Lisbon, where they arrived on 11 May. In Lisbon they waited until mid-June to embark for New York (fig. 5).

### Rescuing the works

In addition to the dangers to be expected when crossing frontiers in a continent at war, another issue was the transportation and protection of Chagall's large amount of valuable luggage. It consisted of around



Fig. 5  
 Map of France, Spain and Portugal, showing  
 the route taken by the Chagall family before  
 arriving in New York

six hundred kilos of paintings, some completed and others underway, as well as gouaches and drawings, which he had been able to gather together and pack up in Marseilles in April 1941 when the trip to New York seemed a likely prospect. "Through a complicated series of manoeuvres and operations carried out with great skill by Ida and her husband, Chagall had managed to have shipped into Spain, awaiting transport to Lisbon and America, trunks and packing-cases containing most of his output in recent years."<sup>6</sup> Almost all the biographies of the artist recount a piece of information which is still, however, slightly mysterious: apparently the paintings, which travelled separately, were detained in Spain for at least five weeks. Why was this the case? Who knew about them there and about Chagall's trip? Who was involved in releasing the paintings?

Benjamin Harshav was able to make a number of suggestions regarding this issue on the basis of the account offered by Michel Gordey, Ida Chagall's first husband. Gordey suggested that the luggage probably went to Madrid accompanied by François Piétri, the French Ambassador there and a friend of Chagall's.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear who was behind the unexpected embargo of the works in Madrid that prevented them from continuing on to Lisbon. Sydney Alexander has suggested that the German Embassy ordered them to be detained due to pressure from the Gestapo,<sup>8</sup> but his reasons for this suspicion are unknown. Like Jackie Wullschlager,<sup>9</sup> Alexander referred to the possible mediation of a curator at the Museo del Prado who succeeded in having the luggage released. Neither author provides a specific name, however.

Looking at the list of specialist-administrative staff at the Prado at that date, only two names are possible: Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor, the Museum's Director, and Javier Sánchez Cantón, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of Paintings. We have no evidence of a direct connection between Chagall and either of these two men: in the summer of 1934 (by which date Sánchez Cantón was already working at the Prado) Chagall had visited the Museum but there is no record of any correspondence or contact between the two men. However, there is evidence of contact between Piétri and the two museum employees as they had coincided at official events. Another possible connection between Chagall and the museum's Director and Deputy Director was Wifredo Lam, who studied with Álvarez de Sotomayor. Chagall knew Lam in Paris and both fled Europe with the help of Varian Fry and Hiram Bingham.

Chagall and his wife Bella had a lengthy wait in Lisbon and one marked by uncertainty regarding the fate of the works of art. In a letter of 1 June sent to Solomon R. Guggenheim, Chagall wrote: "I am already in Lisbon and am waiting for my paintings which are still on the way."<sup>10</sup> On 10 June Chagall took his leave of Hiram Bingham in a letter, indicating that the issue of the luggage seemed to have been resolved: "This is to inform you that we are embarking today for Monsanto.



Fig. 6  
 News item published in the ABC of 28 June 1941

This is completely unexpected. The paintings have just arrived and we have just been offered a cabin."<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to know what really happened to the works as Customs forms of that period have not survived. Sidney Alexander recounted that when Chagall arrived in New York he found a note from the Spanish Customs stating that the luggage continued to be detained in Spain due to an administrative problem, namely that belongings had to be personally identified by their owners before sending, as a consequence of which the agent appointed by Marc and Bella could not carry out the task. Citing Sidney Alexander and Franz Meyer as a source, Ziva Amishai-Maisels considers that there were two delays, the first in Madrid on the orders of the German Embassy, and the second in Lisbon on the orders of the Spanish authorities.<sup>12</sup>

### Ida takes action

Varian Fry had been unable to obtain visas for Ida and her husband Michel who lived in Marseilles between March and May of that year. In June they moved to the house at Gordes that Marc and Bella had left in April. On 16 June the two were deprived of French nationality. The need to flee from Europe was urgent, as was that of recovering Ida's father's works (Chagall had made contact with his daughter on his arrival in New York, only to learn that the luggage had not been sent). Ida, followed a few days later by Michel, managed to cross the French border from Gordes. Michel was arrested but rapidly released, again through the intervention of the French Ambassador in Spain, François Piétri.

Once in Madrid, Ida and Michel battled with the administrative issues in question and turned to contacts for help. As a result they were able to rescue the luggage. Around this time Piétri had various meetings with Serrano Suñer, Franco's Minister for Foreign Affairs. The two signed a reciprocal agreement between the French and Spanish governments relating to works of art, documents and Spanish objects of historical value (fig. 6).<sup>13</sup> No documentation survives regarding these meetings and we can only speculate whether the situation of Ida and Michel and that of Chagall's works was discussed during these meetings of high-level Spanish, French and German officials.

In New York, Chagall impatiently waited for news from Madrid: "We have already received a heap of telegrams concerning our daughter. That disturbed our vacation and we all hurried to return to New York to try to obtain the visas that our daughter and son-in-law lack."<sup>14</sup> On 29 July Chagall wrote to his friend Yosef Opatoshu: "We are worried about my daughter and her husband, we still don't know where they are."<sup>15</sup> Chagall did not receive definite information regarding Ida and Michel until September, writing again to Opatoshu: "The children, God knows, swim with the Spanish boat 'Navemare' via Cuba."<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 7  
 Interior of the exhibition *Chagall* held at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1946. On the right wall is *White Crucifixion* and *The Madonna of the Village*

### The works cross the Atlantic

Before leaving Marseilles, Michel had booked two passages on a ship, partly paid for by his parents (Chagall's attempts to raise money in New York had been unsuccessful). This cargo ship with a capacity for twelve passengers took 1,200 Jews ready to flee from Europe at any price (some paid up to 1,000 dollars for the trip). The sanitary conditions were so poor that the American consul in Seville denied the ship permission to sail to the US. Finally the 'Navemar' received the necessary authorization in Cadiz and docked in Lisbon for passengers to renew their out-of-date visas. Sidney Alexander indicated that it was there that Chagall's precious luggage with his works was loaded, accompanied by Michel and Ida.<sup>17</sup>

Accounts by some of the passengers indicate that on the deck of the ship there was a huge box measuring around 183 x 183 x 91 centimetres, which a red-headed woman with blue eyes (Ida) constantly guarded.<sup>18</sup> Had they not travelled on deck under Ida's supervision all of Chagall's paintings would have been lost as the luggage in the hold rotted due to damp. It was declared insanitary by the Brooklyn Port Authorities and thrown overboard. On 13 September news of the ship's arrival was noted on page 19 of *The New York Times* with the headline: "Ship, Packed like a Cattle Boat with 769 Exiles, Here From Spain/Freighter Docks after one of the Strangest Voyages of War [...]" German submarines torpedoed and sunk the 'Navemar' during its return passage to Europe. After its eventful journey *The Madonna of the Village* was reunited with its creator who began work on it again, completing it in 1942, probably before receiving his first major commission in the US for the backdrops and costumes for the ballet *Aleko* directed by Léonide Massine.

In 1946 The Museum of Modern Art in New York in collaboration with The Art Institute of Chicago devoted a major retrospective to the work of Chagall, which was the first to be held in the US. It gave concrete form to the invitation that the artist had received six years earlier and which had enabled him to obtain a visa and flee from Europe. *The Madonna of the Village* was the mute witness to that long journey in which it and other works by the artist were obliged to experience the hazards of travel in a continent at war in order to finally be displayed with honour in the new world capital of art.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The Emergency Rescue Committee was established in the US in 1940 with the aim of helping refugees trapped in Europe. It was set up by political activists and committed intellectuals and enjoyed the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of the US President of the day.
- 2 Meret Meyer wrote a biography of his grandfather Marc Chagall which was first published in Pierre Schneider's book, *Chagall à travers le siècle*, Paris, Flammarion, 1995.
- 3 Christopher Green, *The European Avant-Gardes. Art in France and Western Europe 1904 – ca. 1945: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*. London, Zwemmer, 1995.
- 4 Numerous surviving letters written by Dina Glanz (Fund for Jewish Refugee Writers) or Curt Valentin request financial assistance from Solomon R. Guggenheim, Hilla Rebay, Helena Rubenstein and Walter C. Arensberg, who acted as patrons and protectors of the artist.
- 5 In his account "El oro de Canfranc" Ramón J. Campo reconstructed the flight of Jews through Spain, specifically via the station of Canfranc through which Chagall probably passed.
- 6 Sidney Alexander, *Marc Chagall. A Biography*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978, p. 327.
- 7 Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and His Times. A Documentary Narrative*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 503.
- 8 Alexander, op. cit., p. 327.
- 9 Jackie Wullschlager, *Chagall. Love and Exile*. London, Penguin Books, 2008, p. 398.
- 10 Harshav, op. cit., p. 500.
- 11 Letter reproduced in "The Rescue of Marc Chagall", an educational documentary made by the Wyman Institute. <http://www.wymaninstitute.org/education/>
- 12 Ziva Amishai-Maisels: "Chagall's 'White Crucifixion'", in *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*. 1991, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 140.
- 13 In *ABC*, Madrid, 28 June 1941, p. 3. The article can be consulted on <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/>
- 14 Letter from Marc Chagall to Hilla Rebay, June-July 1941, Harshav, op. cit., p. 511.
- 15 Harshav, op. cit., p. 512.
- 16 Harshav, op. cit., p. 512.
- 17 Alexander, op. cit., p. 330.
- 18 See Harshav, op. cit., p. 504.
- 19 With thanks to Carla Bianchi, curatorial assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for helping us confirming *The Madonna of the Village*'s inclusion on the 1946 show celebrated in that museum.

# “Art comes out to engage with life”

Blanca Uría Prado

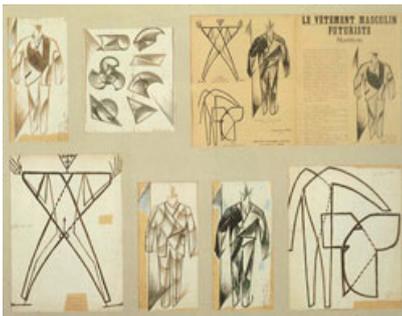


Fig. 1  
Giacomo Balla  
*The Male Futurist Suit*, 1914  
Six studies in ink on paper and a manifesto  
printed on paper and laid down on card  
Courtesy Galleria Tega, Milan



Fig. 2  
Giacomo Balla  
*Patriotic Demonstration*, 1915  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 3  
Giacomo Balla in his studio holding  
*Futurist Flowers green, navy blue  
and blue*, ca. 1931

In 1909 five painters – Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrá, Luigi Russolo and Gino Severini – joined forces to throw down a challenge, once more declaring the decline and death of old art and once more proclaiming the need for change and freedom. However, as Christopher Green noted, few movements had shown such a level of commitment as that professed by Futurism in Italy.<sup>1</sup> The Futurists began by rejecting the art of the past and terminated by denying their own previous identity. Art came out to engage with life. In the *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*, Balla and Depero recounted that Marinetti had looked at their assemblages and said: “art becomes art-action through such optimism, aggressiveness, possession, penetration, joy and brutal reality in art”.<sup>2</sup> In 1913 Balla auctioned off all his earlier work, and hence his earlier life. In 1915 he declared that he had died and had been reborn as *FuturBalla* or *BallaFuturista*. He painted, sculpted, wrote, made frames, clothes, chairs, and more (fig. 1). Balla designed a new vision of life, wishing to “reconstruct the universe by making it more joyful, completely remaking it.”<sup>3</sup>

The Futurists looked for a new vision of the modern world. In *Patriotic Demonstration* (fig. 2) Balla depicts a political protest through its “abstract equivalents.” The colours and forms are simplified in order to acquire a symbolic value but nonetheless continue to represent reality. This is an aesthetic language of abstraction and simplification of forms that still remains accessible, aiming to attract the spectator and to appeal to the widest possible audience. The colours of the Italian flag stand out, making it clear from the start that the painting deals with the issue of identity and is a call to popular unity. It is worth remembering that in the first Futurist Manifesto, published in *Le Figaro* on 11 February 1909, Marinetti wrote: “Let us sing to the great masses stirred up by work, pleasure or rebellion: let us sing to the multicoloured and polyphonic tides of the revolutions in modern capital cities.”<sup>4</sup>

Alongside this propagandistic purpose that is characteristic of Futurism, Balla’s work is also notable for its distinctive, individual nature (fig. 3). According to his fellow Futurist, Umberto Boccioni: “everything is transformed by the dynamic idea, interpreted according to his abstract sensibility.”<sup>5</sup> Balla did not merely offer a descriptive account of the pro-Interventionist demonstration: rather, with the simplicity that characterises good publicity material, he appealed to the viewer’s sensibility in order to win him or her around to this viewpoint. The work conveys pride, reflected in the colours of the flag, and strength, evident in the speed of the lines that move the united crowd in a single direction. Balla’s works reveal a desire to achieve a visual synthesis between form, sentiment and ideal. He represents the energy of the crowd.

The Italian monarch, head of the House of Savoy, was a known Interventionist. Christopher Green believes that the introduction of a royalist motif in the centre of the composition indicates that the protest



Fig. 4  
Giacomo Balla  
*Demonstration in the Piazza del Quirinale  
(Forming the Shape of Viva Italia)*, 1915  
Private collection, Rome

in question is the one convened by Gabriele D'Annunzio on 21 March 1915 in the Piazza del Quirinale in Rome, calling for Italy's entry in World War I (fig. 4). The King lent over the balcony of the royal palace and shouted out "Viva Italia", thus supporting the message of the event. The Moebius strip functions here as the emblem of the house of Savoy but also as a metaphor of war awakening Italy, a country that considered itself inferior to the rest of Europe. The Futurists longed for a new and glorious future, no longer looking backwards and with its melancholy recollections of Italy's great and glorious historical and artistic past. War signified the destruction of previous decadence and the possibility of starting anew, prepared for the modern world.

Balla found a new means of communication in language and signs. Manifestoes, which are works of art in themselves, are another example of Futurism's aim of invading all areas of life (fig. 5). In the first Manifesto words create images, which in turn provoke sensations. Words acquire a visual weight that sets in motion a play of metamorphoses, all intended to activate the reader's imagination on the basis of successive images. In *Patriotic Demonstration* we see the visual equivalent of the acceleration that is evident in real events of this type and which brings to mind the run-up before a high-risk rump: that impulse prior to the moment of taking off into space, in this case hurling into war in order to change everything.

The First Manifesto is filled with metaphors in which everything gathers speed, jumps and flies away from the past, "flinging its challenge to the stars".<sup>6</sup> Marinetti exclaims: "Let us emerge from wisdom as if from a horrible wound and hurl ourselves like fruit ripened by pride at the huge, twisted mouth of the wind!" The Futurists approach the "three snorting machines in order to lovingly caress their torrid breasts", while the "great sweep of madness" drives them along the streets. In addition to this whirlwind action we find an evocation of colour and texture used as a weapon against neutrality and nostalgia for the past. Dawn is "the splendour of the sun's red sword", while rivers are "glittering in the sun with sparks like a knife". Noise is also present in the propellers of aeroplanes that "whine in the wind" and in the "huge rumbling of the enormous double-decker trams leaping by, streaked with multi-coloured lights."<sup>7</sup>

*Patriotic Demonstration* reveals the artist's desire to represent the scene as an overall effect of noise, colour and movement in order to convey the sensation produced by all these elements. In previous visual investigations Balla had aimed to convey the effect produced by a passing car. The result was to make the viewer's eye traverse the canvas, following the black lines of force that represent movement in space and the sensation that we experience when something passes us by at high speed (fig. 6). Such compositions can be associated with the advances in photography made by Étienne Jules Marey in France



Fig. 5  
Giacomo Balla  
*Manifesto for the Exhibition at the Galleria  
Angelelli*, 1915  
Private collection



Fig. 6  
Giacomo Balla  
*Car Speed + Light*, 1913  
Moderna Museet, Stockholm



Fig. 7  
Giacomo Balla  
*Iridescent Compenetration no. 7*, 1912  
Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna  
e Contemporanea, Turin

and the experiments of the Bragaglia brothers in Italy, which, together with scientific advances and research into light, changed previously held concepts of light and space. Balla came close to the style of Severini who focused on effects of light in his "iridescent compenetrations" (fig. 7). This was a moment of intensive technical research into the potential of painting as an expression of the new reality discovered by science. Nonetheless, the spectator's viewpoint continued to be a distant one.

In December 1915 the exhibition *Fu Balla e futurista* took place at the Galleria Angelelli in Rome. In it and for the first time, Balla exhibited his group of paintings on Interventionist demonstrations. Six years had passed since *Le Figaro* had published the first Futurist Manifesto written by Marinetti, and five years since Umberto Boccioni, Balla's pupil, convinced him to join the group. The political climate in Rome and Milan had become even more agitated. April saw further Interventionist demonstrations and Balla was arrested together with Marinetti and Benito Mussolini, a name that would come to attract increasing attention.

In his series of demonstrations, particularly in *Patriotic Demonstration*, Balla's painting reveals a shift of direction. The prospect of involvement in the war offered him a new range of forms, movements and colours and a new motivation. If this work were any larger it would seem aggressive, given the way that large flags and vibrant colours can suggest moments of pro-war fanaticism, death and destruction. In fact, its actual size (101 x 137.5 cm) means that it perfectly envelops and attracts the viewer in a subtle manner, encompassing the spectator's viewpoint. The centrifugal movement of the lines of force direct our gaze towards the centre while the movement engulfs and absorbs us, breaking down the barriers between the pictorial space and our position outside of it. Balla no longer requires us to experience movement, but rather that we become part of that energy. Movement and speed revitalise and rejuvenate, looking to the future represented in the dazzling blue that crosses the composition diagonally. The sensation of instability and dissent that the work conveys brings to mind Umberto Eco and his definition of art when he said that: "man in his entirety, in conclusion, should get used to never getting used to things" and that "art, in reality, has never done more than conform to the rhythm of science".<sup>8</sup> Art offers an appropriate vision of the world that helps man to locate himself in it at times of change and transformation. Its function is thus that of not allowing the public to settle down into habits and of continually offering new solutions and drastic changes. That liberating impulse, which was so pronounced in Futurism, meant that the early 20th Century avant-gardes renewed and updated visual language with results that remain in force today.

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**Notes**

- 1 Christopher Green: *The European Avant-Gardes. Art in France and Western Europe 1904-1945: The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection*. London, Zwemmer, 1995, p. 15.
- 2 Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero: "Reconstrucción Futurista del Universo" in Ester Coen and María Teresa Ocaña: *Futurismo 1909-1916*. [Exhib.cat., Barcelona, Museu Picasso]. Barcelona Àmbit, 1996, p. 259.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid, p. 213.
- 5 Ibid, p. 153.
- 6 Ibid. p. 214.
- 7 Ibid, p. 212.
- 8 Umberto Eco: *La Definición del Arte*. Barcelona, Ediciones Martínez Roca S.A., 1970, p. 220.