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THE ART OF QUOTATION

Forms and Themes
of the Art Quote
1990–2010

λογος

He, in turn, has been accused of being sexist for his early paintings featuring women measuring enormous breasts and other images with pornographic content.

In Currin's work, the references to old master works are manifold, especially in a series of nudes in front of black backgrounds. Generally referred to as the "Cranach-paintings" for their monochrome dark backgrounds[251], art critics have often overlooked that the references in these paintings are much more directly related to the work of Hans Baldung Grien, Albrecht Dürer's pupil, than to Lucas Cranach the Elder.

The painting entitled "Three Friends" from 1998 is a fitting example for this presupposition. A group of three female nudes is standing in front of a monochrome black background on a patch of grass with small white flowers. While the connection to Lucas Cranach's "Three Graces" or "The Judgement of Paris" may certainly appear plausible – presumably because of the characteristic threesome, the familiar background[252] and the slightly stiff postures of the models – closer inspection reveals that Currin's figures stem from a work by Hans Baldung Grien.

The reclining pose of the sitting woman in Currin's "Three Friends" is a mirror-inverted rendition of Grien's chiaroscuro drawing on tinted paper called "Witches' Sabbath" (1514) at the Louvre in Paris[253]. Baldung's drawing shows three witches amidst their magical accoutrements that pay tribute to their dark powers and sinister characters. One witch is half-lying on the ground trying to inflame a stick with the fiery gases protruding from her anus; a symbol for the degeneration of civil and human inhibitions. The witches' strangely twisted anatomies and their gestures touching themselves inappropriately mark them as perverse and grotesque women. Baldung's detailed account caricatures the subject of the classical nude with a moralising impetus.

It strikes as peculiar that Currin has chosen, of all sources, a study of witches in order to substitute them with the classical depiction of beautiful, good-natured, sensuous women. In Currin's painting, Baldung's poses are re-used but the women's looks are substituted with sublime, almost ethereal looks. The figures now have contemporary faces and are graceful beauties, despite their anatomically incorrect bodies featuring hanging breasts[254], swollen bellies and

muscular legs. Their elongated features entwine the figures with each other in a deeply intimate, trusting way.

The figure on the ground is looking rather playfully behind the legs of the other two females. The muscular woman on the left is placing her head like a child on the upper body of the central redhead. While the weird bending of her elongated neck recalls the mannerist Parmigianino, it is especially her raised elbow that may have been taken from a Cranach dipytch, perhaps his "Adam" from 1528, who is doubtfully scratching his head as a reaction to Eve's offering of the apple on the corresponding panel.

In Currin's painting though, this female version of Adam is not at all doubting the situation, but is instead finding shelter on the red head's upper body and potentially even bowing to her graceful autonomy. Like a mother, the redhead stands at the centre of the image and tenderly caresses the sitting woman's head. This maternal figure does in fact resemble the artist's wife, Rachel Feinstein, a brunette with long curly hair with whom Currin had his first of three children in 2000. The thumb and small finger of her caressing hand are splayed out, a gesture that is strikingly similar to Lucas Cranach the Elder's panel of "Venus and Cupid" (1531).

The relationship of the depicted women and their respective gestures seems to play out with the maternal Venus/Eve in the centre holding the female resembling the features of "Adam" at her breast, smiling benevolently over the twisted "witch" figure on the ground taken from Baldung's drawing. By patting her head, the central redhead seems to treat her like a child, perhaps accepting the playfulness of potential evil on one side and the comforting shelter she is able to provide on the other side.

The most interesting part of this painting is the enigmatic play with hand gestures. An upside down triangle is formed by the different hands which changes between a stroking gesture (Venus/Eve), a luring one (Adam) and a palm that seems to be holding off something (witch). This gives a wide range of indications of

the complex relationships between the figures as they seem to symbolize the cycle of temptation, seduction and repression.

Currin's figures are not only painted with an old master technique, but also imitate the posture of the Eves and Venuses in Cranach's works. Insofar, the viewer is tricked into looking at a painting by Currin whereby consciously being reminded of older styles, subjects or compositions. Currin refers to Cranach in terms of his painting technique of sharp contrasts between the black background and the light bodies, but re-uses Baldung's anatomical solutions for the postures. The artist works eclectically and chooses what he needs from both precursors. Baldung's witches become Currin's friends, vulgarity turns to the sublime and the good substitutes evil. Hence, this is not only a substitution of figures, but also a substitution of form, from Baldung's drawn caricature of women to Currin's imitation of the painted masterwork depicting the classical nude.

With this technical and compositional trick of reversal Currin manages to confuse what his classically composed, but contemporary looking figures really are about. When visiting the Royal Academy on the occasion of a Cranach retrospective, he was quoted to have said the following about Cranach's painting "Charity" (1534) that is very much valid for Currin's own practice:

"What Cranach does here is combine almost naïve craft painting in the landscape with the most mind-boggling, intense, old-master technique. And there's almost a lack of concern for anatomical correctness and proportion, it's all about the needs of the picture which is what makes it so great. It's also just so morally good, and tender without being sentimental or cloying and I love Cranach for that, it's something I aspire to in my painting. It's a pretty irresistible picture."[255]

Similar to Currin's method of amalgamating source images, the work by the last artist of this chapter, British painter **Glenn Brown [Illustration 18]**, is equally inspired by the use of manifold sources from high art as well as from low popular culture, particularly science fiction illustrations. However, there are fundamental

ary and boring, they're seen as never leading to any kind of excitement in new art. So I realized that high culture in the form of masterpieces is kind of my vice. Not in the sense that I make them, but I am enthusiastic about them." John Currin quoted in an edited transcript based on a conversation between John Currin and William Stover. Stover, William / Brutvan, Cheryl: John Currin Selects, Boston 2003, p. 24.

250 The dates of this series of nudes suggest the possibility that Currin visited the exhibition "The Print in the North: The Age of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden" at *the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1997*, which included prints from Martin Schongauer to Hans Baldung Grien. *Baldung's woodcuts were also published in the accompanying essay by Boorsch, Suzanne, and M. Orenstein, Nadine*: The Print in the North: The Age of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 54, no. 4 (Spring 1997).

251 "I do think that people responded very positively to the nudes that look like Lucas Cranach figures because, for the first time, I didn't feel I had to have an 'idea'. I think this opened my work up to a much more direct way of thinking, in spite of or maybe because of a more methodical technique." John Currin in an interview with Rochelle Steiner. In: John Currin, Chicago 2003, p. 78.

252 The dark forest backdrop in Cranach's images often served as surface for inscriptions. Currin has commented about it that "… in old German art, the void is frightening, evil. It's where the devil creeps in. That's why I like German art.", but in his subsequent work he has often used white or very lightly coloured backgrounds. *John Currin quoted in Plagens, Peter: Brilliance of Bust. Newsweek, Volume 142, Issue 25, p. 50.*

253 As exemplified by Jacobi, Antonia: Frauenakte von Hans Baldung Grien und John Currin: Ein Vergleich, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2006, p. 69. See also Urs Graf's copy of Baldung's drawing in the Albertina, Vienna, from 1514. For the reference to Baldung see also Rosenblum, Robert: John Currin and the American Grotesque. In Dahlgren, Kari (ed.): John Currin, Chicago 2003, p. 19.

254 For the particular form of the hanging breasts of the central figure, see the figure on the bottom in Otto Dix's painting "Three Women" which might have inspired Currin.

255 John Currin quoted in Sumpter, Helen: John Currin on Lucas Cranach, Time Out London, 15. April 2008.

ILLUSTRATION 18

Jean-Honoré Fragonard
Portrait Mlle Guimard (recently discovered to be Marie-Anne-Eléonore de Grave), 1769
Oil on canvas
82 × 65 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris

© bpk | RMN | Photographers: A. Dequier / M. Bard

Glenn Brown
Filth, 2004
Oil on wood
133 × 94,3 cm

© Courtesy the artist and Gagosian. Photo: Rob Mc Keever

differences between Currin's and Brown's works. While Currin depicts figures that still bear a natu-ralistic resemblance to the human body, Brown's figures have a morbid, fantastic, and, as has been formulated, "superrealist"[256] appearance.

This is the case with Brown's painting bearing the rather unflattering title "Filth" from 2004. It refers to one of the Rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard's series of fifteen "Portraits de Fantaisie". Researchers assumed that it features Marie-Madeleine Mlle Guimard[257] in 1769 (at the time, Fragonard was courting Mlle Guimard and she later became one of his commissioners), but the recent discovery of a drawing by Fragonard in 2012 on the art market identified the sitter as Marie Anne Eléonore de Grave[258]. Before the portrait was identified as Mme de Grave, a resemblance to the central female pilgrim on Antoine Watteau's painting "The Embarkation for Cythere" from 1717 was also suggested[259].

During the 1760s, Fragonard was deeply influenced by his growing interest in theatre and some of his portraits were in fact inspired by staging his sitters in a theatrical manner. Fragonard's "Portraits de Fantaisie" characteristically centre the sitter's head in the middle of the canvas from which diagonally composed body axes turn away or forward. The sitters are twisting their bodies in a state of heightened alertness and expectant expressions towards a point beyond the picture frame.

Fragonard's imaginary portraits mark one of the most interesting phases in his development of painting techniques as he created these in opposition to depictions bearing resemblance to their sitters; a debate that was largely discussed by philosophic contemporaries of the time, particularly by Diderot. Pondering about the question what the difference between a fantasy portrait and a real portrait was, the conclusion resumed was that imaginary portraits dealt less with the sitter's real appearance with the painting technique and style executed in the portrait by the artist. Consequently, the way in which a portrait was painted revealed more about the artist than about the sitter and henceforth the painting became a document of the artistic self-portrait.

In a certain way, this abstraction from the portrait as a means of representing a person could be transferred to express the distinct painting style of Glenn Brown. In his reference to Fragonard, he takes into account the entire novelty of depiction explored by Fragonard in regards to the conventions of portraiture painting in 18th century France. Stating in an interview with the author, Brown spoke about this 'stand-in' function of painting when talking about the intentionally cloudy, semi-transparent eyeballs that allow an undisturbed gaze on his rendition of the sitter:

"The eyes are indeed the first things we look at and we try to find out what they are communicating, what expression do they have? But I was less keen on having the figure speak back. Moreover, I was interested what I had to say as an artist about the strange colours and the idea of appropriation as well as the idea of the figure becoming more abstract. To that end I looked at the work by Picasso and Matisse to see what they had did. If you look at their paintings, almost the first thing they do is take the eyes out. Neither of them wanted you to look at the figures, they weren't interested in the actual sitter but in themselves. In a sense, the 20th century is a selfish century where artists are actually depicting themselves, not the woman in the chair in front of them."[260]

Fragonard's 'hinting' is a result of having closely studied conventional portraiture in order to contribute something completely new to the medium through its painterly execution, emphasizing the bodily gestures of his sitters, their heightened accoutrements, and the colouring of certain details. He may have also begun with a more allegorical intention for his imaginative portraits, as they depict famous figures from the field of the arts, who were required to slip in and out of roles on stage.

In terms of colours, Fragonard's painting palette and technique was heavily influenced by Rubens whose works he had copied in 1767 at the Palais de Luxembourg. There are striking similarities to Rubens in Fragonard's technique, such as the use of toned, grayed ground, *alla prima* impasto for accents or highlights as well as the extensive use of glazes[261]. Fragonard painted in an almost expressionistic manner, using only very few marks to hint at certain features, such as Mlle Guimard's lavish dress or the accentuated make-up towel in front of her. In contrast, her facial features are worked with extreme caution and precision. With rosy white skin, she is an elegant and aspiring young lady looking benevolently at an imaginary audience. The background is left blank to fully emphasize the uniqueness of its portrayed representatives of the arts.

Following the thread of the "Portraits de Fantaisie", Glenn Brown has indeed created his own fantastical depictions of Fragonard's portraits, thereby bringing something original, capricious and entirely novel to the portrait[262]. In "Filth", Brown has cropped Fragonard's portrait and further tilted the sitter's body by using Photoshop in order to make the gravity feel slightly awkward[263].

In Brown's painting technique, the sitter is completely transformed. Fragonard's smooth mix of pink and beige skin tones has been replaced by cascading twists and mottling swirls in hues of greys, strokes of whites and acid greens. With these colours, Brown recalls the tonal values of stage lighting. In fact, it seems as though Brown's spectacular painting technique is itself at centre stage here. The sweetness of Fragonard's Rococo portrait is substituted with a depiction of morbidity. With the tightly woven net of colour pools and swirls dripping along the sitter's skin, that continue indefinitely into her gown and head dress, no textural difference between fabric, flesh, and hair is visible anymore. Her gown is similarly painted in Fragonard's expressionistic technique, with apparently more chunky lines and less refined renditions, thereby still remaining extremely flat.

Her young physique is maintained yet certain changes make her look much more old such as her hair with patches of white streaks which ironically nods to the 18th century use of powdering natural hair with white starch. The sick looking tinge of her skin and the white eyes add to this perception of ageing. As Brown has stated, the colours used in his rendition of the portrait derive from a Kirchner painting and refer back to a practice of lighting actors on stage:

"These colours are relatively unpleasant, they are acidy, with burnt reds, strange ash grey backgrounds and different purples. I think Kirchner was painting at a time when Berlin was lit by artificial light at night for the first time and it was very acid yellowly. Theatres would be lit that way too. In fact, the word 'limelight' comes from exactly that light when burning lime, creating a green and yellow light. It instantly gives this rather grotesque effect. So with limelight on stage, people would have looked pretty unhealthy, strange and perhaps even grotesque. I was trying to capture that meeting point of early 20th century with the 18th century, asking what would happen if you bring one person from a century into another day and age."[264]

Like Currin's work, Brown's portrait is an amalgamation of older styles and historical epochs. Brown recreated his figure as if coming from an

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256 Term used from the essay by Grunenberg, Christoph: Capability Brown: Spectacles of Hyperrealism, the Panorama and Abject Horror in the Painting of Glenn Brown, p. 17.

257 Pierre Rosenberg confirms the authenticity of the portrait while other scholars disagree. See Rosenberg, Pierre: Fragonard, Harry N Abrams 1988, p. 260.

258 Carole Blumenfeld, Une Facétie de Fragonard –Les révélations d'un dessin retrouvé, Paris, Editions Gourcuff et Gradenigo, 2013. See the discovered drawing with montages of Fragonard's portraits in L'Objet d'Art, June 2013, p. 57, http://www.hubertduchemin.com/fichiers/bibliotheque/frago.pdf See also http://musees.angers.fr/fileadmin/plugin/tx_dcddownloads/Depliant_Fragonard_OK.pdf

259 See the article on Fragonard's portraits de fantaisie by Sheriff, Mary D.: Invention, Resemblance and Fragonard's Portraits de Fantaisie, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 69, No. 1, Mar., 1987, p. 85.

260 See Interview Appendix of this publication. Interview Glenn Brown with the author, 20th August 2012, p. 311.

261 Ashton, Dore: Fragonard in the Universe of Painting, Washington D.C. 1988, p. 121.

262 Brown has also made another reference to Fragonard's painting of the same year depicting "Portrait of a Young Artist", that stood in for Brown's reference "America" from 2004.

263 See Interview Appendix of this publication. Interview Glenn Brown with the author, 20th August 2012, p. 311.

264 Ibid.

afterworld. Scholar Melissa Percival mentions that even Fragonard's contemporaries saw the portraits as otherworldly "with frenzied, diabolic undertones"[265]. The judgmental title "Filth" may underline the future perception of Mlle Guimard (this was before the true identity of the sitter was revealed) over the centuries as being famous for her many amorous liaisons[266] as well as for her difficult character as a commissioner, particularly in confronts to Fragonard[267]. In Brown's version, she becomes scary-looking yet elegant, poised and ever so compelling precisely for the neatness that Brown has wiped out of her face. Clearly, Brown alienates the figure of the source image in order to make it a creature from another world, haunting and familiar at the same time. His technique stands in for another concept of portraiture, thereby taking Fragonard's bold steps further and rendering his imaginary portraits to portraits imagined from an utopian afterlife.

Both Currin and Brown are examples for the occupation with old master works and how they can radically alter the image of a quoted source. Currin chooses to work with the old master techniques but breaks with tradition by giving his figures contemporary faces and attributes, whereas Brown breaks with the old master technique by substituting it with his own spectacular painting method, thereby maintaining a distinct compositional recognisability to the quoted source.

C.II.5
Conclusion

The initial chapters have aimed to look at different ways in which tableaux vivants and tableaux non-vivants are made. These twin chapters are

subsumed under the umbrella term "Strategies of Substitution" as they are characterised through their commune feature of substitution. In both cases, a figure is substituted with another one (in the form of a living person re-enacting a figure in a tableau vivant, or a substitute body is created to replace a figure (in the form of a dummy, an avatar/game player or a painted figure in a tableau non-vivant). The strategy of substitution is the most frequently used strategy of the entire database. Why is this particular strategy so popular?

First of all, one reason is certainly the wide range of media that both forms cover. All photographed, filmed or performed tableaux vivants as well as all re-painted, re-sculpted, re-drawn, re-digitalised tableaux non-vivants fall under this category. They comprise both the animate and inanimate substitution of a figure with another one.

Secondly, the process of recreation is an obvious approach when referring to older works of art. Recreating a composition allows the artist to take all the necessary steps again, but substitute the result with new protagonists that offer an altered reading of the image. This was the case with the artists substituting the figures from artworks with new sitters, evident in the works by Kehinde Wiley (black males), Tom Hunter (white squatters), and Adi Nes (Israeli soldiers). The artists react to the disposition of the quoted artworks, their iconicity, significance and purpose.

Next to the fact that introducing new protagonists is one way of dealing with old masterworks, there is, thirdly, also the possibility of keeping the same protagonists by costuming them according to the role image, as was the case with Eve Sussman's filmed tableau vivant

265 Percival, Melissa: Fragonard and the Fantasy Figure. Painting the Imagination, Ashgate Publishing Limited 2012, p. 2.
266 As Bob Duggan describes: "In this aptly titled work, all innocence is lost here — the sitter is made filthy. As is the case with most of Brown's works, the title almost immediately suggests the works ethical dimension. *Filth* here, is perhaps an allusion to the Madame being more famous for her love affairs than for her dancing. What is certain, however, is that while Madame Guimard Jean-Honoré was a real person who was there at the start, Brown has transformed and warped her image to the point that she has almost disappeared completely, only her ghost remaining." Duggan, Bob: Variety Show: The Art of Glenn Brown, *Big Think*, Oct. 11 2010, p. 16. Catalogue excerpt available at http://www.phillips.com/detail/GLENN-BROWN/NY010111/6.
267 Rosenberg, Pierre: Fragonard, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N Abrams 1988, p. 19.

based on Velázquez's "Las Meninas". Thus, the narration can be enhanced by adding a pre or post history to the composition.

Fourthly, the re-enactment allows to include the artist's self as a model. Artists have addressed identity issues concerning their gender, nationality and cultural background by employing their own bodies in their photographed tableaux vivants, such as Yasumasa Morimura or Cindy Sherman. Eva and Franco Mattes have used their own avatars to explore digital identity and identification in decidedly body-based performance pieces.

Fifthly, tableaux non-vivants like these offer the appealing possibility of re-creating human figures with inanimate matter, thereby reaching a startling effect of verisimilitude. This was achieved in the customisation of dummies according to specific individuals (David Cerný's rendition of Saddam Hussein), and the disruption of this principle may also lead to an unrestricted handling of the figure that wouldn't be possible with real models (for example in Yinka Shonibare's headless dummies or the Chapman's 'decayed' dummy corpses).

This limitless rendition of the human figure is equally valid for painterly recreations of the human figure. The fantastical portraits by Glenn Brown, sixthly, rethink the concept of portraiture as an entire genre anew, imagining otherworld characters that "are identified" by the way they have been painted. This stands in contrast to John Currin's likewise imagined yet much more realistic females that offer a new perception of the classical nude by painting in old master techniques.

All examples of these types of tableau-style quotations focus on the human figure. Figures are inevitably bound to their physical appearance (materiality), the artist's intention (identity) and their placement in a certain background (context). The first two chapters have therefore dealt, to the same degree, with questions of role play and identity issues as well as with matters of execution concerning materiality, techniques and styles.

While Chapter I concluded that tableaux vivants show 'same scene, different actors', Chapter II finishes with the conclusion 'same scene, different materiality, genre or style'. The substitution of a figure with another one – regardless if in the form of the tableau vivant or tableau non-vivant – results in a new reading of all of these aspects.