

Art & beauty in our time

SOLSTICE

2026 Volume 1



Nathan Hood

Amory Crane

S D Smith

Alexander Adams

Rob Floyd

Shieldmaiden

William Collen

Beth Wells

The Print Room

Exhibition 2

Vercingetorix

Walter Crane

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Kristina Djordjevic (IG: @kristinadjordjevicart), The Ash Tree.
Illustration to M. R. James 'The Ash Tree'. Oil on canvas. 2025.

K. Djordjevic

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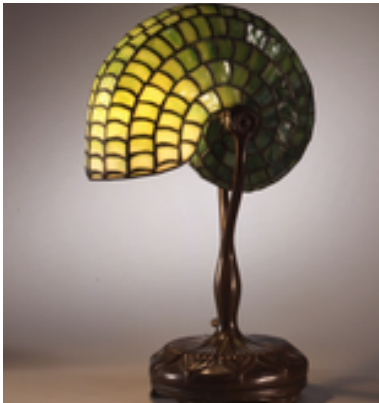
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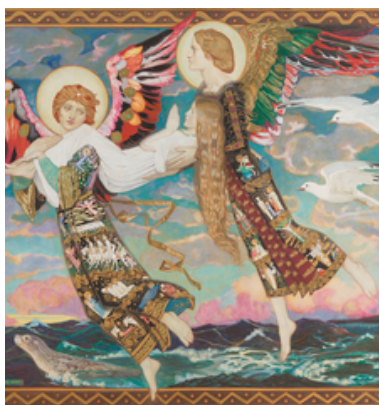
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Editor's Letter

Welcome to our inaugural Volume of Solstice! It is high time that the intellectual and artistic energies that are swirling and moving in the twitter-sphere and abroad had a physical print magazine to document and support them - and that's what the objective of Solstice is. We thank all of our contributors for making this first volume rich in interesting content. William Collen has a very unique take on the picture frame; and Alexander Adams shares his thoughts on the dubious nature of a certain group of 'sculptors' doing the social media rounds. Adams also shares excerpts from his new semi-autobiographical novel 'White Spirit'; and Armory Crane considers the relation between the arts and 'Elite theory'. I have written a lengthy-ish article exploring the nature of Contemporary Art that aims to understand what Contemporary Art is as a historical/cultural phenomenon; and Shieldmaiden reflects in her article on the predicament facing the artist who exists outside of the 'system' and its monopolised institutional support network.

So we explore a lot of pertinent and important questions that are highly topical vis-a-vis the arts scene(s) and its goings on. As important as Art Theory is to Solstice though, it is not all theory; and we look at a number of themes and artists from the History of Art. Nathan Hood explores the symbolism of one of his favourite Scottish Artists and Beth Wells reflects on a powerful Australian ANZAC sculpture. Plus other articles exploring historical art and themes. The magazine would be severely lacking without looking at the work of current day artists however; and apart from having art work dispersed throughout the magazine, we also have a review of Exhibition 2 (timely because Exhibition 3 is on the way) and an interview with practising artist Rob Floyd.



The Print Room also showcases some recent graphic print work by the artist Juniper.

So a decent amount of features we would say, and we really hope you enjoy what is on offer with this first volume. Moving forward we hope to get our readers feedback and correspondence; and we will be looking for contributions related to the emerging art scene and its predicaments (as well as thoughtful and insightful articles that explore Art History). In the meantime though, please enjoy this volume and spread the word!

With sincere thanks,
S D Smith

On Contemporary Art

S D Smith

There is a certain vagueness with the term 'Contemporary Art', and it is true that we want to guard against speaking about Contemporary Art, or the Contemporary Art scene in a too generalised way. There are a growing number of critiques and thoughts on Contemporary Art and its current predicament, and a lot of these are very interesting. There is a risk however, of speaking too carelessly; and floating a red herring that is more a cliché of Contemporary Art, rather than a concrete exposition of what Contemporary Art currently is as something really out there [1]. At the same time, we don't want to be paralysed by not generalising or categorising either, and we recognise that Contemporary Art is a current world thing, that is by and large still the current era main institutional art framework, or orthodoxy. Speaking to some art students in art academies or undertaking art degrees is probably sufficient proof of this hegemony; but it can be demonstrated just by the higher profile gallery/exhibition content/format, and also by the integration and promotion of this format within the broader media structures. With Contemporary Art as an art era phenomenon, it is not uncommon to trace the roots of this back to the emergence of modernism in the 19th Century; although if one understands what happened with the break down of modernism post-WWII, and the shift to something post modern, they will have a sense of Contemporary Art as something emerging properly with the 1960's. This emergence is importantly connected with what we might call the post-WWII political world order; which is an ideological structure or paradigm that is still by-and-large the governing power (in terms of institutional, narrative and political power) today, and Contemporary Art is just the art world extension of this structure in many ways.

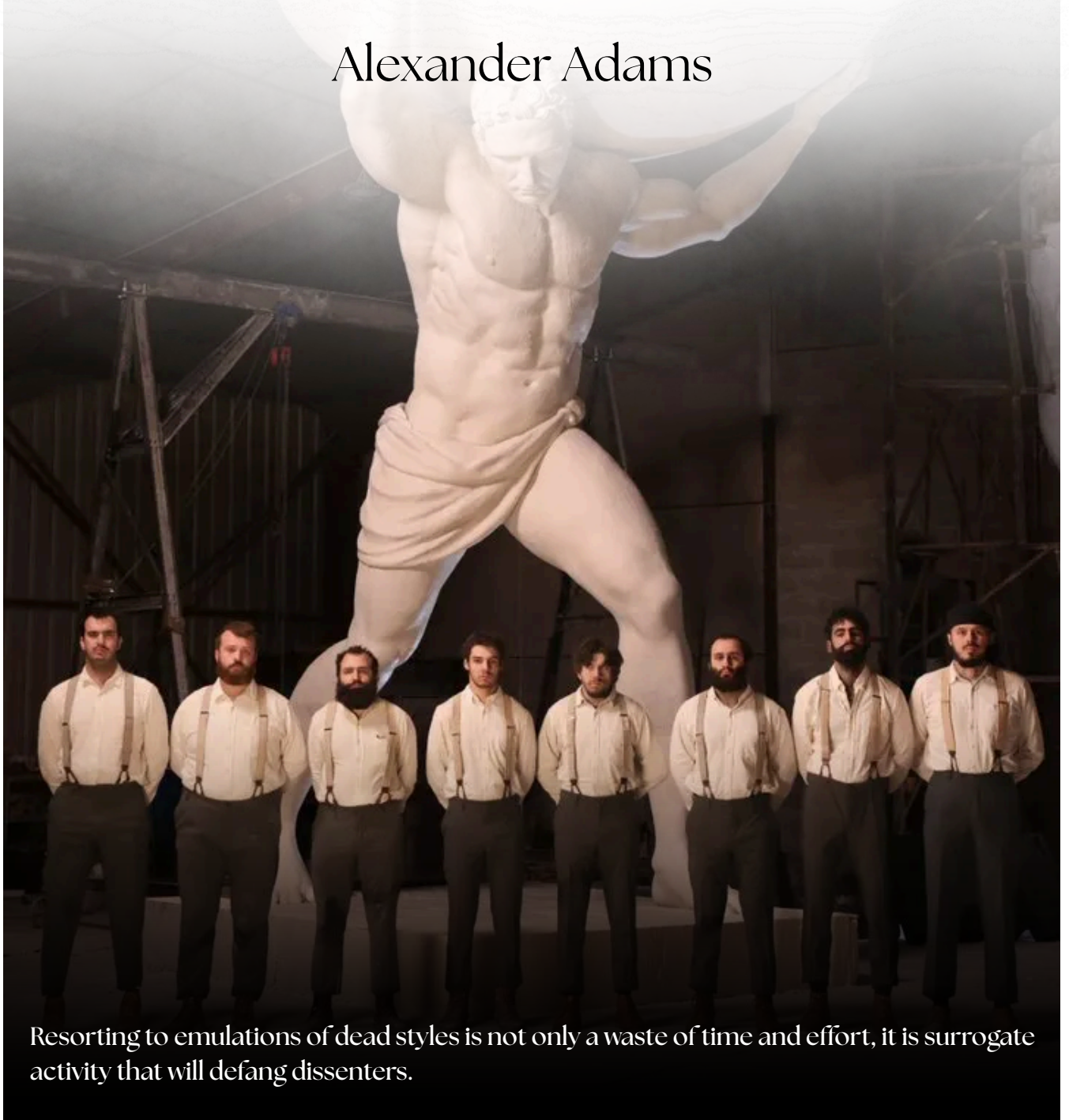
As might be expected then, the shifts and state of the Contemporary Art scene at any given point will be reflected in the shifts of this post-WWII political order. Maybe this is true of every art period: that there is a synchronicity and symbiosis between the cultural phenomenon and the religious/ideological/spiritual geist of the time, and it would be odd to think of the arts as existing in a vacuum. With Contemporary Art however, this has a particular flavour that is novel, insofar as this paradigm emerged with mass globalisation, political homogenisation and the advent of technologies that enabled a spread of information that far exceeded what had been possible in earlier epochs. Although Contemporary Art is still the main art world grammar, it is fair to say that is more heterogeneous than it

was in the hey day of unreflective high progressivism and its assumed inevitability and hegemony. Ever since modernism and the emergence of the 'age of ideology' in the 19th Century, there has been a kind of fast moving dynamic in the art world, where the constant shifts are connected with both the move away from old world academic hierarchies, and the corresponding shifts of the political and ideological scenes (the emergence of 'democratic norms' for instance). Interestingly enough however, Contemporary Art as an art era, has had a relatively long run, even accounting for its internal shifts and changes. If Futurism lasted around 30 years, Contemporary Art is running to the best part of a 60 year plus reign [2]. This is obviously tied up with the ideological homogeneity of post WWII America-centric Liberalism; but we must also recognise the internal pressures of the art world itself, where things like the need of individual artists to stand out and do something different is always a shaping dynamic. Being provocative and going for the 'shock factor' of course has its limits, and there is only so much shock something can get away with before it has to look toward other ideas. Needing to stand out through sheer virtuosity is always something that comes into play in any artistic milieu and with the return of representational content and representational modes of expression in Contemporary Art, a return to artistic virtuosity (or artistic skill) began to show itself more evidently after the turn of the millennium, and heading toward the 2010's and beyond [3]. In 2026, even though we continue to witness stunts akin to what Tracey Emin or Damian Hurst was doing in the 90's, not all Contemporary Art is installation pieces or non representational content that is supposed to speak in some cryptic way (conceptually), or odd video displays. If we look at something like the Venice Biennale - which professes to showcase the best and most elite of Contemporary Art - then you can see it is a mixed bag in terms of what is showcased. Installation pieces are still very much a thing for sure, but also paintings that are representational or abstract-representational (that are very internationalist in character), are all part of the bag now.

It was an oft heard sentiment that Contemporary Artists 'cannot draw', and there was often this strained relation with the public in terms of trying to convince them, or get them interested in what Contemporary Art 'has to say'. It is true that a lot of Contemporary Artists cannot draw, but it's way too broad of a generalisation now to be true. Also, the strained relations of contemporary art with a broader

Hipster Comfy Trad Category Error

Alexander Adams



Resorting to emulations of dead styles is not only a waste of time and effort, it is surrogate activity that will defang dissenters.

A dark, atmospheric illustration in a painterly style. In the center, a man with a beard and intense expression is depicted from the chest up, looking towards the viewer. He is surrounded by a large, dark snake that coils around him. The background is dark and textured, with some light reflecting off the snake's scales and the man's face. The overall mood is mysterious and dramatic.

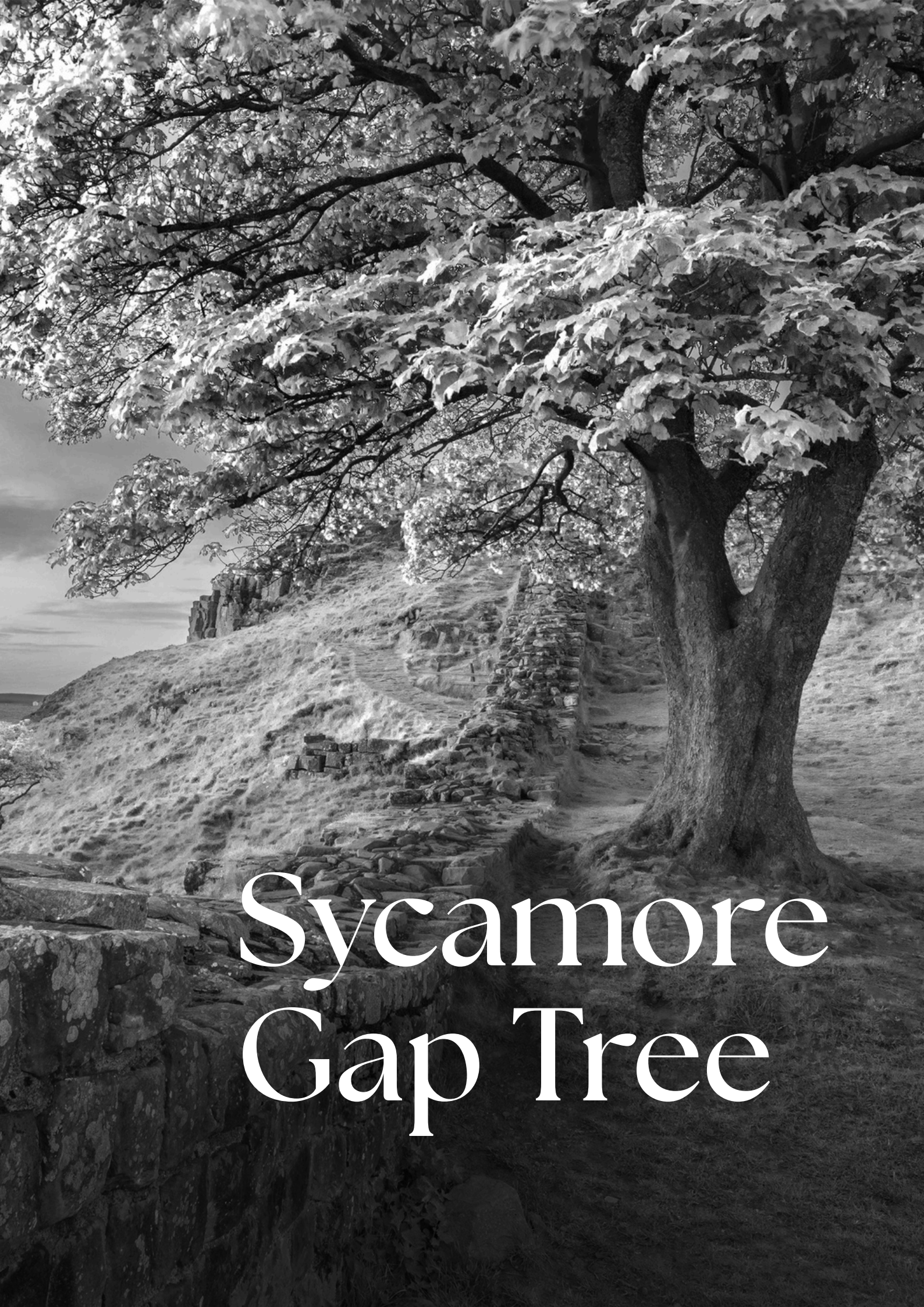
THE EXHIBITION

III:

AGAINST THE GRAIN

LONDON

November 24th - 29th (noon)



Sycamore Gap Tree

Lisa House



I painted the Sycamore Gap for a friend who commissioned it after the tree had been destroyed. It was a significant place for them.

I think it was a beautiful landmark representing strength, history and a connection to nature, and I wanted to capture it's beauty and significance through my artwork, and emphasize it's importance within the landscape. I used a gentle lavender and green colour palette to portray this and highlight both it's beauty and a sense of calm it brought to the surrounding environment. I used acrylic on a wooden panel and the painting was approx 70 x 70 cm

I think the regrowth of the tree is wonderful and shows nature's resilience and ability to recover, and new life and growth are possible.

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Paul Tavernor



For many hundred years I grew,
a lust for life with hopes,
Despite what nature threw at me
Steadfast I held these slopes.
But one cruel night the devil came,
to harm this Sycamore.
I offered only beauty,
but now I grow no more.

One day just like a phoenix
I will reach towards the sky.
One day I'll show the world that our
spirits never die.

It may take many years and many suns to set,
but trees hold deep root memory
and remember who they met.

One day just like a phoenix
my arms will rise once more.

I am a constant entity, I am the sycamore.



Return of the Sycamore
Paul Tavernor



Paul Tavernor Gallery

website:

www.paultavernor.com

Instagram:

[@paultavernor](https://www.instagram.com/paultavernor)

Facebook:

[paultavernorart](https://www.facebook.com/paultavernorart)

Paul Tavernor is a self taught artist, storyteller and wire sculptor. Paul began his art journey over 35 years ago and now has his own Art Gallery in the village of Poynton in Cheshire, where you can see a diverse range of his creations from a life size wire horse and a fox, to beautiful oil paintings to many narrated illustrations of Inktails Mouse. A mouse that was inspired by a real little creature visiting the gallery just before lockdown.

His penned illustrations are often accompanied with uplifting, positive stories of messages of hope and optimism that have been enjoyed by thousands of people. Paul has enjoyed having his work nationally published and has had his work featured at RHS Hampton Court and on Media & TV.

He always appreciates new followers and people who embrace art and the beautiful world of nature and the natural environments that uplift us.

George Scott



© George Scott

Web: geoscottillustration.com

Email: george@geoscottillustration.com

Why did you choose to depict the gap tree? As an illustrator I enjoy drawing trees as a subject matter. Locally to me, in Cornwall, we have a significant copse on the crest of a hill by the side of the main road in and out of Cornwall - known as the 'nearly home trees', 'coming home trees' or 'nearly there trees'. I drew the trees and they were greatly received. My mind drifted to the next significant tree(s) I'd like to illustrate, and it was obvious to me that I wanted to draw the gap tree. This was shortly before it was felled and it became more symbolic after the incident.

What medium did you choose and why? By trade I am an archaeological illustrator, which is a scientific or technical style of drawing, leading me to have quite a graphical detailed style, and trends my drawing to be more tonal or black and white. The original gap tree illustration was drawn with fineliner on Bristol board paper.

How do you feel about the gap tree's regrowth? I think it's great that the gap tree is being regrown. These places hold significance to people for different reasons and it is good to keep that going. It will be interesting to see the literal shape the sapling or saplings will take, as the silhouetted shape of the previous sycamore tree, within 'the gap', along Hadrian's Wall has become so iconic.

I sell prints of the sycamore gap tree through my Etsy store ([link](#)) in A5, A4, A3 and A2 sizes on Somerset enhanced radiant white velvet 255gsm paper.

John Duncan's Saint Bride

Nathan CJ Hood

A few years ago, I was visiting the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh. The established collection had an array of great Scottish and international artworks, including paintings by El Greco, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Sargent and Turner. At that time there was a room upstairs with 20th century artworks. As I reached the top of the stairs I was met with a dazzling array of impressionism. The colours of Manet and Monet swirled in mesmerising brushstrokes. It was an astounding sight.



Yet, amidst it all, one painting forced itself upon my attention. On the back wall hung a large canvas. It was different from the rest of the paintings surrounding it. *Saint Bride* (1913) by Scottish artist John Duncan (1866-1945) is an impressive 142 x 164 cm tempera and gold leaf depiction of a mythical scene rooted in Scottish Gaelic culture. It shows a moment in the life of St Brigid of Kildare or Brigid of Ireland, one of the central figures in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Christianity.

In legend and tradition, St Bride was carried by angels from the island of Iona to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. There she acted as a midwife to Mary during the Nativity, leading to her having the epithet 'knee woman of Mary'. This is depicted in Duncan's painting. A youthful Brigid, eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer, is gently and lovingly held by two resplendent angels as they travel across the Irish Sea. Their appearances were the first thing that caught my attention when I first saw this painting. Their halos, wings and beautiful appearances are recognisably angelic. But Duncan puts his own stamp on their presentation. Rather than painting them white, as is common in most depictions, their wings are multicoloured. Pinks, reds, greens, oranges and golds, they are like peacocks or birds of paradise. Matching their feathers are their highly decorated tunics, trimmed in gold, red and black. They contrast with the white of Brigid's dress and the seagull's plumage, highlighting their otherworldly beauty and enchanting significance.

Transcendent splendour is rooted in the Scottish people and their home. The two angels, with their fair skin, blonde hair and physiognomies look like beautiful Scottish women. They wear tunics adorned with Celtic knotwork. Their wings and clothes share the pallet of their setting. Turquoise waves break from black depths, while lighter blues are punctuated by sunset pink skies. Joined by seabirds, salmon and seals, these angels belong in this landscape. They are the spiritual emanation of the sea, sky and islands, the invisible transcendent presence made visible.

Brigid is herself tied to the western coastline of Scotland. Pre-Christian mythologies featured a goddess named Brigid who influenced the fertility of the land. She was celebrated at Imbolc, the beginning of Spring. Similarly, St Brigid, who may be a Christianisation of a pagan goddess, is still celebrated on 1st February (Imbolc). What situates Duncan's Brigid in her Christian context is the storytelling depicted on the clothing of the angels. The images, when studied closely, reveal the life of Christ. On the leftward angel we find the nativity narratives. There is the virgin conception, the proclamation to the shepherds, the arrival of the wisemen, the animals worshipping the infant Jesus, and the dream of Joseph. On the rightward angel the adult life of Christ is shown. We see his early life as a carpenter, his baptism, the blessing of the children, the raising of Lazarus, the last supper, the crucifixion, the burial and resurrection.

We can read the spiritual symbolism of this painting in different ways. In the liturgical calendar, St Brigid's day fall in between the events depicted on the two angels, the bridge between the nativity narratives and the move towards lent and Easter. From the perspective of the saint's day, we could see Brigid as the link between the past (represented by the angel looking behind her) and the

future (symbolised by the angel looking forward) in the programme church rituals.

There's a further, more esoteric meaning, that we can draw. Brigid is held in prayer, seemingly oblivious to the world. There's no indication she is aware of the angels who hold her tenderly aloft across the sea. There's a sense that her physical transportation is a visible representation of what happens to the soul in prayer. By the power of grace, contemplation on scripture carries the mind and heart into the biblical narratives. By the power of grace, prayer carries the contrite spirit into communion with God. Accompanied by the Holy Spirit, symbolised in scripture by a white bird hovering over water (like the seagulls in Duncan's paintings), prayer can become a spiritual ladder, transporting the soul from earth to heaven.

Duncan creates a moment wherein the strands of the Scottish landscape and Gaelic culture intersect with Divine revelation and mystical experience. He achieves this in at least two ways. In terms of composition, his characters are hanging in a sort of stillness, travelling in dimensions that are not bound by normal space and time. They are drawn forward from the choppy and gurgling Scottish sea, their wings breaking out of the scene and over the gilded borders (as do the seagulls). Though their hair and clothes, along with St Brigid's, is gently touched by the breeze, they are relatively still for those flying over a tossing and turning ocean. They are touched by but transcend their environment.

Duncan's use of egg tempera creates a luminosity and vividness of colour. Using thin layers of paint, he was able to create the effect that the angels and St Brigid have their own, inner light. Their colours are strong, clear and saturated, removing ambiguity or the greyness of the mundane. They are more 'real'. They are dazzling and attractive. Combined with beautiful and elegant faces and outfits, the effect is elevating. For what one beholds is a vision of humanity in its fullness, if the murk and grime are washed away in the love of God. It is a visualisation of a layer of reality that is often hidden from us, the supernatural brought brightly forth in ways that are commensurate with and yet enhancing of the people, lands and cultures of Scotland. St Bride presents sumptuous and gentle Divinity through the vivacity of colour and elegance of form. Duncan's painting is now featured as a masterwork in the Scottish section of the National Galleries of Scotland. They have made much from it in the way of merchandise, with postcards, prints, bags and scarves decorated with angelic faces and brightly coloured wings. Such commodification speaks to the evident appeal of this painting, the power it has on its viewer, the brilliant integration of symbol and visual art. For Duncan stands out as an artist in his ability to bring together the best of Scottish culture and Christian faith into an ecstatic vision that elevates the viewer's soul. His attention to the medium he was working in (egg tempera) and the composition of the scene combine with a vibrant imagination to represent an ancient legend in warm and bright beauty.

Historical

Martin Schongauer

Everyone is familiar with the name of Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), the legendary Germanic artist and probably the best known figure (or one of the best known) of the Northern Renaissance. Sometimes called the Da Vinci of the North, Dürer is recognised as a polymath and an archetypal 'Renaissance Man'; whose influence was far reaching and seminal. One of the single greatest technicians who shifted the art standard toward a higher level of representational quality, without ever devolving into the triteness of mundane realism. Dürer as an artist skirted so close pictorially to the transcendent that his best friend - the German humanist scholar Willibald Pirckheimer - had chiselled on Dürer's tombstone the phrase: *Quicquid Alberti Dureri mortale fuit, sub hoc conditur tumulo*. [Whatever was mortal of Albrecht Dürer lies beneath this mound]

But Dürer himself was not without those he looked up to and admired, and Martin

Schongauer (1453-1491) was one of the contemporary, albeit senior artists, that Dürer greatly respected. In the 15th Century information did not travel fast, and at the age of 20 when Dürer was still what was called a 'Wanderjahre', ['Journey man'], he travelled to Colmar with the intent of entering Schongauer's workshop - only to find that Schongauer had died in the previous year. Dürer was nevertheless received by Schongauer's immediate surviving family members and was gifted a drawing done by the great master. Dürer continued to collect (and most likely helped preserve) many of Schongauer's print works; and it is for his print works (his engravings) that Schongauer's legacy is mostly secured. Most of Schongauer's drawings and paintings didn't survive, and there is only spattering of work in this respect. 116 engravings however are safely attributed to Schongauer; and each print would have had a sufficiently high volume of prints made in helping guarantee the survival of at least a few copies for any given print.

It's not just that Schongauer was good, it was that he represented the great shift from a late Medieval mode of representation toward the post-medieval mode of representation (a stylistic shift that ultimately became known as the 'Northern Renaissance'). Many histories have looked at this difference and we do not need to go over this here again (the scope of it is massive) - but suffice to say the shift included moving away from a kind of flat, stylised figure, that had little understanding or regard for linear or 'true' perspective, toward a more precise rendering using various forms of hatching techniques, individualised/personified figures and carefully constructed linear perspectives and environments. Anatomy became more realistic, environments became



more individuated and less generic, and grace and the beauty of the rendered form became the new language of print making and artistic representation - largely due to the individual effort and genius of Schongauer. He was a revolution in Art and an engine of the new Renaissance spirit that was emerging (and was well under way in places like Italy).

And Schongauer's influence spread beyond the Germanic lands, and no less than Michelangelo is credited with an oil painting copy of Schongauer's 'The Temptation of St Anthony' engraving. There is some doubt about the attribution, although academics are inclined to credit Michelangelo as the author of the painting; and it is considered his earliest known, or earliest surviving painting (painted at the age of 13). It is certain that Michelangelo did make a copy of the Schongauer print however, since he said so himself and even corrected Vasari for claiming, in his first Edition of *The Lives of the Artists* (1550), that *The Temptation of St Anthony* was a print by Dürer. Under Michelangelo's instruction, this misattribution was corrected. We can see in the painting (page 91) that Michelangelo made significant artistic adjustments to Schongauer's original design; although we ought to expect that from Michelangelo whose own sense of purpose was always at the forefront. In any case, the influence of Schongauer outside of the Holy Roman Empire and the Germanic territories was definite and pronounced; and in Italy he was much loved (and imitated).

As Dürer grew into the artist he became, his indebtedness and tribute to Schongauer is always present. Although Dürer undoubtedly surpassed





very nice to see the sensitive and detailed study that, for a long time, was lost to us.

The legacy of Schongauer's line and rendering is also very visible in Schongauer's Bust of a Monk Assisting at Communion; and one could be forgiven for assuming it a drawing by Durer himself. This is one of Schongauer's few surviving drawings; and it shows the brilliance of his rendering of form through line and hatching. There is a looseness or casualness to the drawing that gives the drawing incredible expression and presence, and the casualness never becomes sloppiness - so that there is no fudging. Every line, hatch and dash has its place in the whole; which has incredible weight and gravitas. Interestingly enough, Schongauer's paintings stylistically place him in a medieval tradition that lead some to think of him - or categorise him - as more late medieval than renaissance proper (see Patrick Hunt's essay, "Martin Schongauer: Gothic Vanguard of the Renaissance"). This is probably fair, and of course overly fussing in which stylistic category an artist fits into always risks a loss of subtlety and nuance. Schongauer's paintings do have a stronger Medieval character than his print works, which we can rightly call more 'revolutionary' in terms of their shift away from previous modes of printmaking and its methods of representation. This shift is very connected with the technical innovations of

Schongauer as a technician - and expanded beyond just metal engraving print making, into being possibly the single greatest master of the woodcut that has ever lived - Schongauer's revolution is always at the base of the great Germanic achievement generally speaking; and of course it is not just print making. It is very unfortunate that most of Schongauer's painting and drawing work has not survived, but the brilliance of his ability and technical skill is very evident in what has survived; and it is interesting to see that Schongauer also conducted drawing exercises in the same naturalistic mode that Durer also became known for. In fact until the discovery of a 1988 botanical drawing by Schongauer, it was thought the Durer had invented the Northern Renaissance tradition of highly detailed and carefully rendered botanical studies. The discovery of Schongauer's Peonies drawing has corrected the record on that, so that is yet another innovation chalked up to Schongauer. Although it is fair to say the Durer took the skill to its ultimate extreme of sheer perfection, it is

Schongauer, where his deep line burin technique and hatching innovations (most likely brought over in part from his experience as a Goldsmith) - coupled with his own genius for image making - was fertile in bringing about an entirely new mode and language of representation in copper metal engraving.



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