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This Glass Thing:

Empty, full, solid, liquid; an exercise in paradoxical thing(k)ing

Rhiannon Vogl

Glass is a thing in disguise, an actor, is not solid at all, but a liquid, that an old sheet of glass will not only take on a royal and purplish tinge but will reveal its true liquid nature by having grown fatter at the bottom and thinner at the top, and that even that it is frail as the ice in a Parmatta puddle, it is stronger under compression than Sydney sandstone, that it is invisible, solid, in short, a joyous and paradoxical thing, as good a material as any to build a life from.

- Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*, 1988

What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing.

- Martin Heidegger, *The Thing, Poetry, Language and Thought*, 1971

There are three types of body: external body, internal body, spiritual body. Breathing is very important. Without breathing, the spiritual mind and body are not coming.

- Sri Krishna Pattabhi Jois

Breath comes before speech, before walking, before writing. The breath, as Jois notes, is fundamental to being, to knowing, to living. With the ability to control the breath, to hold it, to mould its rhythm, humans also have the power to control their minds, their thoughts, their bodies. Breath can also be used to make, to create, and to extend the presence of the breather outwards to the external world. Taken as such, this paper considers the breath as a tool of sorts, to consider the materiality of an ancient glass flask and in turn, to find the lingering presence of its maker. After a visual analysis of the object, a discussion of its material affordances and historical context, we will move to a discussion of the unique chemical and physical properties of glass, before a theorization of the flask *qua* flask. Drawing together the writings of Georg Theiner and Chris Drain; Andy Clark; Martin Heidegger and Susan Sontag; and relying heavily on the historical and archeological research of Robert Brill and Julian Henderson, this paper presents the flask not as a simple museum artefact, but as a container that ultimately keeps an imprint of the person who made it. The author acknowledges that glass, glass making, and its industrialization is a complex social, cultural, and political web of technologies, value systems, education, and interrelated infrastructure developments, each that involve an equally intertwined web of praxeological techniques, that would have in turn played a part in the bio-psycho-sociological¹ human-being that crafted this particular vessel. The author equally acknowledges that if humans learn, make, and act through each of these interlinked ontologies, then our objects must also be results of them.² And yet, by narrowing the/our focus here on the specific materiality of one particular glass vessel, this paper takes an admittedly limited look at the *full* bio-psycho-sociological context of its making, and instead uses a more “bio-philo-technological” approach, taking this artefact as a thing-in-and-of-itself, a functional container that inevitably, through its making, evidences the essence of its maker and their material explorations.

¹ Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the body,” *Economy and Society*, 2(1): 70-88, 1935; 1973.

² Like glass production, pottery and metal technologies frequently involved the construction of kilns and furnaces respectively. These structures are necessary so as to produce high temperatures and to be able to control heat and the gaseous atmosphere. Therefore, access to and preparation of ceramic materials or stone for constructing kilns and furnaces creates a link between all three technologies. Similarly, access to appropriate types of fuel would be necessary to achieve the temperatures and atmospheres. For more information, see: Julian Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 13.



Fig. 1. Author's own photographs, ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018.



Fig. 2. Flask with Ornamental Handles, Object Number 951X8.58, Author's own photograph, ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018.

Visual Analysis, Material Affordances, and Historical Context

The object of this study is a small glass flask from the Byzantine period of Syrian origin, (Figs 2-3), dated to between 400 - 500 CE, held within the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Toronto.³ Identified by the Object Number 951X8.58 and the title *Flask with Ornamental Handles*, it is made of medium-thin, semi-transparent, pale pistachio-green glass. The ROM identifies it as blown formed, meaning that it was made by inflating a molten piece of glass into a bubble (parison), with the aid of a blowpipe, by a person known as a gaffer, or glass blower. The vessel is highly iridized, with large sections of rose-gold flaking covering a great majority of its surface. Given its Object Number, this vessel was acquired by the museum in 1951, although according to present-day curators no further acquisition context has been recorded.⁴ This means that we do not know where the item was found, its provenance, nor how it came to enter the ROM's collection.



Fig. 3. Flask with Ornamental Handles, Object Number 951X8.58, Author's own photographs, ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018.

³ This dating comes from the ROM cataloguing sheet; the museum's didactic label alternatively indicates a date of 275-325 CE.

⁴ Author's personal communication with curators, 2018.

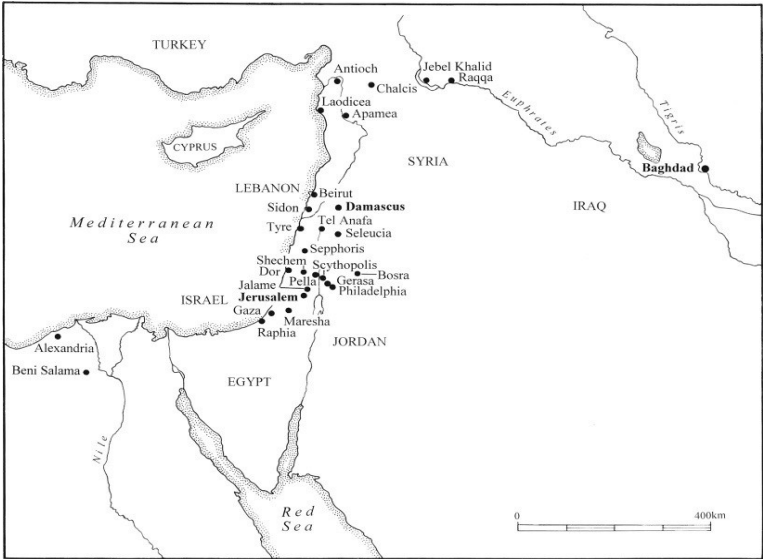
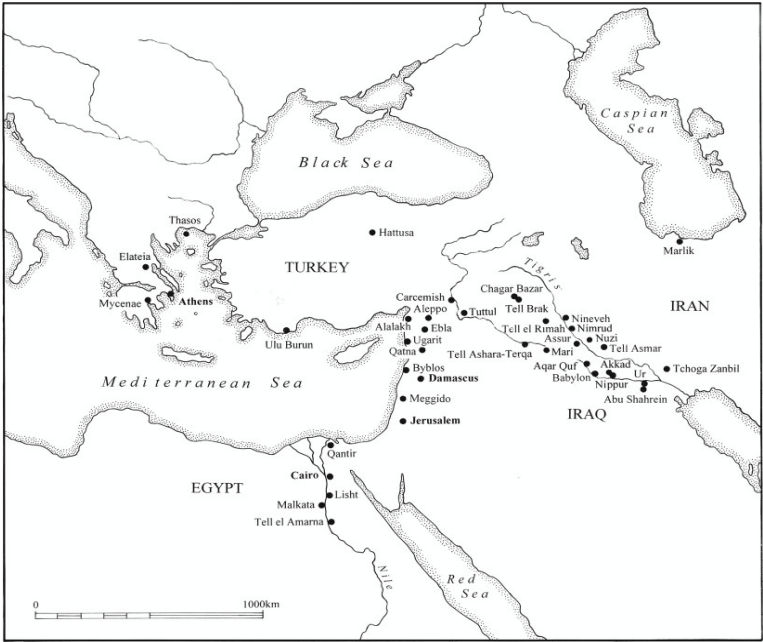
The iridized surface of this vessel would indicate that it was either purposely buried in a grave, or otherwise covered underground, in a semi-moist environment. “Although ordinary glasses under ordinary circumstances can be regarded as being insoluble in water, they are, in fact, susceptible to very slow chemical attack by both liquid water and atmospheric moisture.”⁵ While aesthetically captivating, this sparkling surface pattern is the result of damage to the chemical composition of the glass over time. Most ancient glass, unless found in very arid climates, has been subject in one form or another to this type of rainbow weathering.

An online search of the ROM’s holdings for objects with the same Object Number prefix —951X8—reveals a small selection of 31 items, all glass, all made between the 6th and 5th centuries BCE and 1200 and 1300 CE. Most items however, are dated between 50 and 500 CE, and are said to be from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon or Egypt. Several pieces from this acquisition group are also on view currently, including *Small flask with dolphin-shaped handles* (Object number: 951X8.57), which provides our closest visual comparative in this particular collection (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. *Small flask with dolphin-shaped handles*. Author’s own photographs ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018.

⁵ Robert Brill, *Chemical analyses of early glasses*, (Corning, N.Y, Corning Museum of Glass, 1999), 18, Accessed Dec 2018 and Jan 2019 via <https://www.cmog.org/sites/default/files/collections/50/5052FA17-E769-478E-A9B4-0F89C6458478.pdf>



Figs. 5-6. Maps of general geographical locations discussed in Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* © Henderson, 2016

Klein and Lloyd help here to provide ample historical context. By the last quarter of the third century CE, the Roman Empire had experienced fundamental social and political change, significantly, the acceptance of Christianity as the principal religion and the transfer of the official state capital from Rome to Constantinople (330 CE). Arts and crafts also experienced a drastic shift, including glass making. There was a marked turn away from the decorative styles seen in earlier production, towards more simplified shapes and colours. According to Klein and Lloyd:

... ordinary table-and-storage wares were now thinly blown vessels in shades of pale yet distinct yellow, green, olive and brown, and, less commonly, colourless or bluish-green metals. The range of principal shapes also underwent fundamental change, and the total number offend overall diversity of forms diminished. Among the new shapes to appear at this time were small, stemmed cups and hanging glass lamps [...] tall flasks, jars, and jugs with exceedingly long necks and pronounced funnel- or bowl-shaped rims. Decoration on these household items was rare and usually limited to spiralling threads or random blobs, either in the same colour as the vessel or in contrasting glass.⁶

They go on to note that after the collapse of the unity of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, and the establishment of early Byzantine society in the eastern Mediterranean provinces, Roman imperial culture continued to evolve:

Nonetheless, artefacts, which include ordinary household articles such as glass lamps, stemmed cups and long-necked flasks, also indicate that overall standards of production declined, and that decorated wares progressively became less diverse and widespread. Thinly blown or mould-blown vessels predominate, along with pale colours, and decoration was largely limited to trans and blobs of glass. Among Syro-Palestinian glass-makers of the fourth and succeeding centuries, experiments with trailing led to the creation of imaginative whimsical vessels such as multiple flasks with elaborate basket handles.⁷ (Figs. 7-9)

⁶ Dan Klein and Ward Lloyd, *The History of Glass*. (London: Black Cat, Little, Brown and Co, 1999, 35.

⁷ Klein and Lloyd, *The History of Glass*, 37.



Fig. 7. *Cosmetic Tube*, Roman Empire; Eastern Mediterranean. 400-499 CE, 54.1.100, 39 cm x 9.6 cm.⁸

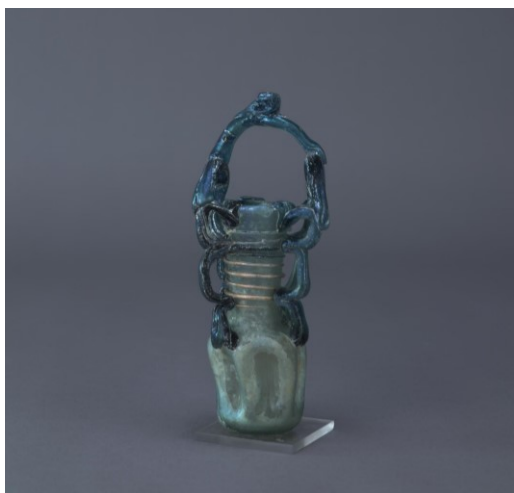


Fig. 8 *Balsamarium* , Roman; Syro-Palestine, 4th century - 5th century MS5109, 16.1 cm x 6.3 cm.⁹

⁸ Pierpont Morgan Library, 1954-09-21, Corning Glass Museum. Image accessed via <https://www.cmog.org/artwork/cosmetic-tube?search=collection:c26755cbddc075d07d647c5db8fb4cf1&page=118>

⁹ Purchased from Fr. Vester and Company, American Colony Store, Jerusalem, 1913, Penn Museum. Accessed via: <https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/91143>



Fig. 9. Animal Flask, Syria, late 7th–8th century, 69.153, 11.1 cm x 8.3 cm.¹⁰

The visual intrigue of *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is a result of its odd, slightly disfigured form. Whereas most of the other items on display with it in the Byzantine galleries at the ROM are symmetrical and arguably more 'regular,' this flask is decidedly asymmetrical, and appears to be a slight anomaly within the display. Standing just shy of twelve centimetres in height, it tilts ever-so-slightly off its vertical centre, a physical attribute which may be the result of slumping during its initial cooling process, or something which may have occurred over time, if the vessel had been exposed consistently to an overly warm environment. It has an open top, and a trailed glass trim

¹⁰ Gift of Mrs. Charles S. Payson, 1969, Metropolitan Museum of Art Accessed via: <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/69.153/>.

wound around the rim. Its neck narrows downward in a soft, curved shape; its body then undulates into three bulbous segments, the last of which flattens on the bottom to allow the flask to stand level, independently. A large pontil-mark pocks its bottom.

Most distinctively, two trailed decorative handles have been applied in a series of three vertical loops or wings down each side, aligning roughly with the three ballooned sections. The trailing is also asymmetrical, and the four bottom loops appear to have also slumped or been squished at some point. The less-refined handling of the material here seems to suggest that this flask may be an early, more experimental creation of its maker. The trailing is not nearly as fine or even in its gauge as that seen on most of the other pieces in the collection. Even those pieces believed to have been created around approximately the same time show that a more experienced hand had applied this dainty detailing in a more adept way. There are other pieces on display where trailed glass has been used to form a functional handle, but in these cases, the trailing is slightly thicker overall, with openings moderately larger and therefore more easily graspable by at least the thumb and forefinger. In the case of the vessels identified as "flasks for cosmetics," (Figs. 10-11) which possess a considerable amount of trailed ornamentation, there is also a larger, basket handle that arches across the top of the bottle, to facilitate both grasping, and likely hanging it from a hook on a wall or in a cabinet. The functionality of the handles on *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is markedly limited.



Figs. 10-11. Vases from the case identified as "flasks for cosmetics." Author's own photographs ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018.

From here, the physical affordances of *Flask with Ornamental Handles* can be further analyzed.¹¹ Its flat base and low centre of gravity contribute to its ability to stand stable and independently on a flat surface, like a table or shelf,

¹¹ See Carl Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 111-112.

where it would remain as placed. Its impermeable material means that it was able to hold another substance, likely a cool or room-temperature one, such as oil, perfume, or a cosmetic powder or paste. Given the thinness of the glass, it would be unlikely that a hot substance would have been contained within it, as heat would be too easily conducted from the interior to the exterior. Glass is a hard, but delicate material, making this vessel both light and durable. Its small scale makes it easily graspable, but likely by one or two fingers and the thumb, as opposed to a full palm of the hand. It would have been quite awkward to hold the container by its ‘handles’—their thinness would necessitate more of a pinching action; more likely, the vessel would have been picked up using the fingertips with the digits able to reach around the decorative trimming. In one way, this ornamentation decreases the graspability of the container, but also helps increase its top-up directionality.

The delicateness of the container could indicate the similar preciousness of its contents—this small flask is not capable of holding very much of any substance, which suggests both the need to use very little of its contents at a time and/or for the jar to be refilled infrequently. Pragmatically, it is unlikely one would store something that would need to be used in great quantities in a tube so small. One may infer that the substance to be contained, and the flask itself, were treated with a certain amount of care or a ritual aspect, such as the daily practice of applying oil, perfume, or cosmetics to the body. This flask could even be used, due to its open spout, to sip a liquid or libation, although that is slightly less likely. If the flask was used for cosmetic purposes, a wand of thin glass or similar hard material would have been required to reach to the bottom of the tube; however, because of its irregular, bulbous form, such a wand would have needed a degree of flexibility to reach all the creases. Broadly identifying this item as a flask leaves its intended usage open to interpretation—one may equally refer to it as an *amphoriskos*, an *alabastron* or *ungeuntarium*—Greek or Roman terms referring to a small jar, bottle or flask with two handles, narrow neck and cylindrical body used as a container for oil, liquid, or powdered substances.¹² As will be discussed shortly, this container may not have held anything tangible but may instead have been a purely aesthetic object, or again, a simple material experiment on the part of its maker.

¹² Corning Museum of Glass, *Glass Dictionary Online*. <https://www.cmog.org/research/glass-dictionary>



Figs. 12-13. Alternate side and angled top views of *Flask with Ornamental Handles*. Author's own photographs ROM Byzantine Gallery, December 2018

Ancient Glass – Development, Chemical and Physical Considerations.

Relying on the thorough and already-published research of Julian Henderson and Robert Brill, it is not necessary to delve too deeply into the wildly complex, infinitely varied chemical compositions of glass on a broad scale, but rather to understand a more simplified version before moving forward with our discussion.¹³

The first purposely manufactured glass material appears in the 4th millennium BCE, in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, in the form of heated crushed quartz used to make glazes for ceramic vessels. Pliny the Elder is often quoted as documenting the first stages of the glass making in the Mediterranean and Middle East, with this fable-like account:

There is a story that once a ship belonging to some traders in natural soda put in here and that they scattered along the

¹³ Julian Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Robert Brill, *Chemical Analyses of Early Glasses*, (Corning, N.Y, Corning Museum of Glass, 1999).

shore to prepare a meal. Since, however, no stones suitable for supporting their cauldrons were forthcoming, they rested them on lumps of soda from their cargo. When these became heated and completely mingled with the sand on the beach a strange translucent liquid flowed forth in streams; and this, it is said, was the origin of glass.”¹⁴

Ancient glass was first made from a mixture of silica (sand), lime (calcium oxide), which provides durability to the glass, and an alkali flux such as soda or potash, which reduces the melting temperature of silica. By changing the proportions of soda, lime, and silica, the melting and working properties of glass also change.¹⁵ When heated, typically in a large furnace, to an optimal temperature of around 1100°C and 1000°C, the mixture becomes soft and malleable, and can be formed by various techniques into different shapes and sizes. Once cooled sufficiently, the vessel is hard and durable, although as Henderson astutely notes, the "solid" property of glass is somewhat misleading. "Material scientists actually refer to glass as a 'super-cooled liquid'.”¹⁶ As it cools, glass progressively stiffens until rigid but does not set up a network of interlocking crystals that one would see in a solid, like metal, and instead retains the random molecular structure of a liquid. This is why glass shatters and is susceptible to deterioration, especially when exposed to moisture.¹⁷ Glass is therefore more accurately described as “an inorganic product of fusion which has been cooled to a rigid condition without crystallisation.”¹⁸ Its resting state is always somewhat illusory, which in turn gives glass a slightly magical quality, as it is never quite what it seems.

Wood or plant ashes are traditional sources of glass fluxing materials;¹⁹ however, according to the literature, it would be more likely that *Flask with Ornamental Handles* was made with natron.²⁰ With little known about the archeological context in which this flask was found, and no existing chemical analysis provided, visual analysis alongside Brill’s in-depth study of the archeological record and sustained chemical analysis of ancient glass, would indicate the light or aqua-greenish colour of this vessel is result of a certain natural level of iron impurities in its chemical makeup.²¹ Admittedly,

¹⁴ As quoted in Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, 51: Henderson gives a thorough discussion of the potential discovery of glass and the human capacity to recreate it, a lengthy history unable to be retold here.

¹⁵ Henderson, *Ancient glass: an interdisciplinary exploration*, 5.

¹⁶ Henderson, *Ancient glass: an interdisciplinary exploration*, 4.

¹⁷ Klein and Lloyd, *The History of Glass*, 13-14.

¹⁸ Henderson, *Ancient glass: an interdisciplinary exploration*, 4.

¹⁹ Henderson, *Ancient glass: an interdisciplinary exploration*, 5.

²⁰ Henderson cites numerous other studies to corroborate on page 51 and writes an excellent chapter on the topic.

²¹ Brill, *Chemical analyses of early glasses*, 15.

the complex relationships between the type of alkali used, be it plant or natron-based, and the resulting composition of the final glass object is difficult to untangle and is beyond the scope of this paper. Given its dating and apparent location of manufacture, the assumption that it is natron glass seems to fit.

Further, Henderson notes that natron would have provided:

a relatively pure source of alkali, compared with plant ash, and the glass made from it would therefore have behaved in a somewhat more predictable way when worked. Moreover, it was denser and generally had higher alkali concentrations than found in plant ash. Both of these factors meant that it was easier to transport and to melt. Natron glass was used to make the full range of glass artefacts and the evidence suggests that it was the first glass type to be used for glass blowing.²²

According to the Corning Museum of Glass, the discovery of glass blowing dates to 75-50 BCE in the eastern Mediterranean.²³ Henderson's book includes an exceptionally poetic quote describing the discovery, as it is noted in a third or fourth century CE papyrus:

First he heated the very point of the iron, then snatched from nearby a lump of bright glass and placed it skilfully within the hollow furnace. And the crystal as it tasted the heat of the fire was softened by the strokes of Hephaestus like [...] He blew in from his mouth a quick breath [...] like a man essaying the most delightful art of the flute. The glass received the force of his divine breath, for swinging it often like an ox-herd swings his crook, he would breathe into it.²⁴

Archeological evidence of early blown glass bottles found in Jerusalem's old city dating to 40 BCE²⁵ and the discovery of early, very large tank furnaces in Beirut dating between the first century BCE and the first century CE serve as further material evidence for the newly invented technology. By the time *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is said to have been produced, glass containers, such as bottles and jars, had become an important means of transporting liquids, such as olive oil and other agricultural produce, for domestic storage purposes, and general everyday use.

Glass Blowing - The Extended Mind, The Extended Breath

²² Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, 51.

²³ Corning Museum of Glass, *Glass Blowing*. <https://www.cmog.org/video/glass-blowing>

²⁴ Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, 213.

²⁵ Klein and Lloyd, *The History of Glass*, 26.

Glass blowing is a highly skilled craft that involves full bodily engagement of the maker. The raw compounds are placed in a hot furnace and heated to their melting point where they take on a fiery orange-red colour. The gaffer extracts a molten blob of glass by dipping one end of a hollow, approximately 1.5 meter long metal pipe into this newly melted substance. The blob is then drawn out of the furnace and rolled by twirling the pipe horizontally at a 90-degree angle, using both hands, on a cool metal surface known as a marver. This rolling action (marvering), creates a regular, concentric shape in the glass—an action similar to forming a ball of clay or dough in the palm of the hands. Once formed, the gaffer raises the other end of the pipe to his mouth, tipping it to about 60/45-degree angle and blows a stream of air down it, to inflate the glass into a hollow bubble. The gaffer repeats the process of reheating, and marvering the glass at various angles along the metal surface, to form the base of the vessel. Once satisfied, they reheat the vessel again, and elongate it by swinging or sweeping the blowpipe across their body using two arms, to allow the glass hanging down at its tip to stretch through centrifugal force and gravity.

To create a bulbous bottom, the gaffer blows into the tube to further inflate the end of the vessel. After using a thin set of pinchers to create a small constriction near the neck of the blowpipe, they flatten the bottom of the flask using a small metal paddle (often the opposite end of the pincher tool), all the while continuing to roll the pipe back and forth with their other hand along an even, horizontal surface to steady it. It is likely that thin pinchers (jacks) were used at this point to create the three constricted sections of *Flask with Ornamental Handles* as the pipe is continuously twirled. At this phase, a pontil is added - resting the blowpipe on the flat surface, another solid rod is dipped into the furnace, to gather a small glob of molten material, and pressed gently onto the bottom of the vessel. This will allow the gaffer to hold the vessel while shaping and reheating its top opening. Dripping a fine amount of cool water along the neck they use pinchers to tap the top away from the blowpipe, and re-dip this newly open top end into the furnace to be reheated and twirled again as the gaffer uses his other hand to insert a conical tool (sophietta) and then fine pinchers to fold in and shape the spout.

To add the trailing, on another rod, a small amount of glass is gathered (while still holding the first rod with the vessel in the other hand); the vessel rod is then rested on the support surface, steadied, and the second rod is used to dab a small piece of glass onto the side of the vessel. Clipped off from the gathering rod, this blob-side is rotated downward, where the pinchers are used to pull and elongate it into a fine 'trail' which is then bent three times to attach the decorative loops. The process is repeated on the other side while throughout the vessel must be kept hot, in order to avoid cracking. The final flask is flashed back into the furnace once decorated. With a soft tap on the metal rod, the gaffer is able to break it away from its pontil and rest it flat on its bottom. It is cooled slowly in an annealing oven over the

course of approximately 12-14 hours.²⁶ "Now released from the making process, the self-supporting [flask] has to gather itself for the task of containing";²⁷ it is now an independent thing in the world.

The highly choreographed, exceptionally physical gestures and coordination required to create a single blown vessel such as the one under consideration are an exemplary form of asymmetrical scaffolding:²⁸ actions and interactions that unfold between the maker, their materials and their tools; an infrastructure or "trans-corporal" enterprise, not simply bound by the skull or the body, but actively mediated through objects, tools, and social processes. As Theiner and Drain write, "... a scaffold 'mediates' an activity in one or more of five ways: it provides a support; it functions as a tool; it extends the range of the worker; it allows the worker to accomplish a task not otherwise possible; and it is used selectively to aid the worker where needed."²⁹ This relationship cannot be considered as one-sided, it is instead bi-directional; the object and subject or the maker and the artefact, bring about some form of change within each other. In order to understand the "causal flow and emergent functionality of these 'hybrid' ensembles, we need to pay detailed attention to the coordination, externalization, internalization, and interaction between persons and things rather than their properties considered in isolation."³⁰ The dance between the gaffer, their tools, and the molten glass is certainly such a hybrid ensemble, one where the agency of the maker is extended through their tools and into the glass: their decisions are responsive to the actions and reactions of the materials, which themselves respond both to the maker and the internal or external environment. The gaffer may certainly attempt to "lead" their vessel into shape but would also have to remain open and flexible to all the contingent variables that may come into play in the workshop.

By invoking the concept of scaffolding, one cannot continue without mention of Andy Clark. And yet, for the purposes of this paper, it is another of Clark's concepts that proves most interesting: that of the leaky mind. Clark conceives of its "natural" confines and mingling shamelessly with body and with world."³¹ Let us return to the papyrus:

²⁶ Corning Museum of Glass, *Glass Blowing*.

<https://www.cmog.org/video/glass-blowing>, author's transcription.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language and Thought*, (New York, Harper and Row., 1971), 166.

²⁸ Georg Theiner and Chris Drain. "What's the Matter with Cognition? A 'Vygotskian' Perspective on Material Engagement Theory," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 2017, 6(5): 837–62.

²⁹ Georg Theiner and Chris Drain. "What's the Matter with Cognition? A 'Vygotskian' Perspective on Material Engagement Theory," 843.

³⁰ Georg Theiner and Chris Drain. "What's the Matter with Cognition? A 'Vygotskian' Perspective on Material Engagement Theory," 851.

³¹ Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 53.

First he heated the very point of the iron, then snatched from nearby a lump of bright glass and placed it skilfully within the hollow furnace. And the crystal as it tasted the heat of the fire was softened by the strokes of Hephaestus like [...] He blew in from his mouth a quick breath [...] like a man essaying the most delightful art of the flute. The glass received the force of his divine breath, for swinging it often like an ox-herd swings his crook, he would breathe into it.³²

The glass received the force of his divine breath. Ostensibly, it is just as much via the breath of the gaffer that their mind 'leaks' out into the world and into *Flask with Ornamental Handles*. Whereas hands are often privileged as being the site of making as "it is only by way of a haptic understanding of the world that it becomes possible to imagine something new,"³³ an over-privileging of these appendages in the making of blown glass vessels risks obscuring the importance that the breath plays in their creation. While not denying the crucial roll the physical body plays in glass blowing, perhaps there is another way to think about *Flask with Ornamental Handles* and its relation to the subtle body.

The Thing that Contains

Writing in 1950, Martin Heidegger theorizes the essence of what it is to experience "nearness" through the objects that surround us. Using the jug as his example, he sets out to understand the phenomenological relationship between a person and this "thing:" how one knows it, experiences it, and how it is what it is. As he states: "The jug is a thing. What is the jug? We say: a vessel, something of the kind that holds something else within it. The jug's holding is done by its base and sides. This container itself can again be held by the handle. As a vessel the jug is something self-sustained, something that stands on its own."³⁴ He continues:

As a vessel the jug stands on its own as self-supporting. But what does it mean to say that the container stands on its own? Does the vessel's self-support alone define the jug as a thing? Clearly the jug stands as a vessel only because it has been brought to a stand. This happened during, and happens by means of, a process of setting, of setting forth, namely, by

³² Henderson, *Ancient Glass: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, 213.

³³ Julia Sofaer, "Hands: The Human Body and Clay." *Clay in the Age of Bronze: Essays in the Archaeology of Prehistoric Creativity*. (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 6.

³⁴ Heidegger, "The Thing," 164.

producing the jug. The potter makes the earthen jug out of earth that he has specially chosen and prepared for it.³⁵

Flask with Ornamental Handles could easily be substituted here for the jug, and glass for the clay: it too is a vessel, that holds something else within it; it can again be held (if only theoretically by the handle); it stands on its own and has been brought forth by its maker to stand on its own. But if “in truth we are thinking of this self-support in terms of the making process. Self-support is what the *making* aims at”³⁶ then what, as Heidegger asks, “in the thing is thingly? What is the thing in itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing.”³⁷ If *Flask with Ornamental Handles* stands on its own, it is certainly because the gaffer made it that way, but what makes *this* vessel *a* vessel, this thing *a* thing, in itself?

Heidegger asserts that what and how this flask is as this flask-thing, can never be learned or thought properly by simply looking at its outward appearance (the irony of the visual analysis portion of this paper is not lost here). “No representation of what is present, in the sense of what stands forth and of what stands over against as an object, ever reaches to the thing *qua* thing.”³⁸ Instead, “the jug’s thingness resides in its being *qua* vessel.”³⁹ He continues:

We become aware of the vessel’s holding nature when we fill the jug. The jug’s bottom and sides obviously take on the task of holding. But not so fast! When we fill the jug with wine, do we pour the wine into the sides and bottom? At most, we pour the wine between the sides and over the bottom. Sides and bottom are, to be sure, what is impermeable in the vessel. But what is impermeable is not yet what does the holding. When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel’s holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel.⁴⁰

Although lengthy, it is necessary to continue quoting, in order to draw nearer to the thingness of the argument. Sides and bottom, of which the jug consists and by which it stands, are not really what does the holding. But if the holding is done by the jug’s void, then the potter who forms sides and

³⁵ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 165.

³⁶ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 165. [author’s emphasis]

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 166.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No—he shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it, he forms the clay into the form. From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The jug's void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds. And yet, is the jug really empty?⁴¹

Herein lies the crux of this discussion. As Heidegger recognizes, “physical science assures us that the jug is filled with air and with everything that goes to make up the air's mixture. We allowed ourselves to be misled by a semi-poetic way of looking at things when we pointed to the void of the jug in order to define its acting as a container,”⁴² and even though, “as soon as we agree to study the actual jug scientifically, in regard to its reality, the facts turn out differently.” His essential argument is that “the twofold holding of the void rests on the outpouring. In the outpouring, the holding is authentically how it is. To pour from the jug is to give,”⁴³ we shall return to the papyrus: *The glass received the force of his divine breath* within that void. This was the original air that *Flask with Ornamental Handles* contained, and, to a certain extent, still does.

Several authors, including Sofia (2000) and Wanier (2006) postulate that the body is a series of containers (organs) within a container (skin), and that its openings—mouth, nose, pores etc.—are boundaries that create conjunctions between the outside and inside world. The lungs are one such container that hold air, temporarily, as it enters and exits the body via the nostrils and the open lips. The lungs too take in and pour out. In glass blowing, that action of pouring out, that “giving” Heidegger discusses, is the very thing that has served to create the void within the flask / vessel / thing in question.

On a physical level, one container is literally emptied into the void of another; more subtly, the mind leaks out through the body and the internal essence of the maker is used to form the thingness of the other. Unlike the clay potter, who uses their hands to shape the sides and bottom of the jug, the gaffer never makes physical contact with the flask, only ever manipulating its form from the inside out. (Its detailed trails are also mediated by tools). More like an analogue photographer, the gaffer creates the ideal physical and chemical conditions for the vessel to develop, but cannot entirely predict its final outcome, nor fix its absolute permanence over time, as is evidenced by the iridized degradation seen in *Flask with Ornamental Handles*.

⁴¹ Ibid., 167.

⁴² Heidegger, “The Thing,” 167.

⁴³ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 169.

When Susan Sontag writes that a photograph is “a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask [...] never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)—a material vestige of its subject in a way no painting can ever be,”⁴⁴ it is acknowledged that both her examples are created by pressing one material into another, and that such physicality is rarely the actual case in photography. However, in the case of glass blowing, there *is* a physical imprint made on the void of the vessel, and its form *does* register an “emanation” or “material vestige” of its maker. Given both the physical distance of the gaffer and the photographer from their product, as a result of the hybrid ensemble of tools and technology necessarily required to create their work, as well as the complex chemical composition of both media, the inherent fragility and unfixed nature of their materials, this parallel between glass blowing and photography is oblique, but certainly not unfounded. *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is a flask *qua* flask, *because* of what another container-thing gave into it; the flask flasks because it is in turn able to both contain and give, to pour out but also take in. *To take in the force of the gaffer’s breath.* “To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability... all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt;”⁴⁵ *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is equally, not just an artefact in a museum, but a container that ultimately keeps an imprint of its maker. It attests to both it and its makers “mortality, vulnerability, mutability” and too is subject to the “relentless melt” of time.

Final Contained Thoughts

This paper has attempted to use the materiality of an ancient glass flask to propose the lingering presence of its maker, and to theorize what makes this thing the thing that it is. Using a “bio-philotechnological” approach, the ostensibly orphaned museum artefact *Flask with Ornamental Handles* is considered a thing-in-and-of-itself, a functional container that inevitably, through its making, evidences the presence of its maker and their material explorations. This is an admittedly poetic, experimental offering, one that omits many social and cultural factors that have given rise to glass, glass making, and the making of *this* particular glass; and yet, it too is simply evidence of, or a container for, the leaky mind of its author, who is, in a scaffolded way, using her materials to think through those of another maker.

⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux., 1977), 154.

⁴⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 15.

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<https://collections.rom.on.ca/objects/391184/flask-with-ornamental-handles?ctx=bb7002b3-7113-44c4-bc72-de5a4f415a19&idx=9>My Collections

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Beloved Mosque:

The Wazir Khan Masjid of Lahore

Sanniah Jabeen

The Wazir Khan mosque is located in the Walled City of Lahore, along the southern side of Lahore's *Shahi Guzargah*, or “Royal Road.” This was the traditional route traversed by Mughal nobles and their guests on their way to royal residences at the Lahore Fort. The mosque is situated approximately 260 meters west of the Delhi Gate, where the mosque's *Shahi Hammam* (Royal Bath) is also located. The mosque faces both a town square, known as Wazir Khan Chowk, and the *Chitta* (White) Gate.

A trip through the Delhi Gate to the Wazir Khan Chowk is an explosion of the senses. If one searches for images of the Delhi Gate Lahore, most incorrectly show the Gate as a wide-open entrance through which vehicles and people can easily pass. If one actually walks through the Delhi Gate, it is absolute chaos. Cars have to be parked many blocks away and visitors have to push through busy cart vendors, donkeys, hens, the occasional cow, as well as young men carrying twice their body weight in fruit, shoes, eatables, and clothing items. The Walled City of Lahore is the only place in the city where human driven carts still exist, as many streets are almost too narrow to allow motor vehicles or even donkey carts. The call for the prayer bellows periodically from the minarets of the Wazir Khan mosque and an increasing cacophony of human chatter, rickshaws, and motorbikes fills the air. Yet, the minute one steps through the grand entrance of the Wazir Khan, everything quietens. As Robert Kaplan describes in his *New York Times* article, despite the overwhelming bustle outside, “on account of the courtyard's silence and the lovely reflecting pool in the center, I felt far removed from the city.”¹

¹ Robert Kaplan's article, though written in 1989, is a colorful and interestingly accurate account of the Walled city of Lahore and can be read [here](#). Nadiem also gives a similar account of being “transported back in time” in his book *Historic Mosques of Lahore*. See: Ihsan H. Nadiem, *Historic Mosques of Lahore*, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1998): 87.

Built in 1642 C.E. as a public endowment by then governor of Lahore, Sheikh Ilm-ud-Din Ansari ibn Shaykh ‘Abd al-Latif ibn Shaykh Hassan, the Wazir Khan Mosque is one of the most frequented mosques in Lahore. In countless monographs, tour guides and popular histories of the city, the Wazir Khan Mosque is exemplified as the “beauty spot on the cheek of Lahore.” In his book, *Historic Mosques of Lahore*, Ihsan Nadiem claims that the Wazir Khan Mosque “stands out prominently” amongst the prized buildings of Lahore.²



Fig. 1. Aerial View of the Wazir Khan Mosque (Source: [Locally Lahore](#))

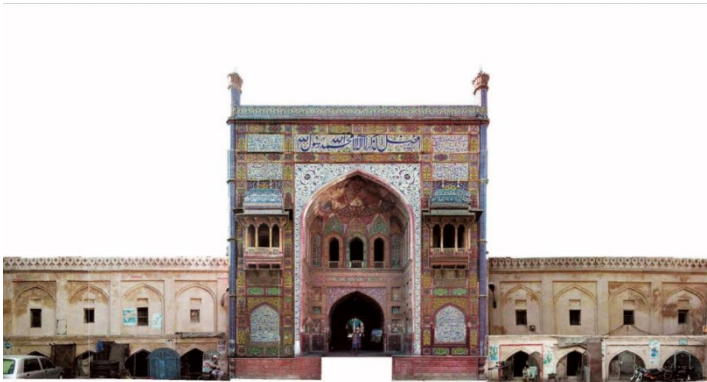


Fig. 2. Main entrance of the Mosque (source: [AKCSP](#))

² Nadiem, *Historic Mosques of Lahore*, 87.

The carefully selected historical location of the Wazir Khan Mosque plays a highly important role in its reception today. The Walled City of Lahore has always been one of the most congested areas of Lahore, home today to around 300,000 people. Previously an important political center, it is now the tourist hub of Lahore, hosting increasing numbers of tourists each year with 51,647 tourists visiting in 2015.³ Such numbers can be attributed to the history of the Wazir Khan Mosque and the Chowk⁴ that flanks it. There are many myths associated with the creation of the Wazir Khan Mosque, which have much to do with the rise of Shaykh Ilm al- Din to the ranks of Lahore's governor. The title Wazir Khan was bestowed upon him by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan after he became an esteemed physician by apparently curing the Queen Nur Jahan of a nasty cyst on her foot.⁵ Khan narrates that Wazir Khan vowed to spend all the gifts that he received for curing the Queen on the building of a mosque. It is debatable whether he was governor of Lahore when the mosque was built but most accounts agree that it is probable that the mosque was constructed when he was Governor of Lahore, otherwise it would not bear his name. He left many memorials to his career as Governor in Lahore including baths, markets, *serais*, mosques and gardens.⁶ Yet, out of all of his endowments, Wazir Khan Mosque appears to have been a personal favorite. When Wazir Khan died in 1651, he donated all of his personal property to the upkeep of this mosque and left clear instructions for its maintenance in an Endowment Deed.

The presence of such a deed was key in ensuring the self-preservation of this mosque long after Wazir Khan's death and had much to contribute to the cultural activities that abounded within and around the mosque.⁷ A *madrasah* (Islamic school) was established in the mosque with two appointed teachers. The open courtyard in front of the mosque served as a place for contracting business and hosting cultural activities and social gatherings. Ahmad Nabi Khan writes that "Indeed the mosque was a popular rendezvous of the local as well as those coming from far off places, who gathered here for exchange of views, recital of poetic works, for scholarly discourses... the arrange so made by the *waqfi* (endower) continued during the long period of the Moghul rule...[until] the holocaust of the Sikhs."⁸ During the Sikh rule from 1799 to 1849, the mosque and its surroundings

³ Quoted in Dawn News, "[Ten fold increase in foreign tourists for Lahore Walled City](#)" published January 2nd 2016.

⁴ The intersection of tracks and a wide-open courtyard around the Wazir Khan Mosque that was also named after Wazir Khan for his contributions to the area. The Wazir Khan Chowk also had two wells, one of which remains today.

⁵ Mamoon Khan, *Wazir Khan Mosque: Rediscovered*. (Pakistan Writers Co-Operative Society, 2011): 2.

⁶ Khan, *Wazir Khan Mosque: Rediscovered*, 3.

⁷ Kamil Khan Mumtaz, "Reading Masjid Wazir Khan," *Lahore Museum Bulletin*, Vol 5, No. 2, (1992): 1.

⁸ Ahmad Nabi Khan, *Development of Mosque Architecture in Pakistan*, (Lok Virsa Publishing House, 1991): 93.

were mistreated, and the Wazir Khan Chowk was almost destroyed. Apart from unnecessary encroachments, it was also used for various purposes other than as a religious site. An interesting incident is narrated by Mamoon Khan, where Ranjit Singh, the Sikh king, brought a famous prostitute, Moran, to the portal of the mosque; here they danced and exclaimed profanities in a drunken haze. According to local legends, he and Moran promptly became sick that very night, only to be cured when they paid Rs. 500 to the tomb of the saint within the Mosque. According to legend, the Sikhs never touched the mosque of Wazir Khan again.⁹

Though such myths and narrations played a role in ensuring the sanctity of the mosque, the Wazir Khan Chowk has played an equally important role in maintaining the culture around the mosque. Such chowks have for centuries have been vital for the healthy social function of Islamic societies, all the way up to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (S) when the courtyard of the Mosque of Madina was essential to the spread of Islam. But in the subcontinent's historical cities, the Chowk plays an especially important role. As historical cities of the subcontinent are "typically characterized by traditional houses, streetscapes, water systems, living communities and their associated traditional livelihoods and social practices clearly differentiating them from the rest of the city the old city elements not only ensured a walkable and compact urban development but also kept social cohesion as an important aspect."¹⁰ The Wazir Khan Chowk was built while keeping the cultural history and social fabric of the time in mind, and has been restored by the Aga Khan Foundation in 2017 in a similar fashion.¹¹ Since historical cities function differently from their modern counterparts, respecting such differences during restoration is especially important. The reconstruction of the Chowk maintains respect by allowing tourists to pass through without disturbing the residents of the Walled City. The Walled City of Lahore Authority's mandate of involving residents within the upkeep and preservation of the Chowk and the mosque echoes that of Wazir Khan's Endowment Deed of 1641.¹² According to this mandate, only locals from the Walled City can serve as tourist guides, drive the tourist rickshaws, and sell cultural fares. Now that the mosque once again has a large courtyard, many cultural and social events are hosted there such as qawwali nights, lectures on Islamic heritage, and Eid Milad un-Nabi celebrations.¹³ Recently the

⁹ Khan, *Wazir Khan Mosque: Rediscovered*, 13.

¹⁰ Dhingra, Mani, et al. "Macro Level Characterization of Historic Urban Landscape: Case Study of Alwar Walled City." *City, Culture and Society*, vol. 9, 2017, pp. 39–53., doi:10.1016/j.ccs.2016.10.001.

¹¹ Aga Khan Cultural Services Pakistan (AKCSP). "Conservation of the Wazir Khan Mosque Lahore: Preliminary Report on Condition and Risk Assessment." Lahore, Pakistan. Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, 2012.

¹² The Walled City of Lahore Authority's website gives an interesting account of the history of the Chowk and its use today. It can be read [here](#).

¹³ The birthday of the Prophet Muhammad is celebrated with zest throughout Pakistan.

inaugural Lahore Biennale in 2018 also displayed the works of the prominent Pakistani artist, Imran Qureshi, within the courtyard of the mosque.¹⁴

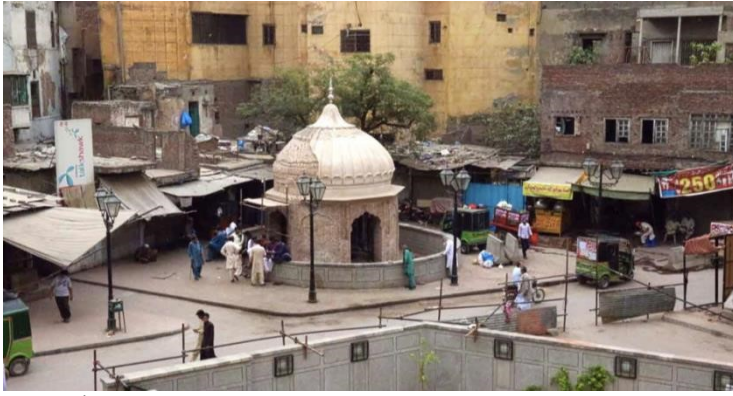


Fig. 4. The newly restored Wazir Khan Chowk (Source: [AKCSP](#))



Fig. 5. The restored front courtyard of the mosque (Source: [AKCSP](#))

The pleasing aesthetic of the mosque also very obviously contributes to much of its appeal. Much of the mosque is constructed of cut and dressed brick decorated with glazed tile mosaics, but there are many interior decorations in the form of *naqqashī* wall painting (a semi-dry form of fresco). Both these forms of embellishment have integral calligraphic components drawing on

¹⁴ The Lahore Biennale of 2018 made full use of the restored Wazir Khan Chowk and its surrounding monuments. Details about the exhibition can be read [here](#).



Fig. 6. Fresco work, tile inlay work and faux brickwork on the main portal of the mosque. (Source: [AKCSP](#))

the Quran and the Hadith as well as Sufi sayings. The colors used are reminiscent of Persian styles which include *lajvard* (cobalt blue), *firozi* (cerulean), white, green, orange, yellow and purple. The use of color is liberal and almost consumes the viewer in its variation of dullness and liveliness. Yet, despite the explosion of color, the palette is harmonious and calming. Ghazala Misbah elaborates on the selection of colors by commenting that the colours of the mosque have closely related values, with the light balancing the dark, the cool offsetting the warm, and the intense matched with neutrals.¹⁵ An example of this are the cool blue and white calligraphy plates (insert figure) can be read without straining the eyes. At many points in the building, the dull, warm brick is kept bare to perfectly balance the brilliantly colored mosaics.

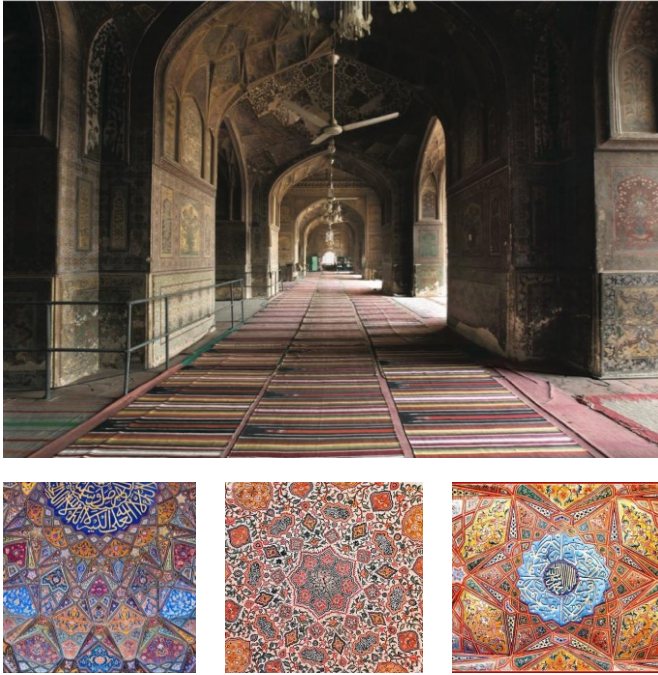
Building upon Misbah's thorough study of the coloring of the Wazir Khan Mosque, I argue that the selection of these earthly colors has an instant psychological impact on the viewer, and enable the visitor to feel calm and connected to the mosque.¹⁶ Moreover, despite the liberal use of colors and elaborate designs, each of these artistic elements warrants individual attention. Stefan Weidner has deemed 'Islamic Baroque,' as a style that emphasizes opulence and detail to create a dynamic interaction with the viewer; despite familiarity with the mosque, each visit can reveal a new element to the point where the mosque will always provide a new visual experience.¹⁷ The "crescendo" of colors in the

¹⁵ Misbah, Ghazala. *The Wazir Khan Mosque: Its Aesthetic Beauty*. Ferozsons, 1999.

¹⁶ For a detailed look at the colors of the Mosque, see Misbah's chapter "Aesthetic Aspects of the Mosque" in her book *The Wazir Khan Mosque: It's Aesthetic Beauty* (Ferozsons, 1999.)

¹⁷ Stefan Weidner's potent description is important here; "The portal of the mosque fascinates already from the outside by its unusually varied, varied colors. When the visitor has passed through the portal and the courtyard of the mosque and finally enters the prayer hall, the impression of fullness, liveliness and colorfulness reaches a crescendo. Hardly any work of Islamic sacral architecture is likely to show as many different colors inside and outside as the Wazir Khan Mosque. The different colors and color surfaces bring about a revitalization of the architecture and at the same time - one may call it - a confusion of the observer, who finds it difficult to decide on which surface, on which element his eye should rest, to which detail he wants to focus his contemplation. Because, as harmonious as the overall impression they create, the different colors, motifs and calligraphies each call for their own attention. Thus, the individual elements seem to be emphasized, less the overall impression. At the same time, there is an interplay and tension

prayer hall that Weidner refers to is an especially important study for this theory. Every inch of the prayer hall is elaborately decorated from the squinches and the niches at eye level to the soffits and the domed ceilings. The study or observance of this majestic craftsmanship can take hours, motivating the curious worshipper within the prayer hall to stay longer than the time taken to offer prayer. It can also be argued that the almost excessive calligraphic inscriptions are a deliberate attempt to glorify Allah. Just reading the many calligraphic inscriptions on the domes and the walls can cause a visitor to unwittingly pray and praise Allah, thus ensuring that almost every person walking into the prayer aisle performs an act of prayer. According to Kamil Khan Mumtaz, the entire Wazir Khan Mosque should be read as an act of praise, a celebration of the glory of Allah where the designer takes no credit for its creation, for the source of all beauty is “Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of Form and color.”¹⁸



Figs. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4: Main prayer hall and details of some ornamentation.
(Source: [AKCSP](#))

between the individual design elements and, of course, the overall effect of the building, which nevertheless does not exist in the more regular decoration of most other Islamic (and Mughal) sacred buildings” See: Stefan Weidner, “Zahir and Batin: The Picture Puzzles of Lahore,” *Fikrun Wa Fann*, Goethe-Institut, Nov. 2014, 64.

¹⁸ Mumtaz, “Reading Masjid Wazir Khan,” 9.

While aesthetics, location, histories, and culture have played an integral part in keeping the Wazir Khan Mosque alive and loved, there is much more to be said regarding the connection that people feel with certain monuments. This case study of the Wazir Khan Mosque is written due to my own personal connections with the mosque; a single visit to the site in 2011 was enough to change the trajectory of my career towards studying the arts. While there are many studies that deal with how communities neglect heritage sites, there is much more to be discovered in terms of how certain heritage sites impact communities over long periods of time. In this sense, the Wazir Khan Mosque functions as an ‘active’ site that is not just meant to be looked at but experienced with all its histories and cultures. Understanding the history of a monument is just as important as creating activities around it that keep local communities engaged. Such studies are especially important to include within the discipline of art history, which keeps updating itself to include more communities and new methodologies, while still revisiting the all-important question ‘who is the artist’?

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Conversations with Caravaggio:

Temporal disruption and the transformative role of the spectator in Caravaggio's works.

Grace Guest

As a testament to the changing trends of Baroque art, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's paintings refute chronology and the linear order, allowing audiences of both past and present to engage in a divine experience. Many scholars have detailed the ways in which Caravaggio complicates time within his work. Specific works within the artist's oeuvre have been employed time and time again to examine the representation of *multiple* temporalities. These case studies burst with humanity and realism; they are both familiar and intimate, made so by the striking mortality of Caravaggio's characters. His ecclesiastical commissions are grounded in biblical narrative and yet, ambiguity is continually produced by the absence of verifiable settings and concrete contexts. In certain pieces, Caravaggio minutely alters the narrative, forcing one to question the moment that is being painted.

Pamela Askew's formative article "Outward Action, Inner Vision" places emphasis on the subtlest details of humanity within Caravaggio's works. In doing so, she is able to negotiate the relationship between interior and exterior stimuli in the production of temporality. Offering an intriguing approach to Caravaggio's sacred scenes, Askew contends that the artist altered the mimetic tradition of conversion painting. It is important that one explore the process in which Caravaggio uses, confuses, and reinterprets the natural, spontaneous activity of memory. Examining four case studies, this paper presents a brief summary of Askew's binary of 'inward absorption' and 'outward expression,' seeing it applied to each piece. Additional theorists are discussed in relation to Askew's interpretations to further an understanding of the temporality and viewing experience that Caravaggio might have intended. Theories by Alexander Nagel, Christopher Wood, and Michael Fried—among others—are employed in order to examine where unity may be found in Caravaggio's habitual and active approach to memory. By modifying the traditions of temporality, Caravaggio invites the spectator to participate in a transformative conversation.



Fig. 1. Caravaggio, *Penitent Magdalen*, 1596-97, oil on canvas, 122.5 x 98.5 cm, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome.¹



Fig. 2. Detail of oil pot, *Penitent Magdalen*.

¹ Image retrieved from text: *Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio: La Vita e Le Opere Attraverso I Documenti*.

Pamela Askew's article, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inner Vision," introduces a revelatory theory in terms of Caravaggio's temporal scheme. Studying the 'narratives' of specific pieces painted during his time in Rome, the short essay references both classical treatises as well as modern art-historical scholarship. Askew begins by questioning the place of the ancillary figures within the artist's conversion paintings. Instead of dismissing these figures as mere accessories to the main plot, she considers their "moral and spiritual contrast"² to the central figure. Not to be neglected, these ancillary figures appear to bear witness to the main action; one may see them as responding to it in different ways. Really, these figures are participating as much as experiencing; they are active in their roles, they are receptive to the protagonist and to the presence of the divine. They are made to confuse the clarity of the *mise en scène*. Askew suggests that these characters are integral to the way the artist structured his scenes, and to the painting's function.

Caravaggio painted scenes from scripture in his most famous works, but to an untrained eye, they may appear without narrative or story. Askew emphasizes that as a result, nothing appears to "*proceed*." She sees the 'before' and 'after' of the moment Caravaggio paints as having been "sliced away."³ His characters are rendered static; they do not move through space and time. This negates the possibility of *istoria*, which Askew defines as the "ongoing actions required to tell a story." *Istoria* requires a specific time and setting to be plausible.⁴ The 'where' and 'when' of a narrative is made ambiguous within Caravaggio's works. Yet, the artist ultimately succeeds in bringing together history and what Askew terms 'non-history,' a curious feat that raises more questions. Askew argues for an inversion of convention: the question is not 'how has the artist made the historical look so real?' but rather, 'how has Caravaggio made the real look historical?'⁵

I

The Penitent Magdalene

Askew first turns to an analysis of the *Penitent Magdalene* [fig. 1]. It is the only sacred example without subsidiary figures but remains a powerful piece of testimony. One may recognize the woman slumped before them as the Magdalene—despite the fact that she appears to sit in a setting outside of time and space—purely from the oil pot and material goods that she has cast aside [fig. 2]. Here, the motif is oversimplified. The transparent liquid within the flask at her feet has been easily reinterpreted as a flask of wine; Bellori

² Stefania B. Macioce and Pamela Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," in *Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio: La Vita e Le Opere Attraverso I Documenti* (Logart Press, 1997), 248.

³ Stefania B. Macioce and Pamela Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 248.

⁴ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 248.

⁵ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 249.

reads the vessel as the companion of a girl merely *pretending* to be the Magdalen.⁶ Departing from the pictorial tradition of a glowing girl with a lifted gaze, one that appears to be experiencing a divine revelation, Caravaggio's rendering hangs her head. Her gaze is cast downward, her eyes appear closed as a single tear—nearly undetectable—relays the depth of emotion behind her eyelids. The position of her hands is a similar departure, as they are neither clasped in prayer nor pressed to her breast, but merely relaxed in her lap. She seems to be inwardly illuminated and withdrawn, her conversion made palpable only by her delicate state, and the vague symbols at her side. The figure's biblical status has come into question time and time again, with scholars identifying her garb as being contemporary to Caravaggio's time. Askew reasons that the girl is not the Magdalene, but suggests she is in a state that has caused her to "inwardly *become as the Magdalene*."⁷ In this way, one might consider this an artistic performance, or rather, an act of performativity.

The performance might be understood in terms of Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's *Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism*. The framework of art historical study is challenged by their reinterpretation of the role of anachronism in visual practice. The authors attempt to emphasize the natural temporal instability of images, arguing that anachronism—and the temporal tension it creates – summons the observer to linger and hesitate before the image.⁸ They see the Renaissance as being particularly involved with a meditational approach to temporality in this sense. Nagel and Wood postulate that anachronism exists in two modes as 'performativism' and 'substitution'. When an artist leaves symbols or 'traces' within the work, leading the observer to think or consider a particular iconographical model, they are thus *performing* and referencing their own authorship. Alternatively, when a symbol is substituted into a painting as a direct replica of a known object—anything from a chair to a church—Nagel and Wood see it as a 'token.' This second theory of substitution implies that all artifacts are to be understood as having a "double historicity," fabricated in a present moment but possessing the value attributed to their antique predecessor.⁹ These items are to be seen as "tokens of types," the artifacts themselves belonging to a chain of replicas, thereby stretching across time and space.¹⁰ The theories of substitution and performativism reconfigure time, manipulating its fabric; they provide the viewer with the ability to grasp history "all at once."¹¹ Their

⁶ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 249.

⁷ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 249.

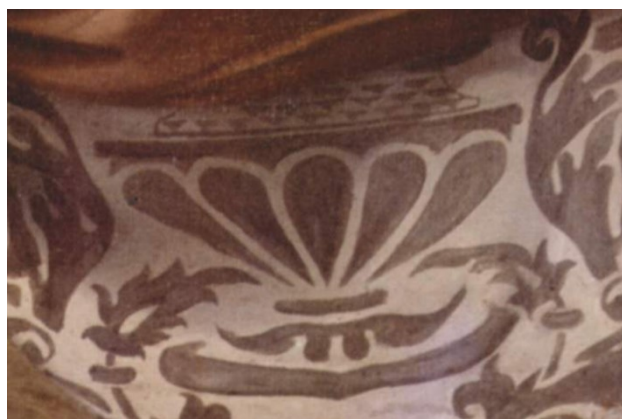
⁸ Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 13.

⁹ Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *The Art Bulletin* 87, no.3 (September 2005), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25067185>, 405.

¹⁰ Nagel and Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 405.

¹¹ Nagel and Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 408.

approach emphasizes execution, with a work achieving legitimacy through the implication of multiple narratives. Caravaggio's Magdalen acts as an example.



Figs. 3-4: A sixteenth century frieze in Brescia and details from *Pentinent Magdalene*.¹²

¹² Retrieved from text: *Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio: La Vita e Le Opere Attraverso I Documenti, Frieze*, XVI century, Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio-Martinengo, per concessione dei Civici Musei d'Arte e Storia.

The ‘traces’ or ‘symbols’ identified by Nagel and Wood are to be found in the ointment pot on the floor and its reflection in the pattern of the girl’s gown [fig. 2]. The sign of the vessel, at first glance blending into the fabric, is said to reference a sixteenth century frieze in Brescia [figs. 3-4]. It presents yet another signal to a separate time and setting in spite of being nearly undetectable to the fleeting eye. While Nagel and Wood position their theories in relation to scholarship on memory, Askew is perhaps the only scholar to place as much emphasis on how the *modern* audience is implicated. Askew argues that Caravaggio has purposefully imprinted the girl’s attire in order to signal the historical Mary, linking the figure to her contemporary so as to make them one.¹³ Unlike Nagel and Wood’s examples, Caravaggio’s work does not persuade his viewer but, on the contrary, leaves them to develop their own conclusions. While Nagel and Wood argue that anachronism encouraged viewers to *assess* the work in question, Caravaggio appears to surpass this by inviting the viewer, imploring them, to see themselves *within* the frame.

Boasting both a relic from scripture *and* its modern interpretation, substitution effectively lifts the biblical event out of history, with the repository belonging to an expansive number of historical moments all at once. Georges Didi-Huberman states that anachronism has proven to be fruitful in the way it uses temporality to convey the “exuberance, complexity and overdetermination of images.”¹⁴ One should indeed search for an anachronic item that remembers but, taking it further, the modern viewer might do so in order to use it as an agent in their own devotional practice. Recognizing and praising such transcendental tokens speaks to the perceived ability of faith itself to focus and form a point of connection with a saint or sinner of a different age. Whether it be in past or present times, the implications for the viewer remain the same. It is the marriage of knowledge and action that might signal the power of one’s piety.

Treating the *Magdalen* as an example, one must consider the depth of her interiority. Michael Fried, in his book *The Moment of Caravaggio*, recognizes the motif of ‘absorption’ in a staggering number of the artist’s paintings. Fried states that in the 1590s and early 1600s, the art of painting took on new significance, finding equal authority given to the “psychological, epistemological and ontological.”¹⁵ In the text, Caravaggio’s figures are granted the most ardent, emotional, “imagined inwardness,”¹⁶ doing well to signal the tastes of the era. With the absence of movement, it is easy for the viewer to do away with action in order to focus on both individual and

¹³ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 249.

¹⁴ Dan Karlholm and Keith P.F. Moxey, *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology, and Anachrony* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 19.

¹⁵ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 100.

¹⁶ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 81.

collective immersion. The private moment of the Magdalen is noteworthy as it metaphorically implies an “inner reality of psychological experience.”¹⁷ Fried emphasizes that the temporal suspension employed in the *Magdalen* gives both viewer and artist “all the time and freedom they require for their respective tasks.”¹⁸ In the case of the observer, time is required to appraise the work, make connections—perhaps on anachronisms—and digest the significance of the details. The “logic of absorption” contends that as long as this exercise lasts, the spectator remains “within the implied temporality of the image.”¹⁹ To understand this argument in terms of memory, and in terms of a transactional relationship between viewer and painting, Fried maintains that the audience should “feel himself or herself into” the body of the depicted figure.²⁰ This surpasses the capabilities of real-world connections, and as a result, art eclipses life.

Hegel’s philosophies are pertinent to Fried’s theorization for a few reasons. Hegel, as an idealist, places the *most* gravity on the interior depth, on an inwardness that is inclined to transcend the body and its limitations. He explains that as remembering beings, we possess the non-natural power to *overcome* externality. David Ciavatta, in his article on *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art*, elaborates upon Hegel’s ideas. Citing Hegel’s *Lectures on Fine Art*, he draws connections between our aesthetic experience of art and our reverence for the autonomy and freedom of being human.²¹ The body, as a sophisticated organism, is made up of parts doing particular jobs and yet each is an expression of the same *one thing*. Hegel postulates that organic beings might be structurally characterized insofar as having ‘unity-in-multiplicity.’²² Art and artworks that are conscious of temporality are said to operate similarly, intensifying these ‘unities-in-multiplicity.’ Hegel sees art as distinct from natural objects; it has rid itself of externality so as to grant its viewer a “glimpse into a way of being that is not itself simply finite.”²³ As echoed by Fried, Hegel posits that the richness and complexity of art may only be appreciated in “a temporally-extended, synthetic experience,” especially if the object is more evolved, or inherently temporal, in character.²⁴ The power of art resides in its ability to mark the passing of time, enabling human experience to “have an encounter with itself.”²⁵ The *Penitent Magdalen* embodies a humanity that is by nature developmental. It exemplifies how art surpasses externality, being capable of representing an interiority that cannot

¹⁷ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 81.

¹⁸ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 78.

¹⁹ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 102.

²⁰ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 102.

²¹ David Ciavatta, “Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art,” in *Phenomenology and the Arts*, ed. Peter Costello and Licia Carlson (Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2016), 2.

²² David Ciavatta, “Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art,” 6.

²³ Ciavatta, “Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art,” 9.

²⁴ Ciavatta, “Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art,” 20.

²⁵ Ciavatta, “Hegel and the Phenomenology of Art,” 23.

be expressed, only felt. In essence, it is the visible signalling the invisible. Here, there is only inaction. The whole of this painting is focused on what is happening inside, leaving the observer to relate, reflect and reminisce.

II

Death of the Virgin

Askew's scholarship places particular emphasis on the *Death of the Virgin* [fig. 5] for being the most baffling of Caravaggio's public commissions. Her book *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, an in-depth study of the painting as a religious masterwork, investigates its content and reassesses its originality and spiritual significance.²⁶ It is unusual that the painting is excluded from "Outward Action, Inner Vision" as it aligns with Askew's temporal hypotheses and, more gravely, exemplifies the striking realism that is said to have altered the tradition of sacred art. In *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, Askew explains that this piece had been sequestered, having been originally refused by the church to which it was given.²⁷ The Virgin, her body bloated with death, has been painted "obliquely to the picture plane," dramatically foreshortened. He has "cantilevered" her and therein extended her form to occupy the space, so much so that she acts as barrier between observer and the apostles crowded behind her. By having the apostles at her right side, bearing down on the viewer—as opposed to acting as placid margins—the artist makes the spectator a participant. An area is left at the forefront of the frame, drawing us into the "physical reality" of the event.²⁸ Responding to passages within "Outward Action," Askew discusses the irrational character of the space, created "by and for" these figures. The work again implies a singular moment; it compresses and intensifies the emotions of each character, their sorrow, despair or focus.²⁹

Revisiting the article, Askew calls our attention to a reoccurring motif. Caravaggio has once more joined "and [held] in stasis," the "historical past and [his] contemporary present," using clothing. The Virgin and the Magdalen, similarly slumped in the foreground of the image, are painted in contemporary attire, while the artist's apostles wear robes from biblical times. This scene is hardly ambiguous, and yet Caravaggio plays with historical conventions.

²⁶ Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

²⁷ Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 4.

²⁸ Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 14.

²⁹ Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 15.



Fig. 5. Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, 1601-2, oil on canvas, 369 x 245 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Askew looks at the tradition of painting this scene, identifying the minute changes that Caravaggio makes as an artist. As an example, one could look at his positioning of the apostles in relation to the Virgin's form. The Golden Legend dictates that John, carrying a branch from the "palm of paradise," should stand at the head of Mary at the burial next to Peter. Paul, self-titled as the "least of the apostles," has repeatedly been placed at her feet.³⁰ This ordering can be seen in a number of representations and is unquestionably the most popular in the Italian tradition. In this case, the placement has been reversed. It is Peter who stands at the forefront of the scene at the Virgin's feet, and John, youthfully depicted and deep in thought, is placed at her head. By reversing the conventional order, the artist once again positions historical sanctity against a contemporary realism. As Askew reasons, he has emblematically put Peter, his feet having been washed by Christ, in line with the feet of Christ's mother. Similarly, he has placed John, who slept on Christ's breast, parallel to her upper body. It should also be noted that this choice in spacing results in John's being in line with both the Madonna and Magdalen, thereby associating him with the two women "with whom he witnessed" Christ's crucifixion.³¹ The temporal disturbances continue when one considers the *number* of saints the artist has chosen to represent.

In its various depictions, the *Dormition* sees much variation in the number of saints crowded around the Madonna. John the evangelist identifies thirteen apostles, however, it is common to see only eleven or twelve in Italian paintings. Caravaggio paints eleven to corroborate a legend written by Joseph of Arimathea.³² Askew explains the omission of St. Thomas, a popular tradition in Italy during the era, as being relevant to the impression of time. It is Thomas who was handed the belt by the Virgin after her ascension to heaven, a belt said to have resided in Prato. Thomas is *also* the one to have drawn attention to the Madonna's empty tomb. In this way, Caravaggio excludes him so as to hint at the future, to promise this potential.³³ Askew insists that if Thomas had been present within the scene, it would have appeared "temporally sealed." It is clear that the artist was of the mind to avoid a conceptually fixed event.

This choice ties into more complex temporality. The artist is aware of how time is simply not static, of how it might be used to constantly engage with and shape the work in which it is implied. In Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey's *Time in the History of Art*, Moxey contends that, "works of art seethe with the confusion of multiple forms of time in their very materials, and that these materials bear traces of the temporal systems of the cultures [that made

³⁰ Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 29.

³¹ Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 29.

³² Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 29.

³³ Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin*, 30.

them].”³⁴ He emphasizes the gravity of the human encounter with artistic time and how, as a result, the art’s temporality is consistently transformed. Contemporary art is thereby “betrayed” if aligned with a chronological record, something which Caravaggio’s *Dormition* enthusiastically resists. Karlholm, in his chapter “Considering Efficient Art History,” appraises the theories of Heidegger. Heidegger warns that “the working of the work does not consist in the taking effect of a cause. It lies in change.”³⁵ He further postulates that things “are not simple entities [but are] assembled in time.” As “networks are constantly worked and reworked,” the work of art is not simply “the mere result of a laborious process...[requiring] material and intellectual resources, but the *source* of a new process, a future, a history, a ‘life.’”³⁶ These sentiments resonate in Caravaggio’s oeuvre and indicate the power imbued in the *Dormition*’s subtle changes. Askew maintains that Caravaggio desired an “indeterminate and universal frame of reference” in order to create a “truth to human experience.”³⁷ The *Death of the Virgin* openly refutes the precedents set by the commonly accepted testimony of a Neoplatonic mystic.³⁸ Like the *Penitent Magdalen*, it refuses to be tied to a point in time and is thereby constantly garnering new meaning, interacting with new interpretations. For as long as new eyes are invited to rove the canvas, the painting will remain a ‘source.’

Similar to other renderings within the tradition, we are unable to fully identify each saint from the next. However, the way in which the apostles are grouped is understood to align with a model in Saint Mark’s basilica in Venice, a mosaic designed by Castagno-Giambono [fig. 6]. John remains at the head and Peter at the foot; three apostles are shown in intense conversation at the far right. Askew lists a number of details that validate the possibility of this being Caravaggio’s inspiration, including the way in which the youthful John’s pose remembers Paul, the elderly saint in blue robes, in Castagno’s version. The ambiguity persists here, as seen in the *Magdalen*. We can only attribute historiography in a pictorial sense. Nagel and Wood’s theories might also apply in this case. Askew recognizes the mosaic of St. Mark and thereby it may be considered a performance, tied to historic tradition, even if dubiously so.

³⁴ Dan Karlholm and Keith P.F. Moxey, *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology, and Anachrony* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 4.

³⁵ Dan Karlholm and Keith P.F. Moxey, *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology, and Anachrony*, 17.

³⁶ Karlholm and Moxey, *Time in the History of Art*, 18.

³⁷ Askew, *Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin*, 37.

³⁸ Askew, *Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin*, 36. Theologians of the late 16th c. authenticated one particular account of the Virgin’s death, given by ‘Pseudo Dionysius who had declared himself to have been in attendance for the event. His description lies with his *Divine Names* and was later popularized in Voraine’s *Golden Legend* – to which artistic tradition often referred.



Fig. 6. Castagno-Giambono, Detail of *Dormition of the Virgin*, 1448-51, Mosaic, Basilica di San Marco, Venice.

The presence of a weeping Mary Magdalen is equally stimulating. Her participation has been recorded on only one occasion. Here, her inclusion is both novel and highly influential in terms of the piece's meditative function. For Fried the *Dormition* exemplifies, in reference to Sydney Freedberg, the 'thematization of absorption,' where the absence of rhetoric and drama pairs specifically to the "primacy of absorption."³⁹ This is shown more demurely in the aforementioned *Magdalen*. Fried's theory is manifest and impactful. The unprecedented treatment of the apostles is profound in that reality is made inescapable. Fried recognizes a natural relationship between absorption and realism, propelled by Caravaggio and those who would ultimately follow him in later years.⁴⁰ An audience is able to take in the staggering detail of this human scene due to Caravaggio's artistic prowess, and yet, his abilities are most inclined to imply the complex, private experience of each stationary figure. Both Fried and Freedberg see the girl in the foreground—who we must assume to be the Magdalen—as the epitome of emotional inwardness, and again we return to the psychological factor. She epitomizes grief, personifies the way it might be evoked, and carries the

³⁹ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 79.

⁴⁰ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 78.

“keenest imagined inwardness.”⁴¹ As the emphasis seems to fall on the interior, spiritual depth, one “begins to imagine a split or division between the inward condition and the outward being.”⁴² In this case, Caravaggio has subordinated the outward tasks to accentuate the moment, using other effects to subvert spontaneity. For all their dynamism or stillness, it is necessary to separate mind from body in order to engage with multiple temporal planes. Although the details assert the verism of the picture, we are still obligated to imagine the Magdalen’s sorrow, her face hidden from view. In doing so, absorption brings us in, and the invisible is made perceptible.

Hegel’s scholarship remains pertinent in this interpretation. Comparable to how one must receive the hidden features of the Magdalen, the invisible gains visibility in respect to Caravaggio’s implication of divine light. This theme of light as illumination reappears throughout his oeuvre. The source here is from above, making the Virgin’s unorthodox portrayal appear to glow. Askew reiterates that the artist uses the visible to “most powerfully evoke the invisible, materially and symbolically.”⁴³ She sustains that, in communicating the delicate nature of mortality, invisible truths have no need for supernatural phenomena. In fact, it is perhaps this timelessness that motivates the viewer to *see*. Revelation shares a relationship with light in that it is not tangible, and yet touches all. Askew’s “Outward Action, Inward Vision” quotes Augustine in his veneration for Christ as the light that does away with doubt, as “the true Light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.”⁴⁴ Caravaggio’s work does away with the elitist ideal, while the artist appears conscious of a wider audience.

III

The Calling of Saint Matthew

The *Calling of St. Matthew* [fig. 7], which currently hangs in the Contarelli chapel of the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, hosts the same powerful implication of divine light and the coming of Christ. The painting is used as one of Askew’s central arguments in *Outward Action, Inner Vision*. Commissioned by Cardinal Matthew Contarelli, Caravaggio illustrates a story from the Gospel of Matthew. Christ has stepped into the custom house and called on the tax collector Levi to follow him. Askew explains that Caravaggio has again created a symbiosis, combining the sacred and secular, the historical and contemporary. For this reason, she argues that it is difficult to decide who in the scene is supposed to be Matthew. The artist has once more put a contemporary spin on a biblical scene, painting figures in

⁴¹Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 81.

⁴² Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 100.

⁴³ Askew, *Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin*, 131.

⁴⁴ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 255.

contemporary clothing, setting his characters in what might be a common tavern. It is important to note that this was his first public commission. As with the *Penitent Magdalene*, perhaps to a greater extent, one could dispute the biblical nature of this painting, even more so if it were separated from its current context. While the sorrowful girl acts as an “exemplum for the present,”⁴⁵ the mortality of the characters within the tavern makes them approachable, relatable.



Fig. 7. Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599-1600, oil on canvas, 322 x 340 cm, Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

Askew's scholarship participates in an ongoing debate regarding the identity of the apostle. Who is Matthew? From the time of the painting's creation, critics have assumed that Levi is the bearded, smartly dressed man. His seasoned face, glowing with Christ's illumination, looks in the direction of the light source. He appears to point to himself as if to say “me, a publican?”⁴⁶ His gesture could be seen as an interaction with the Christ figure on the far right. The man, wearing a nearly undetectable halo, reaches out his hand in a manner that might pay a historical and divine reference to the

⁴⁵ Stefania B. Macioce and Pamela Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” in *Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio: La Vita e Le Opere Attraverso I Documenti* (Logart Press, 1997), 249.

⁴⁶ Stefania B. Macioce and Pamela Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 249.

Creation of Adam by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Indeed, he is ‘seeing the light,’ however, it has been disputed that the man is actually pointing to his right, to a youthful figure who hangs his head. Askew states that this identification has been less extensively yet adeptly argued for. She agrees that the observer should see the *youth*, slumped on the left side of the frame, as the tax collector. His eyes are downcast, he cradles a bag of money close to his body, he is engrossed in his counting of the coins on the table. Askew uses this young Levi to explain the theory of a “secondary drama,”⁴⁷ which is maintained throughout the article. By including figures in modern apparel, the author understands Caravaggio to be creating a drama belonging to the secular world of his present day. In doing so, he confuses time by including two dramas occurring on different temporal planes, the first being between the historical characters as they receive Christ. While the artist paints this moment of confusion, shock and wonder, he simultaneously encourages the viewer to engage with the boy. Again, he appears withdrawn from both the historical and contemporary world. He is absorbed—with coins or faith, one could not know—and thereby exists in a liminal space of the artist’s making.

The observer might consider what moment Matthew belongs to; either he has not yet realized Christ’s presence or, he has *just* become conscious of his spiritual path.⁴⁸ If one regards this scene as being of the now-time, the boy can be seen as experiencing a divine vision. Going about his daily routine, a young boy—upon recognizing the arrangement and conduct of his cohorts—comes to be reminded of the historical calling of Levi the tax-collector. He remembers as he himself engages in a “vivid [re-enactment].”⁴⁹ The artist thereby proves that a “transformation from avarice to spiritual commitment” might be “emotionally relived,” even in the most ordinary place and time.⁵⁰ Conjuring such an event, the boy’s hand appears limp as he abandons his desire for material goods.

The secondary drama remains arguably the most important convention of Caravaggio’s conversion paintings. It is the bridge between past and present, illustrating the power of memory. It requires the observer to place equal weight upon the contemporary experience and its biblical foundations. It demands that the viewer consider the complicated nature of memory. Time is alive in each part of this process. While scholars tease the idea of Caravaggio’s ambiguity, their hypotheses remain predicated upon variable knowledge of the artist’s desires and preferences. Askew, theorizing the objective, puts thought into action. She holds the contemporary conversion in high esteem. She recognizes its power and justifies its import as a motif in the iconography of *The Calling*.

⁴⁷ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 249.

⁴⁸ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 250.

⁴⁹ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio” 250.

⁵⁰ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio” 250.

Giovanni Careri has highlighted the significance of the three panels in the Contarelli Chapel in his chapter “Heterochronies: The Gospel According to Caravaggio.”⁵¹ He initially identifies three different temporalities, emphasizing how they interact within this context; as the *now-time* of the spectator, the time of *then* (when events were supposed to have happened), and the time of the painting’s creation in the late sixteenth century.⁵² They operate in the three representations of Matthew within the chapel and, as discussed, more specifically in details of *The Calling*. As one will see in *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, beyond a philosophical joining of past and present, the artist chooses to paint a physical connection between multiple times. It seems no coincidence that the hands of the figure Askew consider considers to be the historical Matthew and his contemporary depiction are touching. They interact as if partaking in one “life-transfiguring experience,”⁵³ which compares to the chapel saga itself. The device that the artist is employing, most emphatically in the setup of the three paintings, is in no way restricted to Caravaggio’s time. As in the works mentioned previously, Careri argues that the temporal interactions implicit within them were one of the artist’s “explicit goals.”⁵⁴ The historical is not forgotten, as he paints Christ and St. Peter in antique dress. They insinuate that Christ can manifest himself in any place, at any time, *continually* inviting men and women to follow him. The call is to abandon the ordinary, which Caravaggio persuasively paints. Bearing a connection to the act of memory, Careri sees the *spectator* as the link between different times. The author uses the term “replay,” and encourages the ideologies of Askew; he sees the scene as being available to belong to any point in time. Diverging from Askew, he labels those figures that seem unaware of Christ and Peter with a negative connotation. He perceives them as demonstrating the ignorance of one who refuses to adopt the “position of the convert.”⁵⁵ This discrepancy falls away when he cites *The Spiritual Exercises*. Here again he echoes the sentiments of Askew by recalling the teachings of Ignatius of Loyola. These teachings directed the faithful to imagine themselves within the scenes “of the life of Christ,” as Careri calls it a “mental and emotional theatre.”⁵⁶

Conversion was of great concern in Caravaggio’s era, and this was very much reflected in the mimetic tradition. Askew posits that although scholars have connected the artist’s thematic concerns to Ignatius’ teachings, it is not accurate to truly associate the two. *The Spiritual Exercises* are predicated on the ability to envision and thereafter implicate oneself in a scene from scripture, however, this requires the believer to imagine a detailed

⁵¹ Giovanni Careri, “Heterochronies,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, ed. Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey (Routledge, 2018)

⁵² Giovanni Careri, “Heterochronies,” 149.

⁵³ Macioce and Askew, “Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision,” 250.

⁵⁴ Careri, “Heterochronies,” 149.

⁵⁵ Careri, “Heterochronies,” 149.

⁵⁶ Careri, “Heterochronies,” 149.

setting, a town, a figure in costume. The mental picture necessitates the details, a feature that has been excluded from Caravaggio's work. Ignatius requests that his pupils use the five senses, of which the artist produces only two. The Jesuit mission is "highly structured" and in this way is a complete departure from Caravaggio's model.⁵⁷ The objective here is not to conceive oneself as being *with* Christ. It is not a deliberate act that Askew argues for but rather the expectation that the past *will* overwhelm the present.

Askew explains that memory is not consciously invoked. Instead, it is dramatically represented as a spontaneous remembering of prototypes in a moment of the ordinary present.⁵⁸ Careri maintains that, even if one were to set aside the frame of Catholicism, Caravaggio's paintings would stimulate an intellectual and emotional exercise. They are made to be experienced through time, which remains "qualitatively engaged" through a program that "[captures], [intensifies] and [prolongs] attention."⁵⁹ Put simply, the temporal power of Caravaggio's paintings will remain to exist, even under the scrutiny of a contemporary non-believer. This does not take away from the devotional power of the works themselves.

Fried's absorption principle resurfaces in relation to *The Calling*, reproduced in Careri's talk of the artist's attention-capturing program. It should be emphasized that Askew's theory of the double-drama requires one to look past the social, religious or political context of the period, to look beyond a purely historical demonstration.⁶⁰ As we begin to evaluate these works in a broader sense, Walter Benjamin's sentiments become particularly relevant. Benjamin expresses that one can and must interpret and "decipher...the prophesies which gave [the great works of the past] value in the time they were made" but must also see them as part of a "sequence [constantly] developing, intermittently [over] the course of centuries."⁶¹ The scholar proposes a history of art that remains "both rigorous *and* anachronic,"⁶² seeing the past consistently seeping into the present. As Nagel and Wood acquiesce, the anachronic is presented in a work that "repeats...hesitates...remembers,"⁶³ but also when it actively participates in a future or ideal. As much as these artworks altered the devotional traditions of the Catholic faith, they will continue to experience change, as their impact extends beyond sacred or historic conditions. It is the spectator, in their faithful practice or secular scrutiny, who makes the work immune to stasis. In a sacred sense, the work signals the viewer's constant *exchanges* with Christ, thereby existing above time. In a secular sense, the art calls attention to the practice and power of remembering and therein gives itself purpose within

⁵⁷ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio: Outward Action, Inward Vision," 253.

⁵⁸ Macioce and Askew, "Caravaggio," 253.

⁵⁹ Careri, "Heterochronies," 151.

⁶⁰ Careri, "Heterochronies," 151.

⁶¹ Careri, "Heterochronies," 152.

⁶² Careri, "Heterochronies," 152.

⁶³ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 13.

the present day. The work is an actor, engaging in a conversation with each observer, effectively transcending time.

IV

Salome with the head of John the Baptist

The idea of a dialogue between canvas and viewer becomes more palpable in *Salome with the head of John the Baptist* [fig. 8]. In the aforementioned works, the bridge exists as an invocation, a mental component. A foreground space might be left open for the viewer, visually summoning them to join in; an iconographic symbol might provoke one to take a closer look. These invitations are made far less potent when compared to the suggestion of external contact found within the National Gallery's *Salome*. This piece, like its predecessors, overcomplicates time. Dated from 1609, it abandons the range of colour seen in Caravaggio's earlier works for a more expressionistic handling of paint. Here, he creates what Letizia Treves calls a "sophisticated interplay between the main" characters.⁶⁴ The youth of Salome is posed in stark contrast to the figure of the old maid beside her, and yet they seem to be sharing the same body. They are connected in a similar fashion to the two Matthews in *The Calling*. Salome looks *out* of the frame to something or some time that one cannot see nor comprehend, while the older woman stares at the severed head with a disturbed fascination. This haggard, subsidiary figure might be engaging in a more gruesome double drama if interpreted according to Askew's theories. With her gaze focused on an indiscernible point, one must view her as a figure absorbed in the act—willing the watcher to feel what she feels. Salome's distracted gaze poses far more questions than answers. Is she denying the moment of involvement by refusing to look? Is she looking away in response to the macabre?⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Aidan Weston-Lewis and Letizia Treves, *Beyond Caravaggio* (London: National Gallery Company, 2016), 114.

⁶⁵ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 64.



Fig. 8. Caravaggio, *Salome with the head of John the Baptist*, 1607, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 106.7 cm, National Gallery, London.⁶⁶

There is much more to discuss, especially in examining the severed head. As a plausible self-portrait by the artist, common in his work, the head of the Baptist is a potent reference to Caravaggio's time. However, ambiguity surrounds this too. Fried examines the secular presence of the executioner who, gazing out of the frame, refuses to meet the observer's eye. His writings concentrate on the placement of his left hand which, in lieu of holding the Baptist's head, is found fingering the hilt of his sword. Due to its placement in the lower right-hand corner, Fried sees the painted hand of the executioner as having a special connection to Caravaggio's painting-hand.⁶⁷ There has been a strong demarcation of this area of the canvas within the artist's oeuvre, as it signifies a tangible, corporeal correspondence between the painted world and *our* side of the surface.⁶⁸ Salome, in handing the spectator the head of the artist, is effectively delivering Caravaggio to the now-time.

⁶⁶ Retrieved from: The National Gallery.

⁶⁷ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 65.

⁶⁸ Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 65.

Caravaggio inhabits the observer's mental and physical space, and in this exchange, invokes a shared time.

Mieke Bal's *Quoting Caravaggio* appraises modern art and its relationship to Caravaggio. She reflects upon the Baroque's creation of a new relationship with time, having asked, "in respect to the past and present, who illuminates—or helps us understand—who?"⁶⁹ Bal reiterates Askew, asking one to reverse expectations; she postulates how the artist has painted reality to indicate the historic past. In the same way that Bal seeks to establish an agelessness between the 21st century works of Caravaggisti and the artist's historical paintings, Askew's theories attempt to convince us of a similar sharing of time. Bal sees her modern artists as having the same concerns as Caravaggio, the past and present thereby being linked through artistic import.

In essence, Bal's contemporary scholarship acknowledges a hallucinatory relationship between multiple temporalities. This comes as a result of the changes within the Baroque's mimetic tradition. She speaks of an oscillation between the subject and object of Caravaggio's vision, a binding concept that changes the composition of both. This is achieved through a double-drama, an instance of absorption, a representation of something *beyond* our visibility, a memory. Mind and body remain inseparable, as do the observer and the vehicle of Caravaggio's artistic capacities. All of the scholarship mentioned within this paper, in reference to Askew and in terms of these works by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, belongs to a larger conversation. The predominance of history is being challenged, the importance of chronology and linear time is continuously being refuted. It is necessary to see these works as constantly transforming, participating and interacting within their frame. They consequently transcend time, in constant conversation with those beyond the canvas.

⁶⁹ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.

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Interiors That Conform to Our Existence:

Eileen Gray, Evelyn Wyld, Eyre de Lanux, and Sapphic
Primitivism in Interwar Paris

Niharika Russell

In the interwar period, Paris was the centre for Sapphic Modernism and was recognized as the capital of same-sex love and creative intellectualism. Numerous lesbian women moved to Paris during this period to pursue careers in painting, writing, design, and architecture. The city provided them an opportunity to live more openly and to form creative and social networks. This era was also the apogee of French colonialism, and many prominent creatives living and working in Paris engaged philosophically and artistically with primitivist ideas and aesthetics. Simultaneously, growing interwar concerns about French national stability focused on the relationship between the health of the nation, normative sexuality, and racial purity. The emerging field of sexology established strong associations between the primitive Other and homosexuality, an association that was taken up by Europeans seeking to understand and define their own sexual difference.

The literary scholar Robin Hackett has argued for the existence of the term “Sapphic primitivism” to describe how Sapphic Modernists utilized primitivism in literary works to articulate their sexualities. However, little has been written about the Sapphic Modernist engagement with primitivist aesthetics in interior design even though it was a creative and professional field that was dominated by Sapphic Modernists in interwar Paris. Eileen Gray (1879-1976), Evelyn Wyld (1882-1973), and Eyre de Lanux (1894-1996), three critically and commercially successful expatriates who shared working and personal relationships, were especially prolific in the use of primitivist aesthetics in their design practices, drawing on motifs, materials, and crafting methods associated with cultures categorized as “primitive” within cultural hierarchies of colonial ideology. In the 1920s and 1930s, domestic interiors were centres where concerns about national health concentrated, and these spaces became powerful sites for the subversion of sexual norms, which could be achieved through primitivist designs. However, the use of primitivist aesthetics in French design was also employed by the state to promote and justify the French colonial project. Gray, Wyld, and

Lanux were able to utilize primitivist aesthetics in interior design to express sexual difference for themselves and their shared network of Sapphic Modernists, but their relationship as interior designers with French colonial economics also meant that their use of luxury materials associated with the primitive legitimized French colonialism.

Cultures and societies that were categorized as primitive by colonial scholarship were identified as sites of sexual aberration, particularly in Modern sexology. Homosexuality was a main characteristic of sexual behaviour that European sexologists ascribed to the primitive, and Hackett provides an overview of how this association was established and popularized in the European consciousness through sexological publications.¹ In his foundational 1882 text, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Richard von Krafft-Ebing defines homosexuality within European society as the result of “moral slippage” within a civilized culture, and contrasts it with “uncivilized races” where pathological homosexuality was rampant because of an absence of the civilizing power of Christianity.² Havelock Ellis’ 1897 *Sexual Inversion* takes this association between pathology, homosexuality and the primitive further by positing that acceptance of homosexuality among the “lower races” causes homosexuality to spread within those cultures, and he uses this argument to present degeneracy as a threat spreading through European society.³ Sigmund Freud reaffirms these theories in the early twentieth century in his “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in which he observes that “inverts” and “primitive states of society” share more in common with each other than with European heterosexuals, and argues that homosexuality is “remarkably widespread among many savage and primitive races... and, even among the civilized peoples of Europe, climate and race exercise the most powerful influence on the presence of inversion and upon the attitude adopted towards it.”⁴ John Addington Symonds’ 1928 *Sexual Inversion: A Classic Study of Homosexuality* continues to assert that same-sex relationships are prevalent amongst “all half-savage nations.” late into the interwar period.⁵ This pathologized connection between primitive sexual behavior and European homosexuality equated sexual difference in European society with the

¹ Robin Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” in *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 21-23.

² Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis with Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. R.J. Rebman (New York: Physicians and Surgeons Book Co., 1926).

³ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. 2: *Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1904).

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (Basic Books, 1962).

⁵ Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 24-30; John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Classic Study of Homosexuality* (New York: Bell, 1984).

degeneracy of uncivilized primitives, and characterized homosexuality as a threat to the health civilized nations.

Hackett continues to examine how the perceived relationship between homosexuality and the primitive that was reinforced by Modern sexology inadvertently established a backdrop for non-heterosexual Europeans to understand and articulate their sexual difference. Edward Carpenter was an openly gay sexologist who argued for the acceptance of sexual difference in European society, and his work uses the same modes of comparison to perceived primitives outside of Western Europe. His 1908 book *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, and the 1914 follow-up, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, utilize ethnography to argue for a legitimate place for homosexuality within European culture. Carpenter's uses his studies of same-sex relationships in Africa, Polynesia, and Asia, and among indigenous peoples in North, Central, and South America to argue that homosexuality "[exists] in abundance in all ages and among all races of the world."⁶ However, Carpenter's work still relies on the ethnographic construct of a primitive Other whose sexual difference has been used to construct and legitimize categories of racial difference.⁷ In *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, Carpenter asserts that the "germ" of "late and high developments" can be "indicated... in primitive stages," and that the presence of homosexuality in what he perceives of as an earlier state of human evolution means that it is an original human trait or human truth.⁸ Hackett offers a summary of this argument, observing that "the sexual gauge against which European homosexuality is held is an imagined, and naturally superior and/or naturally inferior, primitive being."⁹ How the perceived sexual difference of the primitive is utilized in the self-identification of non-heterosexual Europeans like the Sapphic Modernists becomes essential to concerns around the domestic sphere in interwar Europe, and therefore, to the Sapphic Modernists who both constructed and inhabited those domestic spaces.

In interwar Europe, the fear of declining nationhood was embodied by the imagined threat of degeneration. In particular, the challenge to sexual norms embodied by the sexuality of the imagined primitive posed a threat. Transgression of "proper or normal class, national, or ethnographic positions" was a polluting force because of the association between sexual difference and racial difference, and the pathologized character of sexual difference allowed it to pollute civilized societies and disrupt social order

⁶ Hackett, "The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism," 33; Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); Edward Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919).

⁷ Hackett, "The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism," 21.

⁸ Hackett, "The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism," 33; Carpenter, *Intermediate Types*.

⁹ Hackett, "The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism," 33.

from the inside.¹⁰ The fears of degeneracy embodied in the pathological sexual difference of the primitive equated the strength of European civilization with racial purity, which was protected by sexual hygiene.¹¹ The regulation of sexual norms as a matter of national health was largely understood in terms of “overlapping constructions of racial and sexual identity.”¹² Lesbianism was understood as a force of degeneracy that served to undermine national stability because the lesbian body was unrepreative.¹³ This failure in procreation on the part of white middle and upper class European lesbians displaced them from their proper societal place. Their autonomous sexuality posed a threat of disrupted social order and racial extinction. Such transgression of sexual norms was understood, alongside transgressions of working class and non-white sexuality, to be associated with the degeneration symbolized by the constructed sexual identity of the primitive Other.¹⁴ In 1921, British parliament attempted to alter the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) with a clause criminalizing lesbianism, emphasizing the pathologized relationship between European lesbianism and the primitive Other by defining women and lesbians as separate categories and asserting that women could be “made into” lesbians through contact with lower classes, non-whites, and non-Europeans.¹⁵ Specifically, legislators were anxious about pathologized, contagious pollution of domestic space, where women resided and primarily were seen to operate.¹⁶ Suspicion about health and hygiene centred on the domestic sphere, as the home was the locus of sexual activity.

As a realm dominated by women, domestic space was a powerful site from which lesbian transgression of female sexual norms was both expressed and suppressed. Christopher Reed, an art historian whose work

¹⁰ Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 34.

¹¹ Robin Hackett, “Sapphic Primitivism, an Introduction,” in *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 17.

¹² Hackett, “Sapphic Primitivism, an Introduction,” 18-19; Jasmine Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity: Fashioning Spaces and Subjects,” in *Fashion, Interior Design, and the Contours of Modern Identity*, ed. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 191.

¹³ Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, “Introduction,” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture*, ed. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 8.

¹⁴ Laura Doan, “Woman’s Place Is the Home: Conservative Sapphic Modernity,” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture*, ed. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) 94; Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 34.

¹⁵ Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 36; “The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885,” Collection Items, The British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-criminal-law-amendment-act-1885#:~:text=In%201921%20MPs%20attempted%20to,committed%20by%20male%20persons%20under.>

¹⁶ Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 36.

centres on the relationship between literature and visual culture, argues that domesticity itself “is a specifically modern phenomenon” in which “issues of sex are central, for it is primarily in the home that we are constructed as sexual and gendered beings.”¹⁷ The interior design of these domestic spaces was itself subject to suspicion and anxiety around pollution, as “the look of the home was a vital index for the moral health of the nation.”¹⁸ Sexuality was essential to that index in a “convergence of... sexology and decorative arts.”¹⁹ The Sapphic Modernist author Radclyffe Hall was put on trial in 1928 on charges of obscenity stemming from the lesbian content of her book *The Well of Loneliness*. This trial brought lesbianism into public discourse, and much of the scrutiny and suspicion around Hall became centred around the domestic.²⁰ In 1927 and 1928, Hall participated in a series of press interviews where she enthusiastically discussed her domestic life and habits to distance herself from the image of cultural pollution that defined lesbianism.²¹ Hall used these interviews to emphasize a keen interest in domestic cleanliness. Laura Doan has interpreted Hall’s performative concern for domestic hygiene as a conscious attempt to affirm her respectability by distancing herself from national anxieties about the role of sexual difference in the spread of disease and societal degeneration.²² Following the trial, *Sunday Express* editor James Douglas emphasized the pathologized threat of lesbianism to the domestic sphere by accusing Hall and women like her of residing in homes that were “a realm of pollution, pestilence, and contagion.”²³ These concerns around sexuality and domesticity in interwar France were expressed in prominent Modernist philosophies surrounding domestic architecture and interiors, which engaged with primitive otherness in order to assert national values of heterosexual norms.

Modernist figures Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Adolf Loos (1870-1933) were extremely influential in French architecture and interior design of the 1920s and 1930s, and both men engaged with primitivist tropes and ideas in their design theories. Examinations of their philosophical approaches to architecture and design provide a backdrop for the intellectual and creative contexts of Paris in which Gray, Wyld, and Lanux worked. Loos’ foundational essay *Ornament and Crime* was first published in France in 1913 and gained increased prominence in 1920 when it was republished by Le Corbusier in his architectural journal *L’Esprit Nouveau*. In *Ornament and Crime*,

¹⁷ Christopher Reed, “Walking,” In *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7,16.

¹⁸ Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity,” 191.

¹⁹ Reed, “Walking,” 12.

²⁰ Doan, “Woman’s Place *Is* the Home,” 91, 94.

²¹ Doan, “Woman’s Place *Is* the Home,” 94.

²² Doan, “Woman’s Place *Is* the Home,” 98.

²³ Doan, “Woman’s Place *Is* the Home,” 102; James Douglas, “A Book That Must Be Suppressed” (August 19, 1928),” reprinted in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, ed. Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (New York: Columbia UP, 2001), 36-38.

Loos argues for purism in architecture and design by contrasting modern Europe with an image of primitive degeneracy. In discussing decorative interiors, Loos states that “what is natural to the Papuan and the child is a symptom of degeneracy to the modern adult... the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.”²⁴ Loos associates decorative design with primitive “peoples who have not yet reached” the “cultural level” of modern Europe and relegates it to a degenerative polluting force that damages the very health of “the nation that produces it.”²⁵ Loos’ anti-ornamental manifesto asserts European cultural progress over primitive societies and calls for the strengthening of national health by ridding society of degeneracy, which is symbolized as the “pathological phenomenon” of men in “silk, satin, and lace” who “[design] wallpaper patterns.”²⁶ Loos’ opposition between primitivity and cultural progress is centralized in domestic architecture and design, with much emphasis being placed on the importance of adhering to sexual norms to promote national health. Loos’ philosophies were formative to Le Corbusier’s own practices, which further contrasted concerns for national health and the reinforcement of sexual norms with primitive tropes of degeneracy and pollution.

Le Corbusier was a colleague of Gray and moved in the same intellectual circles as many Sapphic Modernists. He signed a purist manifesto in 1918, perhaps already deeply influenced by the 1913 publication of *Ornament and Crime*.²⁷ He denounced the decorative design of people he deemed to be peasants and savages and called for a “return to order” (*retour à l’ordre*) in architecture and design for the improvement of health and national morale, concerns that appealed to French conservatism of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁸ Like Loos, Le Corbusier promoted Modernist architecture and interiors as “the exact prescription” for a nation at risk of degeneration because of a crisis of national health.²⁹ In her examination of Sapphic Modernity as reflected in interior design, media scholar Jasmine Rault states that modern architects and designers were, “along with a nexus of legal and medical professionals... in the business of making healthy bodies.”³⁰ She

²⁴ Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 20.

²⁵ Loos, *Ornament and Crime*,” 23, 22.

²⁶ Loos, *Ornament and Crime*,” 22, 24.

²⁷ Christopher Long, “The Origins and Context of Adolf Loos’ ‘Ornament and Crime,’” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 2 (June 2009): 215, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jsah.2009.68.2.200>.

²⁸ Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013), 93, 92. Translations my own.

²⁹ Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity,” 190; Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be Used as the Basis of Our Machine Age* (New York: Orion Press, 1967), 143.

³⁰ Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity,” 191; Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, 143.

further stresses that “the modern project of producing healthy bodies was also the project of regulating and producing sexuality,” with domestic space being central to that regulation.³¹ Le Corbusier sought to turn the home into “a machine for living,” an ordered and standardized model of domesticity.³² His buildings enforced norms of gender and sexuality through hierarchical divisions of gendered space and through the removal of private spaces where deviance might hide.³³ Architect and architectural scholar Mabel Wilson interprets Le Corbusier’s own Modernist architectural manifesto of 1936, “When Cathedrals Were White,” which he wrote following a trip to Harlem, as employing primitivist tropes “to construct and stabilize whiteness.”³⁴ The full extent of Le Corbusier’s complicated primitivist fascinations is beyond the scope of this paper, but his standardizing vision of Modernist architecture as a remedy for concerns about the health and stability of the French nation at a time when those fears were generated by notions of pollution within the domestic realm, can be understood as a reinforcement of the interconnected pathologizing of non-normative sexual and gendered conduct in Europe and the perceived degenerative threat posed by the primitive.

How the primitive was conceived of by prominent figures in French Modernist architecture, whose design theories sought to strengthen the health of the nation through the reinforcement of sexual norms with colonial hierarchies, can be contrasted with the use of primitivism employed by Gray, Wyld, and Lanux. For women, the panic over sexuality and national health in domesticity was especially acute because of the association between women and the domestic sphere.³⁵ With the modern advent of domesticity and the association between women and the keeping of domestic space, numerous women in the interwar French design world worked on interior decoration and furnishings. Many leading figures in this field, including Gray, Wyld, and Lanux pursued same sex relationships and belonged to a personal, professional, and creative network of other lesbian women.³⁶ The prevalence of these networks can perhaps be attributed to the association between women and domestic decoration, and the understanding of individualized spatial desires by sexually non-conforming women for whom standardized models of the home were incompatible with a domesticity not centred

³¹ Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity,” 191, 201.

³² Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 92.

³³ Reed, “Walking,” 10.

³⁴ Mabel Wilson, “Black Bodies/White Cities: Le Corbusier in Harlem,” *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 16, Whiteness: White Forms, Forms of Whiteness (1996): 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41796597>.

³⁵ Reed, “Walking,” 16.

³⁶ Bridget Elliott, “Art Deco Hybridity, Interior Design, and Sexuality between the Wars: Two Double Acts: Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher/Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld,” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture*, ed. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 109-110.

around heterosexual married life.³⁷ Additionally, the reputation of France, and Paris in particular, as a centre for gay and lesbian life may explain why Paris became a site for Sapphic Modernist designers, as Gray, Wyld, and Lanux were all expatriates who moved to Paris to escape restrictions in their home countries, with Gray arriving from Ireland, Wyld from England, and Lanux from America.³⁸

The use of domestic interiors in French Modernist architecture to reinforce female heterosexuality meant that lesbian intervention into the design and decoration of domestic space could subvert conventions of space built around sexual norms and create new spaces that “enabled female non-heterosexuality as a mode of modernity.”³⁹ Gray directly challenged the health-oriented formulaic nature of Corbusian houses. She instead prioritized individualized needs of inhabitation, stating that the Modernist “ill understood concern for hygiene makes hygiene intolerable,” and that “formulae are worth nothing; life is worth everything.”⁴⁰ This rejection of the nationalistic concerns over the relationship between norms of health, domesticity, and heteronormativity are characteristic of how interior design could function as a means for lesbian subversion of the regulation of sexuality in an interwar France that sought to purify itself of “racialized, sexualized, and classed degeneration.”⁴¹ Gray, Wyld, and Lanux all engaged with the primitive Other in their design, but the way in which they did so seems to have been an attempt to evoke a perceived primitive sexuality in order to articulate sexual difference in spaces built for women who found themselves outside the bounds of European sexual norms.

The relationship between Sapphic Modernist design and primitivist aesthetic is complicated by intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality within colonial France. Modernist design historian Bridget Elliott suggests that the “primitive enthusiasms” of Gray, Wyld, and Lanux’s work is “differently affected according to gender and sexuality,” with Rault attributing “the exoticization and cultural appropriation” of Sapphic Primitivism in design to a resistance of “Modern architecture’s drive toward a purified identity.”⁴² Indeed, the existing connections between lesbianism and the degeneration signified by the primitive meant that any accommodation or

³⁷ Elliott, “Two Double Acts,” 109-110; Doan, “Woman’s Place *Is* the Home,” 98.

³⁸ Katarina Bonnevier, “Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Theory of Architecture,” (PhD diss., KTH Royal Institute of Technology, 2007) 44; Isabelle Anscombe, “Equipment and Couture,” in *A Woman’s Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin Inc., 1984): 121.

³⁹ Rault, “Designing Sapphic Modernity,” 201.

⁴⁰ Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, “From Eclecticism to Doubt,” in *Eileen Gray: An Architecture for All Senses*, ed. Caroline Constant and Wilfried Wang (Berlin, Germany: Ernst J. Wasmuth Verlag GmbH & Co., 1996), 68.

⁴¹ Jasmine Rault, “Losing Feelings: Elizabeth Eyre de Lanux and Her Affective Archive of Sapphic Modernity,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 48, no. 1/2 (Spring 2009): 61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40649416>.

⁴² Elliott, “Art Deco Hybridity,” 121; Rault, “Losing Feelings,” 62.

assertion of sexual difference within domestic space was oppositional to French nationalism by virtue of allowing for the transgression of European sexual norms by upper and middle-class white women. This expression of sexual difference destabilized racial categories by circumventing the sexual categories entrenched in French society of the period, and stood in stark contrast to the Modernism championed by architects whose philosophies reaffirmed hierarchical binaries between European civilization and its constructed primitive Others. A more in-depth discussion of Sapphic Primitivism in French interior design during the interwar period can reveal the contrast between primitivism as adopted by heterosexual male Modernists, and that adopted by Sapphic Modernists, and can, perhaps, address some of the complexities of Sapphic Primitivism.



Fig. 1. *Oranges* and *Romano* carpet designs by Evelyn Wyld (left) and *Antenne* and *Pélican* carpet designs by Eyre de Lanux (right), 1928. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013), 88-89. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The primitivist aesthetics that characterized the interior designs and furnishings created by Gray, Wyld, and Lanux are more complicated than a surface aesthetic inspiration from ethnographic objects. Wyld and Gray travelled to North Africa together in 1907 to learn weaving and dyeing textile processes from Arab women, and Wyld later taught these techniques to Lanux at the beginning of their professional partnership. The techniques they learned greatly influenced the processes and aesthetics of their textile production, both in collaboration with each other and as individuals, and this influence can be seen in carpet designs produced by Wyld and Lanux (fig. 1).⁴³ This is certainly a less superficial engagement with the art of the cultures

⁴³ Elliot, "Two Double Acts," 122.

categorized as primitive Others than the level of intellectual and creative engagement in the design process proposed by Loos, in which the civilized European may “[use] the ornaments of earlier or alien cultures as he sees fit,” but must “[concentrate] his own inventiveness on other things.”⁴⁴

While living in Paris in 1906, Gray learned the Japanese lacquer work process from Seizo Sugawara (1884-1937), a master of lacquer methods who came to Paris in 1900 to restore lacquer pieces sent by Japan for the Universal Exhibition.⁴⁵ She made extensive use of this method in her work, and the influence of Sugawara’s teaching can be seen in many of Gray’s furniture projects, which often featured lacquer. The longstanding personal and professional relationship between Gray and Sugawara, as well as the less-documented professional relationship between Sugawara, Wyld, and Lanux, suggests that these women viewed Sugawara and his practice as artistically legitimate. This view stood as a rejection of the national atmosphere of conservatism that defined interwar France, where manifestations of “foreign influence” in art were denounced as unhealthy because of associations between immorality and exotic sensuality.⁴⁶ As emphasized, the French national concern for health and morality in relation to exoticized and primitivized foreign Others was tied to suspicion around the degeneration of sexual norms that spread from the transgression of these Others within European society, particularly in the domestic sphere.

Although Japan and its arts were not categorized as primitive in the same manner that cultures colonized by Europe were, *Japonisme*, a fascination with Japanese art and design that had profound influence on many French Modernists, carried a similar potential for sexual and gendered dissidence. European sexological texts of the era defined Japan as yet another site of sexual aberration alongside the colonies in regards to same-sex relationship practices.⁴⁷ In his exploration of *Japonisme* and male non-normative domesticity in nineteenth-century Paris, Christopher Reed characterizes the interest in *Japonisme* in avant-garde intellectual and creative circles as “the original primitivism” because of its potential to destabilize Western norms and ideals, particularly in regards to expectations of gender, through the consumption of Japanese arts.⁴⁸ There is no question that Japan was not

⁴⁴ Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” 24.

⁴⁵ Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect/ Designer: A Biography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 2000), 49-50.

⁴⁶ Adam, *Eileen Gray*, 50; Bridget Elliott, “Housing the Work: Women Artists, Modernism, and the *Maison d’Artiste*: Eileen Gray, Romaine Brooks, and Gluck,” in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1830-1935: The Gender of Ornament*, ed. Bridget Elliot and Janice Helland (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 180; Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 92.

⁴⁷ Hackett, “The Homosexual Primitivism of Modernism,” 24-33.

⁴⁸ Christopher Reed, “Bachelor Quarters: Spaces of *Japonisme* in Nineteenth-century Paris,” in *Oriental Interiors*, ed. John Potvin (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 111. For treatment of sexuality and Japanese collecting amongst men in the interwar period, see John Potvin, “At the Edge of Propriety: Rolf de Mare and Niles Dardel at the

subject to the same systems of dominance and othering via French *Japonisme* that primitivist tropes served to uphold and reinforce within French colonies in Africa. However, as Japan was aligned with colonized cultures as a site where non-normative sexuality thrived, it was similarly used by Gray, Wyld, and Lanux in their designs in a manner that can be seen as disruptive to European sexual norms in the domestic sphere.

Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's engagement with the artistic processes of cultures characterized as primitive complicates their use of primitivist aesthetics. What appears to be a genuine acknowledgement of the living artistic practices of Othered and primitivized cultures by these women is far from Loos' assertions that the difference in artistic practices between Europeans and primitive Others is indicative of European cultural progress. Additionally, the ways in which Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's primitivist works were used in domestic spaces to facilitate female rejection of normative sexual expectations worked directly against Modernist domestic spaces designed with nationalist ideals in mind.



Fig. 2. Eyre de Lanux in her and Evelyn Wyld's atelier, seated on *Zèbre* carpet designed by Wyld and Lanux. London, 1930. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013): 132. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's primitivist decor and furnishings were incorporated into the subversive domestic spaces of many non-heterosexual women in interwar France, such as the writer Natalie Barney (1876-1972) and the painter Romaine Brooks (1874-1970), whose homes served as sites for

Hildesborg Estate," in *Oriental Interiors*, ed. John Potvin (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 145-164.

the cultivation of networks of lesbian creative intellectuals that included Gray, Wyld, and Lanux.⁴⁹ As such, these homes needed to be suited to the individualized needs of women operating outside of heterosexual conventions of domesticity. Standardized domesticity, with its gendered divisions of space defined by heterosexual partnership, reinforced sexual norms.⁵⁰ These norms were further regulated by steel-and-glass Modernist aesthetics, which denied the refuge of privacy for the occupant and turned domesticity into a “spectacle to be witnessed by an audience of outsiders.”⁵¹ In contrast, Barney’s long-term romantic partner Élisabeth de Gramont (1875-1954), who was also a creative intellectual and writer, described Gray’s lacquered furnishings as an example of how Gray “seeks to create interiors that conform to *our* existence, to the proportions of *our* rooms and to the aspirations of *our* sensibility” in a 1922 issue of the journal *The Living Arts*.⁵²



Fig. 3. Romaine Brooks, *Chasseresse*, 1920, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1968.18.1.

⁴⁹ Elliott, “Two Double Acts,” 122-123.

⁵⁰ Elliott, “Housing the Work,” 182.

⁵¹ Reed, “Walking,” 10, 8.

⁵² Caroline Constant, “E.1027: The Nonheroic Modernism of Eileen Gray,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 3 (1994): 267, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/990937>. Emphasis mine.



Fig. 4. Lotus table. Eileen Gray, 1913. In Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect/ Designer: A Biography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 2000), 59. National Museum of Ireland.



Fig. 5. Oriental cabinet, home of Jacques Doucet, featuring Lotus table by Eileen Gray. In Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: Architect/ Designer: A Biography* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 2000), 87. National Museum of Ireland.

Much of Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's decor and furnishings were created in studios within their own domestic spaces, and the pieces they sold among the lesbian networks they associated with were often similar to the decor and furnishings of their own homes (fig. 2).⁵³ These design pieces rejected traditional decorative expectations of the European home, particularly expectations surrounding the female realm, and its associated heterosexual trappings. Furthermore, these pieces helped to construct spaces that accommodated the lives of women who often lived outside of convention. Brooks purchased rugs by both Wyld and Gray for her rue Raynouard apartment, where she regularly displayed her paintings to a network of lesbian clients and colleagues.⁵⁴ One such painting, a portrait of Lanux titled *Chasserresse* that features Lanux dressed as a bare-chested, Dianaesque huntress draped in a pelt with an animal companion against a mountain backdrop (fig. 3), incorporates primitivist aesthetics to evoke the ancient past which Sapphists like Barney and Brooks looked towards as a precedent for female same-sex love in figures like Sappho.⁵⁵ Gray, Wyld, Lanux, and their lesbian peers and clients engaged with the construct of the primitive in domestic space to create interiors where lesbian self-identity could be asserted through engagement with perceived precedents to lesbian identity. These precedents were understood to exist in cultures with perceived sexual customs and behaviours that were viewed as belonging to the realm of the primitive and existing outside of civilized European sexual mores. This assertion capitalized on the association between lesbianism and the primitive sexuality and used primitive aesthetics to individualize the domestic realm as a site for articulating sexual difference.

⁵³ Anscombe, "Equipment and Couture," 127-128.

⁵⁴ Adam, *Eileen Gray*, 110; Elliot, "Two Double Acts," 120-121.

⁵⁵ Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 44; Adam, *Eileen Gray*, 109; Doan and Garrity, "Introduction," 9.



Fig. 6. Apartment of Smithsonian curator Helen Simpson, with *Romano* carpet by Evelyn Wyld and Eyre de Lanux. 1928, Paris. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013), 149. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 7. Apartment of Madame Sherfeseec, with *Romano* carpet by Evelyn Wyld and Eyre de Lanux. 1928, Paris. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013): 157. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's primitivist work was not limited to the homes of Sapphic Modernists. All three women attracted wealthy French clientele who sought out their design services and products to express their own primitivist fascinations, which were not necessarily subversive. The French fashion designer Jacques Doucet (1853-1929), who was also an art collector who amassed a large collection of works that included Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) *Les Femmes d'Alger*, a work that took inspiration from Iberian and African masks and that can also be said to explore notions of the primitivist aesthetic, commissioned a 'lotus table' (fig. 4) from Gray for the 'Oriental cabinet' (fig. 5) in his home. This cabinet was filled with ethnographic curiosities and was situated across from a sitting room that housed works by preeminent artists of Modernist primitivism, including Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) and Picasso.⁵⁶ While Gray was quite distant and aloof with Doucet and took issue with the more Orientalist adjustments he requested for the table, the project was still completed to his specifications and the patronage of the famed couturier helped launch Gray's design career.⁵⁷ Rugs woven by Wyld and Lanux (fig. 6, fig. 7) modelled after Congolese Kasai patterns were purchased by wealthy clients who used them to complement African masks and collections of Mexican pottery.⁵⁸ In 1930, the art critic Jan Heiliger commissioned Lanux and Wyld to design the interior of his Paris apartment. For this commission, a gouache by Picasso served as the starting point for the design scheme and Lanux and Wyld based the interior design of the space around this work.⁵⁹ Carpets and tapestries inspired by "American Indian" and African designs were joined by lacquer furnishings and lamps produced by Sugawara through Gray's atelier and were interspersed with a collection of ethnographic objects (fig. 8, fig. 9).⁶⁰ Working as designers of French luxury goods, the clientele that Gray, Lanux, and Wyld served were interested in the primitivist aesthetics of their work not as a statement of subversive domesticity, but simply as an aesthetic complement to the primitivist Modernist artworks and ethnographic objects they collected.

The commercial nature of Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's professions as luxury designers in France meant that the use of primitivist aesthetics in their work inadvertently promoted French nationalism through the relationship between primitivist design aesthetics and France's colonial project. The 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes and the 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale were jointly organized by state offices, such as the Ministry of the Colonies, and commercial enterprises to

⁵⁶ Adam, *Eileen Gray*, 87.

⁵⁷ Adam, *Eileen Gray*, 86-88; Volker Fischer, "Elegance and Abstraction: On Eileen Gray's Lacquer Works," in *Eileen Gray: An Architecture for All Senses*, ed. Caroline Constant and Wilfried Wang (Berlin, Germany: Ernst J. Wasmuth Verlag GmbH & Co., 1996), 5.

⁵⁸ Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 148, 156.

⁵⁹ Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 158.

⁶⁰ Castor and Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux*, 158-163.

simultaneously promote French design and the French colonial project. In particular, these two exhibitions emphasized the importance of incorporating exotic woods brought from the French colonies into French modern interior design.⁶¹ The official government report on the 1931 exhibition, authored by Marcel Olivier, asserted that there was an intrinsic connection between the raw materials brought into France from the colonies and the qualities that made French modern design beautiful and luxurious.⁶² The association between French designs crafted from colonial materials and “the desirable modern decorative qualities afforded by the unusual grain patterns and vibrant colours” that characterized French modern design as innovative luxury “at the forefront of taste” justified and necessitated French colonialism.⁶³ The reliance on the ready availability of raw colonial materials meant that one of France’s most important industries depended on continued control over its colonies.⁶⁴ Staged designed interiors at the Colonial Museum unveiled at the 1931 exposition featured geometric inlays, varnished colonial woods, geometric print fabrics, shark skin, and primitive inspired designs that were not dissimilar in material to works produced by Gray, Wyld, and Lanux. Gray worked with exotic woods to achieve the very material sensuality that led to her work being criticized as “a chamber for the daughter of Doctor Caligari in all its horrors” in an unsigned article clipping found in Gray’s papers titled “Le Salon des Décorateurs” dating to May 1923.⁶⁵ Lanux occasionally used shark skin herself as a reference to the decadence of eighteenth-century aristocratic aesthetics, which Loos also associated with sexual degeneracy.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that the Union des Artistes Moderne, the design collective to which Wyld and Lanux belonged, was seen as too radical to work on the pavilions of the 1925 exhibition and the museum of the 1935 exhibition.⁶⁷ The material similarities between the commercial work of Sapphic Primitivists and the design presentations used by the French government to promote the French colonial project complicate the occupation of the primitive Other by these women, even though their particular primitivist aesthetic was unsuitable to the promotion of French colonialism.

⁶¹ Laura Sextro, “Promoting the Colonial Empire through French Interior Design,” in *Oriental Interiors*, ed. John Potvin (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 190.

⁶² Sextro, “Promoting the Colonial Empire,” 196.

⁶³ Sextro, “Promoting the Colonial Empire,” 190-192.

⁶⁴ Sextro, “Promoting the Colonial Empire,” 196-197.

⁶⁵ Constant, “The Nonheroic Modernism of Eileen Gray,” 266; Elliott, “Housing the Work,” 180; J. Stewart Johnson, *Eileen Gray: Designer* (New York: Debrete’s Peerage for The Museum of Modern Art, 1979), 35.

⁶⁶ Elliott, “Two Double Acts,” 122.

⁶⁷ Patricia A. Morton, “National and Colonial: The Musée des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1998): 369, 363, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3051237>.

The overlapping concerns around national health, the domestic sphere, sexual transgression, and societal degeneration in interwar France make figures like Gray, Wyld, and Lanux essential in the examination of Modernism's relationship with primitivism. Sapphic Modernist interior designers who engaged with primitivism subverted nationalistic regulations of female sexuality in the domestic sphere. The use of primitivist ideas by Gray, Wyld, and Lanux can be contrasted with that of their heterosexual contemporaries to reveal how associations between European homosexuality and European constructs of primitive sexuality were used by lesbian designers to leverage domestic space as a means of articulating sexual difference. Sapphic Primitivists' preoccupation with the primitive is complicated by the interdependent relationship between French luxury design and the French colonial project. While Gray, Wyld, and Lanux's designs were popular in lesbian circles and served to construct domestic space for sexually non-conforming women, their success was also enabled by a wealthy clientele whose interest in primitivism was more aligned with the primitivist tropes presented by figures like Picasso. This problematization of the work of Gray, Wyld, and Lanux is not meant to detract from the value that their historical visibility has to queer history and academia. White lesbians who possessed the economic freedom to assert their sexual difference through the use of primitivism occupied a complex space in early twentieth-century European society, and acknowledging this reality opens up new discussions around Modernism's relationship with its primitive Others.



Fig. 8. Apartment of Jan Heiliger, with carpet by Evelyn Wyld and Eyre de Lanux and gouache by Pablo Picasso. 1930, Paris. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013): 158. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig. 9. Apartment of Jan Heiliger, with *Antenne* carpet by Eyre de Lanux and Evelyn Wyld and lacquer cabinet by Seizo Sugawara working from the atelier of Eileen Gray. 1930, Paris. In Louis-Géraud Castor and Willy Huybrechts, *Eyre de Lanux: Une Décoratrice Américaine à Paris* (Paris, France: Editions Norma, 2013): 162. Eyre de Lanux papers, 1865-1995. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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TWA Hotel:

Back to the Future

Andrew Yin

At New York City's JFK Airport stands a building with large glass panels below a white concrete wing-shaped roof, giving it a bird-like appearance. Originally named the TWA Flight Center, this building was designed by Eero Saarinen and opened in 1962 as the terminal of the now-defunct Trans World Airlines (TWA).¹ Although the building was closed in 2001, a restoration was completed in May 2019. The building, along with two new eight-storey wings, has been transformed into the TWA Hotel.² The hotel's curving forms and flowing spaces show visitors a past vision of the future, generating a sense of nostalgia and optimism as visitors experience the architecture, transforming the typically dull hotel lobby experience. The two guestroom wings, designed in the International Style, complement the headhouse, while the observation deck, accessible by the public, allows for a greater appreciation of this architectural landmark.



Figure 1. Exterior of the TWA Hotel headhouse.³

¹ "TWA Hotel," Beyer Blinder Belle Architects, accessed November 21, 2019, https://www.beyerblinderbelle.com/projects/167_twa_hotel

² TWA Hotel," Beyer Blinder Belle Architects.

³ The author, untitled image of the TWA Hotel exterior, November 5, 2019.

The design and development of the TWA Flight Center is inseparable from the growth of the aviation industry after the Second World War. Developers of New York's airport encouraged major airlines to build their own terminals, leading TWA to commission the building.⁴ Meanwhile, a few factors fuelled TWA's desire to commission an evocative design. First, the aviation industry's growth during the postwar era demanded better ground infrastructure, as the simpler terminal buildings built before the war became obsolete.⁵ Second, the aviation industry was at its "golden age" during the 1950s and 60s, during which air travel was perceived as a special event, and airlines competed in amenities and services to attract an upscale clientele that could afford air travel.⁶ As such, TWA management desired a terminal building that would not only capture "the spirit of flight," but also act as a corporate flagship for the airline.⁷

TWA's desire for a dramatic design led its management to commission Eero Saarinen. Saarinen was known to design at "the confluence of technology, building materials, and expressive artistry."⁸ His previous works demonstrate this characteristic. For example, he designed the MIT Kresge Auditorium, a large shell structure representing an engineering breakthrough.⁹ Meeting TWA's requirements, the TWA Flight Center became an example of postwar American corporate modernism, using architecture to advance corporate marketing. The promotional effect of the building on TWA was similar to that of the International Style Lever House on the Lever Company.¹⁰ However, while Lever House is stylistically austere and designed for corporate employees, the TWA Flight Center belonged to a group of public buildings in the postwar Western world representing "a new affluence of forms."¹¹ Their expressive shapes, curving forms, and use of new engineering techniques created a futurist style, attempting to bring new pleasures to the public and demonstrate an optimistic vision of the future.¹²

Saarinen reflected this vision in his design, and a visit to the TWA Hotel in the twenty-first century is a nostalgic and ceremonial experience. Approaching the headhouse, the original terminal building, visitors notice its resemblance to a soaring bird. The large, clear glass panels create a sense of airiness [see figure 1]. Visitors enter the building through one glass door,

⁴ Kornel Ringli, *Designing TWA: Eero Saarinen's Airport Terminal in New York* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 23.

⁵ Ringli, *Designing TWA*, 51-52

⁶ Scott McCartney, "The Golden Age of Flight," *The Wall Street Journal*, updated July 22, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704684604575380992283473182>

⁷ Jayne Merkel, *Eero Saarinen* (New York: Phaidon, 2005), 205.

⁸ Alice T. Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 132.

⁹ Merkel, *Eero Saarinen*, 115-116.

¹⁰ Ringli, *Designing TWA*, 24-25

¹¹ Friedman, *American Glamour*, 144.

¹² Friedman, *American Glamour*, 144.

between two of the four curvilinear Y-shaped columns. They are now in a large, flowing space with soaring ceilings and curvilinear forms [see figure 2]. During the daytime, the interior is flooded with light from the glass panels and glass slits on the roof, reflecting off the interior's white surfaces, invoking visitors a sense of optimism. In this building, spaces are divided not by thresholds or doors, but by elevations and flowing forms [see figures 3]. In front of visitors is the central staircase to take them up half a level to the back-half of the building. However, the hall space between the entrance and the staircase invites visitors to examine their two sides, where they find two low-ceilinged, tunnel-like spaces [see figure 4]. These spaces, originally occupied by airline check-in desks, are now a food court and hotel check-in area. A working baggage conveyor belt moves visitors' baggage to the storage area, taking visitors back to the technical innovations of the 1960s.

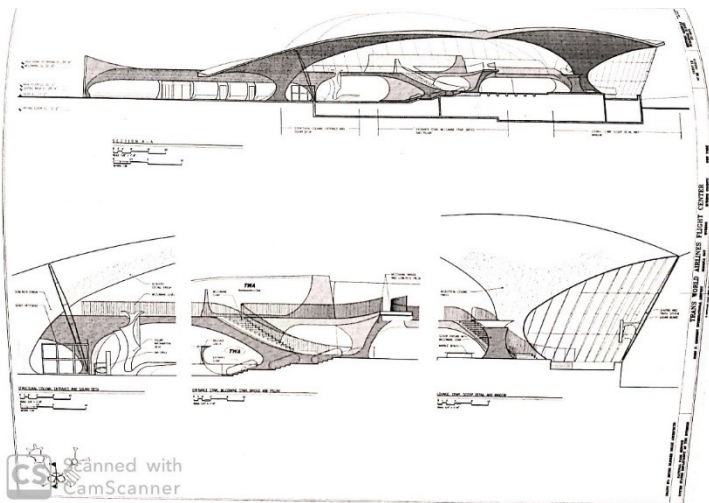


Figure 2. Transverse section of the TWA Flight Center.¹³

¹³ Beyer Blinder Belle Architects, *Transverse Section*, 2004-2005, in Kornel Ringli, *Designing TWA: Eero Saarinen's Airport Terminal in New York* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 187

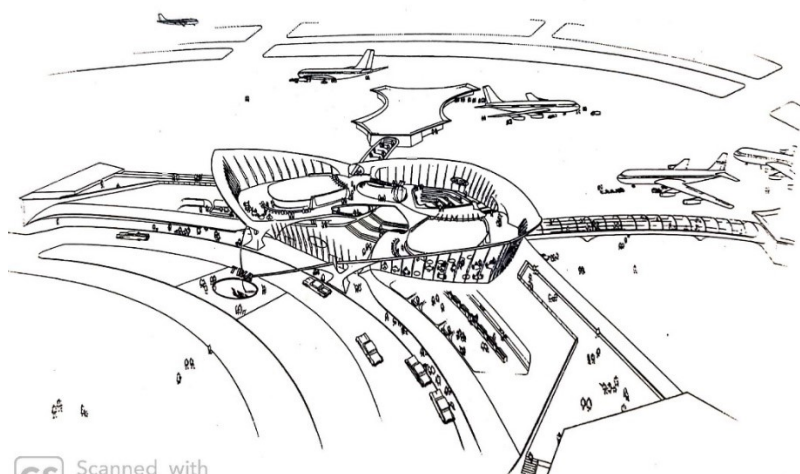


Figure 3. Axonometric view of the TWA Flight Center.¹⁴

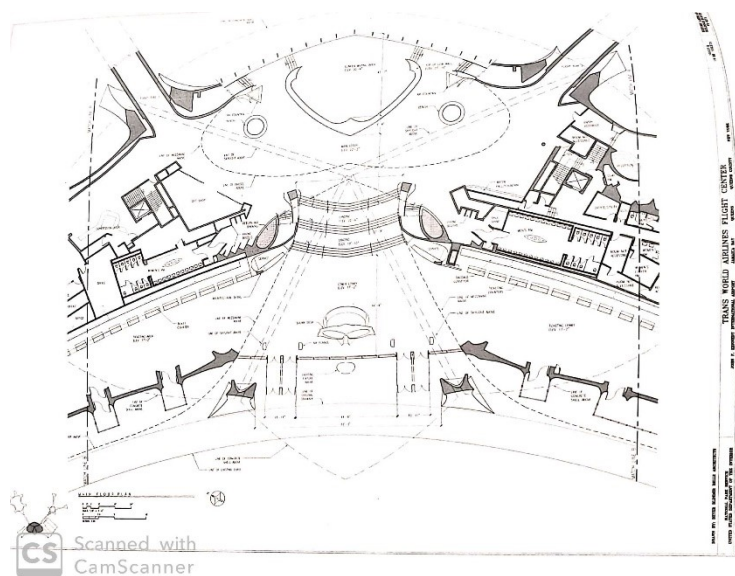


Figure 4. Plan of main floor of TWA Flight Center.¹⁵

¹⁴ Yale University Library, *Axonometric View*, n.d., in Kornel Ringli, *Designing TWA: Eero Saarinen's Airport Terminal in New York* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 44

¹⁵ Beyer Blinder Belle Architects, *Plan of Departure Hall, Main Floor*, 2004-2005, in Kornel Ringli, *Designing TWA: Eero Saarinen's Airport Terminal in New York* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 185

As visitors emerge from the low-ceilinged check-in space, they ascend the central staircase, which brings them to the building's dining and lounging components. On the ground floor is a circular sunken lounge, its spatial division created by a difference in elevation instead of through doors or walls. Sitting in the red-carpeted sunken lounge, visitors face a retro flap display board in front of a large window looking towards the airport, where modern jets take off and land. The obsolete flap board with airliner activity in the background connects the airport's past with its future. On the lounge's two sides, curvilinear stairs take visitors to an open-plan second floor with additional dining and lounging options in its two wings. A corridor connecting the two wings allows visitors to view the building's flowing forms from an elevated perspective. Finally, to reach their guestrooms, visitors are taken on a ceremonial walk through a tube that originally took airline travellers to satellite terminals to board their planes. The experience of walking along the red carpet through the windowless tube towards a different part of the hotel echoes the excitement of boarding an airplane in the 1960s, ending visitors' experience of the headhouse on a high note [see figure 5].

Despite the awe-inspiring interior, some features make the design less practical. The central staircase, a crucial component of interior circulation, can be a barrier to accessibility. Without a ramp, visitors who are carrying heavy luggage may find the stairs a nuisance, while visitors with mobility issues may have trouble accessing the rest of the building. Additionally, instead of a continuous sequence, a break for every four steps causes the stairway to be incongruent with the sense of continuity throughout the building. Another flaw is a lack of lighting at night, especially for the second-floor spaces [see figure 7]. The lack of light fixtures on the ceiling results in dark spaces on the second floor. While the restaurant may benefit from the ambiance created by dim lighting, the darkness creates a gloomy, uninviting corridor at night, discouraging visitors from ascending the stairs to the second floor and reducing the building's otherwise sense of optimism.

The hotel's 512 guestrooms are housed in two modernist wings designed by Lubrano Ciavarra Architects which are slightly behind the headhouse and extend along both sides.¹⁶ They are the newest part of the morphology of the building [see figure 6]. With a glass curtain wall facade stripped of ornaments and interspersed with aluminum panels' clean lines, the two wings appear austere, resembling the International Style [see figure 8]. Despite mostly serving corporate clients, International Style buildings were seen in the postwar era as optimistic symbols of hope and the future.¹⁷

¹⁶ "TWA Hotel," Beyer Blinder Belle Architects

¹⁷ Lewis Mumford, "House of Glass," *New Yorker*, August 9, 1952, repr. in Alexandra Lange, *Writing About Architecture: Mastering the Language of Buildings and Cities* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 21–28.

This symbolism becomes a part of the nostalgia and optimism that visitors experience today. Thus, while the austere wings contrast with the excitement generated by the headhouse's design, they complement the headhouse in vision.

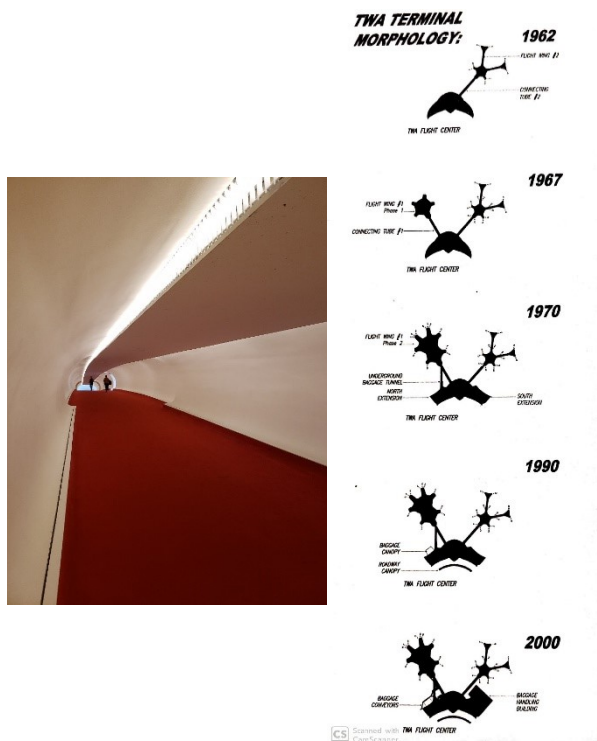


Figure 5 (left). Interior of a flight tube.¹⁸

Figure 6 (right). Morphology of the TWA Flight Center from 1962 to 2000.¹⁹

Additionally, in contrast to International Style skyscrapers, the two wings reach a height of eight storeys and radiate from the headhouse in a curved form. This design resembles some of Saarinen's past projects, notably the convex, dark-glass facade of the IBM Watson Research Center [see figure 9]. At the TWA Hotel, these design features have functional aspects. They complement, while not overshadowing, the headhouse's curved forms and are functional spaces for guestrooms, separating the quieter guestroom quarter from the hustle in the headhouse.

¹⁸ The author, untitled image of a flight tube of the TWA Hotel, November 5, 2019.

¹⁹ Library of Congress, *TWA Terminal: Morphology*, n.d., in Kornel Ringli, *Designing TWA: Eero Saarinen's Airport Terminal in New York* (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 124

A notable component of the guestroom wings is the use of rooftop spaces. Perched on the rooftop of one wing is an observation deck that all guests can freely access. On the airside, visitors can view the busy activities of JFK Airport, making it an ideal space for aviation enthusiasts; however, a real gem is the view of the headhouse from the other side of the deck. This vantage point offers a near-axonometric view of the building that captures its technical innovation and creative form [see figure 9]. Visitors can see its roof, divided into four components, and experience a sense of lightness and clarity as the interior spaces are visible through the building's glass panels. However, the rooftop space of the other wing is entirely used for mechanical systems. The uneven rooftop fixtures contrast with the smoothness of the rooftop observation deck, interrupting the hotel's symmetry. This practical use, clearly visible from the observation deck and from afar, becomes an eyesore. Installing the mechanical systems in an enclosed floor space would have resulted in a consistent, smooth flow, allowing the rooftop to be in greater harmony with the entire design.



Figure 7. Interior of the TWA Hotel at night.²⁰

²⁰ The author, untitled image of the interior of the TWA Hotel at night, November 5, 2019.

Despite some design flaws, the TWA Hotel transforms a traditional hotel experience into one that provides visitors with an optimistic, ceremonial experience through its curvilinear forms and flowing spaces while allowing visitors to glimpse a past vision of the future. The design of the two guestroom wings is in conversation with the headhouse, conveying a similar sense of optimism while housing the observation deck, bringing the public into the building. The hotel builds on Saarinen's intention of using modernism to create a space that evokes excitement and brings new experiences to the public.

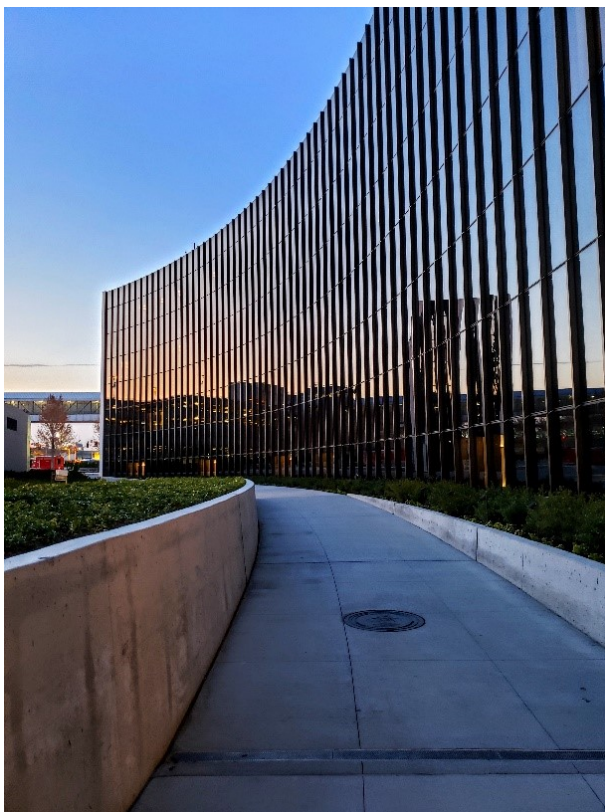


Figure 8. Guestroom wing of the TWA Hotel.²¹

²¹ The author, untitled image of the TWA Hotel guestroom wing, November 5, 2019.



Figure 9. Exterior of the IBM Watson Research Center.²²



Figure 10. View of the TWA Hotel headhouse from the observation deck.²³

²² Balthazar Khorab Ltd., *IBM Watson, Entrance*, n.d., in Jayne Merkel, *Eero Saarinen* (New York: Phaidon, 2005), 93.

²³ The author, untitled image of the TWA Hotel viewed from the observation deck, November 5, 2019.

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