

Preface

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This issue of Birkbeck's peer-reviewed, online journal *19* gives concrete expression to an established and fruitful partnership between two institutions with mutual interests in exploring art history from exciting new angles and through interdisciplinary approaches.

Its origin was a conference hosted at the National Gallery on 10 November 2017, which captured the public's imagination with its intriguing title, 'Knowing "as much of art as the cat"?: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers on the Old Masters'. Its aim was to uncover more about the overlooked role of English-speaking women as disseminators of knowledge about old master paintings and historical painting techniques during the Victorian era. Most academic conferences today are multi-partner ventures and this was no exception. Indeed, it was the second of a two-part collaboration between the National Gallery; Birkbeck, University of London; Chawton House Library, Hampshire; and the Southampton Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies, University of Southampton, the first of which, 'Writing Art: Women Writers as Art Critics in the Long Eighteenth Century' (25 February 2017), had been hosted at Chawton House.

These twin conferences were the first public-facing outputs of a still-ongoing Collaborative Doctoral Award between the National Gallery and Birkbeck, established by Susanna Avery-Quash and Hilary Fraser. The project investigates women's contributions during the long nineteenth century to the evolving discipline of art history, with a focus on their writings about the old masters, many of which referenced paintings in the National Gallery's collection. A second outcome arising from the award is this issue of *19*, which brings together articles developed from themes explored in both 2017 conferences and some newly commissioned work. Susanna Avery-Quash and Hilary Fraser have been joined as co-editors of this issue by their PhD student, Maria Alambritis.

From what has just been noted, it will be apparent that the National Gallery values partnerships of all kinds, whether with other museums, universities, or research institutes in Britain or abroad. The gallery has enjoyed particularly close links with Birkbeck in recent years. For the record, I would like to draw attention to just two of the different collaborations that our institutions have successfully undertaken together, which, from their diverse

topics and intellectual ambition, exemplify the range of research interests we have jointly pioneered. Firstly, we undertook an earlier Collaborative Doctoral Award that investigated for the first time the great art collection at Longford Castle, near Salisbury. The project explored the origins and developments during the eighteenth century of this country house, which has been opened to the public through newly devised tours arranged by the National Gallery since 2013. That award, supervised by Susanna Avery-Quash of the National Gallery and Kate Retford of Birkbeck, similarly led to two conferences, the first of which, 'Animating the Eighteenth-Century Country House' (5–6 March 2015) was organized by the gallery, Birkbeck, and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London. Its success led to the suggestion by my predecessor, Sir Nicholas Penny, to organize a sister event to consider the country house's urban counterpart. This ambition found expression in an event a year later, 'Animating the Georgian London Town House' (17–18 March 2016), organized by the same scholars and supported by the same institutions. A publication arising from the second conference and co-edited by Susanna Avery-Quash and Kate Retford has now been published: *The Georgian London Town House: Building, Collecting and Display* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

The second recent joint venture between the gallery and Birkbeck was an ambitious three-day international conference, 'Leonardo in Britain: Collections and Reception' (25–27 May 2016), involving yet more partners: the Biblioteca Leonardiana, Vinci; the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence; the Warburg Institute, London; the British Museum, London; and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The event, organized by Juliana Barone of Birkbeck in partnership with Susanna Avery-Quash, explored the importance and impact of Leonardo's paintings and drawings in key British private and public collections as well as the influence of Leonardo's manuscripts and the first English editions of his *Treatise on Painting*. Once again, the organizers have been able to extend the reach of the conference through publishing a book on the topic, co-edited by Juliana Barone and Susanna Avery-Quash: *Leonardo in Britain: Collections and Historical Reception* (Olschki, 2019).

We hope this history of fruitful collaboration between the National Gallery and Birkbeck will continue into the future, and indeed spin-offs from the conferences that generated this issue of *19* are already in development. For instance, a practice-led event on 'Experimenting in the Galleries', based on the work of Vernon Lee, and organized by Carolyn Burdett at Birkbeck in November 2018, is now being developed with the National Gallery. The gallery is a natural home for work on nineteenth-century women writers on art, for Elizabeth Eastlake (née Rigby), the wife of its first director, Sir Charles Eastlake, was a pioneering female art historian.

Several of the contributors to the current issue of *19* in fact focus on the writings of Lady Eastlake, and it is worth pointing out that the gallery recently acquired as a unique and precious item for its History

Collection a drawing album containing more than two hundred drawings by her. It came to light during the gallery's 2011 exhibition about Charles Eastlake, curated by Susanna Avery-Quash, and was gifted to the gallery by Caroline Gibbons in 2017, in whose family the album had passed through several generations. It is a fascinating document and demonstrates what an accomplished amateur artist Lady Eastlake was. It includes not only family portraits and landscapes of her travels round Britain, but also sketches of European cities that she visited with her husband after his appointment as director of the gallery in 1855, when they toured Europe together so that he might identify eligible masterpieces for the national collection. Intriguingly, some of the accomplished sketches in pencil or pen and ink show her work after the old masters, which she made in front of the originals to serve as aides-memoires for her husband's activities once they were back home in London. One of them — her drawing after Giovanni Bellini's *Virgin and Child with Saints Paul and George* from the Accademia, Venice — has been chosen as the cover image for this issue of *19*. Her sketches in fact relate to detailed written descriptions of paintings that we find penned in Eastlake's own travel diaries, today preserved in the gallery's archive, which include specific reference to certain of his wife's sketches. It is highly pleasing and appropriate, therefore, that Eastlake's diaries and his wife's drawings after the old masters have been reunited for posterity through this very generous gift, and may be viewed side by side.

An even more recent gallery acquisition also worthy of mention in the current context is our purchase in July 2018 of a recently discovered, rare self-portrait by the most celebrated female artist of the Italian Baroque, Artemisia Gentileschi. This purchase realizes a long-held dream of increasing the National Gallery's collection of paintings by important women artists. As our Chairman of Trustees Hannah Rothschild (who in 2015 became the first woman to chair the National Gallery Board) notes: 'This picture will help us transform how we collect, exhibit and tell the story of women artists throughout history.' Artemisia became the first woman to become a member of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence and she had a truly international clientele, including the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Charles I of England, and Philip IV of Spain. The painting has been on display since late 2018, having undergone conservation treatment when it first arrived in the gallery last year. There is an interview with our curator of Italian and Spanish paintings, 1600–1800, Letizia Treves, in the '19 Live' section, which will tell you more about the painter and how she overcame extreme personal difficulties to succeed in the art of painting. I hope that you will come to the gallery to see this 'masterpiece' by a great female 'old master' for yourselves.

(The thumbnail image in the Table of Contents is courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives: reference — Collage 29382.)