In a Better Light: Vision, Spatiality and the Connoisseurial Practices of the National Gallery, c. 1875–1916

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Abstract
Visual assessment was crucial to the judgement of artworks throughout the Victorian period and beyond, and yet our understanding of the practice of connoisseurship is too often limited to a largely theoretical approach. This article adopts a spatial methodology to study the practice of institutional connoisseurship of Old Master paintings in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, thus highlighting the extent to which connoisseurship relied on visual analysis in this period. The concept of connoisseurship is widened to encompass not just issues of authenticity and attribution, but also equally important criteria such as condition and beauty that were similarly judged by eye.
This article opens with the description of a visual model of connoisseurship, drawing on current psychological theories on vision and expertise. This model posits the practice of connoisseurship as a series of swift judgements based on a visual mental canon built up over years of exposure to comparative images. I then go on to test this model with a case study centring on the professional practices of staff at London's National Gallery between the 1870s and 1910s. Making particular use of material from the National Gallery archives, my analysis relies far less than previous studies on written theories of connoisseurship, instead using a broad range of sources including museum minutes, private correspondence, photographs, and building plans to consider the physical conditions under which connoisseurial judgements were reached. Using these materials, I explore how the spaces in which connoisseurship was practised overwhelmingly predicated vision as an analytical tool, as opposed to alternatives such as technical examination.
There is strong potential for the translation of this approach from the context under review in this article to other periods in history, wider geographical areas, different historical actors, and the judgement of a much broader range of material culture artefacts beyond Old Master paintings. This will help to deepen our understanding of connoisseurship as a flexible practice with divergent aims and methods for different stakeholder groups, each adopting its own particular connoisseurial lens.

In early June 1845, the National Gallery invested in a painting that was to have far-reaching repercussions for the institution's management and reputation.[1] The

[1] The research for this article was made possible by funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the form of a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Award held between the University of Liverpool and the National Gallery (Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Award 1509057), and an International Placement Scheme Fellowship that allowed me to spend two months as a Fellow at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin

portrait known as the ‘mock Holbein’ (NG195, Figure 1) was bought as an autograph work by the master but was within weeks stripped of this over-optimistic attribution.[2] When the picture was put on display, hung well above the eyeline, critics and visitors to the Gallery became sceptical of the reliability of the connoisseurship that had led to its purchase. The *Athenaeum* wrote that,

> Respecting its condition, we can furnish no precise details; for the Committee have, with suspicious prudence, hung it much too high. New acquisitions, we submit, should at first obtain place on the lowermost line, or eye-level, where their veritable qualities might challenge examination; otherwise, it will be thought they cannot bear the test of criticism.[3]

Within the month, the scandal had spread to Parliament, where National Gallery Trustee Sir Robert Peel was himself forced to admit to uncertainties regarding the work:

> It is difficult to say, in the case of a picture of the age of two or three hundred years, whether it can be justly attributed to the master or not. The picture in question was bought as a Holbein; and though there is no doubt that it is a contemporary painting, yet, as there had arisen a doubt as to its being a Holbein, it was withdrawn. […] No guarantee had been received as to the authenticity of the picture; but, indeed, in such cases, it was difficult to obtain a guarantee.[4]

The bad publicity generated by the revelation that this painting was, indeed, not by Holbein, is thought to have had a hand in the resignation of Charles Lock Eastlake (1793–1856) from his position as Keeper of the National Gallery in November 1847.[5] It was to continue to haunt Eastlake during his subsequent Directorship a decade later, when in 1857 MP and art collector William Coningham could still refer in a House of Commons speech to ‘this daub, a libel

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[2] ‘P.’, ‘The National Gallery’, *The Times*, 2 July 1845; Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World* (London: National Gallery Company, 2011), p. 46; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *A Closer Look: Deceptions and Discoveries* (London: National Gallery Company, 2010), pp. 50–51; Christopher Whitehead, ‘Architectures of Display at the National Gallery: The Barry Rooms as Art Historiography and the Problems of Reconstructing Historical Gallery Space’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 17 (2005), 189–211 (p. 193); David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 85–87.

[3] ‘A Holbein…’, *The Athenaeum*, 7 June 1845.

[4] United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 81, col. 1337 (1845).

[5] *Art for the Nation*, p. 47.

upon the great artist whose work it pretended to be' as part of his ongoing criticism of the National Gallery.[6]

More broadly, the case of the 'mock Holbein' highlights just how crucial visual assessment was to the judgement of paintings throughout the nineteenth century. The tide was starting to turn from the power of aesthetic criticism sitting with artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds in the previous century, to the broader world of art critics, dealers and newly emerging museum professionals.[7] In particular, much has been written on the emergence of Italian art critic Giovanni Morelli's theories of connoisseurship from the mid-nineteenth century onwards — themselves strongly based on ideas of visual comparison — and on Morelli's influence on institutional collecting practice.[8] Indeed, even when alternative methods of attribution such as scientific examination began to emerge in the later Victorian and Edwardian periods, visual connoisseurship remained the key approach in the professional's arsenal of analytical methods.

This article focuses on the period from the 1870s onwards, exploring the strong links between vision, connoisseurship and space and arguing that connoisseurs continued to rely on their visual judgement alone because of the spaces in which pictures were available for inspection. For the first time, I adopt a spatial methodology to analyse the historical practice of connoisseurship, drawing on both textual descriptions of connoisseurship and spatial evidence. In particular, I put forward and test a model according to which connoisseurship as practised by the staff of the National Gallery in this period can be framed as a series of swift judgements, based on a visual mental canon built up over years of exposure to comparative images. Such an approach allows us to determine more clearly how connoisseurship was applied, as well as to articulate the reasons why visual judgment was so strongly prioritized. In short, connoisseurship should not be understood as a sterile, disembodied theory, but instead as a visual practice strongly affected and determined by the spaces in which it was performed.

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[6] United Kingdom, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 146, col. 828 (1857); Francis Haskell, 'William Coningham and His Collection of Old Masters', *The Burlington Magazine*, 133 (1991), no. 1063, 676–81.

[7] Claire Wildsmith, '"Candid and Earnest": The Rise of the Art Critic in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *Ruskin's Artists: Studies in the Victorian Visual Economy: Papers from the Ruskin Programme, Lancaster University*, ed. by Robert Hewison (Brookfield, CT: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 15–30.

[8] See, for example, Jaynie Anderson, 'The Political Power of Connoisseurship in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Wilhelm von Bode versus Giovanni Morelli', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen,* 38 (1996), 107–19; Johanna Vakkari, 'Giovanni Morelli's "Scientific" Method of Attribution and its Reinterpretations from the 1960s until the 1990s', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 70 (2001), 46–54; Donata Levi, 'Let Agents Be Sent to All the Cities of Italy': British Public Museums and the Italian Art Market in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by John E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 33–53; Luke Uglow, 'Giovanni Morelli and his Friend Giorgione: Connoisseurship, Science and Irony', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 11 (2014), 1–30.

Connoisseurship, following a fallow period during which it became unfashionable as the object of scholarly interest, is now once again the subject of critical discussion.[9] As a method of analysis, it is still heavily employed by modern galleries, auction houses and collectors alike; however, accusations of a lack of transparency also abound. In an ongoing series of blog posts entitled 'The Transparent Connoisseur', art historian Gary Schwartz has called for greater openness and consistency with regard to connoisseurship, arguing that 'sharp questioning' is necessary for a practice that is 'indispensable for the integrity' of the field.[10] This article engages in such questioning through its attempts to determine more clearly where and how connoisseurship has historically been performed. Indeed, even the concept of connoisseurship deserves a brief discussion: the terms 'connoisseurship' and 'attribution' have frequently been used interchangeably by art historians, while much recent scholarship has focused on the growing importance of attribution during the eighteenth century, especially in France.[11] However, my research has identified what can be termed a 'triumvirate of connoisseurship' as consistently representing the major criteria for the acquisition of paintings in this period: attribution, condition and beauty. While it may seem obvious that connoisseurs worked to judge aspects of artworks other than attribution, this fact has been largely overlooked by theorists of connoisseurship to date. Nevertheless, such criteria were, and remain, important factors in the judgements reached by artists, dealers, museum staff, and collectors.[12] In this article I therefore adopt a broad definition of the concept that takes into account not just issues of authorship, but also other important markers of artistic quality prized by connoisseurs. This is particularly important as far as

[9] As well as the papers and books cited throughout this article, connoisseurship has also been the subject of a range of conferences and exhibitions over the past decade, including 'CODART NEGENTIEN: Connoisseurship: Between Intuition and Science' (CODART, Madrid, 2016); 'The Educated Eye? Connoisseurship Now' (The Paul Mellon Centre, London, 2014); 'Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries' (National Gallery, London, 2010).

[10] Gary Schwartz, '364. The Transparent Connoisseur 5: Keeping the Rembrandt Research Project to Its Word' (8 May 2018), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190305143520/http://www.garyschwartzarthistorian.nl/364-the-transparent-connoisseur-5-keeping-the-rembrandt-research-project-to-its-word/> [accessed 28 November 2018 and 5 March 2019].

[11] Carol Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli* (New York, NY: Garland, 1988); Kristel Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); David Pullins, 'The Individual's Triumph: The Eighteenth-Century Consolidation of Authorship and Art Historiography', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 16 (2017), 1–26.

[12] For an important recent exception concerning condition, see Paul Taylor, *Condition: The Ageing of Art* (London: Paul Holberton, 2015). A comprehensive discussion of the definition of connoisseurship can be found in Chapters 1 of Alison Clarke, 'The Spatial Aspects of Connoisseurship: Agnew's and the National Gallery, 1874–1916' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 2018) and Alison Clarke, *Spaces of Connoisseurship: Judging Old Masters at Agnew's and the National Gallery, c.1874-1916* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

vision is concerned, given that visual examination is so integral to the judgements of particularly subjective criteria such as beauty.

A Visual Model for Connoisseurship

The evidence to be discussed below reveals multiple spatial and chronological factors that feed into a visual model for connoisseurship as practised by National Gallery personnel in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Because of the physical limitations often encountered in the spaces in which they had to examine works, staff needed to be confident of the reliability of their connoisseurship, potentially based on no more than the briefest of inspections, and not necessarily under the ideal conditions. Both at the Gallery itself, and in the other spaces in which connoisseurship was practised, the sources repeatedly show that visual criteria such as lighting and physical proximity to the artwork were considered of paramount importance. It can therefore be deduced that the major practical technique of connoisseurship for the National Gallery staff in this period must have been visual scrutiny. When a previously unknown artwork was encountered, it would be ranked against other paintings understood to be comparable in terms of attribution, beauty and condition, in order to reach a qualitative judgement of these categories.

This model tallies strongly with previous work on theories of connoisseurship: scholars have long recognized the comparative method as a connoisseurial technique. Hayden Maginnis has argued that Morelli's method can be summed up by the theory of the creation of a 'storehouse of memory' holding copies of the original experience; on encountering a new work, the connoisseur could simply call to mind the memory image for comparison.[13] Such a model of connoisseurship highlights the importance of direct visual contact with a range of objects in the development of visual expertise: a vital connoisseurial skill across the last three centuries. Meanwhile, John Brewer and others have rightly highlighted the similarities between the connoisseurial methods adopted by Morelli and his predecessors such as Cavalcaselle, drawing out the continued importance of the comparative method whether or not this was explicitly alluded to in the writings of the connoisseur.[14] However, the spatial aspects relating to the comparison of artworks have received insufficient critical attention, with much secondary work concentrating on theoretical writings rather than practical methods of connoisseurship. The adoption of the spatial approach as demonstrated here circumvents some of the problems of a traditional textual approach by highlighting the ways in which connoisseurs could access both

[13] Hayden B. J. Maginnis, 'The Role of Perceptual Learning in Connoisseurship: Morelli, Berenson, and Beyond', *Art History*, 13 (1990), no. 1, 104–17 (p. 107); David Ebitz, 'Connoisseurship as Practice', *Artibus et Historiae*, 18 (1988), no. 9, 207–12 (p. 208).
[14] John Brewer, *The American Leonardo: A 20th-Century Tale of Obsession, Art and Money* (London: Constable, 2009). Chapter 2.

potential acquisitions and comparable works. In fact, it becomes clear that the spaces in which connoisseurship was practised had a direct impact on the ways in which connoisseurship was carried out: in particular, the requirement for a swift judgement, often based on visual evidence alone, ensured that visual comparison was prioritized over alternative methods.

This type of swift, visual connoisseurship maps well onto a more general model of perceptual expertise as developed by cognitive psychologists Thomas J. Palmeri and Michael J. Tarr. As they outline, 'hybrid' image-based/structural-description theories describe how information is stored in long-term memory — thus allowing visual objects to be recognized, identified and categorized — by suggesting that these objects are broken down into parts: 'We can remember an object's colour, position, orientation, or size, and can use such dimensions to determine an object's identity or category if those dimensions prove diagnostic for […] perceptual decisions'.[15] Accepting this ability to separate visually perceived objects into categorizable parts, expertise is thus characterized as making 'fine perceptual discriminations with speeds that can astonish the novice observer': experts are able to reach decisions more quickly than the novice, and to distinguish between a greater number of narrow categories.[16] Given that expert perception is more highly developed than that of the novice, it is important to determine how the status of perceptual expert can be achieved. Palmeri and Tarr suggest that this development centres on achieving an understanding of the relevance of particular aspects of an object class for perceptual identification. However, this is made more difficult in the case of particular domains such as art history because 'verbal labels cannot adequately convey the diagnostic perceptual qualities for the novice'.[17] This problem has been recognized with specific respect to connoisseurship by Donata Levi, who has discussed the problems inherent in translating a visual experience into a verbal description.[18]

Instead of necessarily being taught, such perceptual expertise can be considered as the natural result of the normal learning trajectory, leading to the acquisition of vast perceptual memories over a long period of time.[19] This idea is

[15] Thomas J. Palmeri and Michael J. Tarr, 'Visual Object Perception and Long-Term Memory', in *Visual Memory*, ed. by Steven J. Luck and Andrew Hollingworth (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 163–208 (p. 179).

[16] Ibid., p. 173.

[17] Ibid., p. 194.

[18] Donata Levi, 'Connaisseurs français du milieu du XIXe siècle: tradition nationale et apports extérieurs', in *Histoire de l'histoire de l'art en France au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Roland Recht (Paris: Documentation française, 2008), pp. 197–214 (p. 206).

[19] The classic experiment into memory capacity and retrieval for multiple images is Lionel Standing, 'Learning 10,000 Pictures', *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 25 (1973), no. 2, 207–22. More recently, studies have confirmed the extent to which long-term memory is capable of storing a huge number of objects in detail: see, for example, Timothy F.

supported by the fact that National Gallery staff would frequently visit both private and public collections, even when the artworks held in these did not necessarily relate directly to the acquisition at hand, in order to build up a personal 'mental canon' of comparative works for the future. In other words, as Maurizio Lorber has argued, connoisseurship is based on visual evidence as determined by the eye of the connoisseur. For Lorber, connoisseurship is the skill of learning how to recognize forms and separate these into discrete categories. [20] Connoisseurial expertise can be built up through repeated exposure to a wide range of paintings, and in learning to identify and classify such works. Instead of the 'connoisseurial eye' being restricted to a privileged elite, it is therefore possible for almost anyone to learn the skill of connoisseurship. Amongst others, museum professionals can certainly be considered as expert connoisseurs, as long as they have garnered the relevant visual experience.

Examining Practices at the National Gallery

In order to test this model and to explore the links between connoisseurship, space and vision, I have selected as a demonstrative case study the practice of staff at London's National Gallery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period covers the tenure of three successive directors of the institution: Frederic William Burton (in post 1874–94), Edward John Poynter (1894–1904), and Charles Holroyd (1906–1916).[21] The National Gallery is a fitting subject for close analysis because museum professionals were — and, indeed, are — so heavily involved in the selection, acquisition, and study of artworks throughout their careers.[22] As will be demonstrated, paintings were overwhelmingly judged

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Brady et al., 'Visual Long-Term Memory Has a Massive Storage Capacity for Object Details', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105 (2008), no. 38, 14325–29.

[20] Maurizio Lorber, 'Ipotesi visive: "paradigma indiziario" versus "paradigma ipotetico" nella connoisseurship ottocentesca', *Arte in Friuli, Arte a Trieste*, 24 (2005), 119–44.

[21] There was also an intervening period between January 1905 and June 1906 during which the Gallery was without a director and three of the Trustees were made acting directors: Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority, 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 50. On Burton and Poynter, see in particular Charles Saumarez Smith, *The National Gallery: A Short History* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2009), Chapters 7–8. Burton is also the subject of a recent Ph.D thesis and article: Elena Greer, 'Sir Frederic William Burton and the Rosebery Minute: The Directorship of the National Gallery, London, in the Late Nineteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2017); Elena Greer, 'Sir Frederic Burton and the Controversy of Art-Historical Expertise at the National Gallery, London, in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 18 (2018), 1–20.

[22] Linda Sandino, 'A Curatocracy: Who and What Is a V&A Curator?', in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), pp. 87–100. Unfortunately there is little space here to discuss the interesting roles of players such as Keepers, Trustees and external agents in contributing to connoisseurship at the National Gallery. Because of the large number of people involved, the Directors' ultimate

for acquisition through first-hand, visual examination by National Gallery employees: this judgement process has therefore clearly helped to shape the national collection as it stands today. The public nature of the institution also means that a wide range of sources, particularly archival material, are available for scrutiny. While the National Gallery's extensive archives have been mined by a number of scholars, most notably Jonathan Conlin and Christopher Whitehead, much more material remains to be studied in any consistent fashion.[23] The extant Trafalgar Square building, home to the National Gallery since 1838, provides further important evidence for the location in which many paintings were investigated.

While there has been much recent analysis of the National Gallery's acquisition practices under Eastlake's directorship (1855–1865), less attention has been paid to the institution at the transitional point between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[24] And yet visual connoisseurship was one of the key markers of expertise for those operating in the British art world during this period. New theories of Old Master connoisseurship were beginning to emerge, traditionally seen as marking a shift from the mid-century, documentarybased approach of art critics like Joseph Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle to the supposedly 'scientific' approach of art historians Giovanni Morelli and Bernard Berenson.[25] More broadly, art history was starting to take on a disciplinary identity, supported by the launch of new critical periodicals such as *The Connoisseur* and *The Burlington Magazine*, and the development of new History of Art courses in the academy.[26] The National Gallery, with its active acquisitions policy and established mandate to build up a collection that

responsibility for purchases and the fact that much of the archival material relating to connoisseurial practice was authored by the Directors, the focus in this article remains largely on the Directors' connoisseurial practice.

[23] Jonathan Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece: A History of the National Gallery* (London: Pallas Athene, 2006); Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Whitehead, 'Architectures of Display'.

[24] See, in particular, Avery-Quash and Sheldon; Susanna Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake*, 2 vols (London: The Walpole Society, 2011); Susanna Avery-Quash, 'The Eastlake Library: Origins, History and Importance', *Studi di Memofonte*, 10 (2013), 3–45.

[25] Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), Chapter 4.

[26] Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, 'The Periodical and the Art Market: Investigating the 'Dealer–Critic System' in Victorian England', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 41 (2008), 323–51; Barbara Pezzini, 'The Burlington Magazine, The Burlington Gazette, and The Connoisseur: The Art Periodical and the Market for Old Master Paintings in Edwardian London', *Visual Resources*, 29 (2013): 154–83; Donald Preziosi, 'The Question of Art History', in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. by James K. Chandler, Arnold Ira Davidson and Harry D. Harootunian (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 203–26; John Summerson, *What Is a Professor of Fine Art? An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the University of Hull on 17 November 1960* (Hull: University of Hull, 1961).

showcased the development of Western art, was situated at the very centre of this transformation.[27] Nevertheless, previous research has largely failed to recognize that despite this context of theoretical change, the practical connoisseurial methods applied by many art world professionals — including those at the National Gallery — remained essentially similar, strongly marked by the prioritisation of visual examination. That this remained the case throughout the forty-year period under scrutiny here demonstrates that such theoretical changes had little immediate impact upon the practice of connoisseurship.

To date, connoisseurship has too frequently been studied either through the analysis of these written theories, or by the comparison of historical with modern attributions.[28] Both of these approaches tend to focus strongly on the writings of emerging art historians or self-styled ‘experts’, resulting in a somewhat artificial categorisation of these connoisseurs as external to the workings of the art market. It is hard to believe that Berenson was not being disingenuous when he wrote late in his career that

> One can understand the dealers, the amateur merchants and collectors speculating [on attributions] for a rise; but why should art historians and gallery directors do the same? Surely they are not actuated by sordid motives of gain, nor to any extent by questions of prestige.[29]

Even if it can be assumed that the writings of such ‘experts’ are entirely reliable, it seems unlikely that these theories of connoisseurship translated easily into professional connoisseurial practice in spaces such as the auction room or dealer’s gallery.[30] Furthermore, the decision taken here to adopt a broader definition of connoisseurship, encompassing such intrinsically subjective concepts such as beauty and condition, is fundamentally incompatible with any type of quantitative methodology that attempts to make a statistical comparison between historic and present-day attributions. Given my extensive use of written, archival sources as the basis for much of the discussion in this article, I do not intend to argue that texts are unimportant for the analysis of connoisseurship. However, it is when written sources are narrowly used as a basis for the discussion of the *practice* of connoisseurship — in order to determine how such judgements were reached — that they start to become inadequate.

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[27] *Select Committee on the National Gallery: Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (HC 1853, 867), p. xvi. The complicated nature of this mandate, and the practical difficulties in fulfilling it, are explored more fully in *The Nation’s* Mantelpiece, Chapter 5.

[28] For an example of the first approach, see Uglow, ‘Giovanni Morelli and His Friend Giorgione’; for the second, see M. J. Ripps, ‘A Faustian Bargain? Charles Sedelmeyer, Wilhelm Bode, and the Expansion of Rembrandt’s Painted Corpus, 1883–1914’, in *Cultural Clearings: The Object Transformed by the Art Market/Schnittstelle Kunsthandel: Das Objekt im Auge des Marktes* (Nuremburg: CIHA, 2015), pp. 745–47.

[29] Bernard Berenson, *Essays in Appreciation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1958), p. 97.

[30] Levi, ‘Connaisseurs français’.

In order to circumvent these difficulties, this article adopts an alternative spatial approach, drawing on both the written evidence that reveals the criteria upon which connoisseurial judgements were reached by National Gallery staff, and the physical conditions under which these decisions were made.[31] While the spatial turn has now begun to impact art history, a spatial approach has not previously been adopted for the study of connoisseurship and its practice; my research is therefore innovative in this respect.[32] It is important to note that there are artworks for which a spatial methodology is less useful, particularly those for which the acquisition details have been lost or were never recorded. Nevertheless, as this article demonstrates, such an approach is often valuable for bypassing the heavy reliance on descriptions of how connoisseurship was performed. In addition, considering the space in which a connoisseurial decision was reached does not merely fill in the lacunae left by missing or inadequate textual sources, but can also actively contribute to a more complete understanding of how connoisseurship was, and is, performed. For example, I will go on to draw strong parallels between the ways in which paintings were examined in a range of spaces, a comparison that reveals much about the visual methods of connoisseurship as practised by Gallery staff.

The Mobility of People and Artworks

The increasing mobility of both artworks and people from the midnineteenth century onwards strongly facilitated a comparative, visual style of connoisseurship. Before this point in history, it had been difficult to view a

[31] Although the spatial turn has been pivotal to a range of disciplines in the past few decades, space remains conceptually unstable, with a confusing plethora of terms applied and a variety of historical methodologies adopted under the umbrella concepts of space and place (see Leif Jerram, 'Space: A Useless Category for Historical Analysis?', *History and Theory*, 52 [2013], 400–19). In an attempt to avoid such confusion, here I adopt the definitions and terminology suggested in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*: 'place' is defined as a distinct, geometric location, while 'space' can be described as a 'practised place', activated by an actor within that place (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011], p. 117). This distinction between space and place allows for the importance of temporality and change within a place, as well as the multitude of functions that a place may perform for a variety of actors. In addition, it accounts for the way in which the power aspects of space can be exploited by actors for the creation of status and the reinforcement of expertise. This is especially important in the case of art and artistic institutions: as John Brewer has suggested, in galleries the artworks on display can be viewed with the confidence that their authenticity and importance is underwritten by the people who have chosen to display them (John Brewer, *The American Leonardo: A 20th-Century Tale of Obsession, Art and Money* [London: Constable, 2009], p. 2).

[32] See, for example, Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Andrew Graciano (ed.), *Exhibiting Outside the Academy, Salon and Biennial, 1775–1999: Alternative Venues for Display* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

geographically disparate corpus of artworks in person because of the high costs and dedicated time required.[33] From the 1840s onwards, however, the rapid growth of the railway network brought about a shrinkage in the perception of geographical distance and travel time.[34] Even during the Victorian period, it was recognized that this expansion was having an impact on the practice of connoisseurship: in 1893, Berenson lauded the railways as having helped connoisseurship to overcome its previous status as 'more or less of a quack science'.[35] By 1900, British railways were at their fastest and most extensive in history, delivering travellers and goods to within just a few miles of even the most far-flung destinations, while a similar expansion was taking place in the European rail network.[36] As a result, it became far quicker and safer for both paintings and people to move around Britain and abroad.[37]

The ability to inspect a wide range of artworks in person made it easier than ever to perform connoisseurial comparison across artists, schools and eras. National Gallery personnel did not often travel within Britain for the purposes of acquiring new works for the collection from private sellers, although important exceptions were sometimes made: Director Frederic Burton, for example, made a special journey to inspect the Duke of Marlborough's collection at Blenheim Palace in 1884, as a significant number of the Duke's paintings were shortly to go up for auction.[38] However, a strong emphasis was placed on European travel for the sake of inspecting potential acquisitions and comparative collections. While this mobility has previously been recognized for the National Gallery's first director, Charles Lock Eastlake, it has been largely overlooked for the directors who followed him.[39] Nevertheless, letters and reports from the National Gallery archives reveal that Burton made at least eleven Continental journeys on Gallery business in the twenty years of his directorship, while Edward Poynter

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[33] Charlotte Guichard, 'Connoisseurship and Artistic Expertise. London and Paris, 1600–1800', in *Fields of Expertise: A Comparative History of Expert Procedures in Paris and London, 1600 to Present*, ed. by Christelle Rabier (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 173–91.

[34] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986), Chapter 3.

[35] Berensen, 'Documents in the History of Visual Documentation: Bernard Berenson on Isochromatic Film', in *Art History Through the Camera's Lens*, ed. by Helene E. Roberts (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 123–30 (p. 128).

[36] Colin G. Pooley, Jean Turnbull and Mags Adams, *A Mobile Century? Changes in Everyday Mobility in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 18–19; Paul Caruana-Galizia and Jordi Martí-Henneberg, 'European Regional Railways and Real Income, 1870–1910: A Preliminary Report', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 61 (2013), 167–96 (pp. 178–80).

[37] Katherine Manthorne, 'Remapping American Art', *American Art*, 22.3 (2008), 112–17.

[38] London, The National Gallery, National Gallery Archives (hereafter NGA), NG6/10/367, National Gallery to the Exchequer, 19 November 1884.

[39] See Avery-Quash and Sheldon; Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks*.

travelled abroad at least thirteen times in ten years (see Appendix 1).[40] Given the expense and inconvenience of extended foreign travel in this period, it must have been seen as particularly important for directors to view potential acquisitions in person.

The new transport technologies led to increased mobility not just for connoisseurs, but also for the artworks that were their subjects of study. The railway had played a pivotal role in the facilitation of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857, characterized by Elizabeth Pergam as the first blockbuster exhibition because of the sheer number of works travelling on loan from private collections.[41] By the final decades of the nineteenth century, it became widely acceptable for paintings to be sent and received by rail. In the case of the National Gallery, this movement of artworks was particularly important because the institution placed such a strong emphasis on having works sent to London for direct inspection by the Director and Board of Trustees.

Spaces of Connoisseurship: At the National Gallery

National Gallery staff encountered paintings for sale in a variety of locations across the private and public spheres: in collectors' houses, dealers' premises, and gallery exhibitions, both in Britain and abroad. However, it is particularly notable that when negotiating with private sellers within Britain, the National Gallery placed a strong emphasis on having paintings sent to Trafalgar Square for inspection prior to acquisition. Because of its international prominence, the Gallery received frequent offers of paintings both for sale and as donations or bequests. From the archived correspondence and registers of offers, it is clear that many of these works were declined without being seen, especially if the description or photograph supplied did not meet the institution's standards.[42] In general, however, once a painting had piqued the Gallery's interest, sellers and donors were strongly encouraged to send their picture to Trafalgar Square for assessment. For example, of the 99 oil paintings left to the Gallery by collector John Henderson in 1878, 13 were selected by the Director following examination in Trafalgar Square (this number being reduced to eight after 'further

[40] Holroyd, in contrast, seems to have made only three foreign trips to inspect works during his ten-year tenure. This was presumably because he had to agree acquisitions with all Trustees following a more rigorous implementation of the so-called 'Rosebery Minute': Geddes Poole, pp. 79–91; 118–20.

[41] Elizabeth A. Pergam, *The Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857: Entrepreneurs, Connoisseurs and the Public* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 21; Amy M. von Lintel, 'Art History as Spectacle: Blockbuster Exhibitions in 1850s England', in *Exhibiting Outside the Academy*, ed. by Andrew Graciano (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 131–68 (p. 138).

[42] The registers of offers can be found at NGA, NG9, and letters relating to rejected offers at NG40.

examination') (Figure 2).[43] Given that Henderson's house in Russell Square was readily accessible if the Director and Trustees had wished to visit, the decision to send the paintings to the National Gallery strongly foregrounds the importance of this space in the decisionmaking process.

There were a number of reasons why pictures needed to be examined at the National Gallery itself if at all possible. The building offered a convenient space for the Director, Keeper and Trustees to hold the board meetings at which paintings could be inspected and discussed. Given this strong emphasis on inspecting potential artworks at the National Gallery itself, it would be useful to determine the particular aspects of the room or rooms used for connoisseurship there. However, it has been difficult to distinguish the specific spaces in which paintings were examined once they had arrived at the Gallery. From the board minutes, it seems likely that paintings would first have been delivered to the Director's Office for his personal inspection; here, they would sometimes then undergo restoration or repair before being presented to the Trustees at boardroom meetings. Due to a lack of evidence, it has been difficult to determine exactly where the Director's Office or Boardroom were located in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, a 1906 plan of the National Gallery drawn up by the Office of Works states that the Eastlake Library, Boardroom, and Keeper's Room were by this date on the ground floor of the west wing of the original Wilkins building (Figure 3), although the exact location of the Boardroom is not stated.[44] It seems likely that the Director's Office was at this point in the location marked on Figure 3 with a red square and close to the labelled 'Director's Entrance': this room features large windows on two elevations, providing excellent daylight for the examination of paintings. The Boardroom, meanwhile, may well have been in its modern location (marked with a blue rectangle on Figure 3) where, prior to the 1911 expansion of the building, the room would have benefited from three sizeable windows and an additional lightwell.[45] Despite this paucity of concrete evidence regarding the Boardroom and Director's Office, they remain important spaces of connoisseurship because of the significant connoisseurial discussions that took place there.

From a practical perspective, the Gallery's boardroom would have to have been physically large enough to accommodate the whole board: while the number of Trustees had previously been limited to six, this number was raised to eight in

[43] NGA, NG1/5, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 15 Mar 1871–1 Feb 1886, p. 123; NGA, NG6/5/960, National Gallery to H. Critchfield, 10 March 1879. The paintings selected for the collection were NG1054–NG1061.

[44] London, The National Archives, Office of Works, WORK 33/1930, *National Gallery. Detail sections through floors showing construction*, 1906.

[45] Useful visual guides to the various extensions and changes to the Trafalgar Square building can be found in Alan Crookham, *The National Gallery: An Illustrated History* (London: National Gallery Company, 2009), p. 123 and Conlin, pp. 467–72.

1897 and again to ten in 1909.[46] This would have made it harder to coordinate painting inspections outside the National Gallery, with the domestic spaces in which many pictures were displayed being simply too small for convenient inspection. In addition, the rooms at the National Gallery would have offered the right conditions for the scrutiny of artworks, acting as a control factor that allowed for paintings to be judged in the same environment. Keeper Charles Locke Eastlake (confusingly, the nephew of first Director Charles Lock Eastlake) wrote to a Mr Macandrew in 1880 to ask whether 'you will kindly allow your picture to be sent to the National Gallery, where [Burton] can examine it more conveniently & by a better light than in its present place'.[47] 'More conveniently' can be interpreted in a number of ways: for example, the Director may have simply found it easier to find time in his schedule to examine the picture at the Gallery. However, the phrase is just as likely to have referred to spatial aspects of connoisseurship, such as the option of repeat viewings, or the ability to examine the work in closer physical proximity. The fact that the 'better light' of the National Gallery was specifically mentioned in this letter, and on other occasions, emphasizes the particular importance of the visual aspects of connoisseurship.

Examining paintings in the Boardroom further allowed for access to additional visual material in the form of library resources, comparative photographs, or similar artworks from the Gallery's own collection; such comparisons would have been impossible if examining a picture in a domestic or commercial setting. For example, in the case of a portrait attributed to Italian mannerist painter Agnolo Bronzino and offered for purchase in 1896, an argument broke out during a board meeting over the relative merits of the work. In order to settle the matter, the minutes record that the 'Portrait of a Lady by Bronzino already in the National Gallery (No. 650) was brought down to the Board Room and placed by the side of [the proffered] picture' in order to facilitate a direct comparison.[48] While Poynter believed the potential purchase to be better executed and a more representative example of Bronzino's work than the painting already in the Gallery's possession, the Trustees were split on the matter and the picture was ultimately not acquired. The Boardroom was therefore a valuable space of connoisseurship in many ways, offering Director and Trustees an

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[46] NGA, NG7/209/1, Treasury to the National Gallery, 14 June 1897; NGA, NG7/365/1, the Treasury to the National Gallery (enclosing a Treasury Minute dated 17 July 1909), 27 July 1909.

[47] NGA, NG6/6/428, National Gallery to J. Macandrew, 22 March 1880.

[48] NGA, NG1/6, Minutes of the Board of Trustees, 1 March 1886–1 June 1897, p. 345. NG650 is now accepted as 'Italian, Florentine'. The portrait offered for acquisition by dealers Messrs. Laurie & Co. was reportedly from the collection of Prince Sciarra and may well be the 'unknown portrait' ('ritratto incognito') depicted in a photograph in this catalogue: Francesco Paolo Michetti and Leone Vicchi, *Dieci quadri della Galleria Sciarra* (Rome: Stab. tipografico della 'Tribuna', 1889). However, I have been unable to access a copy of the catalogue to confirm this.

opportunity to examine a painting at close quarters, draw comparisons with other works, and discuss its merits.

Spaces of Connoisseurship: Outside Trafalgar Square

When Gallery personnel were obliged by circumstance to inspect paintings outside the familiar settings of Trafalgar Square — whether this was in the Great Rooms at Christie's or in the home of a collector in Paris or Siena — a greater range of obstacles to connoisseurship was frequently encountered. Gaining initial permission to examine a work was itself not necessarily straightforward, although access was often easier for staff backed by the prestige of the National Gallery than for other connoisseurs. Charles Holmes noted ruefully in his autobiography that he had found when researching his book on Constable, before his elevation to National Gallery Director in 1916, that 'I could not do all that I wanted to do. It was not easy for a totally unknown clerk to get access to pictures in private collections'.[49] Even Burton, in his position as director, occasionally encountered such difficulties: he wrote to his friend, fellow artist and connoisseur Charles Fairfax Murray in 1879 that

> Your last letter, with the sketch of the Lotto, very much interests me. And I too, should like to compare it with the picture in the Bridgewater Collect[ion] which I do not recollect at all. But it is difficult to get into Bridgewater Ho[use] without knowing the owner, who is a man who cares for nothing but horses.[50]

The first hurdle to performing connoisseurship outside the Gallery premises was simply that of gaining access to view the works displayed within a particular space.

[49] C. J. Holmes, *Self & Partners (Mostly Self): Being the Reminiscences of C. J. Holmes* (London: Rivington, 1936), p. 207; C. J. Holmes, *Constable and his Influence on Landscape Painting* (London: Archibald Constable, 1902).

[50] Austin, Texas, The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin (hereafter HRC), Manuscript Collection MS-0627, Frederic William Burton Collection, Frederic Burton to Charles Fairfax Murray, 18 December 1879. The owner of Bridgewater House was peer and racehorse enthusiast Francis Egerton, 3rd Earl of Ellesmere, while the Lotto referred to was potentially the artist's *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome, Peter, Francis and an Unidentified Female Saint*, now NG2418 in the collection of National Galleries Scotland. The correspondence between Burton and Fairfax Murray has recently been published in Paul Tucker (ed.), *A Connoisseur and his Clients: The Correspondence of Charles Fairfax Murray with Frederic Burton, Wilhelm Bode and Julius Meyer (1867–1914)* (London: Walpole Society, 2017). On Fairfax Murray, see also David B. Elliott, *Charles Fairfax Murray: The Unknown Pre–Raphaelite* (Lewes: Book Guild, 2000); Paul Tucker, 'Eyesight, Knowledge, Argument: Charles Fairfax Murray on «Scientific» Connoisseurship', *Studi di Memofonte*, 12 (2014), 106–42.

Once a connoisseur was granted access to a particular building or room, other factors then came into play that could have a significant impact on the connoisseurial process. For example, the spaces in which paintings were displayed varied widely but were often not designed to suit the specific needs of the connoisseur. Inherited pictures might have been hung in the same position for decades, while collectors would often rearrange their collections to accommodate a new purchase.[51] Outside the houses of aristocrats and the very rich bourgeoisie, dedicated picture galleries were uncommon in the home and paintings might be hung throughout a range of rooms such as corridors or bedrooms; even where picture galleries did exist, additional pictures could still be scattered throughout the house. For example, in 1912, following the death in the previous year of her husband and National Gallery Trustee the Earl of Carlisle, Lady Rosalind Carlisle invited Director Charles Holroyd and the serving Trustees to visit her Yorkshire seat of Castle Howard and select 'six pictures, which they think it would be desirable for the nation to possess'.[52] These lists were then intended to inform her choice of which works to gift to the Gallery. Contemporary photographs of the stately home interior show just how densely packed pictures were into every room, hung behind furniture, in recesses and from floor to ceiling (Figure 4). Following his visit, Trustee Lord Ribblesdale noted in particular that one of the pictures that interested him was 'unluckily […] hung so high that I c[oul]d not make much of it'.[53] Lady Carlisle subsequently agreed to include this painting as part of a batch sent on approval to Trafalgar Square, where it could be examined at leisure and in better conditions.[54]

The episode at Castle Howard shows that proximity could be a particular issue when inspecting paintings outside the National Gallery, particularly if there was not enough physical space to get close to artworks, or if paintings were 'skied' and hung far above the viewer. In an 1877 letter written to Burton and describing a painting attributed to Filippo Lippi that he had seen in Venice, Fairfax Murray specifically linked the poor positioning of the work to his inability to judge its condition, writing that

> Casting a glance at it is sufficient to put [Lippi] out of the question but it is either a Verrocchio or Pollajuolo [sic] of the finest quality hung rather

[51] Francis Russell, 'The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700–1850', *Studies in the History of Art*, 25 (1989), 133–53 (p. 133).
[52] NGA, NG7/410/2, Lady Carlisle to Charles Holroyd, 14 August 1912.
[53] NGA, NG7/410/7, Lord Ribblesdale to Holroyd, October 1912. Thomas Lister, 4th Baron Ribblesdale, was a National Gallery Trustee between 1909 and 1925.
[54] NGA, NG7/426/6, Lady Carlisle to Holroyd, 3 June 1912. This painting (NG2929) was acquired by the Gallery as being by Pierre Mignard, but has since been reattributed to Gabriel Revel.

> above the eye & not in a good light I could only see that it was dirty with varnish but cannot speak as to its general preservation.[55]

In this case, the location of the work prevented Fairfax Murray from being able to judge either its attribution or its condition with any certainty. It was occasionally possible to overcome the proximity problem, if sufficiently enterprising: in 1884, Burton justified the outlay of a £1 gratuity to the butler at Blenheim Palace as being 'in consideration of services rendered during six hours, including the provision of two men with a stepladder to facilitate the examination of several large pictures, which could not have been accomplished without such assistance' (Figure 5).[56] Given that one of the pictures subsequently bought by the National Gallery was Anthony van Dyck's monumental *Equestrian Portrait of Charles I* (NG1172), which is well over three metres tall, a ladder was certainly called for in this instance. In many other cases, however, Director and Trustees were forced to examine paintings where they hung and from a distance.

Lighting was also of particular importance when passing connoisseurial judgement: as mentioned above, a 'better light' was one of the specific reasons why the National Gallery would request paintings to be sent to Trafalgar Square for inspection. Outside these controlled premises, however, lighting was much more variable. Throughout older or smaller houses, or in rooms such as corridors or bedrooms, there might be little natural light available in which to inspect a work. Burton wrote in 1884 of Pisanello's *Vision of Saint Eustace* (Figure 6), delivered from Ashburnham Place to the National Gallery for the purposes of being photographed, that,

> I have never properly seen it at its home. For it hangs in a bad light. But on getting it at the Gallery all its wonderful details came out. […] The picture is in a perfect state – and I am not acquainted with any easel work of Pisano's so fine as this one. It is crammed with birds, large & small, a bear, a hare & several deer – besides dogs of various breeds.[57]

In this case, the 'bad light' of the room where the painting usually hung had given Burton an erroneous impression of the work, which was modified on seeing it in the better light of the National Gallery. Indeed, the lighting was not always better

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[55] NGA, NG54/2, Fairfax Murray to Burton, 21 April 1887. The painting referred to is cat. no. 162 in G. Nicoletti, *Pinacoteca Manfrin a Venezia* (Venice: Marco Visentini, 1872), p. 33.
[56] NGA, NG6/10/367, National Gallery to the Exchequer, 19 November 1884. For more on the background to and negotiations for the purchase of the Blenheim pictures, see Barbara Pezzini, 'Making a Market for Art: Agnew's and the National Gallery, 1850–1944' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 2018), Chapter 3.
[57] HRC, MS-0627, Burton to Fairfax Murray, 11 September 1884. This painting, previously understood to depict the legend of St Hubert, was acquired for the National Gallery by Poynter in 1895 as NG1436.

in spaces that had been specifically designed for the display of art: Burton stated in 1883 that,

> I have been only once at the R[oyal]. Acad[em]y. for the weather is infamously dark – and even then it was too late in the day to discern much […] Amongst the Old Masters there are some fine things. But it was impossible in the murky light to form any proper judgement on any of them.[58]

On the other hand, Trustee J. P. Heseltine submitted a favourable report in 1905 of his inspection in Amsterdam of the collection formed by Dutch collector Jean Charles Joseph Drucker, writing that 'there are a considerable number of desirable pictures as to which I can now give the Trustees detailed information: they are shown together in a good room with a top light at the Riks Museum [sic]'.[59] These two contrasting cases show that the quality of lighting could determine whether or not connoisseurship was in fact possible at all.

Good lighting meant not only the strength of light available, but also the type of lighting: whether it was natural or artificial, and from which direction it was cast onto the painting. As can be seen from Heseltine's praise of the Rijksmuseum, top-lighting was favoured; if at all possible, the National Gallery connoisseurs also preferred to examine a work in daylight. Burton wrote to Fairfax Murray in 1876 that 'As soon as I can get up to [Edward Burne-Jones' house] the Grange for daylight I will ask to see the old pictures you left there. It was no use looking at them last night'.[60] The previous evening, Burton had admired a 'superb' Mantegna at the house, although the need for artificial lighting had somewhat impaired his judgement: 'It seemed to me (by candle light at least) to leave nothing to be wished for'. Good lighting was also particularly vital to the connoisseurial judgement of condition: for example, in 1902 Poynter visited Florence to view a panel offered to the National Gallery for purchase. The Director was confident enough after his first viewing to state that 'There can be no doubt as to the genuiness [sic] & the correct attribution to Lorenzo Monaco of the picture belonging to Mr. Galli-Dunn' (Figure 7).[61] However, Poynter wanted to examine the painting again, and, returning the next day, 'had the picture placed in a good light: it seemed to me, beyond a little rubbing of the old background at the borders, to be in an almost untouched condition'. The comparatively poor

[58] HRC, MS-0627, Burton to Fairfax Murray, 5 January 1883.

[59] NGA, NG/297/6, John Postle Hestletine, Report of the Drucker Collection in Amsterdam, 11 June 1905. On Drucker, see 'Explore Jean Charles Joseph Drucker', RKD, https://web.archive.org/web/20190305143942/https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/artists/428829 [accessed 5 March 2019].

[60] HRC, MS–0627, Burton to Fairfax Murray, 19 February 1876.

[61] NGA, NG7/261/1, Edward Poynter, Director's report of his journey to Italy, 9 February 1902. The picture was acquired as NG1897 and still bears the attribution to Lorenzo Monaco.

light in which the picture had first been viewed was therefore deemed sufficient to determine the attribution of the painting, but a better light was needed in order to judge its condition.

Connoisseurship as a Time-Bound Process

In addition to these major visual and spatial considerations of access, proximity and lighting, the chronological aspects of connoisseurship — themselves frequently dictated by space — also had a significant impact upon the methods used and the decisions reached by connoisseurs. Having the opportunity to spend more time examining a work, or carrying out additional research using archives and printed sources, could lead to a more indepth understanding of the painting, the circumstances of its production and its provenance. However, the space in which the painting was subject to inspection to a large extent determined whether such a lengthy consideration process was possible. This is one of the major ways in which connoisseurship differed across a range of private and public spaces: in the private confines of the Gallery's Boardroom, the Director and Trustees could take as long as reasonably required to examine a work, or carry out repeated inspections over multiple days. If the work being sent to the Gallery was a known one, and had been previously discussed in print, it would also be possible to carry out research in the Gallery's extensive Library (which was in fact moved into the Boardroom itself in 1906) before the picture itself arrived in Trafalgar Square.[62]

However, in many other spaces, such as private residences and dealers' premises, such sustained looking would have been neither permitted nor practical; in such spaces, therefore, connoisseurship was a significantly time-bound process. The National Gallery staff did their best to sidestep this constraint: Poynter, on visiting Madrid in 1899 to inspect a purported Murillo, wrote in his report to the Trustees that he had made 'one or two visits to make sure that I was not mistaken in my first impression' to advise against its purchase because of overcleaning and the poor condition of the head in the portrait (Figure 8).[63] The gap between examinations could also be used to make further investigations into a work, such as viewing comparative paintings in local galleries. Poynter, when arranging the purchase in Florence of the Lorenzo Monaco panel mentioned above, had been impressed with the work on his first viewing but 'arranged to return the next day after I had been to the Uffizi to look at the examples of

[62] *Return to an Order of the Honorable The House of Commons, Dated 5 March 1907;- for, Copy 'of the Report of the Trustees of the National Gallery, for the Year 1906, with Appendices.'* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1907), p. 7.

[63] NGA, NG7/236/1, Edward Poynter, Director's report of his recent journey to Madrid, 3 July 1899. Still attributed to Murillo, this painting is now in the collection of the Denver Art Museum (1961.67): 'Portrait of Don Diego Félix de Esquivel y Aldama', Denver Art Museum, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190304150940/https://denverartmuseum.org/object/1961.67> [accessed 3 March 2019].

Lorenzo Monaco in that gallery'.[64] In this case, Poynter's initially positive opinion of the proffered work was reinforced by the comparison drawn with the Uffizi paintings. Time pressure was also particularly pertinent where foreign acquisitions were concerned because of issues regarding competition; in many cases, if an immediate decision was not reached and the deal clinched, then the work could be lost to another buyer. Fairfax Murray wrote to warn Burton of this risk in 1887:

> Italy is dangerous in these money matters. Do you know the story of the Giorgione sold from the Manfrini Palace to Prince Fioranelli? It was bought I heard by the Berlin Gallery people only they had to get the money from Berlin failed to get it at the exact hour & the picture was lost.[65]

Furthermore, when travelling the National Gallery staff were often confronted with works that they had never seen before. Once abroad, word of mouth could lead to unplanned visits and the inspection of completely unfamiliar works in the homes of collectors with whom the visitor was not personally acquainted. For example, the purchase of Goya's portrait of Doña Isabel de Porcel (NG1473) only took place because Poynter, while attending the sale of the Duke of Osuna's pictures in Madrid in May 1896, 'was informed of some Goyas to be seen at the house of Don Isidro Urzaiz'.[66] Visiting this collection in response to this tip-off and finding 'two portraits far superior in style to those of the Osuna collection', Poynter congratulated himself on acquiring what he felt to be one of the best Goya portraits in Madrid 'at so reasonable a price (about £400)' (Figure 9).[67] While he had presumably carried out some research into the Spanish school before his visit, when visiting the Urzaiz residence Poynter was still expected to make an immediate decision with no prior knowledge of the works in that collection. In such cases, there would have been little or no opportunity to carry out provenance or other documentary research in a library or archive, or to compare the painting with photographs or engravings of other works. In any cases where connoisseurship was time-bound, therefore, visual inspection and judgement became ever more important.

Given these spatial and chronological constraints, the visual evidence offered by the front face of the artwork was frequently the only information

[64] Edward Poynter, Director's report of his journey to Italy, 9 February 1902, NG7/261/1, NGA.
[65] NGA, NG54/3, Fairfax Murray to Burton, 13 August 1877. The painting referred to by Fairfax Murray was Giorgione's *The Tempest*, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice: Jaynie Anderson, 'The Political Power of Connoisseurship', pp. 113–14; Jaynie Anderson, *Giorgione : peintre de la 'Brièveté poétique' : catalogue raisonné* (Paris: Lagune, 1996), pp. 251–53; 359–60.
[66] NGA, NG7/195/1, Edward Poynter, Report of the Director's official journey to Madrid, 15 June 1896.
[67] The attribution of NG1473 to Goya has recently been questioned: see Xavier Bray, *Goya: The Portraits* (London: National Gallery Company, 2015), p. 209 (note 3).

available to determine whether or not a painting was worthy of acquisition. It has been difficult to determine to what extent the National Gallery staff were engaged in the physical connoisseurial examination of an object beyond a basic visual inspection: Fiona Candlin has noted the difficulties inherent in studying the use of touch to examine objects, ascribing this to the tacit knowledge of curatorial practice.[68] It is possible that artworks were commonly available for handling and physical investigation when being inspected in private spaces or such semi-private spaces as art dealers' premises, but that no records of such informal handling were kept. However, in many other cases handling would have been either taboo or explicitly prohibited. There were also few alternatives to visual examination available for the judgement of connoisseurial criteria other than attribution. With regard to condition, although newly developed scientific techniques such as pigment analysis and radiography started to be introduced from the late nineteenth century onwards, it remains to be explored to what extent such methods were employed in practice before an acquisition was made.[69] The visual analysis of beauty and style, meanwhile, remained as subjective as ever, vulnerable both to prevailing fashions and the personal preferences of the individual connoisseur.

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested a visual model for artistic connoisseurship, centring on a strongly visual analysis that is characterized by its speed and reliance on comparison with previous visual knowledge, gleaned from repeated and long-term exposure to numerous artworks. I then went on to test this model through the application of a spatial approach as an alternative to the strongly textual analysis traditionally adopted for the study of connoisseurship. Applying this approach to the specific case study of the National Gallery has revealed previously hidden aspects of connoisseurial technique as practised by museum professionals in the late Victorian and early Edwardian period: particularly striking is an overwhelming emphasis on visual judgement and comparison, a technique that was highly dictated by the spaces in which connoisseurship was performed. The skill of connoisseurship is not applied in isolation, however: it is supported by a complex trust network in which the connoisseur needs to be

[68] Fiona Candlin, *Art, Museums and Touch* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 91.
[69] One of the most thorough examinations of the subject to date, although it focuses only on published material and ends in 1880 is Jilleen Nadolny, 'The First Century of Published Scientific Analyses of the Materials of Historical Painting and Polychromy, circa 1780–1880', *Studies in Conservation*, 48 (2003), sup. 1, 39–51. My thanks to Marika Spring for bringing this paper to my attention.

recognized as possessing the requisite expertise.[70] Further research needs to consider the ways in which professional connoisseurs attempted to demonstrate their connoisseurial expertise to others, whether through writings, display or face-to-face discussion.

The innovative spatial approach demonstrated here additionally allows us to access the methods of those who have not necessarily left detailed written records justifying their connoisseurial practice, but whose activities are nevertheless vital to the understanding of how paintings are judged and the broader workings of the art market.[71] There is thus strong potential for the translation of this approach from the Victorian and Edwardian context under review in this article to other periods in history, wider geographical areas, different historical actors, and the judgement of a much broader range of material culture artefacts beyond Old Master paintings. This will help to deepen our understanding of connoisseurship as a flexible practice with divergent aims and methods for different stakeholder groups, each adopting its own particular connoisseurial lens.

[70] Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Eric H. Ash, 'Introduction: Expertise and the Early Modern State', *Osiris*, 25 (2010), no. 1, 1–24.
[71] See, for example, the application of this method to the activities of art dealers Thos. Agnew & Sons in Clarke, 'The Spatial Aspects of Connoisseurship'.

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Figures

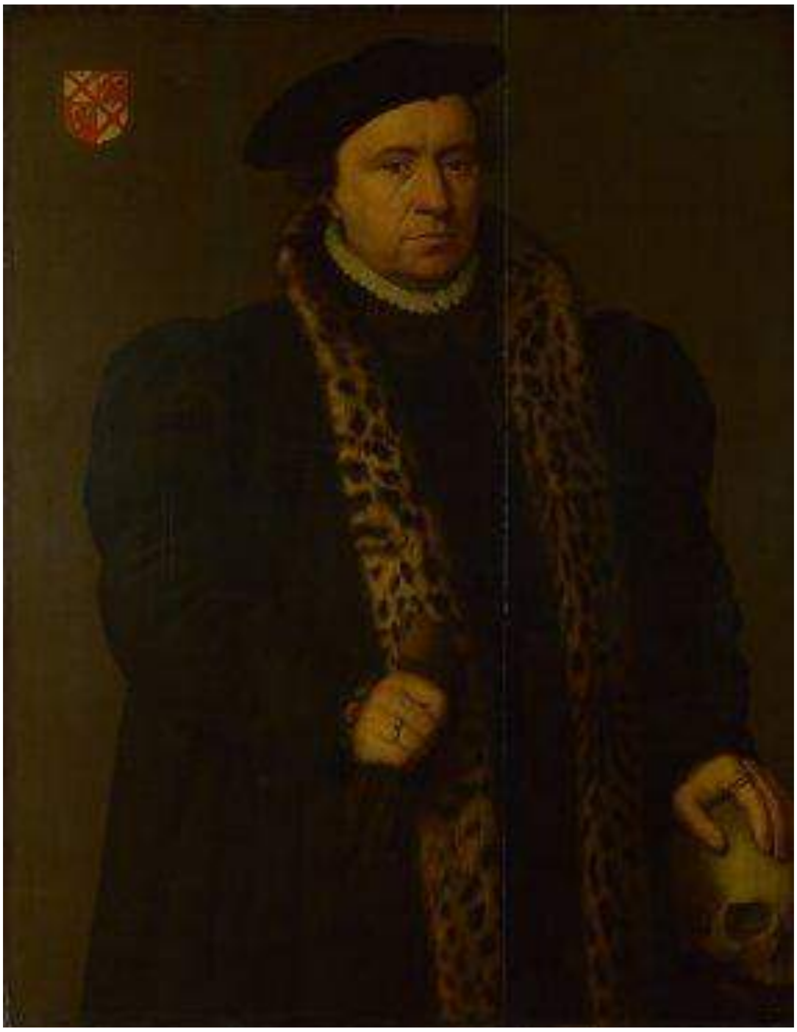

Fig. 1. Michiel Coxcie, *A Man with a Skull*, about 1560 or later, oil on oak, 97 × 75.4 cm
Collection National Gallery, London, NG195

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/michiel-coxcie-a-man-with-a-skull>

Fig. 2. Canaletto, *Venice: S. Pietro in Castello*, 1730s, oil on canvas, 47.3 × 79.5 cm
Collection National Gallery, London, NG1059

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/canaletto-venice-s-pietro-in-castello>

Caption: ***'This Canaletto was one of the eight paintings ultimately selected for acquisition by the National Gallery from the Henderson bequest.'***

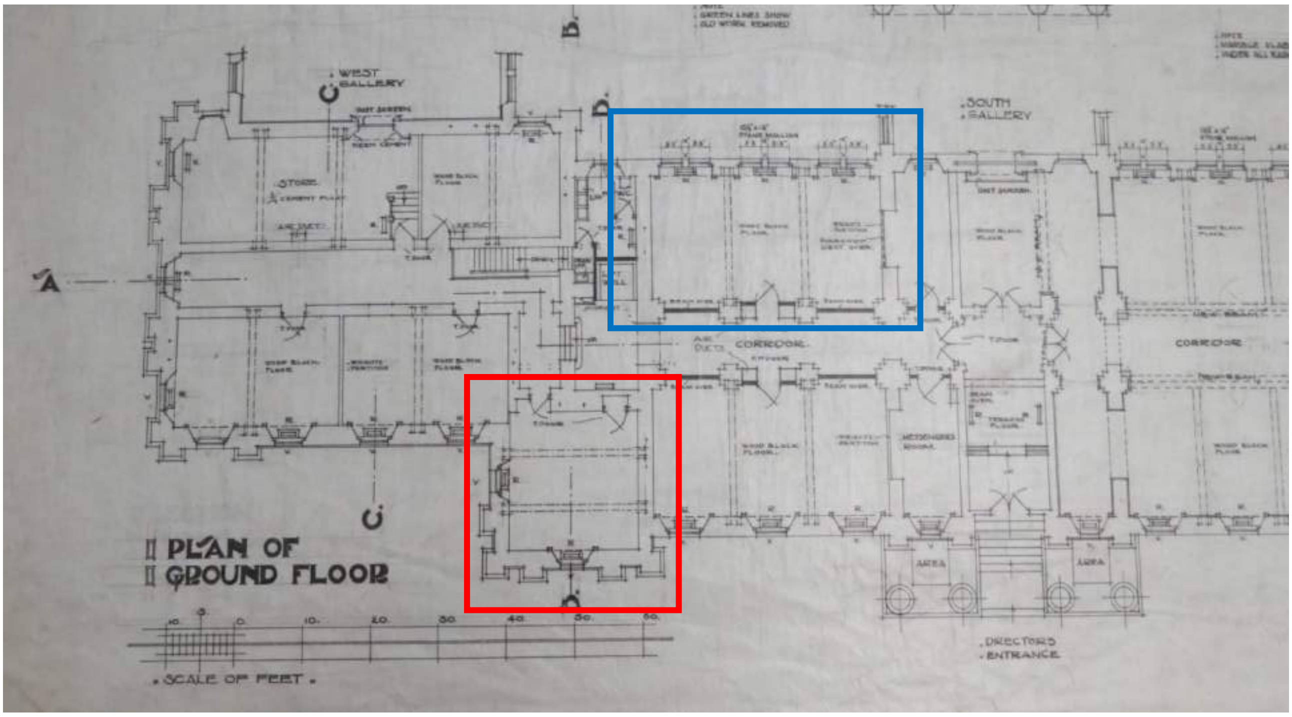

Fig. 3. Office of Works, National Gallery: West Wing. Plan of ground floor and gallery floor (number 2). Scale: 1 inch to 8 feet (detail), 9 August 1910
Collection: The National Archives, WORK 33/1860

Caption: '*The red square has been added to indicate the possible historic location of the Director's Office, and the blue rectangle the Boardroom*'

Fig. 4. Unknown photographer, 'The Garden Hall' in Anon., 'Country Homes: Castle Howard, Yorkshire, the Seat of the Earl of Carlisle', *Country Life* (13 February 1904), 234-242.

<http://www.countrylifeimages.co.uk/Image.aspx?id=7252e755-4a33-4a78-9cac-31f771e39043&rd=2|castle%20howard||1|20|113|150>

Fig. 5. Stefan Plogmann, *Red Drawing Room of Blenheim Palace*, 2015

<https://gallery.plogmann.net/c/1x1x446x32701ximg.html>

Caption: ‘***The van Dyck portrait of Charles I on horseback (NG1172) originally hung in what is now the Red Drawing Room at Blenheim Palace, in the company of the Joshua Reynolds portrait of the Fourth Duke of Marlborough and his family that can be seen here on the right.’***

Fig. 6. Pisanello, *The Vision of Saint Eustace*, about 1438-42, egg tempera on wood, 54.8 × 65.5 cm
Collection National Gallery, NG1436

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/pisanello-the-vision-of-saint-eustace>

Fig. 7. Lorenzo Monaco, *The Coronation of the Virgin: Central Main Tier Panel*, 1407-9, egg tempera on wood, 220.5 × 115.2 cm
Collection National Gallery, NG1897

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/lorenzo-monaco-the-coronation-of-the-virgin>

Fig. 8. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Portrait of Don Diego Félix de Esquivel y Aldama*, about 1655-1660, oil paint on canvas, 204.5 × 106.7 cm
Collection Denver Art Museum, 1961.67

<https://denverartmuseum.org/object/1961.67>

Fig. 9. Francisco de Goya, *Doña Isabel de Porcel*, before 1805, oil on canvas, 82 × 54.6 cm Collection National Gallery, NG1473

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/francisco-de-goya-dona-isabel-de-porcel>

Appendix: List of Foreign Journeys Undertaken by National Gallery Directors, 1876–1916

Sir Frederic Burton, National Gallery Director 1874–1894

Date	**Places/collections visited**	**Archival source**
1874, April	Mayence	NGA, NG5/191/1
1875, March (after)	The Giustiniani Barbarigo Collection at Padua	NGA, NG5/474/3
1876, June	Milan	NGA, NG5/491/2; NGA, NGA2/3/6/10
1879, April	Sale of the Reiset collection at Paris	The National Archives, T 1/16208
1879	Dresden and Brunswick	NGA, NG6/6/54
1880, February	The Demidoff collection at Florence	NGA, NG6/6/322
1880, October–December	Venice and Milan	Various letters following on from NGA, NG6/6/870
1881, Autumn	Italy	NGA, NG7/27/1 [missing as of December 2015]
1882, May	Brussels	NGA, NG8/5/11; NGA, NG6/8/25
1882, October–December	Milan and Venice	NGA, NG6/8/164; NGA, NG6/8/663; NGA, NG7/39/12

[A letter from the National Gallery to the Treasury dated 29 December 1888 reveals that the Director's 'official journey on the Continent' had been suspended for the last 'three or four years' because of the suspension of the Gallery's purchasing grant. However, the £100 travel provision was reinstated from the 1889–90 financial year onwards.]		NGA, NG6/13/862
1889, October–December	Italy	NGA, NG6/14/628; NGA, NG6/14/709
1891, May	Dr Habick's collection at Basel	NGA, NG1/6, 191-92

Sir Edward Poynter, National Gallery Director 1894–1904

Date	**Places/collections visited**	**Source**
1894, Spring	Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome 'and other cities'	NGA, NG1/6, 293
1895, December	Venice, Milan, Brussels, Padua	NGA, NG7/188/1
1896, May–June	Madrid, Seville, Toledo, Aranjuez, San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Granada	NGA, NG7/195/1
1898, May	Paris and Antwerp	NGA, NG7/223/1
1898, November	Turin, Brescia, Venice, Bologna, Modena, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, Dresden	NGA, NG7/228/19
1899, May	Brussels and Ghent	NGA, NG7/235/12
1899, June	Madrid and Paris	NGA, NG7/236/1
1899, October–November	Antwerp, Brussels, Munich, Colmar, Verona, Ferrara, Bologna, Ravenna, Faenza, Perugia, Assisi, Rome, Siena, Florence, Brussels	NGA, NG7/238/2
1901, May–June	Venice, Rome, Naples, Florence, Milan	NGA, NG7/257/1
1902, January	Florence, Pisa, Siena, Rome, Milan	NGA, NG7/261/1
1902, August	Brussels and Bruges	NGA, NG7/267/3

1903, May	Paris, Avignon, Genova, Florence, Pistoia	NGA, NG7/273/1
1904, November	Berlin, Dusseldorf, Brussels	NGA, NG7/287/6

Sir Charles Holroyd, National Gallery Director 1906–1916

Date	**Places/collections visited**	**Source**
1907, June	Bruges, Vienna, Budapest, Venice, Florence, Perugia, Pisa, Bologna, Ancona, Milan, Paris	NGA, NG7/332/1
1910, December	Brussels	NGA, NG7/383/10
1914, spring	Paris (to view paintings bequeathed by John Murray Scott)	NGA, NG7/446/11