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THE POLITICS OF PARTNERSHIP:  
VANESSA BELL AND DUNCAN GRANT,  
1912-1961

Darren K. Clarke

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of DPhil in the  
Department of Art History  
University of Sussex

September 2012

**Declaration:**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to this or any other University for the award of any other degree.

Darren K. Clarke

# UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Darren K. Clarke

The degree of DPhil, September 2012

## **The Politics of Partnership: Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, 1912-1961**

### Summary

This thesis analyses the relationship of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, artists that were central to the visual culture of the Bloomsbury group. The title of this project positions ‘partnership’ as a connecting force between the two artists, a term I interpret as a series of layers, boundaries, and thresholds that are in a constant state of flux, over-lapping, layering and leaking. By mapping the artists’ presence I am able to construct a new model of partnership.

Chapter one considers the artists’ signing and marking of their work, examining the variations of the signature, tracing its evolution, its presence and its absence, its location on the work and the calligraphy of the mark. By examining the various ways that Bell and Grant had of signing and of not signing their work and the use and function of the mechanically reproduced signature, I demonstrate the uneasy relationship that can occur between objects, names and signatures.

Chapter two focuses on the pond at Charleston, the home that the artists shared for almost half a century, which is central to many of the narratives and mythologies of the household and is the subject of many paintings and decorations. I chart how the artists map this space by repeatedly recording it and how the pond acts as a layered topography for the exploration and presentation of gender, queerness and familial relationships.

Chapter three continues the process of examining boundaries and layers by exploring the artists’ often problematic relationship to clothes and to the delicate threshold between fabric and skin that often loosens and gapes. I cast the artists as agents of disguise and masquerade in which uncertain and unstable boundaries are created. I map the transference of fabric and demonstrate how this textile threshold ruptures, how the body leaks, leaving marks and traces.

## **Contents:**

**Summary** page 3

**Acknowledgements** page 6

**List of Abbreviations** page 7

**List of Illustrations** page 8

## **Introduction**

Partnership page 20

Literary Review page 21

Charleston page 29

Chapters page 31

## **Chapter One: Signature in the Frame**

On the Signature page 33

Inscriptions page 34

Not signing page 37

Signing page 43

Slipping page 45

Gifting the Signature page 52

The Mechanical Signature page 56

Vice versa page 63

After I'm Gone page 65

Conclusion page 66

## **Chapter Two: Pond Life**

Fascination of the pond page 67

Mapping the pond page 69

Framing the Map page 74

Mapping the un-mappable page 76

Drawing near page 78

Gazebo and snow page 80

Reflections on the pond page 85

The Sacred Lake page 92

Mapping the Queer pond page 96

Mapping the familial page 103

Identifiable people page 109

Patriarchy and children page 112

Matriarchy and children page 116

Conclusion page 118

## **Chapter Three: Loose Covers**

Introduction page 119

## **Part 1: Bell**

Mirror, mirror page 121

Spitting Image	page 125
“brute, raw fabric”	page 130
The Second Grave	page 132
Closet Space	page 137
Fragments	page 139

**Part 2: Grant**

“don’t trouble to dress”	page 143
Striptease	page 147
Disguise Craze	page 152
Re-vealed	page 165
Petite Morte	page 173

<b>Conclusion</b>	page 183
-------------------	----------

<b>Bibliography</b>	page 185
---------------------	----------

<b>Illustrations</b>	page 204
----------------------	----------

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The Charleston Trust also gave me the opportunity to curate two exhibitions during the course of the project. The first, *Fragments* in 2009, focused on Bell and Grant's textile designs, and *Naked* in 2011, which explored the artists' responses to the life model. I would also like to thank Brighton Museum and Art Gallery for whom I was assistant curator for the 2011 exhibition *Radical Bloomsbury: The Art of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell*.

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I would like to thank my parents, Ken and Irene, and my partner Andrew Connal for his encouragement, patience and proof-reading skills.

Dedicated to Roz Cousley  
1970-2010

**Abbreviations:**

Letters from Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant that were deposited by Henrietta Garnett in 2008 in the Tate Gallery Archives were not catalogued at the time of writing. These I have called the Duncan Grant Papers. The Angelica Garnett Gift, presented to the Charleston Trust in 2008 is also yet to be catalogued though I have included the temporary storage location of pieces presented at the time of writing.

Tate Archives	TGA
Duncan Grant Papers	TGA/DGP
The Charleston Trust Archive	TCTA
The Angelica Garnett Gift	TCTA/TAGG



## Illustrations:

### **Chapter One: Signature in the Frame**

- Fig.1.01 Duncan Grant's and Vanessa Bell's gravestones, Firle church, East Sussex, photograph taken by author.
- Fig.1.02 Vanessa Bell's gravestones, Firle church, East Sussex, photograph taken by author.
- Fig.1.03 Duncan Grant, design for Vanessa Bell's gravestone, c.1961, pencil on paper, 15 x 10.8cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.21.
- Fig.1.04 Angelica Garnett, enamelled saucer, date unknown, diameter 9.6cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/202.
- Fig.1.05 Vanessa Bell, painted wooden box, 9 x 25 x 16.2cm The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/159.
- Fig.1.06 Signature detail, Vanessa Bell, *Portrait of Virginia Woolf*, 1934, oil on canvas, 82 X 63cm, private collection, on loan to The Charleston Trust.
- Fig.1.07 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *By the Fire*, c.1916-17, oil on canvas, 53.2 x 35.5cm, private collection, on loan to The Charleston Trust.
- Fig.1.08 Signature, detail, *Standing Male Nude (Tony Asserati)*, c.1935, oil on canvas, 97 x 45.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/84.
- Fig.1.09 Vanessa Bell, copy of Maurice de Vlaminck's *Poissy-le-Pont*, 1952-56, oil on canvas, 59 x 79.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/62.
- Fig.1.10 Signature detail, Vanessa Bell, copy of Vlaminck's *Poissy-le-Pont*, 1952-56
- Fig.1.11 Example of Maurice de Vlaminck's signature, reproduced on the cover of *Catalogue Raisonné de l'oeuvre gravé, gravures sur cuivre, lithographies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974)
- Fig.1.12 Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 306.1cm, Tate N04567
- Fig.1.13 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911, reproduced in *Paint and Purpose* ed. Stephen Hackney, Rica Jones and Joyce Townsend, (London: Tate Gallery, 1999) p.113.
- Fig.1.14 Vanessa Bell, *The Visit*, c.1921, whereabouts unknown, reproduced in the *Illustrated London News*, 21 May 1921, p.683.
- Fig.1.15 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76cm x 56cm, National Gallery of Scotland GMA 900 NGS.
- Fig.1.16 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915.
- Fig.1.17 Duncan Grant, *Tulips in a Decorated Vase*, c.1960, oil on card, 76 x 63.5cm, Bridgeman Art Library.
- Fig.1.18 Duncan Grant, *Still Life – Leaves in an Omega Jar*, c.1962-65, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 50cm. Source: Sotheby's, London.

- Fig.1.19 Jug, c.1900, North Africa, 17.6 x 11.5cm, The Charleston Trust CHA/C/109.
- Fig.1.20 Duncan Grant, *20,011 Telephonists*, 1939, 50.8 x 63.5cm, reproduced in *The Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Design*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1999).
- Fig.1.21 Duncan Grant, printed proof of boat scene, 28 x 22.5cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.40.
- Fig.1.22 Vanessa Bell, *Cinderella*, 1944, oil on board, size unknown, destroyed. Photograph from the Bruce Castle Museum Archives, Tottenham.
- Fig.1.23 Duncan Grant, *Cinderella*, 1944, oil on board, size unknown, destroyed. Photograph from the Bruce Castle Museum Archives, Tottenham.
- Fig.1.24 Duncan Grant, *Gun Drill*, 1941, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 104cm, Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa 1949-0008-2.
- Fig.1.25 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Gun Drill*, 1941.
- Fig.1.26 Duncan Grant, Study for *The Gunnery Lesson*, 1940, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 75.6cm, Imperial War Museum, Art IWM ART 15547.
- Fig.1.27 Duncan Grant, Study for *Gun Drill/The Gunnery Lesson*, c.1940, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.4cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift.
- Fig.1.28 Duncan Grant, *Still Life*, undated, pencil on paper, 22.3 x 28.3cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.7.
- Fig.1.29 Duncan Grant, *Study for Still Life*, undated, pencil on paper, 17.5 x 22.5cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.5.
- Fig.1.30 Duncan Grant, *Still Life, Lime Juice*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76 x 56cm, The Government Art Collection 14378.
- Fig.1.31 Vanessa Bell, *By the Estuary*, 1915, oil on canvas, 47 x 63.5cm, private collection, reproduced in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, Tate, 1999, no.85, p.160.
- Fig.1.32 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell in profile*, ink on paper, 22.2 x 17.8cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.1.33 Duncan Grant, *Angelica in Fancy Dress*, 1935, pastel, 87 x 54cm, private collection, on loan to The Charleston Trust.
- Fig.1.34 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Angelica in Fancy Dress*, 1935.
- Fig.1.35 Vanessa Bell, *Angelica Bell playing the part of Ellen Terry in the play Freshwater*, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, eds. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: Jill Norman and Hobhouse Ltd, 1981) p.121.
- Fig.1.36 Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond in the Snow*, 1950, oil on canvas, 38 x 47cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/72.
- Fig.1.37 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond in the Snow*, 1950.
- Fig.1.38 Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square*, c.1933-1934, watercolour and pencil on paper, 71 x 53cm, The National Trust, no.768423.

- Fig.1.39 Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf*, 1934, oil on canvas, 82cm x 63cm, private collection on loan to the Charleston Trust.
- Fig.1.40 Signature detail, Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square*, c.1933-1934.
- Fig.1.41 Vanessa Bell ceramics for Foley, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/643a.
- Fig.1.42 Duncan Grant ceramics for Foley, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/127a.
- Fig.1.43 Angelica Bell ceramics for Foley, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/125c.
- Fig.1.44 Vanessa Bell for Clarice Cliff, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/278a.
- Fig.1.45 Duncan Grant for Clarice Cliff, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/34b.
- Fig.1.46 Vanessa Bell's signature, Foley backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/643a.
- Fig.1.47 Duncan Grant's signature, Foley backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/127a.
- Fig.1.48 Vanessa Bell's signature, Wilkinson backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/278e.
- Fig.1.49 Duncan Grant's signature, Wilkinson backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/281a.
- Fig.1.50 Angelica Bell design for Foley, fragment, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/603.
- Fig.1.51 Duncan Grant backstamp for Foley, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/603.
- Fig.1.52 Duncan Grant, *Untitled*, 1976, Intaglio print on paper, 26.7 x 34cm, Tate P03181.
- Fig.1.53 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Untitled*, 1976.
- Fig.1.54 Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Untitled*, 1976.
- Fig.1.55 Duncan Grant, *Untitled*, 1976, reversed.
- Fig.1.56 John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral and Leadenhall from the River Avon*, 1820, oil on canvas, 52.7 x 77cm, Salting Bequest, 1910, National Gallery NG2651.
- Fig.1.57 Vanessa Bell, *Alfriston* (Study for Shell poster), c.1931, 27 x 37cm, private collection, reproduced in *The Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Design*, 1999.
- Fig.1.58 Studio stamp detail, Vanessa Bell, *Alfriston* (study for Shell poster), c.1931.

## Chapter Two: Pond Life

- Fig.2.01 Duncan Grant, *The Hammock*, 1921-1923, oil on canvas, 81.7 x 146.5cm, Laing Gallery Newcastle.
- Fig.2.02 Vanessa Bell, *Clive Bell and his Family*, 1921-23, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.5cm, Leicester Art Gallery.
- Fig.2.03 John De Ward, detail, map of Charleston, 1622, East Sussex Records Office ACC 2933/1/2/1.
- Fig.2.04 Quentin Bell, map of Charleston pond, printed in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.12, 1985, p.10.
- Fig.2.05 Quentin Bell, map of Charleston pond, printed in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.89.
- Fig.2.06 Vanessa Bell, *View of the Pond at Charleston*, c.1919, 63.5 x 67.3cm, City Art Galleries, Sheffield.
- Fig.2.07 Duncan Grant, *The Barn, Charleston*, oil on canvas board, 40.5 x 51cm, private collection. Source: Philips, London.
- Fig.2.08 Duncan Grant, *The Barn at Charleston*, oil on canvas, 65 x 81cm, private collection. Source: Sotheby's, London.
- Fig.2.09 Duncan Grant, *Farm in Sussex*, 1934, oil on canvas, 85 x 127.7cm, Walker Art Gallery.
- Fig.2.10 Duncan Grant, Study for *Farm in Sussex*, c.1934, pencil on paper, 54 x 79cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.10.
- Fig.2.11 Duncan Grant, *Barns and Pond at Charleston*, c.1934, watercolour and pencil on paper, 61.5 x 79cm, private collection, UK, reproduced in *British Bohemia: The Bloomsbury Circle of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Kracow: International Cultural Centre, 2011).
- Fig.2.12 Duncan Grant, *Charleston Barn*, 1942, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 73.7cm, British Council Art Collection.
- Fig.2.13 Duncan Grant *The Farmyard, Charleston*, 1949, oil on canvas, 102.8 x 127cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.2.14 Duncan Grant, *Landscape, Sussex*, 1920, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 76.2cm, Tate, London, N05075.
- Fig.2.15 Duncan Grant, *The Pond at Charleston*, c.1920, reproduced in Pamela Todd, *Bloomsbury at Home* (London: Pavilion Books, 1999).
- Fig.2.16 Duncan Grant, Sketch for *The Farm Pond*, 1930, oil on canvas, 59 x 81.5cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, ABDAG010732.
- Fig.2.17 Duncan Grant, *The Farm Pond near Firle*, 1930-32, Ontario Canada.
- Fig.2.18 Duncan Grant, Chancel Doors, Berwick Church, 1944, oil on wood, photograph by author.
- Fig.2.19 Duncan Grant, *The Pond, Charleston*, 1959, oil on board, laid on board, 76.2 x 63.5cm. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.2.20 Duncan Grant, *untitled*, oil on canvas, un-stretched, 36 x 35.5cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.9

- Fig.2.21 Possibly taken by Julian Bell, *Quentin Bell and two unidentified females at Charleston*, c.1930, black and white print, 11 x 6.6cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.
- Fig.2.22 Possibly taken by Julian Bell, *Quentin Bell and two unidentified females at Charleston*, c.1930, black and white print, 11 x 6.6cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.
- Fig.2.23 Duncan Grant, design for gazebo, pencil on paper, c.1930, 19.7 x 40.5cm, The Angelica Garnet Gift, The Charleston Trust, box.9.
- Fig.2.24 Duncan Grant, design for gazebo, verso, pencil on paper, c.1930, 19.7 x 40.5cm, The Angelica Garnet Gift, The Charleston Trust, box.9.
- Fig.2.25 – 28 Duncan Grant, designs for a gazebo, pencil, sketchbook, each page 15 x 10cm, c.1930, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.12.
- Fig.2.29 Duncan Grant, *The Gazebo, Charleston*, 1942, oil on canvas, 56.5cm x 46.3cm. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.2.30 Duncan Grant, *The Boathouse*, c.1942, oil on canvas, 39.5 x 54.5cm. Source: Bonhams, Henley.
- Fig.2.31 Vanessa Bell, *The Frozen Pond, Charleston*, oil on canvas, 1933, 69 x 56cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.2.32 Vanessa Bell, *Snow at Tilton*, 1941 oil on canvas, 36.5 x 29.2cm, Arts Council Collection
- Fig.2.33 Duncan Grant, *Snow Covered Frozen Pond*, oil and pencil on board, 1964, 57.2 x 75cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, New York.
- Fig.2.34 Duncan Grant, *The Pond at Charleston in Winter*, oil on board 1950, 38 x 47cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/70.
- Fig.2.35 Duncan Grant *Winter Landscape*, collotype published by Frost and Reed Ltd, 1941, 62 x 73.5cm The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.16.
- Fig.2.36 Duncan Grant, *Skating on the Pond*, c.1950, print, 22.5 x 28cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.9.
- Fig.2.37 Vanessa Bell: *The Pond, Charleston*, 1916, oil on canvas, 29.5 x 34.8cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/78.
- Fig.2.38 Duncan Grant, design for *Cat on a Cabbage*, c.1913, gouache on paper, 48 x 61cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/101.
- Fig.2.39 Designed by Duncan Grant, possibly worked by Vanessa Bell, *Cat on a Cabbage*, c.1913, 59 x 72cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/T/155.
- Fig.2.40 Vanessa Bell, jacket design for Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925.
- Fig.2.41 Vanessa Bell, *Charleston*, c.1950, oil on canvas 59.4 x 49cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/225.
- Fig.2.42 Vanessa Bell, *A Garden Walk*, 1934, oil on canvas, 73 x 61cm, private collection, reproduced in exhibition catalogue *A Room of Their Own*, 2008, no.19, p.135.
- Fig.2.43 Vanessa Bell, *Charleston from the Pond*, c.1938, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 35.6 cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, London.

- Fig.2.44 Duncan Grant and The Omega Workshops, *Lily-Pond Table*, c.1913-14, oil on wood, 125.5 x 72.5 x 80.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/120.
- Fig.2.45 Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond*, oil on un-stretched canvas, 70.5 x 60cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.19.
- Fig.2.46 Anonymous, postcard of Charleston Farmhouse, c.1905, 9 x 14cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/186.
- Fig.2.47 Anonymous, postcard of Charleston Farmhouse, c.1910, reprinted in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.12, September 1985, p.42.
- Fig.2.48 Anonymous, postcard of Charleston Farmhouse, c.1910, reprinted in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.12, September 1985, p.42.
- Fig.2.49 Vanessa Bell, photograph of Julian and Quentin, c.1923, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, 1981, p.29.
- Fig.2.50 Duncan Grant, *Handicapped!*, poster, 1909, Library of Congress.
- Fig.2.51 Duncan Grant, inscribed '*The West's cutting down the willow, May/48,*' 1948, pencil, 20 x 15cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box 20.
- Fig.2.52 Duncan Grant, inscribed '*The West's cutting down the willow,*' 1948, pencil, 20 x 15cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box 20.
- Fig.2.53 Maker unknown, *Capitoline Antinous*, monochrome photographic print, 25 x 19.5cm The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/396.
- Fig.2.54 Duncan Grant, *Two Bathers*, 1921, oil on canvas, 59.5 x 89.7cm, The Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge.
- Fig.2.55 Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond*, c.1920-21, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 91.5cm, Pallant House, Chichester.
- Fig.2.56 Georges Seurat, *Study for 'La Grande Jatte': Couple Walking*, 1884-5, oil on canvas, 81 x 65cm, The Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge.
- Fig.2.57 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Large Bathers*, 1884-87, oil on canvas, 117.8 x 170.8cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Fig.2.58 Duncan Grant, terracotta drawing, undated, 29 x 23cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.34.
- Fig.2.59 Duncan Grant, terracotta drawing, undated, approx. 36 x 62cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.34.
- Fig.2.60 Georges Seurat, *Les Poseuses*, 1886-88, oil on canvas, 200 x 249.9cm, The Barnes Foundation, BF811.
- Fig.2.61 Georges Seurat *Bathers at Asnières* 1884, oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, National Gallery NG3908.
- Fig.2.62 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *After the Bath*, 1888, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 54cm, private collection.
- Fig.2.63 Monochrome photograph of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *After the Bath*, 41 x 34cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/43.
- Fig.2.64 Duncan Grant, *Adam and Eve*, 1914, oil on canvas, destroyed.

- Fig.2.65 Photograph of Duncan Grant, photographer unknown, reproduced in Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group*, 1987, plate 2, no.3, from the collection of Paul Roche.
- Fig.2.66 Photograph of Duncan Grant, photographer unknown, reproduced in Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group*, 1987, plate 2, no.4, from the collection of Paul Roche.
- Fig.2.67 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, c.1538, oil on canvas, 119 x 165cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
- Fig.2.68 Monochrome photograph of Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 30.5 x 44.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/311.
- Fig.2.69 Paul Cézanne, *Bathers Resting*, c.1875-1876, oil on canvas, 38 x 45.8cm, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva.
- Fig.2.70 Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 306.1cm, Tate, N04567.
- Fig.2.71 Duncan Grant, *The Bathers*, c.1926-1933, oil on paper on plywood, 138.4cm x 152.8cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, accession number 1824-4.
- Fig.2.72 Monochrome photograph of study for Duncan Grant's Lincoln murals, c.1956, The Charleston Trust.
- Fig.2.73 Vanessa Bell, *Conversation Piece*, 1912, oil on board, 67.5 x 80cm, University of Hull Art Collection.
- Fig.2.74 Vanessa Bell, preparatory drawing for *Clive Bell and his Family*, pencil, 27 x 27cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.12.
- Fig.2.75 Vanessa Bell, preparatory drawing for *Clive Bell and his Family*, pencil, 27 x 27cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift, box.12.
- Fig.2.76 "Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?." Savile Lumley, c.1914-1915, Colour lithograph on paper, printed by Johnson, Riddle and Co. Ltd for the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Museum number: CIRC.466-1969.
- Fig.2.77 Vanessa Bell, photograph of Mary Hutchinson and group at Charleston, c.1922, Tate Archive, reproduced in Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 2004, p.134.
- Fig.2.78 Duncan Grant, *Lovers in a Hammock*, pencil and watercolour, date unknown, 12.7 x 18.4cm. Source: Christie's, London.

### Chapter Three: Loose Covers

- Fig.3.01 Photograph of Vanessa Bell, 1902 (misdated as 1906), gelatin silver print; 26 x 16cm, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- Fig.3.02 Monochrome photograph of Charles Furse, *Portrait of Miss Vanessa Stephen*, 27 x 12cm, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- Fig.3.03 Vanessa Bell, *Dora Morris*, c.1937, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5cm Leeds Museum and Art Galleries.
- Fig.3.04 Vanessa Bell, *The Red Dress*, c.1929, oil on canvas, 73.3 x 60.5cm, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery.
- Fig.3.05 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Portrait of Julia Jackson*, c.1864, albumen print from wet collodin glass negative, Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Fig.3.06 Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Annunciation*, 1876-79, oil on canvas, 250 x 104cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery.
- Fig.3.07 Vanessa Bell, *Study for the Berwick Murals*, c.1940, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, eds. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse Ltd. 1981) p.139.
- Fig.3.08 Unknown photographer, *Study for the Berwick Murals*, c.1940, Tate archives, reproduced in Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, plate.200, p.184 and *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, 1981, p.142.
- Fig.3.09 Vanessa Bell, *study for the Madonna, Berwick Church*, oil on board, 122.5 x 60cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift.
- Fig.3.10 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, 1942, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 61cm, Tate N05405.
- Fig.3.11 Vanessa Bell, *Interior with a Housemaid*, c.1939, oil on canvas, 74 x 54cm, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.
- Fig.3.12 Duncan Grant, *Maynard Keynes' Hat, Shoes and Pipe*, 1908, oil on canvas, 22.9 x 28cm, private collection, reproduced in Pamela Todd, *Bloomsbury at Home* (London: Pavilion Books, 1999).
- Fig.3.13 Vanessa Bell's sewing drawer, The Garden Room, Charleston, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.14 Cupboard decorated by Vanessa Bell, c.1917, 219 x 91 x 32cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/55, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.15 Cotton square on the back of armchair in the Garden Room, Charleston, CHA/T/111, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.16 Vanessa Bell, Lampshade, c.1935, 10 x 42cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/T/15, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.17 Rag-rugs at Charleston: maker unknown, c.1950, 121 x 196cm, CHA/C/57a, and maker unknown, c.1950, 191 x 102cm, CHA/C/74. Exhibited in *Fragments*, The Charleston Gallery, summer 2010, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.18 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, c.1916-17, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.6cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG5541.



- Fig.3.19 Vanessa Bell, *View of the Pond at Charleston*, c.1919, 63.5cm x 67.3cm, City Art Galleries, Sheffield.
- Fig.3.20 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, c.1918, oil on canvas, 94 x 60.6cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 4331.
- Fig.3.21 Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Vanessa Bell*, c.1916, oil and fabric collage, 91.5 x 61cm, Collection Mark Lancaster.
- Fig.3.22 Duncan Grant, *Caryatid (male)*, c.1913-14, oil, watercolour on paper with fabric collage laid on canvas, 140 x 63cm, private collection, reproduced in *A Bloomsbury Canvas* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001)
- Fig.3.23 Duncan Grant, *Caryatid (female)*, c.1917, oil, paper and fabric collaged on canvas, 140.5 x 45.6cm, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- Fig.3.24 Duncan Grant, *Abstract*, 1915, paint, papier collé and fabric on board. Reproduced in *A Bloomsbury Canvas* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001)
- Fig.3.25 Duncan Grant, *Interior at Gordon Square*, c.1914, oil on wood, 40 x 32.1cm, Tate, TO1143.
- Fig.3.26 Duncan Grant, *Interior at Gordon Square*, 1914-15, paint, papier collé and fabric on board, 76 x 65cm, private collection, reproduced in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999.
- Fig.3.27 Duncan Grant, *Abstract Collage*, c.1915, paint, papier collé and fabric on board, 63 x 45cm, Hoffmann Collection, Berlin, reproduced in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999.
- Fig.3.28 Duncan Grant, *In Memoriam: Rupert Brooke*, 1915, paint and papier collé on panel, 55 x 30.5cm, Yale Center for British Art.
- Fig.3.29 Duncan Grant, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1909, 54.3 x 41.9 cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG5131.
- Fig.3.30 Duncan Grant, *Self Portrait*, c.1910, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 29.7cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/65.
- Fig.3.31 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.32 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.33 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.34 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.35 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.36 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.

- Fig.3.37 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.38 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.39 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.40 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive.
- Fig.3.41 Alvin Langdon Coburn, portrait of *Wyndham Lewis*, London, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1916, published in *More Men of Mark* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922) available on-line at:  
[http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection\\_list=BooksbyAlvinLangdonC&col\\_id=210](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection_list=BooksbyAlvinLangdonC&col_id=210)
- Fig.3.42 Duncan Grant, *Self-portrait in a Turban*, c.1909-10, oil on panel, 20.2 x 12.7cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/310
- Fig.3.43 Duncan Grant, *Study for Composition (Self-Portrait in a Turban)*, 1910, oil on board, 76 x 63.5cm, private collection, reproduced in *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905-1970s*, Ava Gallery, Bangor, 2005.
- Fig.3.44 Cecil Beaton, *Duncan Grant*, bromide print on white card mount, 1967, 15.8 x 23.4cm, The National Portrait Gallery, NPGx14087.
- Fig.3.45 Possibly Julian Bell, *Duncan Grant*, c.1933, black and white print, 11 x 6.6cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.
- Fig.3.46 Possibly Julian Bell, *Duncan Grant*, c.1933, black and white print, 6.6 x 11cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.
- Fig.3.47 Lafayette Ltd, *The dreadnought Hoax*, 7 February 1910, matt bromide print, 17.6 x 22.3cm, The National Portrait Gallery, NPG P1293.
- Fig.3.48 Vanessa Bell, *Self-portrait at her Easel*, 1912, oil, private collection. Reproduced in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) Plate. 3.
- Fig.3.49 Duncan Grant, *George Mallory*, c.1912, black and white photograph, Tate Archives, AD12, reproduced in Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.100.
- Fig.3.50 Duncan Grant, *George Mallory*, c.1912, black and white photograph, Tate Archives, AD24, reproduced in Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.101.
- Fig.3.51 Duncan Grant, *George Leigh Mallory*, oil on panel, 1912-13, 77.5 x 53cm, The National Portrait Gallery, NPG5802.
- Fig.3.52 Osbert Lancaster, originally printed in the Daily Express, 31 March 1941, reprinted in *Signs of the Times 1939-1961*, (London: John Murray, 1961) p.17.

- Fig.3.53 Duncan Grant, *Costume*, one of three parts, 1936, gouache on card, 116 x 65cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/453.
- Fig.3.54 Duncan Grant, *Costume*, one of three parts, 1936, gouache on card, 116 x 65cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/453.
- Fig.3.55 Duncan Grant, *Costume*, one of three parts, 1936, gouache on card, 116 x 65cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/453.
- Fig.3.56 Vanessa Bell, *Duncan Grant as Spanish Dancer*, 1936, Tate Archive, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, 1981, p.127, and in Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.177.
- Fig.3.57 Vanessa Bell, *Duncan Grant as Spanish Dancer*, 1936, Tate Archive, reproduced in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.244, fig.186.
- Fig.3.58 Duncan Grant, *Woman in a Mantilla*, 1931, oil on board, 77 x 59.9cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/66.
- Fig.3.59 Duncan Grant, *Police Constable Harry Daley*, 1930, oil on canvas, 76 x 51cm, City of London Corporation.
- Fig.3.60 Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Vanessa Bell in Fancy Dress*, 1930, oil on panel, 116.8 x 61.3cm, private collection.
- Fig.3.61 Vanessa Bell, self portrait sketch in fancy dress, June 1930, reproduced in *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Regina Marler, 1998, p.355.
- Fig.3.62 Vanessa Bell, *The Spanish Lady*, 1912, oil on millboard, 75.6 x 53cm, Leicester Arts and Museums Service.
- Fig.3.63 Duncan Grant, *The Spanish Model (Mantilla)*, 1912, oil on panel, 54 x 48cm, private collection, reproduced in *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905-1970s*, Ava Gallery, Bangor, 2005.
- Fig.3.64 Duncan Grant, photograph of Vanessa Bell or Molly MacCarthy, c.1913, 10.9 x 8.5cm, black and white print, The Charleston Trust, uncatalogued.
- Fig.3.65 Vanessa Bell, *The Tub*, 1917, oil and gouache on canvas, 180.3 x 166.4cm, Tate, T02010.
- Fig.3.66 Vanessa Bell, *Mary Hutchinson at Charleston*, c.1917, Tate Archive, reproduced in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.169, fig.124, and Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, fig.144, p.195.
- Fig.3.67 *Health and Strength*, July 26, 1951, vol.80, no.15.
- Fig.3.68 Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1951, 21.5 x 14cm, private collection.
- Fig.3.69 *Physique Pictorial*, Summer 1957, vol.7, no.2, p.11, reproduced in *The Complete Reprint of Physique Pictorial*, (Köln: Taschen, 1997)
- Fig.3.70 Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1960, private collection
- Fig.3.71 *Physique Pictorial*, Summer 1957, vol.7, no.2, p.5, reproduced in *The Complete Reprint of Physique Pictorial*, (Köln: Taschen, 1997)
- Fig.3.72 Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1960, private collection
- Figs.3.73 & 3.74 Masacchio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy, before and after restoration.

- Fig.3.75 Duncan Grant, *Adam and Eve – After Masaccio*, c.1905, oil on panel, 23cm x 14cm, private collection, reproduced in *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905-1970s*, 2005.
- Fig.3.76 Duncan Grant, *Hylas and the water Nymphs*, c.1950, ink and oil on paper, 64.3 x 47.7cm. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.3.77 Duncan Grant, design for tiled mural, 1950, gouache of paper, 99 x 76.5cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnett Gift.
- Fig.3.78 Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 306.1cm, Tate, N04567.
- Fig.3.79 Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond*, c.1920-21, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 91.5cm, Pallant House Gallery.
- Fig.3.80 Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières*, detail, 1884, oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, The National Gallery, NG3908.
- Fig.3.81 Duncan Grant, *The Bathers*, c.1926-1933, oil on paper on plywood, 138.4 x 152.8cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
- Fig.3.82 Duncan Grant, *Bathers*, 1927, oil on canvas, 132.1x152.5cm, private collection. Source: Christie's, London.
- Fig.3.83 Duncan Grant, untitled study of wrestlers, c.1950, oil on paper, 62 x 43cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnet Gift, box.35.
- Fig.3.84 Duncan Grant, untitled study of wrestlers, c.1960, oil on paper, 25.5 x 27cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnet Gift.
- Fig.3.85 Duncan Grant, untitled study of wrestlers, verso c.1960, oil on paper, 25.5 x 27cm, The Charleston Trust, Angelica Garnet Gift.
- Fig.3.86 Vincenzo de' Rosso, *Hercules and King Diomedes*, c.1550, Salon dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy
- Fig.3.87 Eugene Druet, photograph of Nijinsky, dressed for the 'danse Siamoise' from the Ballets Russes' production of *Les Orientales*, c.1911, 26.5cm x 43.6cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/2, in the Studio at Charleston, photograph by author.
- Fig.3.88 Leo Baskt, poster for *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, 1911.
- Fig.3.89 Bronzino, *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c.1545, oil on wood, 146.1 x 116.2cm, The National Gallery, NG651.
- Fig.3.90 Bronzino, *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c.1545, reproduced in *National Gallery Illustrations: Italian Schools*, 1937.

## **Introduction**

### **Partnership:**

The names of the artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant are often spoken in one breath. Their partnership, both professional and personal, seems secure in the history of art and the history of Bloomsbury. Charleston, the house in East Sussex that they shared from 1916, is now a major tourist destination that advertises itself as “an artists’ home and garden.”

Bell and Grant’s graves cement the idea of partnership. They lie next to each other in the churchyard at Fittlehampton in East Sussex, near to Charleston. Bell died in 1961. Her gravestone is larger than Grant’s, darker and harder, its edges still sharp. Grant’s is made of a softer stone and even though he died seventeen years later, it is more weathered, a host to more lichen, to more layers. Even though these monuments were erected to mark their final resting-places, I find that Bell and Grant refuse to rest. Their partnership, their legacy, their narratives are still in a state of flux, over-lapping, covering and revealing.

Vanessa Bell was married to the art critic Clive Bell, with whom she had two sons. Grant was a homosexual and had affairs with several key members of the Bloomsbury group. Vanessa Bell and Grant had a brief physical relationship in the latter years of the First World War. Bell gave birth to Grant’s daughter on Christmas day 1918. This signalled the end of the physical part of their relationship but they continued to share domestic and creative space until Bell’s death.

Vita Sackville West, when describing her efforts to bring together another unlikely couple, wrote to her husband explaining that “On the whole I have encouraged a collage rather than matrimony.”<sup>1</sup> Bell and Grant’s partnership was not one of matrimony, though it has been perceived, described and catalogued as such. However the concept of a partnership as being a collage is a potent one, one that I will explore.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: the Life of V. Sackville-West* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1983) p.185. The two people in Sackville-West’s collage were the bi-sexual Valerie Taylor and the predominantly homosexual Raymond Mortimer. See also Michael De-la-Noy, *Eddy: The Life of Edward Sackville-West* (London: Arcadia Books, 1999) pp.106-7

Collaging and layering, bringing different, often contrasting elements together, sometimes touching, sometimes overlapping, mirrors the artists' working practice and lifestyles. Sometimes the artists would work side by side, considering the same scene, the same subject but with different eyes, different backgrounds. They would also work apart, in different studios, in different towns, different countries. I will explore the layering and collaging of image, of history and of experience. I interpret the relationship between Bell and Grant as a series of layers, boundaries, and thresholds that are in a constant state of flux, over-lapping, covering, revealing and leaking. I will scratch at these surfaces, peel back some layers while replacing others, pick at the edges and pull at loose threads, trespass over boundaries and thresholds. By mapping the artists' presence I hope to construct a new model of partnership, one that refuses to be glued down. The collage is not fixed, the edges lift, the layers shift and change and perceptions alter.

Politics has equal weight in the title of my work, the politics of the self, "the principles relating to or inherent in a sphere or activity, especially when concerned with power and status."<sup>2</sup> To investigate or explore this new model of partnership I will examine the spoken and the unspoken principles inherent in Bell and Grant's artistic and domestic activity. Across the three chapters that make up this thesis I address three different sites of political discourse, identity, place, and the body.

A satisfactory single study devoted to the work and lives, to the partnership of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant is yet to be written and it is not my intention to write it here. It is not in the scope of this work to encompass all of the nuances of these two lives, nor to provide a complete account of a personal and professional relationship that lasted over half a century. But by focusing on these three areas of political discourse, and by utilising the trope of collage, I am able to expose and explore hitherto unconsidered areas of the artists' partnership.

### **Literary Review:**

The lack of a dual biography of Bell and Grant may appear incongruous as so much has been published about these two artists and their friends, known to the world as the Bloomsbury group. But a joint biography can begin to be pieced together, collaged if you will, from previous publications. Both artists are the subjects of individual and exhaustive biographies by Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* being first published in

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<sup>2</sup> <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/politics> (accessed December 21, 2012)

1983, and *Duncan Grant: A Biography* in 1997.<sup>3</sup> The two volumes offer separate narratives that fold over each other for the period marked out in the title of this thesis, 1912-1961. The first significant work to focus on Bell and Grant, one that has been described as “the standard history of visual Bloomsbury”<sup>4</sup> was Richard Shone’s *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Their Circle* originally published in 1976 and revised in 1993.<sup>5</sup> It places the artists at the centre of a survey of Bloomsbury society and the British art scene in the first quarter of the twentieth century, highlighting Roger Fry’s influence. Simon Watney goes further in emphasising their prominent position in his account of English reactions to French Post-Impressionism in his ground breaking work from 1980, *English Post-Impressionism* in which the artists are rightly considered as individual identities.<sup>6</sup>

Roger Fry is often included as the third side of a triangular relationship, his influence dominating Bell and Grant’s development as artists and designers, his role within the private realm being less stable. Shone continued his group project with the 1999 exhibition *The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant* at the Tate gallery, London and in the United States of America.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition fixes Bloomsbury culture as a triangulate of these three artists. *The Art of Bloomsbury* coincided with the exhibition *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry’s Vision of Art* at the Courtauld Gallery which secured Fry’s position as orchestrator of British and Bloomsbury visual culture, patron and harbinger of Post-Impressionism to Bell and Grant.<sup>8</sup> These two exhibitions were preceded by Anna Gruetzner Robins survey of pioneering exhibitions of modern art in London in the years preceding the First World War with *Modern Art in Britain, 1910-1914* including paintings by Fry, Bell and

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<sup>3</sup> Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2006) first published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983, and Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant: A Biography*, 1998, first published by Chatto & Windus in 1997. Spalding outlines Bell’s biography in an essay for the catalogue of the 1979 exhibition at the Sheffield City Art Galleries, *Vanessa Bell, 1879-1961: An Exhibition to Mark the Centenary of her Birth*.

<sup>4</sup> Regina Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie: The Making of the Bloomsbury Boom* (London: Virago Press, 1998) p.61

<sup>5</sup> Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Their Circle* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), revised edition published in 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Watney, *English Post-Impressionism* (London: Studio Vista, 1980)

<sup>7</sup> Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999) and (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002)

<sup>8</sup> *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry’s Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers Ltd, 1999)

Grant.<sup>9</sup> Work by these three artists make up the lavish illustrations to Gillian Naylor's 1990 book *Bloomsbury: The Artists, Authors and Designers by Themselves*, which juxtaposes the artists' fine art and designs with textural quotations from the Bloomsbury group.<sup>10</sup>

Isabelle Anscombe put Bell and Grant's decorative work as the central focus to her 1981 book *Omega and After: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts*,<sup>11</sup> marking a flurry of interest in the Omega Workshops. While Anscombe places Bell and Grant central to the narrative, the subsequent publications place them within a wider group with Fry at its helm. 1984 saw two major exhibitions, *The Omega Workshops: alliance and enmity in English art 1911-1920* organised by Anthony d'Offay Gallery and *The Omega Workshop 1913-1919: Decorative arts of Bloomsbury* by the Craft's Council.<sup>12</sup> 1984 also saw the most comprehensive publication on the Workshops, Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops*.<sup>13</sup> Other exhibitions and publications have continued to group Bell, Grant and Fry alongside other related artists such as Dora Carrington and Mark Gertler under the umbrella of Bloomsbury.<sup>14</sup>

Bell's relationship to her sister, Virginia Woolf, has been thoroughly examined. As Mary Ann Caws observed, Woolf "threatens to swamp any tale when she is placed alongside others."<sup>15</sup> One of the few works that purport to be dedicated to the partnership of the two artists is Lisa Tickner's essay, 'The "Left Handed Marriage":

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Gruetzner Robins, *Modern Art in Britain, 1910-1914* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997)

<sup>10</sup> *Bloomsbury: The Artists, Authors and Designers by Themselves*, ed. Gillian Naylor (Pyramid Books, 1990)

<sup>11</sup> Isabelle Anscombe, *Omega and After: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981)

<sup>12</sup> *The Omega Workshops: alliance and enmity in English art 1911-1920* (London: Anthony d'Offay, 1984) and *The Omega Workshop 1913-1919: Decorative arts of Bloomsbury* (London: Craft's Council, 1984). *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshop 1913-19*, ed. Alexandra Gerstein (London: Fontanka, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984)

<sup>14</sup> See: *The Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Design*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1999); *A Bloomsbury Canvas: Reflections on the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001); *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, eds. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); *Conversation Anglaise: Le groupe de Bloomsbury - English Conversations: The Bloomsbury Group* (Gallimard, 2009) and *British Bohemia: The Bloomsbury Circle of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Kracow: International Cultural Centre, 2011)

<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (New York and London: Routledge 1991) p.9



Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant.<sup>16</sup> For her unbalanced account, one that concentrates on Bell, Tickner uses as her title a quote from Woolf's diary.<sup>17</sup>

Marianna Torgovnick devotes one chapter of her book *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf* to the sisters. Titled 'The Sisters' Arts',<sup>18</sup> Torgovnick concentrates on the sisters' childhood and rarely mentions Grant. Diane Filby Gillespie also adopts the phrase *The Sisters' Arts* for her examination of the writing and painting of Woolf and Bell.<sup>19</sup> Gillespie proposes that Bell's influence on Woolf's opinions on art have been overlooked in favour of Roger Fry's and Clive Bell's. The book is dominated by analysis of Woolf's writing. The influence of Grant's art practice on Bell or on Woolf is marginalised. Jane Dunn explores more fully the roles of Bell and Woolf's relationships with others as well as themselves in her 1990 book *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: A Very Close Conspiracy*.<sup>20</sup> Susan Sellers has presented a fictionalised account of the sisters relationship titled *Vanessa and Virginia*.<sup>21</sup>

Vanessa Curtis included a chapter on Woolf's relationship to Bell in her 2002 book *Virginia Woolf's Women* followed three years later with an examination of the less well known homes of Bell and Woolf in *The Hidden Houses of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*.<sup>22</sup> Maggie Humm has explored the role of women and modernism in her volumes *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema*, 2002, and *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of*

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Tickner, 'The "Left Handed Marriage": Vanessa Bell & Duncan Grant,' in *Significant Others: Creative and Intimate Partnership*, eds. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) pp.65-81. Tickner continues her consideration of Bell with 'Vanessa Bell: *Studland Beach*, Domesticity and 'Significant Form', in Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000) pp.116-141.

<sup>17</sup> Sunday 23 January 1927, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) p.124

<sup>18</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) See chapter three, 'The Sisters' Arts: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell,' pp.107-123

<sup>19</sup> Diane Filby Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988)

<sup>20</sup> Jane Dunn, *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: A Very Close Conspiracy* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1990) (London: Virago Press, 2000)

<sup>21</sup> Susan Sellers, *Vanessa and Virginia* (Uig, Isle of Lewis: Two Ravens Press, 2008). Angelica Garnett also published a fictionalised account of her biographical experiences, see Angelica Garnett, *The Unspoken Truth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010)

*Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*, 2006, both of which examine at close quarters the photograph albums compiled by Bell and Woolf.<sup>23</sup>

Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace also consider Bell and Woolf's position in modernism in their 1994 survey of women artists, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings*.<sup>24</sup> In chapter three, 'Professionalism, Genre, and the Sister(s') Arts: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell,' they discuss the sisters' professionalism.

Bell has also been grouped together with other female artists. Mary Ann Caws draws Dora Carrington into a triangular study in which she examines the lives, work and relationships of what she considers to be the three *Women of Bloomsbury*. Caws takes a refreshing view of the women's relationships and rallies against those that accuse them of "masochism," instead seeing the "profound joy" that they received from "such a particular mixture of work and solitude, of creation and love and companionship within the idea of work itself."<sup>25</sup> But Caws does not overlook the stresses within Bell and Grant's relationship. She explores Bell's continual denigration of her own work and the jealousies within the relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Most writings show an asymmetrical relationship highlighting Bell's insecurities about working with Grant. These are frequently represented with quotes from a body of correspondence between Bell and Roger Fry.<sup>27</sup> In her biography of Bell, Spalding excavates a recurring theme that sees Bell as sacrificing elements of her career and compromising her personal life to benefit Grant's career and home-life. The biography

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<sup>22</sup> Vanessa Curtis, *Virginia Woolf's Women* (London: Robert Hale, 2002) and Vanessa Curtis, *The Hidden Houses of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 2005)

<sup>23</sup> Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) and Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006)

<sup>24</sup> Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) See chapter three, 'Professionalism, Genre, and the Sister(s') Arts: Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell,' pp.56-89

<sup>25</sup> Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury*, 1991, p.4

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury*, 1991, see chapter 5, 'Vanessa,' pp.69-114. In a chronological account Jan Marsh concentrates on Bell as well as including brief biographical accounts of Woolf, Carrington, Molly MacCarthy and Ottoline Morrell. Quoting at length from Frances Spalding's biography of Bell, Marsh contributes no new aspects to the artists' relationship, Jan Marsh, *Bloomsbury Women: Distinct Figures in Life and Art* (London: Pavilion Books Limited, 1995)

was celebrated in the feminist art press for presenting “a history of art related to social and personal experience,” one in which “the author relates the works to the life, the former not being allowed to exist in a vacuum.”<sup>28</sup>

The pressure on the woman in a mixed sex creative partnership to engage in domestic matters at the detriment of their work is one that has been extensively examined since the 1970s, specifically since the publication of Linda Nochlin 1971 essay ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’<sup>29</sup> This influenced a body of work that reassessed the work and lives of women artists.<sup>30</sup> Bell is often included in these surveys.<sup>31</sup> Four years before Spalding’s biography of Bell, Germain Greer explored how the restrictions on and expectations of women from the middle ages to the twentieth century effected women artists. Set in direct contrast to another Bloomsbury partnership, that of Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey, Greer uses a single paragraph to sum up for her the ideal relationship forged by Bell and Grant, one that “was meticulously adjusted to allow both the fullest expression of their creativity,”<sup>32</sup> Diane Gillespie suggests that “the relationship was certainly not the idyll Greer makes it,”<sup>33</sup>

Bell is often cast in traditional female roles, as acting as mother, sister or wife to Grant. In Leon Edel’s 1979 group biography *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, Grant is caste as a replacement for Bell’s brother Thoby who had died in 1906. Edel considers that for Bell, Grant “brought her back to her earliest needs; he could be a younger brother and she could be wholly in tune with him.”<sup>34</sup> Gillian Elinor noted that Bell “has been valued and esteemed for her mothering qualities (exercised on behalf of Virginia

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<sup>27</sup> See Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, pp.78-81

<sup>28</sup> Gillian Elinor, ‘Vanessa Bell,’ *Fan*, vol.2, no.1 1984, p.14

<sup>29</sup> Linda Nochlin 1971 essay ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’ reprinted in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Westview Press, 1989)

<sup>30</sup> See for example: Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> See for example: Karen Peterson and J.J. Wilson, *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: The Women’s Press, 1978) p.106 and Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1990) pp.257-58

<sup>32</sup> Germain Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Seker & Warburg, 1979) p.57

<sup>33</sup> Diane Filby Gillespie, *The Sisters’ Arts*, 1988, p.342, n.73

<sup>34</sup> Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979) p.213

Woolf, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and Duncan Grant especially, as well as her three children).<sup>35</sup> Lia Giachero sees her as taking the role of a long-suffering wife whom puts up with Grant's "infidelities,"<sup>36</sup> while Shone considers that "her protective domesticity endangered by his [Grant's] lightly-worn affairs."<sup>37</sup> Bell's supposed sacrifices and insecurities are highlighted in Angelica Garnett's memoir of her childhood and her relationship with her parents.<sup>38</sup> Published in 1984 *Deceived With Kindness* provides a much quoted but subjective account, one criticised by her brother for its inaccuracies.<sup>39</sup>

In the catalogue for the 2006 exhibition *From Victorian to Modern: innovation and tradition in the work of Vanessa Bell, Gwen John and Laura Knight*, curator Pamela Gerrish Nunn examines a trio of artists whose work was "indicative of the spectrum of responses" made by women brought up at the end of the nineteenth century who "found that modernity lay in their path."<sup>40</sup> Gerrish Nunn charts the similarities and differences in the three rarely overlapping careers and personal lives, though Bell's relative economic stability and "connections" place her "at the heart of the modern project."<sup>41</sup> While Bell's relationships are not central to the exhibition Gerrish Nunn concludes that it is Bloomsbury's abrogation of "the separation of the spheres" of gender pictorialised in Bell's work "that characterised Bloomsbury as avant-garde" and allowed women to participate "in formulating the modern world."<sup>42</sup> In addition to these volumes Bell's own words have been put into print. A collection of her talks, mainly written for the Memoir Club, were published in 1997 and a selection of her letters in 1998.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gillian Elinor, 'Vanessa Bell and Dora Carrington: Bloomsbury Painters,' *Women's Art Journal*, vol.5, no.1 Spring-Summer 1984, p.28

<sup>36</sup> Lia Giachero, 'To Daylight from Darkness: Vanessa Bell as an Artist,' in Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: The Hogarth Press and Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1997) p.183

<sup>37</sup> Richard Shone, 'The Artists of Bloomsbury: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant,' in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, ed. Richard Shone, 1999, p.13

<sup>38</sup> Angelica Garnett, *Deceived With Kindness* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984)

<sup>39</sup> Quentin Bell, 'Tricks and Memory,' in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.9, December 1984, pp.35-38

<sup>40</sup> Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *From Victorian to Modern: innovation and tradition in the work of Vanessa Bell, Gwen John and Laura Knight* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2006) p.9

<sup>41</sup> Gerrish Nunn, *From Victorian to Modern*, 2006, p.48

<sup>42</sup> Gerrish Nunn, *From Victorian to Modern*, 2006, p.88

<sup>43</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: The Hogarth Press and Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1997) and *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Regina Marler

Grant had been the subject of several slim volumes including one by Roger Fry for the Hogarth Press published in 1924 and an edition of Penguin Books Modern Painters series which included an essay by Raymond Mortimer.<sup>44</sup> In 1934 Grant's painting was used by John Rowdon as a hook on which to hang his theories of art production.<sup>45</sup> Clive Bell included a chapter on Grant in his 1922 book *Since Cézanne*.<sup>46</sup>

In 1982 Paul Roche, Grant's friend, frequent companion and lover in the final three decades of his life, published a partial account of Grant's career and life combined with a travelogue in his book *With Duncan Grant in Southern Turkey*.<sup>47</sup> Roche was instrumental in providing Douglas Blair Turnbaugh information for the first biography dedicated to Grant, his 1987 book *Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group*.<sup>48</sup> Turnbaugh continued this project with the publication of *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant, 1885-1978*, a collection of mainly homo-erotic sketches in 1989.<sup>49</sup> Grant was one of the artists featured in Emmanuel Cooper's 1986 book *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the last 100 Years in the West*.<sup>50</sup>

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(Wakefield, Rhode Island & London: Moyer Bell, 1998). Grant's letters, talks or memoirs haven't been published in full though they have been extensively quoted from for his and other Bloomsbury biographies.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Fry, *Duncan Grant* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924) and Raymond Mortimer, *Duncan Grant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1944)

<sup>45</sup> John Rowdon, *Revaluations: Duncan Grant* (London: Hayward J. W. Marks, 1934), see Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.328.

<sup>46</sup> Clive Bell, *Since Cézanne* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922). The book is a collection of articles and essays previously published in magazines and journals. Katie Roiphe explores Vanessa and Clive Bell's marriage with particular reference to Grant and Fry. See Katie Roiphe, 'Vanessa and Clive Bell,' *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles 1910-1939* (New York: The Dial Press, 2007) pp.143-178

<sup>47</sup> Paul Roche, *With Duncan Grant in Southern Turkey* (Honeyglen Publishing, 1982)

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, 1987)

<sup>49</sup> *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant, 1885-1978*, ed. Douglas Blair Turnbaugh (London: The Gay Mens Press, 1989). Turnbaugh's entry on Grant in *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts* offers an alternative account of his life and work, one laced with inaccuracies, see *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts* ed. Claude J. Summers (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004) pp.161-62.

<sup>50</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the last 100 Years in the West* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), see chapter seven, 'Breaking Out: Private Faces in Public Places.' Cooper also includes a photograph of Grant and David Garnett posing naked in Emmanuel Cooper, *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography* (London, Sydney and Wellington: Unwin Hyman, 1990) p.140. For a recent survey see Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.134-36.

Apart from several exhibitions and supporting catalogues the first major survey dedicated to Grant's career wasn't published until 1990. In *The Art of Duncan Grant* Simon Watney considered that Grant's "career and achievements remain largely unexamined and under-valued."<sup>51</sup> He stated that his aim is to consider the artist as an individual and not as a member of the Bloomsbury group, a membership that acts as a disability to his reputation. But he also considered that Grant and Bell's "collaboration stimulated all their best work, as he gently led the way, and she generally followed."<sup>52</sup>

Watney attributed the apparent neglect of Grant's career to a situation "complicated by attitudes towards his fifty year working collaboration with Vanessa Bell, which raises difficulties for critics and art historians who prefer an artist to subscribe obediently to a less complicated career structure, to display more total autonomy, and to embody a more traditional sense of development and progression."<sup>53</sup> Since Watney wrote these words there has been a dedicated biography to Grant and several major publications and exhibitions dealing with Bloomsbury visual culture, often highlighting the partnership of Bell and Grant.

When considering this considerable body of literature on Bell and Grant and the Bloomsbury group there may appear little room for manoeuvre. But there are gaps within the established histories, flashes of unexplored territory. There is space for me to pick at the edges and reassemble my own collage.

### **Charleston:**

If the perceived dyad of Bell and Grant can be extended to a triangular partnership then Charleston could be considered the third partner. Watney describes the artists' "joint authorship" of Charleston, demonstrated through the repeated representation and modification of the same space.<sup>54</sup> Charleston along with the artists other homes and designs are central to the most recent survey of Bell and Grant, Christopher Reed's *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity*. It builds on Reed's project of negotiating a new modernism that eschews the aggressively masculine in

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<sup>51</sup> Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant* (London: John Murray, 1990) p.7

<sup>52</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.12

<sup>53</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, pp.7-8

<sup>54</sup> Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.53

favour of one rooted in the domestic, one that is inclusive of queerness.<sup>55</sup> It is very influential in my work and provides a thorough and chronological exploration and recontextualisation of the artists' design and fine art work up to the 1930s.

Charleston was important to two of Bell's children who have made a significant contribution to the body of literature of Bloomsbury and Bell and Grant as well as to the preservation of their childhood home. Quentin Bell published the first biography of Virginia Woolf in 1972, which included a thumbnail sketch of Bell and Grant's relationship up to Woolf's suicide in 1941.<sup>56</sup> In his 1995 memoir *Elders and Betters* he dedicates chapter three to his mother and chapter four to Grant.<sup>57</sup> The siblings also edited a collection of their mother's photographs, titled *Vanessa Bell's Family Album* and contributed to the first guidebook to Charleston.<sup>58</sup> At the time of his death in 1996 Quentin Bell was engaged with his daughter in writing a book on Charleston which was printed the following year.<sup>59</sup>

Angelica Garnett's continued generosity manifested itself in the donation of a large collection of works by Bell and Grant to the Charleston Trust in 2008. The contents of the Angelica Garnett Gift number over 8,000 items and include drawings, sketchbooks and canvases removed from Charleston after Grant's death in 1978.<sup>60</sup> This collection, once layered in drawers, cupboards, studios, storerooms and attics of Charleston build a collage of the artists' work and lives.

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<sup>55</sup> Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). Also Christopher Reed, "'A Room of One's Own': The Bloomsbury Group's Creation of a Modernist Domesticity," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996)

<sup>56</sup> Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf* (St Albans: Paladin, 1976, in two volumes) originally published by The Hogarth Press, 1972. This was preceded by Quentin Bell's *Bloomsbury* published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1968 which gives a broad but personal account of the group.

<sup>57</sup> Quentin Bell, *Elders and Betters* (London: John Murray, 1995) Published in the USA as *Bloomsbury Recalled* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)

<sup>58</sup> *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, eds. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse Ltd. 1981) and Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, Henrietta Garnett and Richard Shone, *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987)

<sup>59</sup> Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 1997)

<sup>60</sup> These works were held by Bell and Grant's art dealer for the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London.

I was allowed exclusive access to this un-catalogued collection. As I unpacked the boxes the images revealed themselves. I recognised the first tentative marks that would be worked up into major designs. There is Clive Bell's foot, drawn by Bell for her 1923 painting of *Clive Bell and his Family*, there is the wing of a goose that eventually would become the wings of the angel Gabriel in Bell's mural of the *Annunciation* for Berwick church in 1942. Costume designs by Grant for Alan Greville's 1913 production of *Macbeth* sit beside numerous studies of sheep and shearers made in preparation for the Lincoln Cathedral murals in 1956. These works, unseen and unconsidered for many years, fill in the gaps that led to the final pieces. They add the missing layers while revealing the artists' creative process.

### **Chapters:**

As the objects in the collection overlap and collage, creating layers, so do the chapters in this thesis. The same objects, incidents and characters appear in different circumstances, viewed from different angles.

In chapter one I begin with an ending. In an exploration of the politics of identity I consider the textual layering of the artists' signature, the final layer of paint, of pencil, of image on the image that confidently asserts authorship and authenticity. I examine the variations of Bell and Grant's signature, tracing their evolution, their presence and absence, the location on the work and the calligraphy of the mark. I consider Grant's playful use of signing, demonstrating that he is confident in his role as an artist. Compared to Grant's often subversive positioning of his signature, Bell's is more consistent, more conventional in its position, possibly the artist less sure of her position in a male dominated art world.

The signature when included in the picture plane (and on the body of an object) acts as an agreement; it has juridic qualities, mirroring the signature at the close of a letter or document. By examining the various ways that Bell and Grant had of signing and of not signing, and the use and function of the mechanically reproduced signature, I demonstrate the uneasy relationship that can occur between objects, names and signatures, the slipping between layers and the uneasy partnership of image, object and text.

Charleston is at the centre of chapter two, or more specifically the pond that lies at the front of the house. This single location is used repeatedly by the artists as subject, as background, as setting, as pictorial motif, attributing the space with layers of



experience, meaning and memory. I use theories on mapping and cartography to make sense of Bell and Grant's repeated use of this aquatic area as both subject and location for a body of work that spans the artists' tenure at Charleston. It is not only geography that is mapped, the pond is central to many of the narratives and mythologies of the household and of the artists. It features in Bell's first textural description of Charleston and in her first pictorial recording of the space.

In an exploration of the politics of place I will demonstrate how the pond acts as a layered topography for the exploration and presentation of gender, queerness and familial relationships. In the early 1920s both Bell and Grant used the pond as a background for images of familial domesticity, Bell with *Clive Bell and his Family* and Grant with *The Hammock*. As well as contributing to the mapping of the pond the artists also map familial structures reminiscent of the eighteenth century Conversation Piece, group portraits and family groups that complied to a loose set of conventions. In the latter part of the chapter I use these conventions to unravel Bell and Grant's two paintings.

After mapping space and relationships I move in closer to the artists themselves, to examine their corporeal presence and the politics of the body. Roland Barthes considered the site of the most erotic pleasure is the gape, "the flash."<sup>61</sup> Like the slither of space between the different elements of a collage, that gives a glimpse of what is underneath, it offers the thrill of the gape, the concealed revealed.

Chapter three is a Bloomsbury striptease in which boundaries are traversed and layers removed in an exploration of the artists' often problematic relationship to clothes. I pick at the delicate threshold between fabric and skin that often loosens and gapes. I cast the artists as agents of disguise and masquerade in which uncertain and unstable boundaries are created. I map the transference of fabric and demonstrate how this textile threshold ruptures, how the body leaks, leaving marks and traces.

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<sup>61</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) p.10

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Signature in the Frame**

#### **On the Signature:**

This chapter explores the artists' names and "the irreversible moment of invention,"<sup>62</sup> the signing of that name. It examines the variations of that signature/sign, the uneasy relationship that can occur between objects, names and signatures, and the ways in which they affect and engage with the viewer, what Louis Marin has described as "the slippages between the terms of the visual and the textual."<sup>63</sup> I will include the various ways that Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant had of signing and of not signing their work, the changes in signature throughout their careers and the use and function of the mechanically reproduced signature.

The signature is the final layer of paint, of pencil, of image on the image. If it speaks other words than the ones it pictorially dictates it says, "I made this and it is finished." The signature announces the end, even before the end has arrived. It anticipates the final brush stroke, the final pencil mark, a "textual mark [that] is addressed to the future; to mortality and to the afterlife of the written sign."<sup>64</sup>

It confidently asserts authorship and authenticity. The signature when included in the picture plane (and on the body of an object) acts as an agreement; it has juridic qualities, mirroring the signature at the close of a letter or document. In the majority of works that have been signed by Bell and Grant the signature occupies the expected and certified location, "hidden away[...]" as Louis Marin explains, "in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting which ideally is conceived as the last stage in the trajectory of a gaze that proceeds according to the rules governing the reading of a written page."<sup>65</sup> The signature, when functioning correctly plays by the rules, obeys the law,

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<sup>62</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981) p.104

<sup>63</sup> Louis Marin 'Topics and Figures of Enunciation: It is Myself that I Paint,' in *Vision and Textuality*, eds. Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995) p.199

<sup>64</sup> Seán Burke, 'The Ethics of Signature,' in *Authorship from Plato to Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.289

<sup>65</sup> Louis Marin 'Topics and Figures of Enunciation,' 1995, pp.205-6

for as Derrida states “No signature is possible without recourse, at least implicitly, to the law. The test of authentication is part of the very structure of the signature.”<sup>66</sup>

The central principle of the signature is its repetition. To function fully, to play “by the rules” the signature must have the capacity to be repeated, identifiable by its similarity to the other signatures made by the same hand, identifiable by its dissimilarity to other signatures made by other hands. Within a perfected mode of production the signature proposes the text as an extension of the artist’s body, acting both as a guarantee of the artist’s presence at the image’s production and guarantee of authenticity. For Marin it is more than this, it has “more a creative than a possessive property. The name refers to the author: ‘This painting is (by) me, X’. Thus all paintings tend to be the virtual self-portrait of their painter. Designated by the signature in the painting, it is as though the painter undergoes a process there whereby he or she takes or assumes shape or figure.”<sup>67</sup> The signature can be seen as a textual self-portrait, a trace of the body. As Marin observes, “The proper name is, in a certain respect, the particular face of the self, its portrait within the social community of names.”<sup>68</sup>

But Bell and Grant’s signatures do not always obey the law, they are not always ideal. Sometimes they slip and slide, they can appear where they shouldn’t, and don’t appear where they should. They can be truncated, elongated, inverted or hidden. The accompanying texts, the non-pictorial signs, the dates, names, locations, dedications, adjunct to the signature, contribute to the destabilising of its juridic qualities, questioning its authority, its control and its limits. These anomalies are the subject of this chapter.

### **Inscriptions:**

But whatever transgressions the signature performs it is always testament to the presence, at one time or another, of the artists. Of course “By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer,”<sup>69</sup> the sign outlives the signer just as for Derrida:

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<sup>66</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Afterwards,’ in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) p.133

<sup>67</sup> Louis Marin ‘Topics and Figures of Enunciation,’ 1995, p.206

<sup>68</sup> Louis Marin ‘Topics and Figures of Enunciation,’ 1995, p.205

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context,’ in *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) p.20

My proper name outlives me. After my death, it will still be possible to name me and speak of me. Like every sign, including 'I,' the proper name involves the necessary possibility of functioning in my absence, of detaching itself from its bearer: and according to the logic we have already seen at work, one must be able to take this absence to a certain absolute, which we call death. So we shall say that even while I am alive, my name marks my death. It already bears the death of its bearer. It is already the name of a dead person, the anticipated memory of a departure.<sup>70</sup>

Bell and Grant's gravestones are both markers of presence and markers of absence. Both are simple affairs, inscribed with the common names of the artists, "Vanessa Bell" on one and "Duncan Grant" on the other, with the year of their births and the year of their deaths (*figs. 1.01 & 1.02*).<sup>71</sup> An even simpler design, a quick sketch in Grant's hand in a small notebook, shows Bell's stone with an even simpler inscription, just the initials "V.B" separated by a full stop and underlined (*fig. 1.03*).<sup>72</sup>

Angelica Garnett "approach[es]" her aunt (Virginia Woolf) and her mother through the initials of their married names, she noted how "Both sisters started life with the same initials." Vanessa and Virginia shared their family name of Stephen, the one given by their father. Garnett views the "two V's, angular and ambiguous, undecided whether to symbolise V or U." While she views Woolf's change of surname initial to W as "a variant on the original" V, the replacement B for her mother's name is described as "a round and solid addition,"<sup>73</sup> a possible reflection on Clive Bell's "hearty masculinity" who she married in 1907.<sup>74</sup>

A small enamelled saucer possibly made by the young Angelica Bell, remains at Charleston. Decorated with her mother's initials, the central V is a hinge for a pair of mirrored Bs, the reversed B makes a discernible S shape, the ghostly presence of her mother's and her aunt's maiden name (*fig. 1.04*).<sup>75</sup> Garnett claims that "When I see V.B. on the registration plate of a car it immediately causes me a tremor of

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<sup>70</sup> Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991) p.148

<sup>71</sup> Vanessa Bell's and Duncan Grant's gravestones, Firle church, East Sussex, photograph by author. Frances Spalding regards the "starkness" of Bell's "plain tombstone" as "a reminder of her innate solitariness," see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2000, p.336. She does not mention Grant's gravestone in his biography.

<sup>72</sup> Duncan Grant, design for Vanessa Bell's gravestone, c.1961, pencil on paper, 15 x 10.8cm, TCT/TAGG, box.21.

<sup>73</sup> Angelica Garnett, *The Eternal Moment* (Maine: Howland's Printing Company, 1998) p.49

<sup>74</sup> Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2006) p.39

<sup>75</sup> Angelica Garnett, enamelled saucer, date unknown, diameter 9.6cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/202

recognition.”<sup>76</sup> As well as recognising her mother, Garnett also has recognition of the self, the initials form part of her maiden name, Vanessa Bell eventually naming her Angelica Vanessa Bell.<sup>77</sup> In the roundel on the front of a small, painted box, decorated for her daughter by Bell, are the initials “A.V.B.” (*fig.1.05*).<sup>78</sup> The V once again acts like a pivot to balance or to divide the A and the B. For the jacket designs of Virginia Woolf’s book *A Room of One’s Own* the hands of the clock point to five past eleven, making a letter V, the initial shared by the sisters. For Diane Gillespie this “underscores the significance of the book’s commentary for both of their professional lives.”<sup>79</sup>

Vanessa Bell signs her paintings in upstanding letters, ‘V Bell’ (*fig.1.06*).<sup>80</sup> The signature is rigid, full of verticals, it appears like Roman numerals, like a license plate. Richard Morphet has noted that Bell “seems to have had an obsession with verticals[...] she would seize any opportunity that reasonably presented itself of introducing a vertical into a painting.”<sup>81</sup> For Roger Fry the visual artist’s handwriting, and by extension signature, reflects “a greater readiness to lift the pen from the paper,” it reflects the necessity of lifting the brush from the canvas to recharge its supply of

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<sup>76</sup> Garnett, *The Eternal Moment*, 1998, p. 49

<sup>77</sup> Born on 25 December 1918, Angelica Garnett née Bell was first called Susannah Paula, a name favoured by Clive Bell, (see David Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955) p.196), subsequently Claudia to the displeasure of Virginia Woolf who wrote to Vanessa Bell “I don’t like Claudia – pompous and aristocratic” (see Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 14 January 1919, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two: 1912-1922*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) p.317). She was eventually registered as Helen Vanessa before Bell “a month or so later[...] paid a fee and altered the name to Angelica Vanessa” (see Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest*, 1955, p.196). During the indecision Woolf refers to Angelica as “Anonyma” (see Woolf to Bell, 31 December 1918, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two*, 1976, p.310). Eighteen years later Angelica’s official name was still unsure. Bell wrote to Grant of the trouble that she was having in procuring a birth certificate for their daughter: “she is officially registered as Vanessa Helen, though they say she’s Angelica on the name certificate whatever that may be. So goodness knows what her name really is,” Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 4 August 1938, TGA/DGP.

<sup>78</sup> Vanessa Bell, painted wooden box, 9 x 25 x 16.2cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/159

<sup>79</sup> Diane Filby Gillespie, *The Sisters’ Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988) pp.70-71. Originally noted by Nicolson and Trautman in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Four: 1929-1931*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) p.81.

<sup>80</sup> Detail of Vanessa Bell, *Portrait of Virginia Woolf*, 1934, oil on canvas, 82 X 63cm, private collection

<sup>81</sup> Richard Morphet, ‘The Art of Vanessa Bell,’ in *Vanessa Bell, Painting and Drawing* (London: Anthony d’Offay, 1973) p.8

pigment.<sup>82</sup> Francis Partridge wrote that Bell's "handwriting was very much a painter's – she *drew* the letters."<sup>83</sup> The components of Bell's signature and the accompanying date expose the individual strokes of paint that make up the figures and numerals.

In the rare examples of Grant's early signature the letter are in capitals, as in the signature in the bottom left hand corner of his painting *Parrot Tulips*, exhibited with the Camden Town group, the upright letters complemented by the vertical elements in the accompanying year of 1911.<sup>84</sup> But soon his signature develops a more voluptuous persona. Camouflaged in the rich red of the table top and the pentimenti on the surface of the canvas in the 1916-17 painting *By the Fire* are the initials 'D G'. Their stylising creates a mirrored image, the bending letters echoing the curves of the two figs that sit precariously on the upright plate (*fig.1.07*).<sup>85</sup> By the 1930s Grant had perfected this signature as in his study of the life model Tony Asserati (*fig.1.08*).<sup>86</sup> On drawings and prints the initials curl around each other, an instantly recognisable logo or emblem. Both artists adopt a cipher of their initials, generally used for marking drawings, and sketches; their fuller names reserved for paintings.

### **Not Signing:**

When examining Bell and Grant's early paintings there is a noticeable absence of the textual signature.<sup>87</sup> Bell's painting *Iceland Poppies*,<sup>88</sup> exhibited at the New England

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<sup>82</sup> By contrast Fry considered Woolf's handwriting "as showing the influence of her profession, Virginia's being so purely a literate hand." Roger Fry to Robert Bridges, 18 December 1925, *Letters of Roger Fry, Volume Two*, ed. Denys Sutton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972) p.588.

<sup>83</sup> Frances Partridge, 'Vanessa Bell: A Personal Impression,' in *A Bloomsbury Canvas: reflections on the Bloomsbury group*, eds. Tony Bradshaw and James Beechey (London: Lund Humphries, 2001) p.39

<sup>84</sup> Duncan Grant, *Tulips*, 1911, oil on canvas, 49 x 52cm, Southampton City Art Gallery. The canvas is signed in a border of grey paint that is frequently cropped out when the picture is reproduced.

<sup>85</sup> Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *By the Fire*, oil on canvas, 53.2 x 35.5cm, private collection

<sup>86</sup> Signature detail of Duncan Grant, *Standing Male Nude (Tony Asserati)*, c.1935, oil on canvas, 97 x 45.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/84

<sup>87</sup> Many of Bell's early canvases were lost in 1940 when her and Grant's adjoining studios at 8 Fitzroy Street, London were destroyed during the Blitz. See Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.297.

<sup>88</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Iceland Poppies*, oil on canvas, 53 x 44cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/468. The painting was titled *Still Life* in the NEAC summer exhibition in 1909. In a list of Vanessa Bell's paintings made c.1945 by Grant it is called *Poppies and Poison*. It does not get its current title until 1961, after Bell's death, see Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury* (London: Tate, 1999) p.59.

Art Club in 1909, and enthused over by Sickert,<sup>89</sup> is unsigned, as is *Apples: 46 Gordon Square*, exhibited with the Friday Club.<sup>90</sup> *Conversation Piece*,<sup>91</sup> exhibited in Paris at the Galerie Barbazanges,<sup>92</sup> and *The Spanish Lady*,<sup>93</sup> exhibited at the Second Post Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Gallery in 1912 are also unsigned.

Grant's paintings including *Le Crime et Le Chatement* (verso *Lytton Strachey*),<sup>94</sup> exhibited at the Friday Club in June 1910 as *Interior; James Strachey*,<sup>95</sup> exhibited in 1909 at the New England Art Club; *The Queen of Sheba*,<sup>96</sup> and *Pamela*,<sup>97</sup> both exhibited at the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition, and *The Kitchen*,<sup>98</sup> exhibited at the Omega Workshops in 1917, are also all unsigned.

The unsigned can appear to leave the picture open, to leave it incomplete and unresolved. In a transcribed conversation with Grant from 1972, the interviewer David Brown takes the position of the signature as being the last mark on a painting that signs finality. He wondered whether Grant didn't sign and date his early paintings because he "was still uncertain as to whether he had finished them." Grant takes an opposing stance claiming that "He didn't sign and date many early paintings as he regarded this as being not important."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Cited in Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon Press, 1993) p.62

<sup>90</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Apples: 46 Gordon Square*, oil on canvas, 71 x 50.8cm, private collection, on loan to the Charleston Trust. Richard Shone cites this painting as being exhibited with the Friday Club as either *Still Life* in June 1910 or as *Apples* in 1911, see Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.61.

<sup>91</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Conversation Piece* also known as *Conversation at Asheham House*, 1912, oil on board, 67.5 x 80cm, University of Hull Art Collection

<sup>92</sup> An exhibition of British artists organised by Roger Fry and titled 'Quelques Indépendants Anglias,' at the Galerie Barbazanges, Paris in May 1912, see Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp.21-23

<sup>93</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Spanish Lady*, 1912, oil on millboard, 75.6 x 53cm, Leicester Arts and Museums Service

<sup>94</sup> Duncan Grant. *Le Crime et Le Chatement*, verso *Lytton Strachey*, c.1909, oil on canvas, 53.3 x 66cm, Tate, N05764

<sup>95</sup> Duncan Grant. *James Strachey*, 1910, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2cm, Tate, N05765

<sup>96</sup> Duncan Grant. *The Queen of Sheba*, 1912, oil on board, 120 x 120cm, Tate, N03169

<sup>97</sup> Duncan Grant, *Pamela*, 1911, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 75.1cm, Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund

<sup>98</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Kitchen*, 1914-17, oil on canvas, 106.7 x 135.9cm, Keynes Collection, Kings College, Cambridge

For Derrida this textual signature is also unnecessary, the painting contains other signatures, it functions with other signs on its surface, after all the signature is always present in the shape of the 'irrefutable' presence of the artist. The work is "haunted by the body" of the artist, s/he "signs while painting."<sup>100</sup> Fry also reads the painting, reads the artists' "handwriting" in the application of pigment. In a review of Bell's work he compares the pictorial signing of Bell and Grant, noting that "She has worked much with Duncan Grant, who is distinguished for the charm and elegance of his 'handwriting.' Her 'handwriting,' though it is always distinguished, is not elegant."<sup>101</sup> Four years later Fry considered there to be a dangerous mirroring and merging of "handwriting" styles claiming that "in their decorative paintings they are often almost indistinguishable."<sup>102</sup>

As Derrida states that there are no unsigned works because an unsigned work:

exists only to the extent that it is signed, to the extent that one says there is a work. There is a signature – we don't know which one, we don't know the name of the person who produced it – but the work itself is the attestation of a signature. But it is only the attestation of a signature on the basis of that countersignature, that is, that people come and say there we have something interesting.<sup>103</sup>

The work holds the signature, only realised by the interest of the viewer. The signature only exists once it is countersigned. Within a juridical scenario this involves the repetition of the same pictorial elements of the textual signature. For Derrida this

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<sup>99</sup> Conversation with Duncan Grant 21<sup>st</sup> August 1972 David Brown, TGA 7241.2, p.2. Also cited in Annette King, 'Duncan Grant (1885-1978) Bathing 1911', in *Paint and Purpose*, eds. Stephen Hackney, Rica Jones and Joyce Townsend, (London: Tate Gallery, 1999) p.113

<sup>100</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, 'The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jaques Derrida,' in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp.15-17

<sup>101</sup> Roger Fry, 'Independent Gallery, Vanessa Bell and Othon Friesz,' *The New Statesman*, 2 June 1922, reprinted in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.348.

<sup>102</sup> Roger Fry to Robert Bridges, 20 January 1926, *Letters of Roger Fry, Volume Two*, 1972, p.590. Earlier in the relationship of this trio Bell seems to be happy to attempt to copy Grant's handwriting. In 1910 she made a portrait of Fry using, what she called "Duncan's leopard manner," the short, separated strokes of paint that were used to build up the picture surface. Bell wrote to her husband that she had "persuaded him [Fry] to try the leopard technique too and he isn't at all happy in it but is spotting away industriously in the hopes of getting at something in the end." Vanessa Bell to Clive Bell, January 1912, quoted in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.85. Bell's portrait of Fry is in the National Portrait Gallery, Vanessa Bell, *Roger Fry*, 1912, oil on panel, 29.3 x 23.6cm, NPG 6684. For more on Grant's use of the technique see chapter three, *Loose Covers: Disguise Craze*.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, 'The Spatial Arts,' 1994, p.18



means that “the countersignature precedes the signature. The signature does not exist before the countersignature.”<sup>104</sup>

Bell found it difficult to hide the signature, the “handwriting” in her brush strokes and to take on another’s when she made a copy of Maurice de Vlaminck 1909 painting *Poissy-le-Pont* prior to its sale.<sup>105</sup> Copying had played an important part in both Bell and Grant’s education as artists, particularly works from the Italian Renaissance.<sup>106</sup> She was encouraged to copy by Roger Fry who sent her photographs of paintings by old masters.<sup>107</sup> But the modernist, Post-Impressionist calligraphy offered more of a challenge for Bell, who wrote to Grant, explaining that “I am trying to copy the Vlaminck but I find moderns are terribly difficult to copy – in fact I doubt if one can.”<sup>108</sup> The painting was deemed worthy of replacing the vacated space left in the Garden Room at Charleston by the sale of the referent (*fig. 1.09*).<sup>109</sup> Bell signed the painting in the bottom, right-hand corner (*fig. 1.10*), starting confidently with a “calculated”<sup>110</sup> V for Vanessa mirroring the start of Vlaminck’s signature (*fig. 1.11*). But the proceeding letters are less authoritative, they break down, lose ownership, wrestling between “Bell” and the continuation of “Vlaminck.” Though Bell has added her name to the work it remains unsigned, the painted marks falling short of its juridic role.

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<sup>104</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts,’ 1994, p.18

<sup>105</sup> Bought by Clive and Vanessa Bell in Paris from Kahnweiler’s, described in a letter from Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 25 March 1914, see *The Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, Marler, 1998, pp.160-61. Purported to have been exhibited at *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition) at the Grafton Gallery, London, 5 November 1910-1911, see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.90

<sup>106</sup> See Vanessa Bell’s copies of Raphael’s *Colonna Madonna*, (original in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) c.1923, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/130 and *St. Catherine*, (original in The National Gallery, London) c.1922, oil on canvas, 81 x 65cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/191. Also Grant’s copy of Piero della Francesca’s portrait of *Frederico da Montefeltro*, (original in The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy) c.1904, oil on canvas, 40.6 x 31.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/226, and his copy of Masaccio’s *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (The Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence) 1905, oil on panel, 23cm x 14cm, verso: inscribed and dated Florence (in error) c.1902, private collection (for an analysis of this painting see chapter three, *Loose Covers: Revealed*)

<sup>107</sup> Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p.147

<sup>108</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 14 October, ‘195?’ (indecipherable, year added later), TGA/DGP

<sup>109</sup> Vanessa Bell, copy of Vlaminck’s *Poissy-le-Pont*, 1952-56, oil on canvas, 59 x 79.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/62. The painting is dated in the Charleston inventory as c.1952 but is dated c.1956 by Richard Shone in the ‘Official Guide to the House and garden,’ in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.65

<sup>110</sup> Shone, *Charleston: Past and Present*, 1987, p.65

Fry contributes to a culture of the textually unsigned, of namelessness that relies on the viewer to countersign the work, to attest the signature. For the Grafton Group exhibition he displayed his own work alongside Grant, Bell, Frederick Etchells and Wyndham Lewis anonymously so that the viewer could get “a fresh impression of them without the slight and almost unconscious predilection which a name generally arouses.”<sup>111</sup> Fry severs the link between the textual signature and the pictorial signature.<sup>112</sup> For the *Times* critic of the Grafton Group exhibition, Post-Impressionist painters “will not make use of any of the devices by which a work of commerce or sentiment usually tries to persuade us that it is a work of art.”<sup>113</sup> The signature of the painting, the ‘handwriting’ of the artist is being consciously obtuse. In this dialogue between image and viewer, one that involves the stating of an argument, a textual persuasion, the artist is using an indecipherable hand, foreign ‘handwriting.’

Fry encouraged this privileging of anonymity.<sup>114</sup> At the *Omega Workshops*, designs by artists including Bell and Grant were marked by the unifying symbol of the eponymous Greek letter.<sup>115</sup> Grant’s first collaboration with Fry was to contribute two murals for the dining room of the London Borough Polytechnic in 1911.<sup>116</sup> The seven panels by Grant, Fry, Frederick Etchells, Bernard Adeney, Macdonald Gill and Albert Rutherston were thought to have been unsigned on Fry’s request, this non-act a sign of complete collaboration. Fry claimed that the artists “refused to sign the pictures, saying ‘No, these we did together; there be no individual signatures’.”<sup>117</sup> But on a visit to the Tate Gallery in the 1970s, Grant pointed out his ‘barely discernible’ signature executed

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<sup>111</sup> Roger Fry, quoted in ‘The Grafton Group. A Post-Impressionist Exhibition,’ *The Times*, 20 March 1913, p.4

<sup>112</sup> Fry does the opposite with the first Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910 where the intention is to publicise the names of the artists as much as their work. The exhibition title was *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, Fry using Manet as an established signature for the audience to countersign.

<sup>113</sup> ‘The Grafton Group. A Post-Impressionist Exhibition,’ *The Times*, 20 March 1913, p.4

<sup>114</sup> See Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.123-24

<sup>115</sup> See Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1984, p.39. Winifred Gill, who worked at the Omega Workshops, believed that the need for anonymity frustrated other participants and was “an intolerable burden to these young up and coming artists,” see Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993 p.109.

<sup>116</sup> For details on this project see: Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.110-112 and Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1984, pp.12-14.

<sup>117</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 April 1913, quoted in *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry’s Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green (Merrell Holberton Publishers: London, 1999) p.79

in a pointillist manner in his panel *Bathing* (fig.1.12).<sup>118</sup> In a series of loose dots and dabs of grey paint are ‘DUNCAN’ on the top line, and ‘GRANT’ underneath (fig.1.13).<sup>119</sup> According to the conservator Annette King, Grant had managed to sign the work “without disrupting the idea of anonymity.”<sup>120</sup> The signature becomes a *trompe l’oeil* of the artists pictorial signature which successfully hides the artist’s textual signature within the very structure of the paint surface. Despite this first hand account from the artist the Tate describes the picture as “Not inscribed.”<sup>121</sup> The artist’s attempts to disrupt the anonymity have floundered, the recognisable, duplicatory qualities that define a signature are lacking. The fractured signature is too unique, it cannot be copied, repeated, and without that possibility of comparison it negates its signature status. As Derrida states: ‘This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called ‘normal.’ What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?’<sup>122</sup>

In 1921 namelessness was named, it became the agent of the event. *A Nameless Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Contemporary British Artists* brought together works from ‘modernists’, ‘academics’ and ‘intermediates’, all displayed for the first few weeks of the exhibition without the names of the artists.<sup>123</sup> Fry wrote to Bell how co-curator Henry Tonks had “got you and D[uncan] exactly inverted and gave a little lecture on what a pity that women always imitate men.”<sup>124</sup> Tonks confuses Grant for Bell in what Graham Bell later described as Bell’s “feminine counterpart” of

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<sup>118</sup> Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 306.1cm. Tate N04567

<sup>119</sup> Signature detail, Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911

<sup>120</sup> Annette King, ‘Duncan Grant (1885-1978) *Bathing* 1911,’ 1999, p.113

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=1&workid=5577&searchid=21425&roomid=false&tabview=text&texttype=8>. Accessed 13 May 2011. Judith Collins claims that Rutherford also signed his work for the project, see Judith Collins, ‘Roger Fry’s Social Vision of Art,’ in *Art Made Modern*, 1999, p.79. Richard Shone states that the painting is “signed indistinctly b.r.,” see Shone, *Art of Bloomsbury*, p.147.

<sup>122</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature, Event, Context,’ 1993, p.12

<sup>123</sup> For a description of the *Nameless* exhibition and an account of critical reactions to it see Samuel Elmer, ‘The ‘Nameless Exhibition’, London, 1921,’ *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. CLIII, no.1302, September 2011 pp.583-590

<sup>124</sup> Roger Fry to Vanessa Bell, 12 May 1921, *Letters of Roger Fry, Volume Two*, 1972, p.507. Henry Tonks was Slade Professor of Fine Art, working at the art school from 1893 -1930. Bell and Grant encountered him during their brief attendance at the Slade, Bell in the autumn 1904 and Grant in the summer term of 1908.

Grant's colour.<sup>125</sup> Tonks mis-reads the "handwriting," confusing Grant's pictorial signature for Bell's. Fry later explained to Bell "It's in the small still lifes that you and he [Grant] do get rather interchangeable."<sup>126</sup>

For the reviewer of the *Manchester Guardian* the signature of the artists was plain to see, plain to read, he commented, "Some of the pictures bear so plainly the autograph of their creator."<sup>127</sup> Later the critic lists the names of artists he believed painted the pictures. No.16 entitled *The Visit* (fig.1.14),<sup>128</sup> revealed later as being by Bell, is attributed to a group of artists centred round Fry, their names split and collaged to make, "Vanessa Fry or Roger Grant or Duncan Bell or Clive Wolfe?"<sup>129</sup> The critic sees their pictorial signatures as interchangeable; not only their names but also the portions of their names are loose and shifting.

### Signing:

Though Grant resisted signing work in the early part of his career many of these early works were signed in the 1960s.<sup>130</sup> A process of marking and authenticating began, reflecting renewed interest in, and a renewed market for, his work and that of his peers. When the Tate exhibited a retrospective of Grant's work in 1959 the review in *The Times* was headlined: 'Artist Who Belongs to a Period Now in Disfavour,' a statement justified by the "sparse attendance" at the private view.<sup>131</sup> Five years later the same newspaper would show "increase[d] respect for the work of an artist who in recent

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<sup>125</sup> Graham Bell, 'Art in the "Island Fortress",' *The Studio*, vol.cxx, no.571, October 1940, p.108

<sup>126</sup> Roger Fry to Vanessa Bell, May 1921, *Letters of Roger Fry, Volume Two*, 1972, p.510

<sup>127</sup> 'The Nameless Pictures,' *The Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1921, p.6

<sup>128</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Visit*, c.1921, whereabouts unknown. Published in the *Illustrated London News*, 21 May 1921, p.683

<sup>129</sup> 'Naming the Nameless,' *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1921, p.8. The original names that the critic collaged are: Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant and a possible combination of Clive Bell and Edward Wolfe.

<sup>130</sup> Grant continued "not signing" into the 1920s. Paintings from his first solo exhibition in May 1920 at the Carfax Gallery are unsigned. See *Venus and Adonis*, c.1919, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 94cm, Tate, accession no.T01514; *Room with a View*, 1919, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 57cm, Richard Green Fine Paintings at time of submission, and *Juggler and Tightrope Walker*, c.1918-19, oil on canvas, 103.5 x 72.4cm, private collection.

<sup>131</sup> 'Artist Who Belongs to a Period Now in Disfavour,' *The Times*, Tuesday, 12 May 1959, p.13. The Tate retrospective, 12 May – 20 June 1959, included eighty four oil paintings, the earliest from 1902 (*Cock on Haystack*, oil on canvas, 40.7 x 30.5cm, lent by the artist), the most recent from 1958 (*Amaryllis*, oil on canvas, 64.7 x 49.5cm, lent by the artist), as well as forty drawings and lithographs and 13 exhibits under the section *Furniture, Fabric Designs and Ceramics*.

years seems to have been somewhat undervalued.”<sup>132</sup> The more favourable review was for the 1964 exhibition *Duncan Grant and his World* at the Wildenstein Gallery at which sixty-one of Grant’s paintings were presented, along with 13 by ‘artists other than Duncan Grant.’<sup>133</sup> Of these fifty-six came from Charleston where the studios and storage spaces had been ‘sorted through’ by Grant and Paul Roche, resulting in 200 paintings being sent to the gallery for Denys Sutton to make the final selection.<sup>134</sup> The exhibition can be seen as a turning point in Grant’s (and Bell’s) reputations after several years as unfashionable historical curiosities.<sup>135</sup>

Unlike the Tate retrospective of 1959, the Wildstein exhibition was a selling exhibition, and Grant spent “a lot of time altering, varnishing, signing and occasionally dating paintings.”<sup>136</sup> With the tactical intervention of the signature Grant prepared the work for the art market, as Tom Conley writes “with a signature the work immediately acquires symbolic stature, is subject to archival or historical control, develops abstract worth, and is commodifiable. A signature puts a painting into circulation.”<sup>137</sup> As Baudrillard stated: “all the subtle combinations of supply and demand play upon the signature.”<sup>138</sup>

Examples of this retrospective signing include Grant’s portrait of *Virginia Woolf*, exhibited in 1959 and 1964, with the inscription of “D. Grant 1911” added in the

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<sup>132</sup> ‘The World of Duncan Grant,’ *The Times*, Friday, 6 November 1964, p.15

<sup>133</sup> See: *Duncan Grant and his World: an exhibition, November 1964*, (London: Wildenstein and Co. Ltd., 1964). The additional thirteen paintings not by Grant were: 1. Paul Cézanne, *Pommes*, c.1878; 2. Walter Sickert, *La Loge*, c. 1895; 3. Roger Fry, *Flooded Valley*, 1911; 4. Henri Matisse, *The Port*; 5. Henri Matisse, *Jeune Fille à la robe blanche*, 1941; 6. Simon Bussy, *Portrait of Dorothy Strachey*, 1902; 7. Maurice Vlaminck, *Still Life with bottles*, 1914; 8. Sir Matthew Smith, *The Bright Scarf*, c. 1935; 9. Vanessa Bell, *Still Life: Wild Flowers*, c.1915; 10. André Derain, *Chatou*, c. 1904-5; 11. Jean Marchand, *Vue de Ville*, 1912; 12. André Dunoyer De Segonzac, *Still Life*; 13. Edward Le Bas, *Lady with a parasol*, 1964.

<sup>134</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.447

<sup>135</sup> The early 1960s saw the beginning of a resurgence of interest in the visual culture of Britain from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century including that of Bloomsbury and the work and careers of Grant and Bell. For the groups fluctuating reputations see Regina Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie* (London: Virago, 1998), for the Wildenstein exhibition see pp.51-53.

<sup>136</sup> Grant received almost £5,000 from the sale of works, see Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.448.

<sup>137</sup> Tom Conley, *Film Hieroglyphs: Ruptures in Classical Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) p.xxvii. Conley examines the ‘loosening’ of text in film ‘through a pictorial metaphor taken from the canon of classical painting.’

<sup>138</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.105

bottom left-hand corner.<sup>139</sup> His portrait of *Lady Ottoline Morrell*, despite being exhibited previously in Zürich in 1918, was not signed or exhibited again until 1964 when it was inscribed “D Grant-/13” in top right-hand corner and subsequently sold.<sup>140</sup> The artist signing her or his object transfers the attention from the painting, from the pictorial signature to the textural signature, in the art market the value is re-focused on the name rather than the object itself. For Baudrillard “Value is transferred from an eminent, objective beauty to the singularity of the artist in his gesture.”<sup>141</sup> The signature thrusts the object into the market, “It is no longer simply read, but perceived in its differential value.”<sup>142</sup> The signature is a conduit that connects the viewer/purchaser with the artist, the name standing in for the body and acting as a ‘guarantee’. Baudrillard considers the signature as a “guarantee of vintage” or ‘appellation contrôlée’.<sup>143</sup> The inscribing of the repeated, repeatable and identifiable sign marks the work out, it appears ” to increase its singularity.”<sup>144</sup>

### Slipping:

Grant repeatedly subverts the reliability of the signature by throwing into doubt the time of execution and the stylistic devices he uses to make his mark. This is demonstrated in another painting by Grant exhibited at the *Wildenstein* exhibition, *Vanessa Bell Painting* (fig.1.15), bought for a public collection, The National Gallery of Scotland.<sup>145</sup> Here is a painting of layers. It is a portrait of an artist at work, painted by Grant while he and Bell were staying at West Wittering in West Sussex in 1915.<sup>146</sup> Paintings of people engaged in painting highlight the constructed nature of the work. But it is a portrait with a difference, it highlights the construction of portraiture. Grant views his subject from behind, from her right hand side. She is sitting in a chair and the viewer can see her right arm reaching out across the picture in the act of applying paint

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<sup>139</sup> Duncan Grant, *Virginia Woolf*, 1911, oil on board, 56.5 x 41cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

<sup>140</sup> Duncan Grant, *Lady Ottoline Morrell*, 1913, oil on panel, 83.2 x 64.1cm, private collection. First shown at *Englische Moderne Malerei*, Kunsthaus Zürich, 1918, no.39, then with the artist until Wildensteins 1964, see Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, pp.96-99

<sup>141</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.104

<sup>142</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.104

<sup>143</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.105

<sup>144</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, pp.102-105

<sup>145</sup> Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76cm x 56cm, National Gallery of Scotland, GMA 900 NGS. Purchased from the exhibition *Duncan Grant and his World*, Wildenstein, November-December 1964, for £270. Passed by Trustees 26 January 1965.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Richard Shone to Patrick Elliott, 12 April 1991, National Gallery of Scotland Archives

to one of her own canvases. Her head is tilted down, leaning forward in concentration on her work. Most of the right hand side of Grant's work is taken up by Bell's painting, a still life of kitchen utensils. Bell's picture is now lost but this copy remains.

The painting was in Grant's possession from 1915 until its exhibition and sale in 1964, one of the many canvases that filled the studios and store-rooms of Charleston.<sup>147</sup> Grant didn't sign the work until it was being prepared for exhibition but when he did add this final mark of authorship, this 'appellation contrôlée', he did so within the area of Bell's picture, in its bottom right-hand corner, in a band of white that edges her work (*fig. 1.16*).<sup>148</sup> Grant's now familiar signature inhabits simultaneously both his and Bell's paintings. The signature is double layered, two levels removed from reality, embedded further into the picture, painted on the surface but positioned so that it appears as a copied motif, part of Grant's recording of Bell's work, it becomes an allographic signature.

Moving the signature from the expected place, from its position outside of the pictorial composition, forces the viewer to read it as text rather than as image. As Tom Conley states "At the moment the writing is apprehended along the margins, a mode of intellection apparently changes; we read what we have been seeing. In retracing the signature, all of a sudden, we decipher the work in a different register."<sup>149</sup> Grant's signature has a habit of slipping, of appearing in unexpected places. Rather than being "hidden away" his signature becomes one of a series of events within the picture plane. It appears as graffiti, painted on the edge of a tabletop in *Tulips in a Decorated Vase* (*fig. 1.17*).<sup>150</sup> In *Still Life – Leaves in an Omega Jar* (*fig. 1.18*), a painting from the early 1960s set in the studio at Charleston, Grant's signature appears in the conventional bottom right corner of the painting, but becomes part of the composition by being inscribed across the cover of a book.<sup>151</sup> The title of this painting is itself a slippage.

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<sup>147</sup> Letter from Duncan Grant to Douglas Hall, 4 February 1965, National Gallery of Scotland Archives

<sup>148</sup> Detail of Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915, see note 149.

<sup>149</sup> Tom Conley, *Film Hieroglyphs: Ruptures in Classical Cinema*, 2006, p.xxvii

<sup>150</sup> Duncan Grant, *Tulips in a Decorated Vase*, c.1960, oil on card, 76 x 63.5cm, Bridgeman Art Library

<sup>151</sup> Duncan Grant, *Still Life – Leaves in an Omega Jar*, c.1962-65, oil on canvas, 63.5cm x 50cm, sold at Sotheby's, London, 7 November 1990, lot no.82.

The *Omega Jar* in the title is actually a Jug from North Africa still in the collection at Charleston (*fig. 1.19*).<sup>152</sup>

In Grant's 1950 design for decorative tiles for a university hostel, a naked young man sits by a fountain with a large, open book in his lap. Grant's signature is inscribed on the open page.<sup>153</sup> In his poster design for the General Post Office of a telephonist, Grant has signed his name across one of the operator's pads (*fig. 1.20*),<sup>154</sup> and in an illustration for an unidentified project, Grant's initials appear on the stern of a boat in a river scene (*fig. 1.21*).<sup>155</sup>

In 1943 Bell and Grant were commissioned to design and paint a mural telling the story of Cinderella for a school dining room.<sup>156</sup> These were installed at the beginning of 1944. Bell signed her depiction of Cinderella looking despondent in the kitchen in the bottom left-hand corner of the panel (*fig. 1.22*).<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile Grant adds his signature to a large text panel held by the town crier that announces the marriage of Cinderella and Prince Charming, once again changing his name from signature into subject (*fig. 1.23*).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Jug, c.1900, North Africa, 17.6 x 11.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/109

<sup>153</sup> Designs for the Garden Hostel Annexe, King's College, Cambridge, 1950, see chapter three, *Loose Covers: Revealed* for more details about this scheme.

<sup>154</sup> Duncan Grant, *20,011 Telephonists*, 1939, 50.8 x 63.5cm, reproduced in *The Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Design*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1999). Grant was commissioned to design four posters for the General Post Office as part of the eighth set of posters for schools. Each occupation is prefixed by the number of people employed in that job: *20,011 Telephonists*; *79,242 Postmen*; *7681 Telegraph Messengers* and *41,271 Engineering Workmen*. See *The British Postal Museum and Archive*: [catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk](http://catalogue.postalheritage.org.uk), accessed 23 April 2011. Grant's signature in *Postmen* and *Telegraph Messengers* are in the bottom left-hand and bottom right-hand corner respectively, while in *Engineering Workmen* it is inscribed at the base of the equipment being examined by the engineer.

<sup>155</sup> Duncan Grant, set of printed proofs of boat scene, 22.5 x 28cm, TCT/TAGG, box.40. Little is known about this project. A print of the same dimensions, technique and style also exists of skaters on the pond at Charleston (see chapter two, *Pond Life: Gazebo and snow*) which suggests that they were intended to illustrate the seasons. A colour drawing of the boating scene, given the title *Boating on the Thames*, came up for auction in 2010, initialled in the lower, right section, see Duncan Grant, *Boating on the Thames*, c.1940s/early 1950s, pencil, blue pen, watercolour and bodycolour, 22.2 x 34.3 cm, sold at Christie's, London, 12 October 2010, sale no.5990, lot no.405.

<sup>156</sup> In 1943 Bell and Grant were commissioned by C.E.M.A. (the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) and the British Institute of Adult Education to paint a mural for the children's dining room of the Devonshire Hill School, Tottenham, North London. The murals were later destroyed. The project is briefly mentioned in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.390-91, and Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.303.

<sup>157</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Cinderella*, 1944, oil on board, size unknown, destroyed.

<sup>158</sup> Duncan Grant, *Cinderella*, 1944, oil on board, size unknown, destroyed.



But Grant does not need to reposition the signature away from the expected position to turn it into a site of transgression. In his first painting for the War Artist's Advisory Commission in 1940 the signature, positioned in the bottom right hand corner, is applied over the legs of the two sailors training to use a large gun (*fig.1.24 & 1.25*).<sup>159</sup> The signature starts in black paint, the first initial 'D' and the start of 'Grant' standing out against the grey of the uniform of the sailors. But as the surname progresses its colour becomes grey itself, the strokes of paint merging with the layers of paint in the pictorial surface. Grant's name becomes camouflaged, echoes of Grant's camouflaged signature in his 1911 painting *Bathing*. In the full size study for the painting in the Imperial War Museum Grant presents the space without people. He has signed the painting at the bottom right hand corner, a loose terracotta signature and date against the pinkness of the floor (*fig.1.26*).<sup>160</sup> In an oil sketch at Charleston the signature is again against the floor on the bottom line of the painting, but rather than being over the sailors legs it is positioned further to the left, contrasting against the lighter colour ground (*fig.1.27*).<sup>161</sup>

For Derrida inscribing the name "not in the place where one normally signs" is "playing with the outside." But this playing doesn't homogenise the signature, "one still has the impression that the body is foreign, that it is an element of discursivity or textuality within the work." It remains "heterogeneous."<sup>162</sup> But Marin believes that it lessens the disturbance of the text, making it "possible to safeguard the visual homogeneity of the painting, for the written element that announces the name is a part of it only as a result of the represented object that serves as its basis, allowing it to be seen and read."<sup>163</sup> Grant's signature in *Vanessa Bell Painting* is transgressive, it can be read as being in his painting, not of the painting. But positioning it in the space authorised for signing in Bell's painting disrupts its homogeneity through its textual properties rather than its pictorial elements. The signature is an expected pictorial element in a pictorial schema of a painting but the text reads the name of a different

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<sup>159</sup> Duncan Grant, *Gun Drill*, 1941, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 104cm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Gift of the New Zealand Government, 1949, accession no.1949-0008-2

<sup>160</sup> Duncan Grant, Study for *The Gunnery Lesson*, 1940, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 75.6cm, Imperial War Museum, accession no.Art.IWM ART 15547

<sup>161</sup> Duncan Grant, Study for *Gun Drill/The Gunnery Lesson*, c.1940, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 76.4cm, TCT/TAGG

<sup>162</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, 'The Spatial Arts,' 1994, p.17

<sup>163</sup> Louis Marin 'Topics and Figures of Enunciation,' 1995, p.206

artist than that named as *Painting* in the picture, that of Vanessa Bell. It disrupts rather than “safeguards” the “visual homogeneity of the painting.”

The wholesale signing of work in the 1960s and 70s by Grant led to transgressions in the positioning of the signature, particularly in drawings of still-lives.<sup>164</sup> Numerous pencil drawings were initialled by Grant, the repeating of ‘DG’ appearing on sketches from all periods of his career. Some suggest that Grant wasn’t sure what he was signing. A pencil study of an open cupboard with shelves filled with crockery has been signed upside down (*fig.1.28*).<sup>165</sup> When the pictorial image is the correct way round the inverted initials sit in the top left-hand corner. When the authority of the signature is obeyed the pictorial image is inverted. Another drawing, stylistically from the mid 1920s, has been initialled at a ninety degree angle on its left-hand edge, again challenging the authority of the picture’s orientation (*fig.1.29*).<sup>166</sup>

However even when the artist signs in the expected place, it is still, for Marin a “heterogeneous element[s], and thus their inscription inevitably introduces a certain confusion.”<sup>167</sup> The signature’s textual qualities, no matter where it is located, can disrupt the space of an image, “the signature is foreign to the work.”<sup>168</sup> If the presence of the signature claims completion then Grant’s interloping on-to Bell’s picture plane in *Vanessa Bell Painting* completes Bell’s actions but leaves Grant’s painting eternally incomplete. Though it could be argued that this is not “a signature of appropriation,”<sup>169</sup> that Grant is not claiming authorship of Bell’s work because it is not her work, it is Grant’s. The brush-strokes, the pictorial “handwriting” are all Grant’s.

Beneath Grant’s signature is a date, but the digits have slipped off Bell’s canvas and occupy a space outside of her picture plane, it enters into an uncertain and precarious

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<sup>164</sup> Works in oils seem to have maintained more resonance for Grant. Richard Morphet recalls asking the artist which way round a seemingly abstract painting by the artist should go only to have it pointed out that subject was a still life of a vase of flowers on the corner of a mantelpiece. Talk by Richard Morphet for the Charleston Trust, May 2008, TCTA. Painting exhibited as Duncan Grant, *Paper Flowers*, c.1917, 72.8 x 51.2cm, private collection, in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, Tate, 1999, p.131. The painting is signed in the bottom right-hand corner.

<sup>165</sup> Duncan Grant, *Still Life*, date unknown, pencil on paper, 22.3cm x 28.3cm, TCT/TAGG, box.7.

<sup>166</sup> Duncan Grant, *Study for Still Life Composition*, date unknown, pencil on paper, 17.5cm x 22.5cm, TCT/TAGG, box.5.

<sup>167</sup> Louis Marin ‘Topics and Figures of Enunciation,’ 1995, p.206

<sup>168</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts,’ p.17

position. The date is painted on the chair that Bell's painting is supported by. Unlike the signature that maintains the same elevation as its support, the date hovers vertically on the horizontal plane of the chair seat. As well as slipping off Bell's canvas it has also slipped in time. It reads *1913* but the website for the National Galleries of Scotland states that the date is incorrect and that it should be 1915.<sup>170</sup> The authority of the date is left exposed, its archival qualities challenged, it can no longer be trusted. This uncertainty is reflected on-to the signature, bringing its authenticity into doubt, even the authenticity of the scene depicted. The picture that Bell is depicted as painting, though named as *The Tin Pan*,<sup>171</sup> no longer exists. If the only evidence of its existence is its presence in a painting with an inaccurate date then perhaps the objects and activities in the picture frame are not to be trusted either. This throws into question the authenticity of the signature, possibly the authenticity of the scene depicted, whether Bell painted the picture depicted in the painting.

The now sanctioned date of 1915 comes from Richard Shone who uses biographical detail of the two artists assisted by visual evidence from the painting.<sup>172</sup> Alternative and conflicting textual proof exists in the gallery archive, a letter from Grant written in 1965 in reply to one by Douglas Hall from the National Gallery of Scotland. In it Grant writes "I remember painting it I think in the summer of 1914"<sup>173</sup> Another painting by Grant, *Still Life, Lime Juice*, (fig.1.30)<sup>174</sup> is from the same period. Included in the still life, hanging from the back wall, is a version of a work by Bell, one that has survived, *By the Estuary*, a location identified as being on the coast near Chichester in West Sussex (fig.1.31).<sup>175</sup> Though Grant has signed and dated his painting in the bottom left-hand corner of his canvas, like the signature and date on *Vanessa Bell Painting* it also has slipped, dated by Grant as being 1911, four years before Bell's painting of 1915.

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<sup>169</sup> See Joseph Grigley, *Textuality: Art, Theory and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995) p.163

<sup>170</sup> [http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/online\\_az/4:322/result/0/579?initial=G&artistId=3465&artistName=Duncan%20Grant&submit=1](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/collection/online_az/4:322/result/0/579?initial=G&artistId=3465&artistName=Duncan%20Grant&submit=1) accessed 9 October 2009.

<sup>171</sup> Letter from Richard Shone to Patrick Elliott, 12 April 1991, National Gallery of Scotland Archives.

<sup>172</sup> Letter from Richard Shone to Patrick Elliott, 12 April 1991, National Gallery of Scotland Archives: "This work was painted in early summer 1915... It shows Bell at work on a still life *The Tin Pan* (whereabouts unknown) in the boat-house-studio belonging to Professor Henry Tonks of the Slade School, moored at the Chichester Estuary at West Wittering, Sussex."

<sup>173</sup> Duncan Grant to Douglas Hall, 4 February 1965, National Gallery of Scotland Archives

<sup>174</sup> Duncan Grant, *Still Life, Lime Juice*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76 x 56cm, Government Art Collection, GAC number 14378 [www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=23121](http://www.gac.culture.gov.uk/work.aspx?obj=23121)

Speaking in the late 1960s, Quentin Bell recalled how, in Grant's recollection of the events in his career "The dates get swivelled around."<sup>176</sup> In Spalding's description of Grant's preparations for the Wildstein exhibition she states that the paintings were "not always accurately" dated.<sup>177</sup> One of the paintings sold in 1964, listed as *No.31*, *Mantilla*, had been painted in June 1912. Grant had shared the model dressed in a Spanish costume, wearing a mantilla and holding a fan, with Bell, both painting her at the same time.<sup>178</sup> Bell's version was bought by the Contemporary Art Society and displayed in the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Gallery from October – December 1912.<sup>179</sup> Over fifty years after its execution Grant signed and dated his version in the top right hand corner *d.grant/14*. The inaccurate date of 1914 is also the year of production listed in the Wildstein catalogue. Subsequent entries for the painting state it as being from 1912, as in the catalogue for the exhibition *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905-1970s*.<sup>180</sup>

Another example of a slipped date can be seen in an ink drawing by Grant of Bell's head seen in profile (*fig.1.32*).<sup>181</sup> Grant had subsequently signed and dated the work *D.Grant/20* in the lower centre of the drawing, a date disputed by Richard Shone who proposes that it "almost certainly belongs to circa 1916-17."<sup>182</sup> Shone also disputes Grant's dating of *The Tub*, as being from 1912, making an argument for it being

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<sup>175</sup> Vanessa Bell, *By the Estuary*, 1915, oil on canvas, 47 x 63.5cm, Private Collection, exhibited in *The Art of Bloomsbury*, Tate, 1999, no. 85, p.160

<sup>176</sup> Quentin Bell in the documentary *Duncan Grant at Charleston*, director Christopher Mason, 1969, TCTA.

<sup>177</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.448

<sup>178</sup> Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.108

<sup>179</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Spanish Lady*, 1912, oil on millboard, 75.6 x 53cm, Leicester Arts and Museums Service. Bell describes the purchase to Clive Bell in a letter dated 15 August, see Regina Marler, *The Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, pp122-23. See chapter 3, *Loose Covers: Disguise Craze* for Grant and Bell's Spanish themed paintings.

<sup>180</sup> "The Spanish Model (*Mantilla*), 1912, oil on panel, 54 x 48cm, private collection. Signed and dated (in error) 1914" in Lindy Guinness, *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905-1970s*, Ava Gallery, Bangor, 2005, No.4.

<sup>181</sup> Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell in profile*, ink on paper, 22.2 x 17.8cm, private collection

<sup>182</sup> Richard Shone, lot notes, Christie's, South Kensington, London, 17 December 2008, Sale 5391, 20th century British art including works from the collection of Bannon & Barnabas McHenry, sale.5391, lot no.2. Previously exhibited in *Duncan Grant, Works on Paper*, 1981, no. 15. London, Anthony d'Offay where it is dated as '1920' but annotated "Possibly c.1916." Also simultaneously published in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.123, no.944 December 1981, fig.115, p.710, dated as "1920."

painted in 1913,<sup>183</sup> and the dating of *The Kitchen* as 1902, reasoning that it is more likely to have been painted c.1904-6.<sup>184</sup> Grant had signed and dated the reverse of the image, which, while not disturbing the unity of the picture plane, still compromises Conley's concept of the "archival or historical control" of the signature.<sup>185</sup>

### **Gifting the Signature:**

A group of paintings place the viewer as voyeur to Bell and Grant's relationship. They situate the signature of the creator alongside the name of the recipient layered with the formalities of gifting, the 'to' and the 'from'. In the much quoted words of Marcel Mauss gifts "are never completely separated from the men who exchange them; the communion and alliance they establish are well-nigh indissoluble."<sup>186</sup> These gifted paintings are invariably images of places and people that are resonant with meaning, singled out as having qualities other than their formal composition. Two paintings that display their gifting status hung in Bell's bedroom at Charleston. They are listed in the inventory of paintings hanging in the house made in the 1950s.<sup>187</sup>

*Angelica in Fancy Dress* is a drawing in coloured pastels of Bell and Grant's daughter (fig.1.33).<sup>188</sup> The *Fancy Dress* that the title refers to is a costume that she wore for a performance of Virginia Woolf's comic play *Freshwater*, performed for a private audience in Bell's studio at 8 Fitzroy Street on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1935.<sup>189</sup> Angelica took the

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<sup>183</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Tub*, c.1913, watercolour and wax on paper laid on canvas, 76.2 x 55.9cm, Tate, T00723, see Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.149-50.

<sup>184</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Kitchen*, c.1904-6, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.6cm, Tate, accession no.T00294. See Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1999, p.61. The Tate website maintains the date of production as being 1902 ([www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/grant-the-kitchen-t00294](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/grant-the-kitchen-t00294). Accessed 13 February 2012).

<sup>185</sup> Tom Conley, *Film Hieroglyphs*, 2006, p.xxvii

<sup>186</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (London: Routledge, 1990) p.31

<sup>187</sup> A facsimile copy of the inventory is in the archives of The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued. There are nine pictures listed as being in Bell's bedroom, eight by Grant all marked as owned by Bell, plus *Flowers* by Matthew Smith owned by Grant: "Angelica in fancy dress, pastel. Portrait of Quentin. Portrait of Julian. Portrait of Virginia (about 1909-11). Self-portrait in turban. Lessons out of doors (Mabel Selwood, J & Q). Flowers, Matthew Smith. Snow Charleston 1950. Portrait of Julian."

<sup>188</sup> Duncan Grant, *Angelica in Fancy Dress*, 1935, pastel, 87cm x 54cm, private collection, on loan to the Charleston Trust.

<sup>189</sup> *Freshwater*, a Comedy in Three Acts, deals with the home life of Woolf's and Bell's great-aunt Margaret Julia Cameron and her friends on the Isle of Wight. See: Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf 1919-1941* (St Albans: Paladin, 1976) p.189.

part of Ellen Terry, the young wife of the artist G.F. Watts (played by Grant).<sup>190</sup> She wears a costume made by Bell for a scene at the end of the play where Angelica's character, presumed drowned, runs onto the stage.<sup>191</sup>

In the bottom right-hand corner of the picture is the inscription 'To VB from DG 1935' (*fig. 1.34*).<sup>192</sup> Grant's signature in the form of his initials, enters into an uncertain relationship with the picture. Its presence no longer commits to authorship and production but to ownership and exchange. The initials 'DG' on their own, in isolation would indicate the artists mark on the piece, his final act of authorship. The numerical sequence '1935' places it at a specific time. The addition of 'To VB from' pushes the picture into a different discourse. Grant's written text is like the dedication in a gifted book, but unlike the book where the inscription is usually placed on frontispiece, being both inside the book whilst at the same time outside of the authoritative body of the text, the inscription on the painting becomes part of the narrative of the picture, revealing not only authorship and date ("DG 1935") but of ownership ("To VB") and the act of gifting ("from").

It is possible that the dedication, the first part of the text, is the last part to have been written. 'DG 1935' sits along the bottom of the picture on the left-hand side. If it were the only text on the picture surface it would comply with conventional picture "signing." The first part of the dedication 'To VB from' is written at a slight angle above the artist's initials suggesting that it may have been an addition.

This revealing and commemorating of gifting is a wilful act by Grant. The dedication could have been positioned on the reverse of the picture, out of sight from the viewer, or on a separate medium, a piece of paper or greeting card, adjacent to the painting. Placing the dedication in the viewable picture plane heightens awareness of the image, confers qualities and narratives on the object. That it is a portrait of the artists' daughter adds a duality of gifting, 'To' and 'from' of both the picture and the person. Vanessa Bell took a photograph of Angelica in costume wearing the dress and in a similar pose (*fig. 1.35*).<sup>193</sup> This opens up the possibility that Grant copied the

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<sup>190</sup> Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 2005, p.208

<sup>191</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Freshwater: a comedy*, ed. L.P. Ruotolo (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) p.74

<sup>192</sup> Signature detail of Duncan Grant, *Angelica in Fancy Dress*, 1935

<sup>193</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Angelica Bell playing the part of Ellen Terry in the play Freshwater*, 1934, TGA, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, 1981, p.121.

photograph and gifted Bell's image back to her. But the act of gifting the picture has no textual narrative, there are no calendrical rites of Christmas and birthdays, no *Happy Birthday* or *Merry Christmas* attached to the text, only a year.<sup>194</sup>

Within the intimacy of the private space of Bell's bedroom the exclusive dedication remains intact but when the painting is shown to a wider audience it becomes a textual marker in a bigger picture.<sup>195</sup> The painting is on loan to the Charleston Trust and is normally hung in Bell's bedroom, now a public space, where it enters into the narrative of place, the interpretation of the house and the story of the artists for the tourists and visitors to Charleston. It becomes an illustration, a prop in the story telling of the relationship between Bell and Grant.

Another painting that hung in Bell's bedroom, now titled *Charleston Pond in the Snow* (fig.1.36)<sup>196</sup> but itinerarised by Bell as *Snow*, has in the bottom right-hand corner the inscription 'DG for VB 1950' (fig.1.37).<sup>197</sup> As with the portrait of *Angelica in Fancy Dress* the inscription does not express the marking of a specific calendrical ritual, it only identifies a giver and a recipient and the date when this act of gifting took place. The use of 'for' rather than 'from' indicates a physical action of giving the object but not necessarily of creation. It suggests that the painting was executed explicitly 'for' the recipient. The 'for' reverses the order of the initials, transgresses the gifting protocol of 'to' and 'from'. There is also a child-like element, the marking of initials in the snow that lies on the ground at Charleston, "DG for VB," a declaration of commitment and a marking of property.

Bell also inscribed dedications on to her work. A loose colour sketch of a portrait of her sister hangs in Monks House, the one time home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf (fig.1.38).<sup>198</sup> It has the same formal design as a large oil painting by Bell of Virginia Woolf seated in her Tavistock Square apartment, in a room designed by Bell and Grant

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<sup>194</sup> Grant would have been 50 in 1935 but that anniversary would warrant a gift 'To DG from VB 1935.'

<sup>195</sup> The work was reproduced in colour in Raymond Mortimer's *Duncan Grant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1948) pl.23 as *Angelica* and as being "owned by Vanessa Bell." It was exhibited publicly for the first time in Grant's retrospective, see 'Duncan Grant: A Retrospective Exhibition,' 12 May – 20 June 1959, Tate, *Angelica*, no.106.

<sup>196</sup> Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond in the Snow*, 1950, oil on canvas, 38cm x 47cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/72

<sup>197</sup> Signature detail of Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond in the Snow*, 1950

(fig.1.39).<sup>199</sup> The painting was exhibited and sold at an exhibition of Bell's work in 1934.<sup>200</sup> The sketch is inscribed 'VB to LW Christmas 1935' dated the year after the oil was exhibited (fig.1.40).<sup>201</sup> The reason for the dedication is clear, the picture is testament to one part of a gift cycle, one that is "based on obligation and economic self-interest."<sup>202</sup> It is part of the gift exchange of Christmas and the "indefinite cycle of reciprocity."<sup>203</sup> But the dedication opens speculation of the date of the painting, where it came in Bell's process, what layer it occupies. Is it part of the preparation for the oil painting completed in March 1934,<sup>204</sup> in which case '1935' refers to the date of gifting, or is Bell copying her own work at a later date, the piece made specifically for Leonard Woolf, '1935' becoming both the date of gifting and the date of production?

Grant also inscribed dedications on the reverse of his paintings. *On the Acropolis*,<sup>205</sup> a small oil sketch made in Greece in 1910 is signed on the front, 'D. Grant' in the bottom left-hand corner but on the reverse is inscribed "Christmas 1944. To Maynard in memory of a visit to Athens 1909 from Duncan." This fulfils many of the requirements of a good gift, part of an annually recognised ritual, dated, marked with the recipient and the gifter, even a reason for choosing that particular gift outside of the expected circle of gift exchange. The name of the gifter is even separated from the signature of

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<sup>198</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square*, c.1933-1934, watercolour and pencil on paper, 71 x 53cm, The National Trust, accession no.768423

<sup>199</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Portrait of Virginia Woolf*, 1934, oil on canvas, 82 x 63cm, private collection. Leonard and Virginia Woolf lived on the top two floors of 52 Tavistock Square from March 1924 until August 1939 and commissioned numerous decorations and decorative objects from Bell and Grant, see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.223-230.

<sup>200</sup> No.13 *Virginia Woolf*, 35 Guineas, 'Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell,' with a foreword by Virginia Woolf, The Lefevre Galleries, March 1934.

<sup>201</sup> Signature detail of Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square*, c.1933-1934.

<sup>202</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 1990, p.1

<sup>203</sup> David J. Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988) p.21

<sup>204</sup> Virginia Woolf records sitting for the portrait in her diaries: *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Four 1931-1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) See the following entries: 16 Feb 1932 p.77 "To sit to Vanessa"; 29 November 1933 p.191 "sat to Nessa"; 30 January 1934 p.200 "Nessa painting me again"; Sunday 4 March 1934 p.203, "I'm to sit to Nessa for the last time."

<sup>205</sup> Duncan Grant, *On the Acropolis*, 1910, oil on panel, 25cm x 16.2cm, see *Maynard Keynes: Collector of pictures, books and manuscripts* (Cambridge: Provost and Scholars of King's College, 1983) p.27



the creator, which maintains its isolated and authoritative position on the front. The only slip is the date, Grant and Keynes visited Greece together in 1910 not 1909.<sup>206</sup>

Another work gifted sometime after its production is a drawing of the sculptor Stephen Tomlin that Grant gave to Angus Davidson in the 1950s.<sup>207</sup> Grant inscribed “For Angus from Duncan,” across the bottom of the pencil sketch in dark and distinct letters. Again the ‘For’ could suggest gifting of the image and gifting of the person imaged. Both Grant and Davidson had sexual relationships with Tomlin in the early 1920s. Tomlin also sculpted them both, Emmanuel Cooper noted “the sensitively modelled head” and the “long elegant neck” of Davidson’s bust.<sup>208</sup> The dedication, while stating the act of gifting, conceals the particulars of the gift.

### **The Mechanical Signature:**

The signature is a unique event, one that happens at a single point of place and a single point of time. But it is an event that is compromised by repeated uniqueness. Each signature must bear a resemblance to the previous signature for it to function correctly, a series of unique events that make a canon, an oeuvre. If the unique signature acts as a certificate of presence then the mechanically reproduced signature can “disrupt the category of presence.”<sup>209</sup> When it is mechanised, the inherent attribute of the signature, its capacity to be repeated, to be compared, allowing its authentication, becomes compromised by the ideal nature of the reproduction, that each signature is too perfect, too identical, too authentic, too iterable.

Both Bell and Grant were involved in a commercial project in the 1930s in which the signature played an important part in mechanically reproducing a repeated unique event. Commonly known as the ‘Harrods Experiment’ a group of fine artists were commissioned to design decorations for ceramic tableware for two Stoke on Trent

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<sup>206</sup> When the painting was exhibited publicly for the first time, in Grant’s retrospective exhibition at the Tate in 1959, the inaccurate dating of the inscription, even though unseen in the gallery, was highlighted in the catalogue, see catalogue entry no.11.

<sup>207</sup> No.42 *Portrait of Stephen Tomlin*, c.1930, pencil, 46.6 x 30.2cm, provenance: Angus Davidson. *Duncan Grant: Works on Paper*, catalogue Anthony d’Offay, 9 Dering Street, London, 25 November to 18 December 1981

<sup>208</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1987) p.150. For Tomlin’s bust of Grant, see Stephen Tomlin, *Duncan Grant*, 1924, bronze, 37.5cm high, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 6889. His sculpture of Virginia Woolf is in the Studio at Charleston, see Stephen Tomlin, *Virginia Woolf portrait bust*, c.1931, painted plaster, 41 x 39 x 22cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/SC/8.

<sup>209</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts,’ p.16

manufacturers, Messrs E. Brain and Co. who produced a range under the name of Foley; and the Wilkinson Company who produced the 'Bizarre' range by Clarice Cliff.<sup>210</sup>

Bell and Grant and their daughter Angelica were commissioned by Foley to design tea sets. As Reed notes the artists worked within a traditional genre of floral decoration which they "jazzed up."<sup>211</sup> Vanessa Bell produced a design of freely painted leaves surrounded by a sea of purple lustre and orange cartouches (*fig.1.41*). Grant's was titled *Old English Rose* and combined familiar dots and cross-hatching with a rose motif, occasionally being held by a bejewelled hand (*fig.1.42*).<sup>212</sup> Angelica Bell's design was the lightest with the outline of a blue daisy with a red centre surrounded by random black marks (*fig.1.43*).

Bell and Grant both produced dinner services for Clarice Cliff and Wilkinson. Bell's design is in blue on a white ground, a stem with two flower heads on a background of three large blue circles fill the centre of the design, with an alternating trio of dotted circles and cross-hatching on the rim, edged with a complete circle of small green dots (*fig.1.44*). Grant's design uses a bouquet of flowers and heads of corn loosely drawn out in green, yellow, red, purple and terracotta as a central motif. On the rim, inside an outer black line, are swags containing terracotta dots and "mobbling," Bell and Grant's term for a loose form of marbling (*Fig.1.45*).<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> For a history of the project and a review of its reception see Rowena Pelik, 'The Harrods Experiment,' in *Ceramics: The International Journal of Ceramics and Glass*, August 1987, pp.33-41. Also Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p. 62 and, Spalding *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, pp. 242-243.

<sup>211</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.266

<sup>212</sup> Reed notes that there is no evidence that the large cup and saucer in Grant's 'Old English Rose' pattern at Charleston, marketed and thanks Tony Bradshaw for the information, see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2006, p.301, n.73

<sup>213</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990 p.47. The Charleston Trust has the following ceramics: For Foley: Grant, *English Rose* design: cup, C/127a, saucer, C/127b, milk jug, C/127c. Bell, *Lustre*: cup, C/643a, saucer, C/643b, and side plate, C/643c. Angelica Bell, *Daisy*: teapot & lid C/125a & C/125d, milk jug C/125b, and side plate, C/125c. For Clarice Cliff's *Bizarre*: Grant: thirteen dinner plates, C/34a – C/34h & C/281a – C/281e, two chargers, C/34 & C/282, two serving bowls C/283a & C/283b. Bell: five dinner plates C/278a-C/278e, two soup plates C/280a & C/280b, two chargers C/279 & C/284. Monk's House, managed by the National Trust, also has some examples by Bell: Foley Lustre, cup 768118 & teapot 768091. Clarice Cliff, *Bizarre*, five dinner plates 768105.2.1, 768105.2.2, 768105.3.1-768105.3.3 and two lidded serving bowls 768105.1.1 & 768105.1.2.

Twenty-eight artists were involved in the project, representing a broad cross section of artistic styles in Britain at that time.<sup>214</sup> These were exhibited with great fanfare at the Harrods department store in Knightsbridge from 22 October – 10 November 1934. The store placed several advertisements for the event in national newspapers including the *Observer*:

MODERN ART FOR THE TABLE  
A Unique Collection of China and Glass created by famous living Artists

...Perhaps never before has such an entertaining exhibition been assembled. England's famous artists, whose tastes and expressions are as crossed as the winds, have set themselves to interpreting their moods in the decoration of china. The result is a presentation that is striking in its diversity, eloquent of the various individualities, and uniform only in its new fresh beauty. The work of each artist is projected in its own niche with the original design lending support to its china replica, and, so that the occasion may be adequately marked, each set is being offered in a limited first edition with its designer's signature fired into every piece.<sup>215</sup>

The rhetoric of this announcement includes several interesting conceptions about art, artists and the artist's identity. It promises diversity and individuality, highlights the artist as an alchemist who can transform "their moods" into "decoration," aligning them in a common cause of creating "new fresh beauty." While conceding that the object is a "replica" of the "original design" it can still boast "a limited first edition," highlighting the objects uniqueness, that they are created rather than made. It privileges the artist's skill over that of the designer who works solely in ceramics. Work is "projected in its own niche," separated from the other pieces, maintaining the artist's individuality whilst existing simultaneously as part of a cohesive group, a "unique collection." The china department becomes an exhibition space. The event was opened by Sir William Rothenstein, Principal of the Royal College of Art whose presence added a cultural authority to the proceedings.<sup>216</sup> But it is the "designer's signature" that

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<sup>214</sup> The complete list of artists are: Albert Rutherston, A.R.W.S., Ernest Proctor, A.R.A., Duncan Grant, Gordon Forsyth, R.I., L. Kny, Paul Nash, John Everett, John Armstrong, Ben Nicholson, Eric Ravillious, Milner Gray, Eva Crofts, Barbara Hepworth, Moira Forsyth, Michael Wellmer, Graham Sutherland, A.R.A., Anne Riach, W. P. Robins, Bille Waters, Freda Beardmore, Clarice Cliff, Angelica Bell, Allan Walton, Thomas Acland, Dame Laura Knight, O.B.E., A.R.A., Vanessa Bell, Frank Brangwyn, R.A., Dod Procter, A.R.A.. As listed in the Harrods advertisement in *The Observer*, 21 October 1934.

<sup>215</sup> *The Observer*, 21 October 1934, p.11

<sup>216</sup> While the project had aspirations to fine art the product was still positioned in the popular press in the domestic realm. *The Daily Mirror* asked the question 'Can Art be combined with industrial production?' in their regular column headed 'Women's Point of View by Jennifer' complete with photograph of Grant's china for Clarice Cliff, *The Daily Mirror*, Wednesday 7 October 1934, p.25.

seals the ceramic's position as an art object. "Fired into every piece" alongside the name of the manufacturer, it privileges the object with the authority of the artists' sign, aligns the piece in the artist's oeuvre.

If the signature on a painting is a sign of the finality of the process, the finishing touch, then for the plate, the cup and the saucer it is just another part of its production. The ceramic's mode of production disturbs the time scale of the signature. Each artist sent a sample signature to the manufacturers before the objects were produced from which a transfer print was made.<sup>217</sup> The artist, in effect, had signed the objects before they were made, announcing the end, anticipating the final protective firing and the transparent glaze.

The signature's authority changes with each method of production. Baudrillard describes the signature as a "visible sign" that "does not cause the work to be seen, but to be recognized and evaluated in a system of signs" and which 'integrates it in a series, that of the works of the painter.'<sup>218</sup> A transferred signature only takes with it some of the authenticity of its original. It bears witness to the act that produced it but can never assert the same level of authority over the object it is attached to. It is always on the edge of the oeuvre, its too perfect form only borrowed. It infers authorship and authentication but only when considered in the light of the original, which renders it as an in-authentic copy. It does not have the trace of the author, the authoritative gesture, but the image of one. It performs the signature and the figure of one, an echo rather than a trace. If the signature evokes a presence now lost, the facsimile signature speaks not of loss but of complete absence.

This theoretical slipping of the signature is reflected in its position on the ceramics where it has moved away from the surface to the reverse, to the base. For the plate, the cup and the saucer, the maker's mark is hidden from sight. It contrasts with the painting or the drawing that announces its maker, its authenticity, and its pedigree on the front. Though often pushed out of the spotlight, positioned in the margins of the image, in the corner, it is still very much in the picture, in the frame. When the plate is being used the view of the beneath, its maker, its producer, is denied by practical

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<sup>217</sup> Though I have not traced Bell and Grant's correspondence on this matter a reference to the signature is present in a letter from Ernest Proctor to Thomas Acland Fennemore, art director for Foley china in which he writes: "Dear Fennemore, Your letter requires a comprehensive answer – here it is:[...] Signatures enclosed for reproduction." In folder 'Fennemore 1933-58,' V&A Archive of Art & design, Blythe House, London

considerations. To view the signature, to gain a view of the authoritative mark, the object needs to be handled, to be inverted and touched. The inverting of ceramics demonstrates the status of the viewer, looking for a maker implies knowledge of makers, that recognition will follow perusal of the maker's mark.

Just as the signature is fired into the ceramic, the ceramics fix the artists within the domestic and the daily rituals of feeding and meal times. Now the plates and bowls have reverted to the performative status that they occupied in Harrods in 1934, as objects to be looked at for their decorative qualities disregarding the usefulness for the support and presentation of food. Exhibited for the visitors to Charleston, they have regained their untouched space under the spotlight, back on display, back on the shelf.

The reproduced signature of the artist is on the base of each ceramic piece alongside that of the manufacturers Foley and Wilkinsons Ltd. The Foley backstamp features the manufacturer's name in uppercase letters in a modern font, which dominates the space, occupying a position of authority at the top of the design. Below this are the words 'English Bone China', a line almost of explanation, fixing the piece geographically and culturally, simultaneously reaching back to the eighteenth century origins of bone china, aligning its production with tradition, whilst announcing its modernity in the chosen typeface. Underneath the artist's signature is 'Artist's Copyright reserved' followed by 'First Edition'.

Contrasting with the upper case font used in the rest of the design is the artist's signature. An identical, hand written 'by' prefaces all the signatures across the range, creating a hinge between the commercial printed text and the idiosyncratic signature, the 'by' has allusions to the hand written but its constancy when compared to other designs exposes its lack of individuality. The artist's signature is positioned at a slight angle, raising up from left to right creating a sense of dynamism. Vanessa Bell's signature spills over the outer edges of the design, widening the backstamp and softening its edges (*fig. 1.46*).<sup>219</sup> Duncan Grant truncates his first name signing 'D. Grant' (*fig. 1.47*).<sup>220</sup> His signature fits easily in with the design, the upright of the D in

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<sup>218</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981, p.102

<sup>219</sup> Vanessa Bell's signature, Foley backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust CHA/C/643a

<sup>220</sup> Duncan Grant signature, Foley backstamp, 1934, The Charleston Trust CHA/C/127a

line with the left hand of the design, the final full stop in line with the right hand extreme of the Y in Foley.<sup>221</sup>

For the Wilkinson backstamp the upper case text that support the signatures is less crisp than that used for Foley, giving it a less modern feel. The exclusivity of the artists' signature is challenged by the facsimile signature of both Clarice Cliff and the free flowing text logo for Bizarre, Cliff's range of ceramics. The words 'Designed by' come before the artist's name and 'Produced in' before 'Bizarre by Clarice Cliff' allocating separate roles of production and areas of creativity.

The authority of the artists signatures is weakened to some extent as both Bell and Grant's have distinct stylistic differences between the versions used by Foley and by Wilkinson. For Wilkinson the 'es' in 'Vanessa' are joined together leaving the final 'sa' unconnected and the capital B unconnected to the rest of Bell: for Foley the both 's's in Vanessa are disconnected and the B attaches itself to the rest of the Bell with a lively loop from its base (*fig. 1.48*).

For Grant the solitary 'D' changes format, for Wilkinson a complete, enclosed semi-circle and for Foley a broken semi-circle, the upright not quite touching the top or the bottom of the inverted 'C' (*fig. 1.49*). For his surname the G and proceeding three letters are almost identical but the final t varies greatly, the Foley signature appearing more like those found on paintings of this period, the Wilkinson appearing like an X. Grant also incorporates two full stops in his signature, one after the D and one at the end, a device not used by Bell. These full stops and the use of an initial for his first name give Grant's signature more of a graphic element than Bell's full, undecorated mark.

The use of the term 'First Edition' which featured prominently in the project's publicity and marketing, aligns the ceramics with book production and printmaking<sup>222</sup> where the first impressions of the print were the most desirable as they would be the sharpest and crispest, later impressions deteriorating through repeated use. The

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<sup>221</sup> The backstamp to a version of Duncan Grant's Foley tea set design held by the Charleston Trust has a slight alteration. The text 'First edition' has been replaced with a thick black line. This balances the text and creates a complete and aesthetically satisfying graphic, literally underlining what has been said, in contrast with the 'First Edition' pieces where the text decreases in size until it seems to peter out. This may be a trial piece that did not go into production. See Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2006, p.301, n.73.

mechanical process used for manufacturing the ceramics ensured that there was no deterioration in quality between sequential editions of the ceramics so the phrase was considered ‘a pretty harmless conceit’<sup>223</sup>

While the artists’ textual signatures took the form of a printed transfer, the artists’ pictorial signatures were interpreted by the decorators in the ceramic factories. The decorations were copied from the artists’ designs onto the objects by hand. The Manchester Guardian reported on how “Many of the designs demanded too much for the draughtsmanship of the factory painters, and the lines had been softly engraved so that they could be followed accurately and neatly.” The article continued “It would have been hard for a potter’s painter otherwise to have followed[...] Mr. Duncan Grant’s ‘Purple Hand’ design.”<sup>224</sup> Unlike the painting where the artist “haunts” its surface, the artist’s hand is missing, his/her role in the production being before the creation of the object. The hand that marks the object is unknown, copying the design, applying the colour, the shape in the manner of the artist, forging the pictorial “handwriting.”<sup>225</sup>

The artists had to create designs for existing ceramic shapes already in production at Foley and Wilkinsons.<sup>226</sup> Bell had hoped to use moulds from ceramics made by Roger Fry for the Omega Workshops.<sup>227</sup> Fry’s “privileging of anonymity” in which the identity of the maker is suppressed in favour of the unifying mark of the manufacturer, is in contrast to the 1930s project which celebrates in naming designer, producer and retailer. But there are echoes of the attempts by Fry to reproduce the “handwriting” of the artist using mechanical reproduction. Judith Collins has described how Fry “had moulds taken of his pots in order to facilitate their mass production.” But even though

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<sup>222</sup> The text ‘FIRST EDITION’ added for the first twelve services in each pattern, see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006 p.242.

<sup>223</sup> *Cabinet Maker*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1934, quoted in Rowena Pelik, ‘The Harrods Experiment,’ 1987, p.37

<sup>224</sup> ‘The Artists and the Potteries,’ *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 October 1934, p.10

<sup>225</sup> About the first project, Bell reported that Foley’s art director was ‘wildly enthusiastic’ about their designs and ‘insists upon their being carried out as well as possible. We are to go on having proofs until they’re as good as we think they can be,” Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 7 August 1934, Tate Archives, quoted in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.301, n.74

<sup>226</sup> Dame Laura Knight was the exception to this, having a new mould designed for her. See Alun R. Graves’ article, ‘Ben Nicholson’s designs for Foley China,’ *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.140, No.1143 June 1998, pp.386-390. Graves also gives some insight into the technical issues surrounding the project.

<sup>227</sup> Cited in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.301, n.74

they all came from the same mould “they still bore the directness and sensibility of their maker.”<sup>228</sup>

But even in the regulated environment of the factory and with the too perfect reiterable mechanically reproduced signature there was still room for transgression. A broken piece of Foley pottery is preserved in the archives of the Charleston Trust. It looks like the foot of a bowl, possibly a sugar bowl. On the inside are the remains of Angelica Bell’s design, the outline of a blue daisy with a red centre decorates the base while flecks of black rise up on the remaining shards of the side (*fig. 1.50*).<sup>229</sup> But on the base of the piece, where one would expect to find the perfect signature of ‘Angelica Bell’ is found instead that of ‘D Grant’ (*fig. 1.51*). The signature, while maintaining the authenticity of its repeated self is exposed as a forgery. The order that the various elements were added to the pot in the mechanised process of the factory environment may be different to the process of creating a two dimensional art work. The signature may have been present on the piece first, the wrong decoration added by the factory painter.<sup>230</sup> Whichever event happened first, it is still the signature that appears out of place, the decoration, Angelica Bell’s design and surrogate handwriting being privileged over Grant’s backstamp. It is an Angelica Bell pot incorrectly signed, rather than a Duncan Grant pot incorrectly decorated.

### **Vice versa:**

In 1976 Grant was commissioned by the dealer, Bernard Jacobson to do an etching for a tribute to the artist John Constable to be exhibited at the Tate. In the winter of 1975 Jacobson took a metal plate to Grant who was staying in Tangiers with Paul Roche (*fig. 1.52*).<sup>231</sup> According to Spalding, Grant’s “inability to co-ordinate fully the wavering lines and intermittent hatching giving the print an affecting delicacy and transparency.”<sup>232</sup> The print was published in “an edition of 100 copies. Signed and dated in the plate (printed in reverse) lower left; editioned in pencil on the margin

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<sup>228</sup> Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, p.101. Recently Julian Stair has noted that “despite[...] fascinating documentary evidence” none of the Omega “holloware” in the three key UK collections (Courtauld, V&A, The Charleston Trust) show “any evidence of being cast, but are instead hand-thrown.” See Julian Stair, ‘The Employment of Matter: Pottery of the Omega Workshops,’ in *Beyond Bloomsbury*, 2009, pp.27-33.

<sup>229</sup> Ceramic shard, The Charleston Trust, CHA/C/603

<sup>230</sup> David Herbert, a collector of ceramics from the ‘Harrod’s Experiment’ has noted the same situation with a piece from the Clarice Cliff range in which a design by Milner Gray was marked with the signature and backstamp of Graham Sutherland. Email to author.

<sup>231</sup> Duncan Grant, *Untitled*, 1976, Intaglio print on paper, 267mm x 340mm, Tate P03181.



lower left and signed in pencil in the margin lower right.”<sup>233</sup> The edition in the Tate is entitled ‘Untitled’.

The picture carries two signatures, both ‘D. Grant.’ One signature sits outside of the picture just below its right-hand corner (*fig.1.53*). Marked in a soft pencil in an assured hand the signature is authoritative whilst still being vulnerable, it’s graphite structure open to tampering. Mirroring it on the opposite side of the paper, in the left-hand bottom corner of the print is the other signature, back to front, part of the etching, an immovable presence (*fig.1.54*). The line of this signature is crooked, as though the medium itself, the metal plate were resisting the name, its inversion and crookedness giving the signature the look of an object inside the picture, the vertical lines echoing the foliage that flank it. Below it is the date ‘76,’ its reversed appearance making it unrecognisable.

The printed version not only lacks a comparable signature/name but also lacks the artist’s signature style. The mechanical signature is compromised. Its inversion brings attention to the medium, to the mechanics of the image making. It shows that the image is reversed, the exhibited image not the image that the artist intended. When reversed, Grant’s print bares many pictorial similarities to Constable’s *Salisbury Cathedral and Leadenhall from the River Avon*, of 1829 (*fig.1.55 & fig.1.56*).<sup>234</sup> Inverting Grant’s image reveals a more resolved picture in which the pictorial elements appear more satisfactorily. The whole design appears more structured, more satisfying. There is a symbiosis between the spire of Salisbury Cathedral now on the left and the large elm tree in the centre. In the printed version these two aspects are in conflict, they sit uneasily together, the print loses its cohesion, it feels uncomfortable, not thought out.

But the piece’s biggest transgression is the two signatures’ lack of identity. Even though they present mirror images they exhibit as many variants as similarities. The signature in the plate is faltering and angular, it lacks the fluidity of the pencil signature. Grant had a period of illness whilst staying in Tangiers. His companion,

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<sup>232</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.499-500

<sup>233</sup> *The Bloomsbury Artists: Prints and Book Design*, 1999, p.65

<sup>234</sup> John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral and Leadenhall from the River Avon*, 1820, oil on canvas, 52.7 x 77cm, Salting Bequest, 1910, National Gallery NG2651

Paul Roche recalls Grant hallucinating, not being himself.<sup>235</sup> The printed signature is a calligraphic manifestation of Grant's state of health and mind, probably accounting for its "delicacy and transparency."

### **After I'm Gone:**

I began this chapter with a proposed gravestone for Vanessa Bell, a simple 'V.B.' and I conclude with her studio stamp, which also speaks of death, of loss. Made after the artist's death, Bell's stamp is also composed of her initials 'VB' (*fig.1.57 & 1.58*).<sup>236</sup> There is no attempt to emulate her complete signature, to 'transfer' 'Vanessa Bell' posthumously on-to the picture surface. Though considered to be "in no way a recreation of her hand"<sup>237</sup> the figures do attempt to emulate a signature style, to be "handwriting," to be read as the presence of the artist. The two arms of the 'V' are not symmetrical and the base has a small tale rather than a sharp point. The back line of the 'B' is broken, not touching the top or bottom, the letter bulging unevenly. The design of the initials has been considered and thought through. The impression is clear, almost like a printed text, but it maintains an element of the artist's hand. The initials are contained in a circle that separates them from the picture plane, marks them out as being separate from the image, an addition.

The stamp was made by the Anthony d'Offay Gallery who became the dealers for Grant and for the Bell estate in 1970. They were responsible for mining the artists' reserves of early work and bringing them to the attention of the public throughout the 1970s and 80s. A single stamp was made, "guarded carefully... and used when works ex of the Vanessa Bell Estate were going out of the gallery."<sup>238</sup> The stamp does not carry the authority of the artist but of the dealer, it is a contract with the Anthony d'Offay Gallery that the viewer enters into. The studio mark, though manipulated by hand, though mimicking previously handmade marks and symbols, is only a guarantee of presence and authorship if the recipient of the object has trust and belief in the mark maker.

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<sup>235</sup> Paul Roche, 'With Duncan Grant in Tangiers,' *The Charleston Magazine*, issue 8, winter/spring 1993/93 pp.12-21

<sup>236</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Alfriston* (study for poster), c.1931, 27 x 37cm, private collection, and studio stamp detail.

<sup>237</sup> Email to author from Tony Bradshaw, The Bloomsbury Workshop, 6 December 2011

<sup>238</sup> Email to author from Tony Bradshaw, The Bloomsbury Workshop, 6 December 2011

An estate stamp was also made for Grant after his death in 1978. In an exhibition of *Works on Paper* in 1981 the catalogue announces that “All works from the Estate of Duncan Grant have been stamped with the Estate stamp.”<sup>239</sup> Even though thirty-four of the eighty exhibits had been signed on the front of the pictures by the artist. The estate stamp has set itself up as a higher authority than the artist’s signature or their pictorial handwriting. It is the final word in authenticity. But under Grant’s authority authorship slips. Julian Hartnoll recalls visiting Charleston to select works on paper by Bell for a selling exhibition in 1967.<sup>240</sup> Work was marked with Bell’s estate stamp under the direction of Grant. Regina Marler explains that “In a number of instances Hartnoll thought he’d uncovered drawings that were clearly related to Duncan’s work and must have been by him, but Duncan would decline them: “Oh, that is far too good for me, give it to Vanessa.””<sup>241</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The authority of the engraving on a gravestone is rarely challenged. The indented letters chiselled into the stone, not laying on the surface but part of the object. It was Paul Roche’s original intention for Grant to be buried at Berwick, near the church that he decorated during the Second World War with Bell and Quentin Bell (all of the panels are unsigned,) but Vanessa Bell’s family persuaded him to have him buried at Firlie.<sup>242</sup> In the politics of place this makes for a tidy ending, lying next to each other for the first time in sixty years, their partnership visible and monumental for all to see.

Charleston is a monument to Bell and Grant too, but not one that speaks of death. Regina Marler considers that “Artistic shrines are melancholy places,” made up of “vacant rooms and passages that offer everything but the subject sought.”<sup>243</sup> But Charleston maintains its breath and heart beat because it was not only home to Bell and Grant but also “subject” and as such its spaces and the objects that fill them still resonate with life. The next chapter focuses on a very specific location, one that holds layers of memory and one that acted as subject for numerous projects by the artists.

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<sup>239</sup> *Duncan Grant: Works on Paper*, catalogue Anthony d’Offay, 9 Dering Street, London, 25 November to 18 December 1981

<sup>240</sup> *Vanessa Bell: Drawings and Designs*, Folio Fine Art Gallery, November 1967.

<sup>241</sup> Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie*, 1998, p.58

<sup>242</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1997, p.506

<sup>243</sup> Marler, *Bloomsbury Pie*, 1998, p.227

## Chapter 2:

### Pond Life

#### **Fascination of the pond:**

In Virginia Woolf's short piece of fiction titled *The Fascination of the Pool*,<sup>244</sup> the narrator reflects on all of the different people who may have visited a rural pond.<sup>245</sup> She imagines the "Many, many people... dropping their thoughts into the water." The pond becomes a reservoir not just of water but of conversations, of "all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not printed or spoken aloud, but in a liquid state" in which each echo of the past slid "over the other silently and orderly as fish not impeding each other."<sup>246</sup> The pond that Woolf describes is similar to the one that lies at the front of Charleston. It is near a farm, there is a willow tree and rushes and a centre populated by carp, with "the darkness of very deep water" that conceals its actual depth. And like the pond at Charleston it is the site of many narratives, experiences, visions and transformations, a reservoir of conversations.

When Woolf wrote to her sister in May 1916 describing the suitability and potential of a Sussex farmhouse as a home for Vanessa Bell, her two sons Julian and Quentin, Duncan Grant and David Garnett, she put the pond at the top of the list of attributes in Charleston's 'charming garden.'<sup>247</sup> Even with wartime food rationing making the presence of 'fruit trees, and vegetables'<sup>248</sup> of great benefit for Bell and her extended family, the charms of the pond and its aesthetic virtues were privileged by Woolf above the needs of the physical body. Bell herself reflects these values in a letter to Grant after her second visit to Charleston. Her description begins with "A large lake..." the 'A' enthusiastically underlined.<sup>249</sup> Bell highlights the singularity of a space

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<sup>244</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'The Fascination of the Pool', c.1929, ed. Susan Dick, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) pp.220-21

<sup>245</sup> For an analysis of 'The Fascination of the Pool' see Melba Cuddy Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.125-132 and Susan Dicks, 'I am not trying to tell a story': Three Short Fictions by Virginia Woolf, *English Studies in Canada*, Vol.5, no.2, 1989, pp.171-172. Woolf also uses "the dark pool of the mind" in which are reflected the memories of Orlando in the closing passages of her 1928 novel, see: Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1960) p.294

<sup>246</sup> Woolf, 'The Fascination of the Pool,' 1985, pp.220-21

<sup>247</sup> Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 14 May 1916, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume Two 1912 – 1922*, Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Fine Harvest, 1978) p.95

<sup>248</sup> Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 14 May 1916, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume Two 1912 – 1922*, 1978, p.95

<sup>249</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, September 1916, TGA/DGP

valued for its visual pleasures and pictorial possibilities rather than as a repository of fish, though populated by a large number of carp and eels.<sup>250</sup> In a letter to Roger Fry, a description of the house is followed by one of the garden beginning “The pond is most beautiful with a willow at one side and a stone – or flint – wall edging it all round the garden part and a little lawn sloping down to it,”<sup>251</sup> a textual description of a visual scene that Bell and Grant would reproduce time and time again.

It is not surprising that the presence of a pond should have raised such delight in Bell as it had already become a familiar subject and motif in her work and would continue to be a recurring feature throughout her and Grant’s career. The pond is the setting for the two paintings that are at the centre of this chapter, Grant’s *The Hammock*, c.1923 (fig.2.01).<sup>252</sup> and Bell’s *Clive Bell and his Family*, c.1924 (fig.2.02).<sup>253</sup> Both use the environs of the pond at Charleston as the setting for a group portrait that offer two different but at the same time overlapping depictions of domesticity and familial formations. They present two differing narratives, two different mappings of familial groups.

The setting for this pastoral existence, the private spaces of the garden and specifically the pond, becomes the subject of a pictorial project by the artists in which they map both space and time in a signifying process over their tenure at Charleston. As Denis Cosgrove has stated, “All utopias require mapping, their social order depends upon and generates a spatial order which reorganizes and improves upon existing models.”<sup>254</sup> I will examine this mapping of a utopian, private space, the artists’ visionary construction of this rural idyll in Sussex.

This chapter explores the role that the pond at Charleston played in the artists’ visual culture and family folklore, how it holds layers of memory and narrative, how in the words of Angelica Garnett it “reflected the extraordinary, apparently unlimited peace”

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<sup>250</sup> Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* (London: Francis Lincoln Limited, 2004) p.125

<sup>251</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, October 1916, quoted in Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, Henrietta Garnett and Richard Shone, *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.83

<sup>252</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Hammock*, 1921-1923, oil on canvas, 81.7 x 146.5cm, presented by the Contemporary Art Society in 1935 to the Laing Gallery Newcastle, TWCMS:C10606.

<sup>253</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Clive Bell and his Family*, 1921-23, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.5cm, presented by the Contemporary Art Society in 1927 to the Leicester Art Gallery.

of the inter-war years.<sup>255</sup> It is repeatedly recorded in the artists' work, in their paintings and designs, charting the artists' developing pictorial styles and depicting different ideas of family and community. The pond was the location for celebrations, for play, for theatricals, for alchemy and for quiet contemplation. It is written of in letters and diaries and is one of the main locations for Bell's photographs in which groups pose by its edge or children play on its muddy shores. Using cartographic references I will demonstrate how the pond acts as topography for the exploration and presentation of gender, queerness and displays of familial existence, a place for shifting narratives and self-revelations.

I will then examine *The Hammock* and *Clive Bell and his Family* through the conventions and constructions of the eighteenth century outdoor Conversation Piece, a form of group portrait that concentrated on and elevated the familial and the domestic. The Conversation Piece mapped constructions of familial relationships within a set of informal rules, rules that I will apply to Bell and Grant's paintings.

### **Mapping the pond:<sup>256</sup>**

Between moving to Charleston in 1916 and their respective deaths in 1961 and 1978 Bell and Grant created a collectively authored map of its garden, and in particular the area at the front of the house which features the pond. In individual acts of creating, visualising, conceptualising, recording and representing geographical space, the area is painted and drawn from all aspects, the artists facing almost all points of the compass with the pond as the centre of the dial. The artists' daughter Angelica Garnett has

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<sup>254</sup> Denis Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Mapping Meaning,' in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999) pp.15-16

<sup>255</sup> Angelica Garnett, 'The Pond,' in *A Bloomsbury Canvas: reflections on the Bloomsbury group*, eds. Tony Bradshaw and James Beechey (London: Lund Humphries, 2001) p.70

<sup>256</sup> Dialogues about art and maps have generally confined themselves to maps that have used pictorial elements within them, see Ian D. Whyte, *Landscapes and History since 1500* (London: Reaktion, 2002) pp.50-60. Also artists that have used the formal and pictorial elements of map making within their work. Edward Casey views the paintings of Jasper Johns, Mondrian, Diebenkon and De Kooning as continuing "the ancient tradition of decorated maps," see Edward Casey, 'Mapping the Earth in Works of Art,' in *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, eds. Bruce Foltz & Robert Frodeman (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004) p.262. Denis Cosgrove examines the response of twentieth century artists to emerging conventions and technologies of map making, see Denis Cosgrove, ('Maps, Mapping, Modernity: Art and Cartography in the Twentieth Century,' *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography*, vol.57, part.1, 2005, pp.35-54). Also see *Art & Cartography*, the website for "artists who produce cartographic elements," published by the Commission of the International Cartographic Association. [Artcarto.wordpress.com/terms-of-reference/](http://Artcarto.wordpress.com/terms-of-reference/) accessed 26 March 2012.

claimed that for Bell and Grant “the pond existed in every dimension.”<sup>257</sup> They acted upon a cartological impulse to represent actual space.

Denis Cosgrove has described the process of mapping as “a graphic register of correspondence between two spaces, whose explicit outcome is a space of representation.”<sup>258</sup> Bell and Grant’s “space[s] of representation,” the painted canvases and drawings that they made, the photographs that Bell took, act as their “graphic register,” a map of the space in delineated, fragmented panels. With these over-lapping sections of a pictorial map the artists perform a circumambulation around the pond, raising its status to something akin to a sacred object, a hallowed, hollowed ground.

This area has become an important part of the narrative of Charleston. Grant has stated that the pond was the subject of the first painting Bell executed at the farmhouse.<sup>259</sup> It marks the beginning of a painterly fascination with the pond. But Bell began this process of mapping before the artists’ arrival. As I have noted, her first mappings of the space occur in the textual description of the house and garden in letters to Grant and to Fry. Her first visual interpretation of the space was in a plan drawn for her two young sons Julian and Quentin, intended to give them an idea of where they were moving to. Quentin Bell recalled:

After tea at 46 Gordon Square she gave an account of Charleston. Finding a piece of paper and a pencil she described the general shape of the demesne. I remember the extraordinary slow, sure-handed way in which she used her pencil, drawing the rectangular shapes of the house and the farm buildings and then, making two bold circles, she explained that there was a lake in front of the house and another behind it. The ponds were larger than they are now but, even so, this was an exaggeration.<sup>260</sup>

With this schematic spatial fixing Bell positions herself within a legacy of map making and the repeated drawing of the pond and surrounding buildings. It mimics the earliest surviving pictorial recording of this space, made in 1622 in a map drawn by John De

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<sup>257</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>258</sup> Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Mapping Meaning,’ 1999, p.1

<sup>259</sup> Vanessa Bell: *The Pond, Charleston*, c.1916, oil on canvas, 29.5 x 34.8cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/78. “According to Duncan Grant, this was the first painting made by Bell at Charleston,” Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury* (London: Tate, 1999) p.185.

<sup>260</sup> Quentin Bell, ‘Charleston Garden: A Memory of a Childhood,’ in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.85

Ward for Thomas Elphick, the then owner of Charleston (*fig.2.03*).<sup>261</sup> Surrounded by the marks that demarcate ownership, in front of a line drawing of the house is an oval patch of deep blue that contrasts against the white ground of the map, illustrating not only the position of the pond but also the high status in which it was regarded.

Almost seventy years later Quentin Bell repeated his mother's and De Ward's earlier mapping, to illustrate reminiscences of childhood activities acted out around the pond, once again highlighting and elevating the space (*fig.2.04*).<sup>262</sup> An expanded version of the accompanying article was included in the first guidebook to Charleston published in 1987.<sup>263</sup> For it the pond was redrawn, a pictorial map giving a perspective view looking down "as it might have been seen from the nursery windows at the top of the house" (*fig.2.05*).<sup>264</sup>

Both of Quentin Bell's maps are annotated with letters, markers of activities and physical features from different moments in time, a cartographic construction of his and his siblings' juvenile world, layering the space with punctums of memory, turning the map into a document of experience as well as place. This indexing of space allows Quentin Bell to assemble inter-textual narratives that loosen the maps topographical integrity. As John Rennie Short has stated: "Maps are neither mirrors of nature nor neutral transmitters of universal truths. They are narratives with a purpose, stories with an agenda. They contain silences as well as articulations, secrets as well as knowledge, lies as well as truth. They are biased, partial, and selective."<sup>265</sup> Quentin Bell's subjectification of the pond and his maps give the space a grass-roots narrative, capturing elements that are outside of the landscape, outside of the authorised cartography, a subversive collaging of memory and associations of place.

Quentin Bell's memoirs reflect the pond's seemingly inexhaustible facility for change, not just for childhood play but also for adult intervention and experimentation. It

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<sup>261</sup> East Sussex Records Office (ESRO ACC 2933/1/2/1). For the history of Charleston before Bell and Grant's tenure see research by Judy Woodman in the Charleston Trust Digital Archive.

<sup>262</sup> Quentin Bell, 'Charleston Pond in 1918 – a fragment,' *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.12, 1985, p.10

<sup>263</sup> Quentin Bell, 'Charleston Garden: A Memory of a Childhood,' 1987, p.89.

<sup>264</sup> The pond is included in further maps of Charleston. A line drawing of Charleston including the grounds and the pond and the recently installed car park was printed in *The Charleston Newsletter*, No.10, March 1985 pp.46-47, and a colour map in Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 2004, pp.20-11.



becomes a place of folly and fable, imbuing situations with a mythic almost epic quality. It was “a place for childish engineering and a theatre of war,”<sup>266</sup> Angelica Garnett recalls that “The pond was awfully important in our childhood lives... Quentin and Julian were always on the pond or in it or digging it out or making extraordinary castles out of chalk.”<sup>267</sup> These adventures have echoed across the generations. Quentin Bell’s daughter recalls how she and her brother, on their annual summer holidays to Charleston in the late 1950s, would ‘clip and hack’ their way through the brambles that covered the path around the pond, an experience akin to “exploring the Amazon jungle.”<sup>268</sup>

The pond is central to ‘family’ history and anecdote, to annual rituals, to the common memories that are shared between family members, such as when a guest at Angelica Bell’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party drove his car into the pond.<sup>269</sup> It was the site of the annual fireworks display for Quentin Bell’s birthday. One year during this event Duncan Grant set fire to the surface of the pond after knocking over a bucket of petrol.<sup>270</sup> Grant transforms the pond with an act of alchemy, transforming one element, water with its opposite, fire, the female with the male. It is a space of possibility for artistic distortion, subversion, and re-imagining as in the 1917 plan to keep flamingos on the pond.<sup>271</sup>

Kent Ryden explores these “highly subjective” maps that chart personal experience.<sup>272</sup> He writes of how “Stories – and folklore in general – are inextricably linked with landscapes, overlying them snugly, bound to them and coloring them like paint on a barn wall. They are a central means by which people organize their physical

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<sup>265</sup> John Rennie Short, *The World Through Maps: A History of Cartography* (Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003) p. 24

<sup>266</sup> Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.125

<sup>267</sup> Angelica Garnett talking to Christopher Mason, 1969. Audio recording for the film *Duncan Grant at Charleston*, tape 8, Track 1, TCTA

<sup>268</sup> Virginia Bell, ‘Holidays at Charleston’, *The Charleston Newsletter*, no. 19, September 1987, p.19

<sup>269</sup> Angelica Garnett and Quentin Bell retell the story to Alastair Stuart in the Southern Television programme *Who’s Afraid of Quentin Bell*, 1979, approx. 3mins into programme. Video recording in TCTA.

<sup>270</sup> Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.128

<sup>271</sup> See Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, (London: Pimlico, 1998) p.197

<sup>272</sup> Kent C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993) p.54

surroundings.”<sup>273</sup> Bell and Grant’s paintings of the pond, when seen together, act as a similar index of place, time and activity, snapshots of changing topography, like an album of photographs that charts changes in people and places, an atlas of place and event. As Cosgrove states “The world figured through mapping may thus be material or immaterial, actual or desired, whole or part, in various ways experienced, remembered or projected.”<sup>274</sup>

But there is a difference between maps and mapping. Janet Abrams and Peter Hall consider a map to be “a completed document,”<sup>275</sup> in Denis Cosgrove’s words a “spatial embodiment of knowledge,”<sup>276</sup> something visible, tangible, and concrete. They contrast it to mapping which “refers to a process – ongoing, incomplete and of indeterminate, mutable form.”<sup>277</sup> Abrams and Hall follow the doctrine of James Corner who defines mapping as a productive act that can “unlock potentials,” that uncovers “realities previously unseen or imagined[...] mapping *unfolds* potential; it makes territory over and over again, each time with new and diverse consequences.”<sup>278</sup> The artists are unwitting participants in this subjective process, the project of mapping the space, scrutinising the scene, repeatedly painting, recording and charting. Angelica Garnett wrote of this physical interaction, she described the artists as they “stood in quiet corners, indefatigably analysing the pond’s appearance – cool in the mornings, or glowing in the long shadows of the evening.”<sup>279</sup> Mapping becomes a process of knowing and being through the body.

And it is the body that is central to Edward Casey’s proposal for a joining of the “exactitude” of mapping with the “inexact amplitude” of art.<sup>280</sup> In his essay ‘Mapping the Earth in Works of Art’ Casey distinguishes four kinds of mapping. The first three follow ‘traditional’ paths: Cartography, a representation of the earth with high

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<sup>273</sup> Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 1993, p.56

<sup>274</sup> Denis Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Mapping Meaning’, in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999) p.2

<sup>275</sup> Janet Abrams and Peter Hall, ‘Where/Abouts,’ in *Else/where: Mapping New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*, eds. Janet Abrams and Peter Hall (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Design Institute, 2006) p.12

<sup>276</sup> Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Mapping Meaning’, 1999, p.2

<sup>277</sup> Abrams and Hall, *Else/where: Mapping New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*, 2006, p.12

<sup>278</sup> James Corner, ‘The Agency of Mapping,’ in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) p.213, italics in original.

<sup>279</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond’, 2001, p.70

precision and recognised symbols; Chorography, the “mapping of regions” based on politics or geology; and Topography, the “mapping of particular places.” But it is the fourth category, what Casey names as Body-Mapping in which “the artist’s body... becomes itself a means of mapping,” when the body “as a whole moving mass, displays its sense of the place it paints.”<sup>281</sup> Whilst Casey prescribes Body-Mapping primarily to abstract expressionist works this same sense of the artist’s presence, mapping and marking, can be discerned in the formalist work of Bell and Grant. As their brushes move across the landscape, recording space, the marks map their progress, leaving traces of the movement of the artist’s body in the surface of paint.

### **Framing the Map:**

Each picture made by the artists contributes to an imperfect map of space and time whilst maintaining its own qualities as a singular image. They occupy a dual position, one of autonomy shared with sequence. Each image is a bordered and delineated section of land. For Christian Jacob the edge or the border of the image/map highlights the political practice of cartography, an act that involves “delimitation, selection, and abstraction of a part from the whole.”<sup>282</sup> There is a certain equality between the map’s border and that of a picture. Jacobs quotes Louis Marin who explores how the border of the map corresponds with the border of a picture in the way that it “autonomizes the work in visible space. It puts the representation in a state of exclusive presence; it provides the correct definition of the conditions of visual reception and of the contemplation of representation.” For Marin this “Representation is identified as such by the exclusion of all other objects from the field of vision. Here the world is contained in its entirety; outside it nothing remains to be contemplated.”<sup>283</sup>

Bell disrupts this singular ‘contemplated’ space in her painting *View of the Pond at Charleston* (fig.2.06).<sup>284</sup> In it the pond is viewed from an upper story room at a slight

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<sup>280</sup> Casey, ‘Mapping the Earth in Works of Art,’ 2004, p.260

<sup>281</sup> Casey, ‘Mapping the Earth in Works of Art,’ 2004, p.261

<sup>282</sup> Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History*, trans. Tom Conley, ed. Edward H. Dahl (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006) p.108

<sup>283</sup> Louis Marin, ‘Le cadre de la représentation et quelques-unes de ses figures’ *Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne: Art de voir, art de décrire* 2, no.24, 1988, p.66. Quoted in Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, 2006, p.108

<sup>284</sup> Vanessa Bell, *View of the Pond at Charleston*, c.1919, 63.5cm x 67.3cm City Art Galleries, Sheffield. There is some disagreement as to where and when this painting was made. It was sold in November 1975 by Christie’s, London as being of Charleston. The painting is absent from the first impression of Richard Shone’s *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1976)

angle looking down and to the right. But within the delineated edges of the canvas is another frame that challenges the autonomy of the border. On three sides of the composition can be seen the edges of the window, giving the pond a double frame, its geometric lines at angles to the rigid rectangle of the stretched canvas. This concentric geometry contrasts with the curving lines of the pond, its elliptical edge, the twisting fence that borders its farthest reaches and the trees and bushes that surround it.<sup>285</sup> By placing the viewer inside Bell attempts to orientate the viewer, to literally put the pond in perspective, to give the viewer a visual itinerary that makes logical the elevated viewing position.

On the shallow window ledge is a vase and painted box from the Omega Workshops. The box is open, sitting on its inverted lid, with its contents spilling out above the top. A curtain hangs down the right-hand side of the composition, another delineating edge, but this time a moveable one that can alter the vertical edge of the pond, creating contested borders and cartographic instability. The viewer's focus falters on this threshold, oscillating between the landscape in the background and the linear still-life

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but is included in the revised edition as *Charleston Pond* c.1919 (London: Phaidon, 1993) p.157. It is not included in Elizabeth P. Richardson's *A Bloomsbury Iconography* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1989) though Richardson does note that "Many paintings of interiors, landscapes, and barn and garden scenes by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant have been omitted, as much through ignorance as by design," p.62. Christopher Reed positions the painting as being of Charleston in *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) pp.205-07. Reed shows how Bell and Grant used the same image in a decorative scheme for a pair of doors for John Maynard Keynes' living room in 1918, writing "Closing the doors to the sitting room at Gordon Square, therefore, revealed an image of Charleston that unified its interior and exterior, as well as its two primary inhabitants." (Reed, 2004 p.106). In Frances Spalding's biography of Bell, first published in 1983 by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Spalding positions the painting as being painted at Wissett Lodge in 1916, the farm she shared with Grant and Garnett before the move to Charleston in October 1916, Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, (Stroud: Tempus, 2006) p.149. In a letter from Bell to Roger Fry written at Wissett Lodge in June 1916 she tells him "I have been painting a picture of the pond here, but hayfever makes it almost impossible to work out of doors, so I am going on with it indoors" see *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Regina Marler (Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1998) p.200. It is disputable as to whether this is the painting now titled *View of the Pond at Charleston*. At both Wissett Lodge and at Charleston, Bell used bedrooms for her studios. At Charleston she took a room at the corner of the house on the first floor, with windows facing north and east (later to become Clive Bell's bedroom in 1939). At Wissett the unseasonable cold of the summer forced her to adapt a bedroom into a studio space, as she explained to Roger Fry: "I have now turned a bedroom here into a studio, as I found it rather difficult to work in the barn, which was nearly always too cold." Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, June 1916, (Marler, 1998 p.200). For my argument I will presume that the painting is of Charleston, but the reference by Bell to painting the pond at Wissett Lodge demonstrates the enduring appeal of the subject to the artist.

<sup>285</sup> Shearer West explores the importance of the picture frame to the Conversation Piece, both as a framing device for the painting and as a pictorial device within the composition in 'Framing Hegemony: Economics, Luxury and Family Continuity in the Country House Portrait,' in *The Rhetoric of the Frame*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp.63-78.

in the foreground, between two indexes of mapping.<sup>286</sup> In Pierre Schneider analysis of Matisse's use of the open window he notes how the appearance of the window as the main subject of painting disrupts perspective space and ultimately expels it from the picture plane.<sup>287</sup> While the pond often appears as the view glimpsed through the window in an interior scene of Charleston, the majority of paintings that elevate the pond as the main subject are viewed from within the garden at Charleston or from the house itself unmediated by layered bordering and framing.

### **Mapping the un-mappable:**

It has been stated that for much of his life at Charleston Grant preferred to record the front garden: "It was only in later years that Duncan painted the walled garden; earlier, he had preferred the pond and barns and was happy to venture with his easel into cowsheds, rickyards and the countryside beyond."<sup>288</sup> In a small group of images Grant moves away from the pond, venturing up the farm track that leads past the agricultural buildings to the south. The pond becomes a marker in the landscape, the topology of the land exposed like the bare chalk track uncovered by farm traffic, that leads the viewer's eye down the gently declining gradient to the pond, an oasis set among the trees. All of the pictures are set in the summer, the warm red tiles on the roof of the barn and the neighbouring granary on the left of the composition contrasting with the lush green fields and hedges on the right.

While there are fixed markers included in all of the compositions, the red brick barn and granary, the tall willow that stands by the pond and the chalk lane, there are also disruptive elements within the topography of the space. These are un-mappable effects, transient phenomena, like the late afternoon summer sun casting shadows across the foreground as it moves westerly across the sky. In *The Barn, Charleston* (fig.2.07) Grant maps these slivers of light and blocks of shade that stretch across the track whilst the pond is still bathed in sun, the white gate at the top of the lane distinctly visible.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Frances Spaldings suggests that Bell's use of the window as a framing device for an exterior scene, "may reflect on her need for domestic security and on the protected position from which, because of her sex and class, she viewed the world," Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.149

<sup>287</sup> Pierre Schneider, *Matisse* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984) pp.85-87

<sup>288</sup> Richard Shone, 'Introduction: Official Guide to the House and Gardens,' in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.28

<sup>289</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Barn, Charleston*, oil on canvas board, 40.5 x 51cm, sold at Philips London, 17 June 1997, Modern British and Irish Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures, lot no. 37.

In another group it is the transient presence of people that is mapped. A family group appears in the near left-hand foreground, a woman and two children sitting in the shade. *The Barn at Charleston* (fig.2.08)<sup>290</sup> appears to be a pre-cursor to the 1934 painting *Farm in Sussex* (fig.2.09), now in a public collection.<sup>291</sup> The painting is supported by a preparatory pencil sketch (fig.2.10),<sup>292</sup> and a watercolour (fig.2.11).<sup>293</sup> The painting expands the scene on the right hand side to include a jarring and unsettling juxtaposition of a farm worker shovelling dark brown material onto a cart, the horse standing patiently.<sup>294</sup> The figure may have resonances of Grant's own life as a farm worker, the cause that brought him to Charleston in 1916. The image can be positioned in a heritage of portrayals of rural labourers in Sussex from the nineteenth century.<sup>295</sup>

In Grant's 1942 painting of the same scene, *Charleston Barn* (fig.2.12)<sup>296</sup> there are no people present, no livestock. Charleston in wartime, being on the frontline of an expected invasion became a controlled space, a restricted zone.<sup>297</sup> Grant presents a peaceful but solid evocation of Britain in war time, described by Shone as having "a particular air of hushed remoteness, of a quietly continuing England in troubled times."<sup>298</sup> Grant continues his survey of Charleston's agricultural buildings after the

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<sup>290</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Barn at Charleston*, c.1928, oil on canvas, 65 x 81cm, sold at Sotheby's London, 23 June 1999, Modern British and Irish Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, lot no.48.

<sup>291</sup> Duncan Grant, *Farm in Sussex*, 1934, oil on canvas, 85 x 127.7cm, Walker Art Gallery

<sup>292</sup> Duncan Grant, Study for *Farm in Sussex*, c.1934, pencil on paper, 54 x 79cm cm, TCT/TAGG, box.10.

<sup>293</sup> Duncan Grant, *Barns and Pond at Charleston*, c.1934, watercolour and pencil on paper, 61.5 x 79cm, private collection, UK.

<sup>294</sup> For a study of this figure see Duncan Grant, *Farmer in a Field, Near Charleston*, 1934, watercolour, 80 x 44.4cm, collection of Mitch Bobkin, in *A Room of Their Own*, eds. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2008) p.193, no.96

<sup>295</sup> See Ysanne Holt, 'Poetry of the Peasant,' in *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) pp.11-28 in which Holt explores the representation of rural labour in the paintings of Sussex by Henry Herbert La Thangue and George Clausen.

<sup>296</sup> Duncan Grant, *Charleston Barn*, 1942, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 73.7cm, British Council Art Collection

<sup>297</sup> Charleston, like other places within ten miles of the vulnerable south coast, was declared a 'restricted area,' see Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf* (London: Pocket Books, 2007) p.353.

<sup>298</sup> Richard Shone, lot notes for Duncan Grant, *The Farmyard, Charleston*, 1949, Christie's, sale 5391, lot no.1, 17 December 2008, South Kensington, London

Second World War.<sup>299</sup> *The Farmyard, Charleston* painted in 1949 replaces human life with livestock including a group of cows moving slowly down to the pond (*fig.2.13*).<sup>300</sup>

### Drawing near:

At the end of this lane is a liminal space where the pond straddles the border between the garden and the farm. It was here that livestock would come to drink.<sup>301</sup> The chalk track runs parallel with the water supply that feeds the pond. The water “descended to it from a fold in the Downs running through a little shaw” after serving the wells that supplied the domestic water for Charleston and for neighbouring houses. This “surplus water” as Quentin Bell described it, was carried under the road and into the pond.<sup>302</sup>

This entry point becomes another site of alchemy, of transient matter, where solid becomes liquid, where earth becomes mud, becomes water. The space was continually changing, drying out in the hot, summer months to become hard earth, then being flooded after a downpour of rain when it would “overflow its banks and [the water] escape in dozens of minor rivulets.”<sup>303</sup> For visitors it was “imprinted... with danger and drama.” Nicholas Henderson recalls how a cow became stuck in the mud. The household were “constantly afraid that it was going to happen again and we [children] were warned of the danger we would be in if we fell into the pond.”<sup>304</sup>

Water evades mapping, only the space it occupies can be mapped. Water is constantly moving, as Heraclitus is reported to have said “you cannot step into the same river twice.”<sup>305</sup> The pond itself can become a map of past experience, a topography of where

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<sup>299</sup> See: *Cow Stalls*, 1942, oil on canvas, 43 x 53cm, University of Reading Art Collection; *Farm Building*, 1951, 25.5 x 38cm, Buxton Museum and Art Gallery; *The Barns from the Garden*, c.1959, oil on canvas, 54.7 x 63.4cm, The Charleston Trust; *The Barn at Charleston*, c.1932-34, oil on canvas, 60.3cm x 72.4cm, sold by Christies 20<sup>th</sup> Century British & Irish Art, 27 May 2010, lot no. 85; *Cattle and Granary (view from Charleston)*, 1948, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 68.5cm, sold by Gorrings, Lewes, May 2010, lot no.1523, once owned by Grace Higgins. Alexander Harris has written on the significance of Charleston’s agricultural buildings to Bell and Grant’s visual culture, see ‘A Subject for all Seasons,’ *Canvas*, issue 32, October 2011, The Charleston Trust.

<sup>300</sup> Duncan Grant *The Farmyard, Charleston*, 1949, oil on canvas, 102.8 x 127cm, sold at Christie’s, sale 5391, lot no.1, 17 December 2008, South Kensington, London

<sup>301</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.93

<sup>302</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.89

<sup>303</sup> Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 2004, p.125

<sup>304</sup> Nicholas Henderson, ‘Children at Charleston,’ *Charleston Newsletter*, no.2, 1982, pp.3-4

<sup>305</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999) p.33 (402a)

water was. The Charleston pond had a “perennial leak,” a rupture in its puddled base.<sup>306</sup> In 1921 whilst the artists were planning their respective paintings of family life there was a drought.<sup>307</sup> Angelica recalls “an expanse of clay, cracked like the craters of the moon”<sup>308</sup> while Quentin Bell recalls the “many dead fish rotting upon the intervening mud flats.”<sup>309</sup> Like water, smell cannot be mapped either.

This space of peril where the domestic meets and mingles with the agricultural is included in Grant’s *The Hammock*, one half of the composition that, for Frances Spalding, “like the hammock itself, rocks between two perspectives.”<sup>310</sup> A study of this bank of the pond made in preparation for *The Hammock* was bequeathed to the Tate in 1940 (fig.2.14).<sup>311</sup> The scene is repeated in *The Pond at Charleston* (fig.2.15).<sup>312</sup> Grant returns to this scene a decade later. In an oil sketch for *The Farm Pond* a canoe and paddle sit in the foreground on the bank of the pond (fig.2.16).<sup>313</sup> This is joined in the final composition by a female figure (fig.2.17).<sup>314</sup> In *The Hammock* the view across the pond to the barn is obscured by foliage but Grant recorded this scene several times including *Barns at Charleston*, 1922, *Barn by the Pond*, 1925, and *The Barn at Charleston*, c.1944.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond’, 2001, p.70. The ‘puddling’ of the pond in 1933 “constituted a major event and involved two carts and horses and six men,” see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.245. Bell writes about the problems of trying to find ‘a professional puddler’ in a letter to her son Julian, see Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, 10 October 1936, in *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, pp.422-23.

<sup>307</sup> 1921 was also the year that T.S. Eliot wrote the *Wasteland*. See Weatherwatch: The great year-long drought of 1921 [www.guardian.co.uk/news/2011/oct/13/weatherwatch-drought-margate-eliot-waste-land](http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2011/oct/13/weatherwatch-drought-margate-eliot-waste-land) accessed 22 April 2012.

<sup>308</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>309</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.97

<sup>310</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.249

<sup>311</sup> Duncan Grant, *Landscape, Sussex*, 1920, oil on canvas, 45.7cm x 76.2cm, Tate, London, N05075, bequeathed by Frank Hindley Smith, 1940.

<sup>312</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Pond at Charleston*, reproduced in Pamela Todd, *Bloomsbury at Home* (London: Pavilion Books, 1999).

<sup>313</sup> Duncan Grant, Sketch for *The Farm Pond*, 1930, oil on canvas, 59cm x 81.5cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, ABDAG010732

<sup>314</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Farm Pond near Firle*, 1930-32, Ontario Canada,

<sup>315</sup> Duncan Grant: *Barns at Charleston*, 1922, oil on canvas, private collection, Bridgeman Art Library; *Barn by the Pond*, 1925, oil on board, 60.1cm x 83.5cm, City of Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, purchased in 1961, accession no.ABDAG002256; *The Barn at Charleston*, c.1944, oil on canvas, 63.5cm x 76.7cm, private collection, sold at Christie’s 20<sup>th</sup> Century British & Irish Art, lot no. 21, 19 November 2004.



In *The Hammock* a horse and cart can be seen being driven up the lane past the pond. This presence is not acknowledged by the group but sets up a division between the working world outside of the garden and the leisure pursuits being enjoyed inside. Dr. Wendy Hitchmough writes how “it is significant that this space is neither a front garden, exactly, nor a part of the neighbouring farm.”<sup>316</sup> But for Angelica Garnett it is both domestic and agricultural, with the pond being “a responsibility shared between ourselves and the farmer. He used it and we enjoyed it, contributing when necessary to its upkeep. But when, eventually, the horses became redundant and the cows were watered in their parlour, the farm paid the pond no more attention.”<sup>317</sup>

Certainly the pond’s south bank is a liminal space, a threshold between the domestic garden and the agricultural countryside beyond. But this division of intention between the two spaces is highlighted even further by the conscientious efforts by Bell and Grant and the previous tenants to keep the front garden as a presentable, manicured space. Quentin Bell describes it at the beginning of the families tenure at Charleston as “most respectable part of the garden”<sup>318</sup> and “the garden proper... which had been made respectable” with lawns and bushes.<sup>319</sup> Angelica Garnett considers it an inherited respectability, the act of the previous tenants who conferred on the space “some notion of bourgeois conventionality. Seen from the dining-room window, this may have lulled the ego of those who lived there into thinking they were, socially speaking, on the up and up.”<sup>320</sup> The artists’ maintained this respectable front. John Higgins remembers a rockery, which sloped, down to the pond in a neat formation and that the grass on either side was “extremely neatly mowed.”<sup>321</sup> Bell described it to Grant, giving him ownership of the space, writing, “Your rockery is full of new delights.”<sup>322</sup>

### **Gazebo and snow:**

In most paintings the pond occupies the lower part of the canvas, a foundation that supports the vistas and views that surround Charleston. Angelica Garnett treats this

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<sup>316</sup> Wendy Hitchmough, ‘Charleston,’ TCTA. French translation in *Conversation Anglaise: Le Groupe de Bloomsbury* (Roubaix: Gallimard, 2009) p.78

<sup>317</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.72

<sup>318</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.96

<sup>319</sup> Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.125

<sup>320</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.69

<sup>321</sup> Interview with John Higgins, Tape 8 Side B, TCTA

<sup>322</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 20 May 1940, also mentioned by Bell on 28 May 1940, TGA/DGP

body of water as a corporeal being, a theatrical identity that poses for the artists, that “played its role over and over again,” that transformed itself through the day, “cool in the mornings, or glowing in the long shadows of the evening.”<sup>323</sup> Grant brings together the morning and the evening in his painting on the doors of the Chancel screen in Berwick church, part of a series of decorations made by Grant, Bell and Quentin Bell during the Second World War (*fig.2.18*).<sup>324</sup> Executed in 1944 during the second stage of the commission, the two doors show the pond in two halves, not only split physically but temporally too, the left hand side in daytime the right hand side at night. The left-hand panel shows the rising sun reflected in the pond, the fiery globe brought down to earth. The right hand panel shows a full moon in the sky, again reflected in the pond. The sun is reflected three times, its own image in the surface of the pond and the effects of its light illuminating the moon’s surface, again mirrored by the water.

Grant views this scene from the house side of the pond looking north/east, an aspect more favoured by the artist in the post-war period. In his *The Pond, Charleston* of 1959 Grant depicts a brown, muddy expanse of water inhabited by four ducks (*fig.2.19*).<sup>325</sup> A band of grass at the foot of the painting gives the viewer a sense of distance across the opaque surface of the pond to the bank beyond. There is also an un-stretched square of canvas depicting part of this scene, a series of short strokes of paint that build up abstracted facets of water, vegetation and architecture (*fig.2.20*).<sup>326</sup>

Along this bank of the pond was the site of a brief but significant erection, described by Quentin Bell as ‘an odd interjection,’<sup>327</sup> a gazebo designed by Grant. The wooden structure traversed the boundary of land and water, supported by four wooden stilts, two on the bank and two in the pond. Originally it was built as a platform to support a wicker summer house, that, according to Quentin Bell, once ‘served as a stage’ for amateur dramatics.<sup>328</sup> The hut eventually “rotted and was blown away by a gale”

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<sup>323</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>324</sup> Duncan Grant, doors to the chancel, Berwick Church, 1944, oil on wood. For details of Berwick Church see Richard Shone, *The Berwick Murals* (Eastbourne: Towner Art Gallery, 1969), Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.381-85, Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, pp.299-301, and Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010) pp.196-200.

<sup>325</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Pond, Charleston*, 1959, oil on board, laid on board, 76.2cm x 63.5cm, sold by Christie’s, London, 19 November 2004, 20<sup>th</sup> Century British & Irish Art, lot no.4.

<sup>326</sup> Duncan Grant, *untitled*, oil on canvas, un-stretched, 36 x 35.5cm, TCT/TAGG, box.9.

<sup>327</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.92

<sup>328</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.92. Bell recalls the hut as being the site of ‘a spirited performance’ of Moliere’s *Les Précieuses Ridicules* performed by Angelica Bell, Elizabeth

leaving the original platform. The destroyed summer house was still “a stage” for macabre playacting as illustrated in two photographs showing Quentin Bell and two females posing in the ruins (*fig.2.21 & 2.22*).<sup>329</sup>

Loose pencil sketches of Grant’s plans for the hut’s replacement show a solid structure with a brick base and tiled roof in the side elevation, and on the reverse of the paper the end elevation (*fig.2.23 & fig.2.24*).<sup>330</sup> The gazebo that was built was less substantial, described by Quentin Bell as “a hut of timber, hardboard and straw matting” and “decorated in the Chinese manner; it was adorned with brilliant colours and arresting designs.”<sup>331</sup> The juxtaposition of the garden and Chinese inspired themes is reminiscent of amateur theatricals performed by the pond for Angelica’s sham birthday party in September 1934.<sup>332</sup> Virginia Woolf noted in her diary “They acted very beautifully in Chinese clothes by the pond.”<sup>333</sup> The Gazebo would reflect objects from inside the house. Julian Bell, who worked in China, sent several objects back to Charleston for his mother.<sup>334</sup>

The decorated gazebo “lasted in all its glory for a summer. But the first of the autumn gales brought it down.”<sup>335</sup> When Grant recorded the structure in paintings from the early 1940s its painted persona had gone leaving a skeletal construction, a steeply pitched roof atop an open cube with a rail around the base resting on the elevated platform (*fig.2.29 & 2.30*).<sup>336</sup> Further storms would later remove the roof and upper

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Carr and Francis Birrell, a photograph of which is reproduced in *Vanessa Bell’s Family Album*, eds., Bell and Garnett, 1981, p.118.

<sup>329</sup> Possibly taken by Julian Bell, *Quentin Bell and two unidentified females at Charleston*, c.1930, black and white print, 11 x 6.6cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.

<sup>330</sup> Duncan Grant, design for gazebo, and verso, pencil on paper, c.1930, 19.7 x 40.5cm, TCT/TAGG, box.9. See also *figs.2.25-2.28*: Duncan Grant, design for a gazebo, pencil, sketchbook, each page 15 x 10cm, c.1930, TCT/TAGG, box.12.

<sup>331</sup> For Bloomsbury connections to China see Patricia Lawrence, *Lily Briscoe’s Chinese Eyes: Bloomsbury, Modernism and China* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003)

<sup>332</sup> Angelica Bell was born on Christmas Day 1918 and was given a ‘sham birthday’ in the summer.

<sup>333</sup> Tuesday 18 September 1934, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Four: 1931-1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982) p. 244

<sup>334</sup> Julian Bell was in China from 1935-1937, see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, pp.253, 256, 263-4 and 266.

<sup>335</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.92

<sup>336</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Gazebo, Charleston*, 1942, oil on canvas, 56.5cm x 46.3cm, sold by Christies, London, 27 March 2003, lot no.479 and Duncan Grant, *The Boathouse*, c.1942, oil on canvas, 39.5cm x 54.5cm, sold by Bonhams, Henley, 15 July 2006, lot no.642. See also Duncan

parts of the structure leaving just the base.<sup>337</sup> It changes from a visual focus to a viewing post remembered by both Angelica Garnett and John Higgens.<sup>338</sup> Garnett recalled that “Sitting on it one could stare at the duckweed and watch the dragonflies, or the horses and the cows as they came down to drink in the evening.”<sup>339</sup> Higgens recalled that when Grant, Bell and her family were away from Charleston he would take the opportunity to sunbathe on the platform.<sup>340</sup> Higgens proves a witness for another layer of history, another set of experiences of the space that slide, like the fish in Woolf’s story, one “over the other silently and orderly as fish not impeding each other.”<sup>341</sup> Plans for a replacement gazebo based on the 1942 painting by Grant were in place in 1982 as part of the restoration of Charleston but were never realised.<sup>342</sup>

While *The Hammock* and *Clive Bell and his Family* are, like the majority of paintings of the pond, set in the summer with the trees and bushes covered in leaves and a blue sky flecked with cloud, the dramatically changing effect of winter features in a small group of works. The transforming effects of snow appealed to the artists’ aesthetic senses. Its presence changes the potential of an event. In January 1936, at the time of the funeral of King George V, Bell wrote to her son “If there were to be snow, it might be worth seeing, but there won’t be – it’s foggy and rainy and warmer.”<sup>343</sup> Virginia Woolf was also taken by the aesthetic changes that snow brought to her local landscape. Her photograph albums from Monk’s house contain many pictures of her garden and the surrounding landscape covered in snow.<sup>344</sup>

There are several paintings of Charleston and in particular the pond, covered in snow. The solidified water hides minor topographical markers, erases boundaries and

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Grant, *The Gazebo, Charleston*, 1940, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 52.5cm, sold by Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury, 19 September 2012, lot no.216.

<sup>337</sup> Interview with Johns Higgens, Tape 8 Side B, TCTA

<sup>338</sup> John Higgens was the son of Grace and Walter Higgens, the housekeeper and gardener at Charleston and was born in the house in 1935, see Interview with Johns Higgens, Tape 1 Side A, TCTA

<sup>339</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>340</sup> Interview with Johns Higgens,, Tape 8 Side B, TCTA

<sup>341</sup> Woolf, ‘The Fascination of the Pool,’ 1985, p.220

<sup>342</sup> *Charleston Newsletter*, No.3 October 1982, p.11

<sup>343</sup> Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, Saturday 25 January 1936, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.405

<sup>344</sup> See Virginia Woolf’s Monk’s House photograph album (MH-4 and MH-5), Harvard Theatre Collection. Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. Also see Paula Maggio, *Reading the*

changes in the geology of the landscape, leaving the viewer to negotiate a partially cartographed pictorial space. It acts as a disruptive element within the topography of the space, challenging the maps “spatial embodiment of knowledge,”<sup>345</sup>

During these wintry conditions the artists invariably stayed close to or inside the house when working. Views are observed from windows in the upper stories of the house such as Bell’s attic studio. Her 1944 painting *Snow at Charleston* views the snow-covered weald to the north with the walled garden in the lower foreground.<sup>346</sup> For *Snow at Charleston* Grant looks to the north-east with the edge of the window frame cutting diagonally across the bottom right of the painting and a section of garden wall thrusting out at right angles.<sup>347</sup> The tops of trees by the unseen edge of the pond add texture and interest in the middle distance whilst the snow covered weald gives way to a broad band of luminous grey sky. Another painting by Bell *The Barn at Charleston*, 1945 includes the edge of the barn to the south of Charleston, again viewed from an elevated position.<sup>348</sup>

During these wintry conditions the pond is invariably viewed from the west, the location of house, looking to the east. Bell’s *The Frozen Pond, Charleston*, 1933 (*fig.2.31*)<sup>349</sup> shows the rounded edges of the pond extended and irregularated by the frozen banks, the grey water contrasting with the blue whiteness of the snow. In her 1941 painting *Snow at Tilton* (*fig.2.32*)<sup>350</sup> the whole of the pond is covered in snow, the surface of the pond the same colour as the surrounding landscape, its edges delineated by the wooden fence at its far side and the bulrushes on the western bank.

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*Skies in Virginia Woolf: Woolf on Weather in Her Essays, Her Diaries and Three of Her Novels* (London: Cecil Woolf Publishers, 2009)

<sup>345</sup> Denis Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: Mapping Meaning’, in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999) p.2

<sup>346</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Snow at Charleston (View from the Artist's Studio)*, c.1944 oil on canvas, 51 x 40.5cm, sold at Christie’s 23 November 2001, lot no.13

<sup>347</sup> Duncan Grant, *Snow at Charleston, East Sussex*, oil on canvas, 105 x 80cm, Reading Museum

<sup>348</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Barn at Charleston* (inscribed *Barn in Snow*), 1944, oil on canvas, 61 x 51cm, sold at Southeby’s November 1989

<sup>349</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Frozen Pond, Charleston*, oil on canvas, 1933, 69 x 56cm, private collection, sold at Christie’s London, 11 March 1994

<sup>350</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Snow at Tilton*, 1941 oil on canvas, 36.5 x 29.2cm, Arts Council Collection, AC86 acquired 1942

Grant's *Snow Covered Frozen Pond* of 1964 (fig.2.33)<sup>351</sup> views the scene from the central ground floor room, the plants and bushes on the west back dominating the foreground and truncating the space between it and the far bank. While the earlier *The Pond at Charleston in Winter*, 1950 (fig.2.34)<sup>352</sup> elevates the view point allowing the inclusion of a stretch of muddied water. It shows the same view as Grant's *Winter Landscape*, a painting that was reproduced by printmakers Frost and Reed in 1941 (fig.2.35).<sup>353</sup> The composition includes the gazebo reflected in the chilly, blue water. This image seems to have inspired a later illustration by Grant in which, minus the gazebo, the overall structure of the scene is the same. But the water in the pond has frozen allowing a chain of eight schoolboys to skate on its surface (fig.2.36).<sup>354</sup> This scene is possibly inspired by the harsh winter of 1947 when a group of local youngsters played a `form of ice hockey` on the frozen pond while Quentin skated around, much to the envy of the other people.<sup>355</sup>

### **Reflections on the pond:**

The pond was the subject of the first painting Bell executed at Charleston after moving there in October 1916 (fig.2.37).<sup>356</sup> The painting is quite small, just 30.5cm high by 35.5cm wide but it is a concentrated square of luminosity. Bell views her subject from the north west corner of the pond looking south, beyond the boundary of her new garden towards the Downs. At the visual centre of the picture is the flint wall that holds back the steep bank. It's a grey swoop painted with vertical strokes, the left hand edge of the wall stopping abruptly, the right hand side tapering off as it follows the curve of the pond. This ellipse is echoed throughout the painting: the splinter of grey sky at the top of the picture is its reflection; the edges of the field and the undulations of the Downs that stretch behind it further echoes of its fractured shape. For Richard Shone, Charleston's "remote tranquillity... is captured in this small, perfectly organised painting, each of the warm colours of the landscape telling against the cooler

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<sup>351</sup> Duncan Grant, *Snow Covered Frozen Pond*, oil and pencil on board, 1964, 57.2 x 75cm, private collection, sold at Christie's, New York, 1 September 2009

<sup>352</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Pond at Charleston in Winter*, oil on board 1950, 38 x 47cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/70

<sup>353</sup> Duncan Grant *Winter Landscape*, collotype published by Frost and Reed Ltd, 1941, 62 x 73.5cm TCT/AGG, also reproduced in *Prints for the Home*, ed. Warren E. Cox, (London: The Print Society, 1949) p.44. This is the only print by Grant available in the catalogue, there are none by Bell.

<sup>354</sup> Duncan Grant, *Skating on the Pond*, c.1950, print, 22.5cm x 28cm, TCT/TAGG, box.40

<sup>355</sup> Interview with Johns Higgins, Tape 8 Side B, TCTA

geometry of the reflected water.”<sup>357</sup> These reflections and formations have echoes in other work being executed at the same period. There is a similarity to Grant’s design for an embroidered chair cover for the Omega Workshops called *Cat on a Cabbage* (fig.2.38).<sup>358</sup> The cubist influenced grey, black and white limbs, body and tail of the cat and the elliptical blue and green leaves of the cabbage all confined in the circle of yellow and blue predate and predict Bell’s fractured reflections in Charleston’s pond. Bell had worked Grant’s design early in 1913, warning him that “I don’t know if you’ll approve of my rather bold and violent beginnings.”<sup>359</sup> The chair cover was not sold at the Workshops and remains at Charleston. The central section is heavily worn, its vibrancy gone, but the selva of the piece, tucked down the edges of the chair maintain their “violent beginnings” (fig.2.39).<sup>360</sup> The reporter for the *Daily News and Leader* saw the piece in its full glory when visiting the Omega Workshops later in the year, he wrote:

What do you think that represents?” said Mr. Fry, pointing to a Berlin wool-work cushion covered with a complication of lines beautifully coloured. “A landscape?” I hazarded diffidently. Mr. Fry laughed. “It is a cat lying on a cabbage playing with a butterfly,” he said. I saw the butterfly – a radiant rose-winged creature – but I have not yet traced the cat to my own satisfaction, though Mr. Fry pointed out where its head began and its tail ended.<sup>361</sup>

The reporter mistakes the faceted body of the cat for landscape. The distinct areas of colour and rhythmic design that make up the reflective water’s surface in Bell’s painting could easily have been converted into a similar Omega tapestry.

The painting captures the pond’s optical qualities, the trees at the pond edge doubled in the reflection, the transparency of water reflecting the transparency of blue sky. This mirroring of nature in water leads Bachelard to question “Where is reality – in the sky or in the depth of the water?”<sup>362</sup> Bell and Grant explore these visual problems of

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<sup>356</sup> Vanessa Bell: *The Pond, Charleston*, 1916, oil on canvas, 29.5 x 34.8cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/78, see Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.185.

<sup>357</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.185

<sup>358</sup> Duncan Grant, design for *Cat on a Cabbage*, c.1913, gouache on paper, 48 x 61cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/101

<sup>359</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 14 January 1913, TGA/DGP

<sup>360</sup> Designed by Duncan Grant, possibly worked by Vanessa Bell, *Cat on a Cabbage*, c.1913, 59 x 72cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/T/155

<sup>361</sup> ‘Post-Impressionist Furniture,’ *The Daily News and Leader*, Thursday 7 August 1913

<sup>362</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983) p.48

reflection and doubling, of layering images. Angelica Bell recalled that Grant “was always trying to think of statues to put on the other side to be reflected in the water.”<sup>363</sup> The pond’s reflective qualities give it the qualities of a mirror, reflecting an alternative scene, one that is inverted, upside down, the opposite of the everyday.

Virginia Woolf was thrilled by the transforming effects of water when in November 1940 a bomb ruptured the banks of the River Ouse causing it to flood the valley near her home at Rodmell. She wrote of her “infinite delight,” of the “Cascades of water [that] roared over the marsh – All the gulls came and rode the waves at the end of the field. It was, and still is, an island sea, of such indescribable beauty, almost always changing, day and night, sun and rain, that I cant take my eyes off it.”<sup>364</sup> The following day she wrote to Vita Sackville-West, “I’ve never seen anything more visionary lovely than Caburn upside in the water.”<sup>365</sup> Bachelard writes of how the water’s reflection, “doubles the world, doubles things. It also doubles the dreamer, not simply as a vain image but through his involvement in a new oneiric experience.”<sup>366</sup> In the middle of the upheaval and uncertainty that war brings Woolf seems to have a need for a doubling up of world, with the addition of an alternative, inverted world.

Bell gave her sister the reflected and doubled image of a bridge for the cover of Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway* (fig.2.40).<sup>367</sup> It is the pond’s “reflection” that covers “the whole of its centre” that Woolf draws her reader’s attention back to at the close of *The Fascination of the Pool*.<sup>368</sup> Maybe it is the quality that this reflection of nature has of removing the blemishes found in its referent that appeals to the writer and the artist. With reference to Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Domain of Arnheim* Bachelard notes that “the

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<sup>363</sup> Angelica Garnett talking to Christopher Mason, *Duncan Grant at Charleston* recordings, c.1969, Tape 8, Track 1, TCTA.

<sup>364</sup> *Leave the Letters Till We’re Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1936 – 1941*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980) p.444

<sup>365</sup> *Leave the Letters Till We’re Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1936 – 1941*, ed. Nicolson, 1980, p.446. Mount Caburn is a 480ft isolated peak to the east of Lewes that dominates the surrounding landscape.

<sup>366</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1983, p.48

<sup>367</sup> Vanessa Bell, jacket design for Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 1925. Gillespie does not recognise the imagery of the bridge in Bell’s design, describing it as an “abstract shape” that “cuts across the entire centre,” see Diane Filby Gillespie, *The Sisters’ Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988) p.257. Also highlighted in Simon Watney’s review of the book in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.22, December 1988, p.41.

<sup>368</sup> Woolf, ‘The Fascination of the Pool,’ 1985, p.221



reflected image is subjected to a systematic idealization. The mirage corrects the real; it removes stains and wretchedness.”<sup>369</sup>

Bell had studied Ruskin’s *The Elements of Drawing*, in which the rules for depicting the reflection seen in water were methodically laid out.<sup>370</sup> Ruskin’s route to capturing the “exquisite reflection” involved “patience.” He wrote that “If you give the time necessary to draw these reflections, disturbing them here and there as you see the breeze or current disturb them, you will get the effect of the water.” But he warned the impatient student “no expedient will give you a true effect.”<sup>371</sup> Bell may have recalled these teachings when she executed a trio of paintings at Charleston in which the pond’s reflective qualities become a repeated motif. Angelica Garnett has written that she saw the pond “as an extension of Vanessa, whose huge grey eyes absorbed its image as she stood on the bank, moving her brush like an antenna over the surface of her canvas.”<sup>372</sup> In these three paintings the house is viewed from the eastern bank of the pond, Bell’s brush doubling its image, inverted in the pond’s water and apparently complying with the laws of specular reflection.<sup>373</sup>

*Charleston* (fig.2.41),<sup>374</sup> also known as *Clive Bell at Charleston*,<sup>375</sup> was for some time considered to be the only painting made by Bell of the front of the house.<sup>376</sup> In it the flint wall becomes a hinge for the two images, “the junction, [where] water grasps the

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<sup>369</sup> Citing Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Domain of Arnheim” in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York, 1902), 6:191. Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1983, p.49.

<sup>370</sup> Spalding proposes that it was Ebenezer Cooke, Bell’s art teacher c.1895, who would have introduced her to Ruskin’s publication. See Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.27

<sup>371</sup> John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing in Three Letters to Beginners* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859) p.178

<sup>372</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>373</sup> For an account of the science of reflection and on how artists have manipulated them see Roland W. Fleming, Antonio Torralba and Edward H. Adelson, ‘Specular reflections and the perception of shape,’ *Journal of Vision*, no.4, 2004, pp.798-820 and Patrick Cavanagh, Jessica Chao and Dina Wang, ‘Reflections in art,’ *Spatial Vision*, vol.21, no.3-5, pp. 261-270, 2008.

<sup>374</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Charleston*, c.1950, oil on canvas 59.4cm x 49cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/225.

<sup>375</sup> This painting was the lead image for the eponymously titled exhibition *Clive Bell at Charleston* at the Gallery Edward Harvane, London, 1972.

<sup>376</sup> Stated as being “Vanessa’s only known painting of the front of the house.” Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.107 and as “the only known painting by Vanessa Bell of the house.” On the Art Fund website [www.artfund.org/artwork/2542/charleston-farmhouse](http://www.artfund.org/artwork/2542/charleston-farmhouse) accessed 28/01/2012.

sky.”<sup>377</sup> The reflection occupies as much space as its referent. Painted in 1934 *A Garden Walk* (fig.2.42),<sup>378</sup> shows the “darkness of very deep water” reflecting the front of the house. The property is viewed square on, its tall chimneys set against a blue summer sky peppered with cumulus clouds. The reflection is truncated, the lower edge of the canvas breaking the picture just above guttering at the foot of the roof. Ruskin insisted that “The picture in the pool needs nearly as much delicate drawing as the picture above the pool; except only that if there be the least motion on the water, the horizontal lines of the images will be diffused and broken, while the vertical ones will remain decisive, and the oblique ones decisive in proportion to their steepness.”<sup>379</sup> Bell has disregarded this advice, losing architectural detail seen in the reproduction of the house. She has opened the windows in the reflected version, replacing the glazing bars that indicate the small, panes of glass that make up the main windows with squares of grey, edged with black and grey patches. An attic window has slid down the roof, no longer aligned with its pair. Her 1938 painting *Charleston from the Pond* (fig.2.43)<sup>380</sup> shows a fraction of the house reflected in the weed-filled pond’s surface, dominated by the red-brick lined darkened opening of the front door. Obscuring part of the house is an unidentified structure on the grassed bank of the pond on the site of Grant’s rock garden.<sup>381</sup>

There is an ongoing battle between the reflective qualities of the water and the interceptive elements of the lilies and weeds that grow in the pond. Grant’s *Lily Pond* design for the Omega Workshops celebrates the obscured pond.<sup>382</sup> The design, swirls of green, red, orange and black paint was applied to various pieces of furniture, on the

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<sup>377</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1983, p.48

<sup>378</sup> Vanessa Bell, *A Garden Walk*, 1934, oil on canvas, 73cm x 61cm, private collection, reproduced in exhibition catalogue *A Room of Their Own*, 2008, no.19, p.135.

<sup>379</sup> Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, 1859, p.178

<sup>380</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Charleston from the Pond*, c.1938, oil on canvas, 45.7x35.6 cm, private collection. sold at Christie’s, London, 2008.

<sup>381</sup> Angelica Garnett used the same view to illustrate the cover of the Trust’s first guidebook *Charleston, Past and Present*, 1987, the pond acting like a moat, protecting the house whilst doubling it and framing it. This viewpoint continues to lead the Trust’s marketing material on visitor leaflets and in the banner of the website ([www.charleston.org.uk](http://www.charleston.org.uk)). Bell’s c.1950 painting was itself used as a marketing and fundraising tool, reproduced as a limited edition print by the Charleston Trust.

<sup>382</sup> The roots of Grant’s lily pond design lay in the pond at Roger Fry’s house Durbin’s. Fry’s daughter Pamela Diamond recalls in 1911 Fry, Henri Doucet and Grant painting her portrait sat in front of the pond, see Pamela Fry, ‘Recollections of the Omega,’ *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920* (London: Anthony d’Offay, 1984) p.8. Also see *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshops 1913-1919*, ed. Alexandra Gerstein (London: Fontanka, 1999) p.148.

surface of a table or, challenging the horizontal nature of water, on the vertical panels of a screen.<sup>383</sup> A lily pond table was positioned in the central bedroom of Charleston, the one used by John Maynard Keynes (*fig.2.44*).<sup>384</sup> It looks over the pond, mirroring its surface. There are echoes of this pre-war design in a painting from the 1930s with the irregular shapes of muted colour making up the surface of the pond next to the flint wall (*fig.2.45*).<sup>385</sup>

But it is the mirrored surface of the water that is valued by the artists, the “Platonic solemnity”<sup>386</sup> of reflection. There is a continuous battle with plant-life, a struggle for the image’s survival. Grant complained to Cecil Beaton, about how “He so liked to see a reflected patch of sky but the bulrushes had completely taken over.”<sup>387</sup> Angelica Garnett describes the scene in “the 1970s” when attempts were made to clear the pond of bulrushes “hoping, at the end of the day, to reveal a clear patch of water.”<sup>388</sup> Some seventy years earlier Roger Fry described a days activity of clearing the pond of weed until “by dinner time the pond was practically clear, the trees and hills all neatly reflected and the banks a mass of smelly and clammy weed.”<sup>389</sup>

In Woolf’s short story *A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond* it is a “green carpet” of weed that supposedly conceals the bodies of the three drowned occupants of a punt.<sup>390</sup> Written between 1899 and 1904 “in the manner of a provincial reporter” the story tells of how Virginia and Adrian Stephen together with their cousin capsize a punt on a

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<sup>383</sup> There are four Lily Pond tables known to be in existence. As well as the example in the collection of the Charleston Trust, (CHA/F/120) there is one in the Victoria and Albert museum (W.3-1942), one in the Art Gallery of South Australia (849F4), and one in The Courtauld Gallery, (F.1960.xx.1). The Courtauld also has an example of the four-fold screen with the Lily Pond design (F.1999.xx.1).

<sup>384</sup> Duncan Grant and The Omega Workshops, *Lily Pond Table*, c.1913-14, oil on wood, 125.5 x 72.5 x 80.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/120. The table used by Keynes was sold by the Trust to provide funds for the conservation of Charleston and bought by the Art Gallery of South Australia.

<sup>385</sup> Duncan Grant, *Charleston Pond*, oil on un-stretched canvas, 70.5 x 60cm, The Charleston Trust, TCT/TAGG, box.19.

<sup>386</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1983, p.49

<sup>387</sup> *Beaton in the Sixties: More Unexpurgated Diaries*, ed. Hugo Vickers (London: Phoenix, 2004) p.212

<sup>388</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.72

<sup>389</sup> Roger Fry to Helen Anrep, 2 August 1925, in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) pp.139-140

<sup>390</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond,’ *The Charleston Magazine*, issue 1, Spring/Summer 1990, p.39

pond whilst on holiday.<sup>391</sup> This experience of the instability of water is repeated for the next generation on Charleston pond. Quentin Bell recalls how he and his brother along with some friends capsized their punt: “There were some luscious-looking blackberries growing out over the bank; we began to stretch for them; we stretched too far; the punt suddenly filled, and sank.”<sup>392</sup> The punt at Charleston was inherited, a part of the previous inhabitant’s lives not covered or removed by its new tenants. Quentin Bell recalled its awning of “yellow silk in the last stages of battered decay, it mouldered somewhere in the orchard.”<sup>393</sup>

The pond as a space for recreation was established before Bell and her ‘family’ moved in. At the turn of the century Charleston was a boarding house, the ceramic room numbers still attached to many of the doors creating a numerical index for the domestic, indoor spaces. Three postcards are known to have survived from this pre-Bloomsbury existence (*fig.2.46, fig.2.47 & fig.2.48*).<sup>394</sup> Each views the house from the east bank of the pond and show people in the punt or in a rowing boat. Boating has been described as “a latent form of hydrophobia, an impossible love for the element most feared, the dominant complex of the mariner.”<sup>395</sup> In Grant’s *The Farm Pond* and *The Farm Pond near Firle* (*see fig.2.16 & fig.2.17*) the boat is out of the water, the ultimate hydrophobia. The “romantic balancing act on the tightrope between danger and safety”<sup>396</sup> seems to appeal more to Bell’s sons than her daughter, who were photographed by their mother in the water and in the punt. Described by Angelica as being “steered by the half-naked, aboriginal figure of my brother Julian, for whom the pond encapsulated the world of nature, as yet tranquil and unviolated. It was a kingdom he ruled over with a certain careless arrogance, a dream that lay between earth and sky, suggestive of further horizons” (*fig.2.49*).<sup>397</sup> For Angelica “the water

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<sup>391</sup> See Anne Olivier Bell’s introduction to Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond,’ *The Charleston Magazine*, issue 1, Spring/Summer 1990, p.37

<sup>392</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.91

<sup>393</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.89

<sup>394</sup> Three photograph postcards of Charleston, c.1905-1910. Fig.2.46 is in the collection of the Charleston Trust, c.1905, 9 x 14cm, CHA/PH/186. Fig.2.47 and 2.48 were reproduced in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.12, September 1985, p.42.

<sup>395</sup> Thomas A.P. van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pool: An Intimate History of the Swimming Pool*, ed. Helen Shearing (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 1998) p.233

<sup>396</sup> van Leeuwen, *The Springboard in the Pool*, 1998, p.233

<sup>397</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.69. Photographed reprinted in *Vanessa Bell’s Family Album*, 1981, p.29. Though sailing may not have appealed to Angelica she did bathe in the pond and was photographed by her mother as Ophelia from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, See Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.175.

simply spelt wonder. I looked into it and through it.”<sup>398</sup> It is Julian Bell who seems to instigate sailing on the pond. Bell writes to him in China describing the summer activities of her daughter and her friend: “sailing hasn’t been the fashion so far without you to stir them up to it.”<sup>399</sup> In 1909 Grant had used boating as a motif for a poster in favour of women’s suffrage, the man seen speeding to parliament in full sail while the woman struggled in the rough waters with her oars (*fig.2.50*).<sup>400</sup>

### **The Sacred Lake:**

I have shown the importance of the reflective qualities of water, the mirroring of the ponds surroundings, in Bell and Grant’s work. The surface of the pond offers up a copy, an alternative version, but one that is mirrored and fractured. It is inverted, upside down, the opposite of the everyday, a space for the indescribable chapter, the unnameable love.

One of Quentin Bell’s most treasured memories of his childhood at Charleston was listening to his mother reading *Alice in Wonderland*. He remembers that “Vanessa read this to us one summer evening in the walled garden and I remember actually crying with laughter.”<sup>401</sup> As the words of the story fill the evening air the garden becomes temporarily the scene for Alice’s adventures. But visually it is Grant that takes us ‘Down the Rabbit Hole’ into the alternative world. The pond with its surface “pure enough to reflect the sky”<sup>402</sup> reflects another world, an alternative world abstracted by the ripples of the surface, a world of sensuality.

One of the recurring elements reflected in the pond and captured by the artists was the willow tree that Bell wrote about so enthusiastically to Fry at the beginning of her tenure at Charleston.<sup>403</sup> It fell down in the mid 1940s and was removed in May 1948.

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<sup>398</sup> Garnett, ‘The Pond,’ 2001, p.70

<sup>399</sup> Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, Saturday 29 August 1936, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.420.

<sup>400</sup> On Grant’s suffragette poster see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987) p.16 and Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.19-20

<sup>401</sup> Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.128

<sup>402</sup> E.M. Forster, *A Room With a View* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987) p.149

<sup>403</sup> For examples of paintings that feature the willow tree see: Vanessa Bell, *The Pond, Charleston*, 1934, watercolour, 62 x 44cm, The National Trust, 768415, ex collection Leonard and Virginia Woolf; Duncan Grant, mis-titled *Flatford-on-Avon*, 1944, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 65.5cm, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, 1948.FA.848; and Duncan Grant, *Green Tree*

Bell describes the violent activity to her daughter: “Today the poor old willow has been cut up and almost completely dragged away by[...] tractors. Axes have been ringing and saws sawing, and it all looks very bare.”<sup>404</sup> Grant recorded the scene in a series of rapid sketches (*figs.2.51 & 2.52*).<sup>405</sup> But there were already plans for the vacant space. Angelica Garnett recalled that Grant “was always trying to think of statues to put on the other side to be reflected in the water.”<sup>406</sup> Bell explained to her daughter that “Duncan and Quentin have a plan for erecting a large statue on the site. I think it would be lovely but will make us almost too peculiar.”<sup>407</sup> A statue of Antinous the lover of Roman Emperor Hadrian, was placed there, one of a group of plaster casts that Grant had purchased from Lewes School of Art when it closed in 1931. As Quentin describes the “life-size Antinous, wandered from place to place, from the middle of the orchard to the side of the pond near the gazebo and then to the Cape.”<sup>408</sup> The site continues to be one of gradual loss and decay. The plaster cast weathered away until “for some time the legs of Antinous stood without any body to support.”<sup>409</sup> The drowned Antonius dissolved into the pond, the plaster hero conquered by rain and wind echoing his corporal body’s fate. There is a photograph of the *Capitoline Antinous* in the Charleston archive, possibly the same source of the plaster statue at Charleston (*fig.2.53*).<sup>410</sup>

Sarah Waters charts the importance of Antinous to late nineteenth century self-identified homosexual culture, in particular John Addington Symonds and Oscar Wilde.<sup>411</sup> Around April 1902 E.M. Forster made “jottings” on a back flyleaf of a

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and *Dark Pool*, 1926, oil on canvas, 61 x 76.2cm, The Provost and Scholars of King’s College, Cambridge, ex collection John Maynard Keynes.

<sup>404</sup> Vanessa Bell to Angelica Garnett, 9 May 1948, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Marler, 1998, p.516

<sup>405</sup> Duncan Grant, inscribed ‘The West’s cutting down the willow, May/48,’ pencil, 20 x 15cm, and inscribed ‘The West’s cutting down the willow,’ pencil, 20 x 15cm, TCT/TAGG, box 20.

<sup>406</sup> Angelica Garnett talking to Christopher Mason, *Duncan Grant at Charleston* recordings, 1969, Tape 8, Track 1, TCTA

<sup>407</sup> Vanessa Bell to Angelica Garnett, 9 May 1948, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.516

<sup>408</sup> The Cape was the name Quentin Bell proscribed to the section of the ponds eastern edge where the willow had stood, see Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.100

<sup>409</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.100. Two plaster heads remain at Charleston, see *Head of Hermes*, 37 x 17 x 23cm, CHA/SC/2 and *The Chios Head*, 34 x 26 x 21cm, CHA/SC/60.

<sup>410</sup> Maker unknown, *Capitoline Antinous*, monochrome photographic print, 25 x 19.5cm The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/396

<sup>411</sup> Sarah Waters, ‘“The Most Famous Fairy in History”: Antinous and Homosexual Fantasy,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol.6, no.2 October 1995, pp.194-230

notebook for a three-act play or three-part novel intended to be titled *Antinous*.<sup>412</sup> Possibly it was a passage in Forster's 1908 novel *A Room With a View* that influenced Bell's description of the pond at Charleston as a "lake."<sup>413</sup> In it *The Sacred Lake* is described as "a shallow pool" and as "only a puddle" by the book's young heroine Lucy Honeychurch.<sup>414</sup> But later, after heavy rain has swollen the stream and filled the pool it becomes "large enough to contain the human body, and pure enough to reflect the sky."<sup>415</sup> It also becomes the location for one of Forster's most memorable scenes, according to W. Stone a scene more central to the book than the *Room* and the *View* of the title.<sup>416</sup> It is a scene that is drenched with the resonance of other private Bloomsbury pleasures.

Freddy Honeychurch, George Emerson and the Rev. Beebe go for a bathe in the *Sacred Lake*. They swim naked. Losing their inhibitions and social constraints they play games, splashing each other, running around the pond, pretending to be Red Indians, throwing each other's clothes into the water and trying them on. Their escapades are discovered by Lucy Honeychurch, her mother and Cecil Vyse whose witnessing of the scene ends the chapter.<sup>417</sup>

The action happens in chapter twelve of the novel, titled by Forster as *Twelfth Chapter*. The only other chapter in the book whose title doesn't include some kind of descriptive text is chapter four. Entitled *Fourth Chapter* it describes the scene in which Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson witness a murder in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. It suggests that both these chapters deal with elements that are indescribable and socially unacceptable.

Like the games played by Julian and Quentin on the pond at Charleston, the characters in *A Room with a View* enter into a series of fantasy role-plays. George is described as "Michelangelesque on the flooded margins" an image reminiscent of Grant's

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<sup>412</sup> See The papers of Edward Morgan Forster, King's/PP/EMF/1 /1

<sup>413</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, September 1916, TGA/DGP

<sup>414</sup> Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, p.126

<sup>415</sup> Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, p.149

<sup>416</sup> "The Sacred Lake and the male swimming party could have been the book's symbol rather than the room with the view and the lovers in their chamber. But the Sacred Lake could not issue into the stream of the generations, and Forster quite obviously needs to talk about continuance in a social as well as mystical way." W. Stone, *The cave and the Mountain: A Study of E.M. Forster* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966) p.232.

<sup>417</sup> 'Twelfth Chapter,' in Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, pp.143-152

positioning of the plaster cast of Antinous by the Charleston pond.<sup>418</sup> The men “play at being Indians,” are described as being like “the nymphs in *Götterdämmerung*.”<sup>419</sup> They play at dressing up, putting on each other’s clothes, temporarily inhabiting the appearance of the other man. As Eric Haralson describes, “The three men try on alternative genders, ethnicities, and social roles in a temperate carnival of deviance.”<sup>420</sup>

Grant seems to be searching for a location for a “carnival of deviance” of his own, free from the restrictions and regulations of everyday society. In a letter to Keynes written during the course of their love affair Grant, who was visiting the remote island of Hoy, part of the Orkney Islands off the west coast of Scotland, describes an alternative, inverted place as far away from polite society as imaginable:

Rackwick proper is a largish fishing village about ten miles up the coast, with no road to it and right on the sheer Atlantic near the highest rocks in this part of the world. The people they say are superstitious and frequently mad from too frequent incest. One of them is a Red Indian and the others are the remains of the Spanish Armada mingled with the heroes of the Icelandic saga. There is no priest, no church and no policemen. Don’t you think we better go there at once? I shall make enquiries today.<sup>421</sup>

Grant describes a counter *Wonderland* to the pretend southern one acted out in Sussex or Surrey with real Red Indians, genuine madness where homosexuality would not be out of place, a homo-topia free from the authority and regulations of religion and law, a place like the Sacred Lake where, the Rev. Beebe reasoned in *A Room with a View*, “surely they lie beyond the intrusion of man?”<sup>422</sup> In a group of paintings Grant presents a Foucauldian heterotopia, “a quasi-public space which functions to reflect, expose,

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<sup>418</sup> Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, p.149. For the influence of the art and biography of Michelangelo on nineteenth century homosexual culture see Lene Østermark-Johansen, “The love that dare not speak its name’: Michelangelo as patron saint of sexual inversion,’ in *Sweetness and Strength: The Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998) pp.205-237. Also Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.56 & 60

<sup>419</sup> Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, p.149

<sup>420</sup> Eric Haralson, “Thinking about Homosex’ in Forster and James,’ in *Queer Forster*, ed. Robert K. Martin and George Piggford (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) p.70

<sup>421</sup> Duncan Grant to John Maynard-Keynes, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1906 quoted in Richard Shone, ‘A General Account of the Bloomsbury Group,’ in *Keynes and the Bloomsbury Group: The Fourth Keynes Seminar held at the University of Kent at Canterbury 1978*, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980) p.24. For an account of Grant’s time in Hoy see Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.51-2.

<sup>422</sup> Forster, *A Room With a View*, 1987, p.149



invert, support or compensate for the outside world.”<sup>423</sup> Grant uses the pond to map the “greenwood” ending of Forster’s *Maurice*, a reflection of the homosexual rural society of Edward Carpenter.<sup>424</sup> In Grant’s heterotopian imagination the pond is full of flamingos, drowned Roman heroes and naked, bathing boys.

### Mapping the queer pond:

While Grant was preparing to paint *The Hammock* he was also engaged in two paintings of bathers by the pond, sexually charged images that appear to exclude the familial, that celebrate the alternative and the inverted, that present a society of freedom, mapping inverted sexuality on the pond. *Two Bathers* (fig.2.54)<sup>425</sup> and *Bathers by the Pond* (fig.2.55)<sup>426</sup> were both completed in 1921, the paintings’ production confirmed in a letter written by Bell in August of that year. She described them to Roger Fry: ‘Duncan is painting a picture of 2 nudes by a pond rather under the influence of Seurat I think – very odd pale relief. I hope he means to paint a large group out of doors from drawings’<sup>427</sup> Grant used a more muted, monochromatic palette than other paintings of the period such as *The Hammock*. It suggests the haze of a sultry summer’s day, a fantastic, dreamlike environment removed from the everyday, a kind of Arcadia. It is a development of his “leopard print” manner, in which he used separate dabs and dashes of colour to sketch the image, leaving the canvas visible. For these two paintings Grant has left no spaces between the delineated marks of paint, creating a shimmering languorous quality that reflects the attitude of the subjects of his composition.

Grant would have had the opportunity to study Seurat’s use of pointillism at close quarters. It was on Grant’s recommendation that Maynard Keynes bought Seurat’s oil study of the standing couple featured towards the right in his *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-5) on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1919 (fig.2.56).<sup>428</sup> Another

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<sup>423</sup> Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: an introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.168. See Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces,’ in *Diacritics*, vol.16, no.1, spring 1986, pp.24-7

<sup>424</sup> For the influence of Carpenter on Grant see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.75-76. For Carpenter’s influence on E.M. Forster see Robert K. Martin, ‘Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*,’ *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol.8, issue.3-4, 1983, pp.35-46.

<sup>425</sup> Duncan Grant, *Two Bathers*, 1921, oil on canvas, 59.5 x 89.7cm, The Provost and Scholars of King’s College, Cambridge

<sup>426</sup> Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond*, c.1920-21, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 91.5cm, Pallant House, Chichester

<sup>427</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 21 August 1921, TGA

<sup>428</sup> Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.176. David Scrase, *Maynard Keynes: Collector of pictures, books and manuscripts* (Cambridge: Provost and Scholar’s of King’s College, 1983)

influence was the bathing paintings of Renoir. In 1919 Bell gave Grant photographs of several late paintings by Renoir who had recently died, as a Christmas present. Nearly all of these were groups or single nude bathers in the open air. Grant had the opportunity to study the original painting *The Large Bathers* in February 1921 when he visited Paris (fig.2.57).<sup>429</sup> The painting was in the possession of Grant's old teacher, Jacques-Emile Blanche. Grant also saw further works by Seurat.

Two drawings by Grant show the evolution of Renoir's all female bathing scenes into *Bather's by the Pond*. The first shows a direct influence from the painting in Blanche's possession, two female figures are on the bank of a river or pond under a willow tree (fig.2.58).<sup>430</sup> One sits and one kneels on the bank both with their right foot in the water. In a second sketch a group of naked figures sit under a willow tree, three men, one woman and a pan like figure with the hindquarters, legs and feet of a goat (fig.2.59).<sup>431</sup> It is this pastoral Arcadia that Grant adopts and adapts for his later paintings.

The figure seated on the left of Grant's *Two Bathers* and *Bathers by the Pond* have their back turned to the viewer. These figures have been likened to the seated nude at the left of Seurat's *Les Poseuses* (fig.2.60).<sup>432</sup> Though the figure in *Les Poseuses* has certain similarities to Grant's there is a greater connection to the central figure in Seurat's 1884 painting *Bathers at Asnières* (fig.2.61).<sup>433</sup> particularly with the left-hand figure in *Bather's by the Pond*. His posture has more similarities with his hands in his lap, his shoulders sloping forwards, sitting on the water's edge, surrounded by people yet isolated. A more striking similarity can be seen between the left-hand figure in *Two Bathers* and that of Renoir's 1888 painting *After the Bath* (fig.2.62).<sup>434</sup> Both figures are engaged in the same activity, drying themselves with a towel, the right arm curved around the body to dry the area under the raised left arm. A black and white

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pp.39-42. Georges Seurat, *Study for 'La Grande Jatte': Couple Walking*, 1884-5, oil on canvas, 81 x 65cm, The Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge.

<sup>429</sup> Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Large Bathers*, 1884-87, oil on canvas, 117.8 x 170.8cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

<sup>430</sup> Duncan Grant, terracotta drawing, undated, 29 x 23cm, TCT/TAGG, box.34.

<sup>431</sup> Duncan Grant, terracotta drawing, undated, approx. 36 x 62cm, TCT/TAGG, box.34.

<sup>432</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.202. Georges Seurat, *Les Poseuses*, 1886-88, oil on canvas, 200 x 249.9cm, The Barnes Foundation, BF811.

<sup>433</sup> Georges Seurat *Bathers at Asnières* 1884, oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, bought, 1924, National Gallery, NG3908

<sup>434</sup> Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *After the Bath*, 1888, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 54cm, private collection.

photograph of this painting is in the archives of the Charleston, possibly one of Bell's Christmas gifts to Grant from 1919 (*fig.2.63*).<sup>435</sup>

But it is the prone figure in *Two Bathers* that catches the viewer's eye, stretched out horizontally across the canvas, the naked youth stares out of the picture frame. Shone considers that the painting "suggests a more chaste and cooler vision" than *Bathers by a Pond*,<sup>436</sup> but I would propose that the reclining figure couldn't be viewed as chaste. He looks out from the scene at the viewer, his head is upside down. He is inverting physical space, inverting social protocol, opening up a space for behaviour outside of the sociably acceptable. He provides the viewer with the reflection of the image, the 'Wonderland'.

He is the son of Adam from Grant's highly criticised 1914 painting *Adam and Eve* (*fig.2.64*) who stands on his hands.<sup>437</sup> The painting was included in the second Grafton exhibition at the Alpine Gallery Club in January 1914. Bell recognises the queerness in Grant's inverted figures, she wrote to him explaining, "Of course your Adam and Eve is a good deal objected to, simply on account of the distortion and Adam's standing on his head[...] I believe distortion is like Sodomy. People are simply blindly prejudiced against it because they think it abnormal."<sup>438</sup>

This central figure in *Two Bathers* has similarities to photographs taken of Grant before the First World War, of the naked artist, lying in the grass, playing pipes while standing amongst reeds (*fig.2.65 & 2.66*).<sup>439</sup> Maynard Keynes had taken such pictures

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<sup>435</sup> Monochrome photograph of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *After the Bath*, 41 x 34cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/43.

<sup>436</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.202

<sup>437</sup> Duncan Grant, *Adam and Eve*, 1914, oil on canvas, size unknown, destroyed. For a summary of public reviews and private responses to Grant's *Adam and Eve* see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.142-44, Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.123-24 and Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.142-44.

<sup>438</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 14 January 1914, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, 1998, p.154. Marler incorrectly states that Grant's *Adam and Eve* mentioned in Bell's letter is "Now in JMK's [John Maynard Keynes'] former rooms at King's College, Cambridge." It was actually destroyed after it was damaged in a flood at the Tate Gallery, described by Watney as "one of the most grievous losses in twentieth-century British painting," see Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.35.

<sup>439</sup> Both photographs reproduced in Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1987), plate 2, no.3 & 4. Both photographs were from the collection of Paul Roche and are dated as c.1902-3 but I would date as being later.

when the two were on holiday in Greece in 1910.<sup>440</sup> There is an exchange of the gaze between subject and viewer, in this case Keynes who became the owner of the picture soon after its completion.<sup>441</sup>

There is a possible Keynes connection to *Bathers by the Pond* in the central figure that lies across the front of the composition. His facial characteristics and small moustache are similar to Keynes, possibly a playful reference to his and Grant's affair. The painting could be an illustration to Bell's imaginings of life in Sussex when she is away, as in the lengthy description of homosexual activity she includes in a thank you letter to Keynes in 1914:

Did you have a pleasant afternoon bugging one or more of the young men we left for you? It must have been delicious out on the downs in the afternoon sun... I imagine you... with your bare limbs entwined with him and all the ecstatic preliminaries of Sucking Sodomy – it sounds like the name of a station.<sup>442</sup>

The naturalising and normalising of “sodomy” and homosexuality by Bell, placing it in the sunshine, in the Sussex countryside, as an activity to occupy a “pleasant afternoon” like going for a walk or having a cup of tea is reflected in the figures in Grant's painting with their relaxed, uninhibited and almost mundane society.

The reclining figure and the sleeping dog at his feet is a possible reference to Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (fig.2.67) which Grant had a black and white reproduction of (fig.2.68) and most probably saw in ‘the flesh’ on his visits to the Uffizi gallery in Florence.<sup>443</sup> The dog lying on the bed, whose symbolism in Titian's painting is debated, is, in Grant's painting turning the other way suggesting that, whatever its meaning Grant's scene offers a different perspective, a different set of values. This recumbent figure also has its antecedents in Cézanne's *Bathers at Rest* (*Les baigneurs*

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<sup>440</sup> John Maynard Keynes to Duncan Grant, 30 May 1910, quoted in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, p.95

<sup>441</sup> *Two Bathers* went straight into the collection of John Maynard Keynes and was not exhibited until 1983 when it was credited as *Two Young Bathers* from c.1919 with its provenance ‘unknown’. *Two Bathers* was bequeathed by Keynes to King's College Cambridge and was included in an exhibition *Maynard Keynes: Collector of Pictures, Books and Manuscripts*, Cambridge, 1983

<sup>442</sup> Vanessa Bell to John Maynard Keynes, 19 April 1914, , *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.163

<sup>443</sup> Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, c.1538, oil on canvas, 119 x 165cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Monochrome photograph of Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 30.5 x 44.5cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/311. Grant visited in Florence in 1904-05, 1907 and 1920.

*au repos*) (fig.2.69)<sup>444</sup> which Grant would have seen in the exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* at the Grafton Gallery in 1910.<sup>445</sup>

One of the two panels Grant contributed to the scheme to decorate the dining room of the Borough Polytechnic in 1911 shows seven male figures in various acts of diving into the water, swimming and climbing into a boat (fig.2.70).<sup>446</sup> Originally titled *Bathers in the Serpentine*, this has often been viewed as the actions of a single swimmer caught at various points in his progress across the canvas/water. The art critic of *The Times* commented that Grant had “used all his remarkable powers of draughtsmanship to represent the act of swimming rather than any individual swimmer.”<sup>447</sup> Richard Shone describes it as “a single movement from left to right, the figure seen in seven postures,”<sup>448</sup> and Simon Watney states that this is the effect intended by Grant.<sup>449</sup> This interpretation places the picture as a precursor of Duchamp’s 1912 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2*,<sup>450</sup> placing it in a history of international modernism, but by doing so it denies the image the expression of the joy of a same sex society.

To telescope the seven figures into one helps legitimises the gaze, it allows the viewer to be untroubled by the sight of male corporeal pleasure. The setting for the painting, the Serpentine in Hyde park, was a well known location to see male bathing. The public spectacle allowed for different gazes. Matt Cooke has explored male only

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<sup>444</sup> Paul Cézanne, *Bathers Resting*, c.1875-1876, oil on canvas, 38 x 45.8 cm, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Geneva.

<sup>445</sup> See Anna Gruetzner Robins, “Manet and the Post-Impressionists’: a checklist of exhibits,’ in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.CLII, no.1293, December 2010, pp.784-85. For a detailed consideration of sexuality and Cézanne’s bathing pictures see Aruna D’Souza, *Cézanne Bathers: Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

<sup>446</sup> Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 306.1cm, Tate,N04567. For details of the project see Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.110-112, and Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.68-80 in which Reed examines the influence of the heritage of the Mediterranean on this project and British post-impressionism.

<sup>447</sup> ‘Wall Paintings: Interesting Experiment at the Borough Polytechnic,’ *The Times*, Tuesday 19 September, 1911, p.9

<sup>448</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.149

<sup>449</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.90, n.7 “personnel communication, 1976.”

<sup>450</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 147cm x 89.2cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

bathing spaces,<sup>451</sup> and has noted how the Baedeker tourist guide for London described the scene:

when a flag is hoisted, a crowd of men and boys, most of them in very homely attire, are to be seen undressing and plunging into the waters, where their lusty shouts and hearty laughter testify their enjoyment.<sup>452</sup>

This view of the scene as “homely” wholesomeness contrasts to John Addington Symonds view, who witnessed it with different eyes and wrote in his memoirs:

Early in the morning[...] I would rise from a sleepless bed, walk across the park, and feed my eyes on the naked men and boys bathing in the Serpentine. The homeliest of them would have satisfied me.<sup>453</sup>

Christopher Reed writes that, despite *Bathers by the Pond* being “authorized as art by Grant’s elegant evocation of Seurat’s poses and pointillist style, this painting was still too risky for Grant to exhibit during his lifetime.”<sup>454</sup> It did remain in Grant’s possession until very late in his life when it was gifted to Paul Roche. It was eventually exhibited publicly three years before Grant’s death, in 1975 in an exhibition called *Duncan Grant and Bloomsbury*, organised by the Fine Art Society where it was bought by Walter Hussey.<sup>455</sup> But a painting on a similar theme was exhibited in 1931, one that accommodated a Baedeker perspective on male nudity.

*The Bathers* shows a group of nine naked men in and around the pond at Charleston (figs.2.71).<sup>456</sup> Like *The Hammock* the figures occupy different spaces around the

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<sup>451</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.35-38

<sup>452</sup> Carl Baedeker, *London and its Environs* (London, 1911) p.262, quoted in Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 2003, pp.35-36

<sup>453</sup> John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984) p.166, also quoted in Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, 2003, p.37

<sup>454</sup> Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p.135

<sup>455</sup> *Bathers by the Pond* is now in the collection of Pallant House, Chichester, to whom Hussey bequeathed his collection on his death in 1985. Walter Hussey was Dean of Chichester cathedral, and patron of the arts, commissioning works from, among others, Graham Sutherland, Leonard Bernstein, John Piper and Marc Chagall. See Neil Colyer, *The Walter Hussey Collection* (Chichester: Pallant House Gallery, 1983). There is no formal record of Hussey’s homosexuality, but the author has had conversations with several men who knew him in the 1970s and can confirm his sexual proclivities.

<sup>456</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Bathers*, c.1926-1933, oil on paper on plywood, 138.4cm x 152.8cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, accession number 1824-4

environs, for Spalding “their various poses creating a complex net of directional forces.”<sup>457</sup> Unlike the lugubrious attitudes of the figures in *Bathers by the Pond*, the focus of the composition and the central group of figures is a wrestling match, two of the men are in a tight grip in the foreground.<sup>458</sup> While it may have, as Spalding claims “offered Duncan an outlet for his enjoyment of the male physique,”<sup>459</sup> the gaze of the viewer is legitimised by the athletic action of the pair.

John Rowdon observed Grant’s working method when he was preparing *The Bathers* in the 1920s. He described Grant’s working technique, observing:

Duncan Grant achieves a high state of organization in his work before he puts brush to canvas; not by sketching in a little, but by drawing his composition in full on large pieces of paper with the colours clumsily laid on. He then takes a leg off by cutting it out, and then one side of a face, and so on. It is with these limbs on cut-out pieces of paper that he builds up the final painting. He pins one piece on, stands back, and then moves it; and takes the whole figure down and tries it at the other end of the paper. Once the sketch is put on canvas it is not again fundamentally altered.<sup>460</sup>

By using full scale cut outs Grant charts the space with the figures as he moves them around the canvas. The act of mapping becomes a process of imposing figures on the space, a two way process. A photograph of Grant’s preparations for the mural he made for Lincoln Cathedral show the process, the individual cut outs of sheep and figures pinned to the back ground (fig.2.72).<sup>461</sup> Robert Medley, who modelled for the painting with his boyfriend, the ballet dancer Rupert Doone, described a two way process between artists and model in which the roles were fluid and interchangeable: “we used to draw Rupert and then Duncan would draw Rupert and I, and then I would draw Rupert and we all ended up by drawing each other.”<sup>462</sup> Grant acts as model and artist,

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<sup>457</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.266

<sup>458</sup> A second version of the painting remained in Grant’s possession (Duncan Grant, *Bathers*, 1927, oil on canvas, 132.1x152.5cm, private collection, sold at Christie’s, London, 21 November 2003). When Ivry Freyberg saw the “resuscitated” painting in Grant’s studio in the late 1960s she read the two figures as “embracing” rather than wrestling, see ‘Duncan Grant, 1969,’ in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no. 13, December 1985, p.16.

<sup>459</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.266

<sup>460</sup> John Rowdon, ‘This book about painting is the first of a series of Revaluations and deals with the work of Duncan Grant from the point of view of John Rowdon,’ (London: Hayward J. W. Marks, 1934) p.28

<sup>461</sup> Monochrome photograph of study for Duncan Grant’s Lincoln murals, c.1956, The Charleston Trust.

<sup>462</sup> Robert Medley, National Life Stories Artists Lives, C466/19/02 F4109 Side A, transcript p.39, <http://sounds.bl.uk>.

cartographer and landscaper, the final painting becoming a map of his choreographed collage.

Grant's *The Hammock* and Bell's *Clive Bell and his Family* are equally choreographed pictures, carefully mapped familial constructions that present to the public familiar gender roles that I will now explore with reference to the conventions of the Conversation Piece.

### **Mapping the familial:**

Grant's *The Hammock* (fig.2.01) is set in the front garden at Charleston, looking south, towards the Downs and the farm buildings across the lane from the house. The pond is on the left of the composition balanced on the right by the gravel path that runs along the eastern side of the walled garden. Julian Bell, the eldest son of Vanessa and Clive Bell, is sitting in a punt on the pond. In the centre of the composition the eponymous hammock is occupied by Vanessa Bell with her second son Quentin in the foreground opposite the boys' tutor Sebastian Sprott. Angelica Bell, the daughter of Vanessa Bell and Grant, is walking towards the viewer/artist on the path at the right of the picture. In *Clive Bell and his Family* (fig.2.02) Bell positions her husband and her three children on the west bank of the pond at the front of the house with a view behind them to the east. Clive Bell is at the centre of the composition, seated in a rhorkee chair.<sup>463</sup> Julian kneels behind him holding a gun, Quentin, once again is sat in the foreground and Angelica is standing between Clive Bell's feet to the right of the group.

The painting that has had the greater exposure and accolades is *The Hammock*. It was first shown in Grant's second solo exhibition, '*Recent Paintings and Drawings*' at the Independent Gallery in June 1923. *The Hammock* was one of 26 oils and 13 drawings

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<sup>463</sup> Originating in India, Rhoorkee chairs were made of wood, canvas and leather and were designed to be quickly assembled and dis-assembled as well as being light to carry. See Nicholas A. Brawer, *British Campaign Furniture: Elegance Under Canvas, 1740-1914* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001) pp.71-72. Roger Fry designed a Roorkee chair for the Omega Workshops, using leather instead of canvas for the seat and the back, see Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry: Art and Life* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 1999) p.170. They were advertised in the first Omega Workshop catalogue as "Rhoorkee portable chairs, covered special coloured leather, painted uprights" price £3.3shillings, 1913, p.7. Roorkee chairs appear in photographs taken at Charleston, Monk's House and Wissett Lodge, for examples see; *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, eds. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: Jill Norman and Hobhouse Ltd, 1981) all at Charleston: p.68, 71, 72, 73, 81, 86, 91, 95, 96, 106, 114 & 128. Also Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006) at Monk's House p.125, no.132, at Wissett Lodge p.112, no.111.



and watercolours and became the star of the show. It was photographed for inclusion in Roger Fry's book on Grant published by the Hogarth Press in 1924.<sup>464</sup> It occupied the top third of the first page of a review of Grant's exhibition in *Vogue* that described the piece as being "Miraculously rich in colour and highly original in design, it deserves the most affectionate study."<sup>465</sup> The painting was bought by Samuel Courtauld who presented it to the Contemporary Art Society in 1928, who presented to the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in whose collection it remains.

The painting is large, measuring 81.7cm x 146.5cm. Although dated 1923 *The Hammock* took several years to complete and many supporting pencil and oil sketches were produced including a full size version of the painting that remained at Charleston until sold in 1991.<sup>466</sup> There is also an oil study for Vanessa Bell's figure,<sup>467</sup> for that of Sebastian Sprott,<sup>468</sup> and of Quentin Bell.<sup>469</sup> Richard Shone places it as the third in a trilogy of "ambitiously planned figurative paintings" executed by Grant at Charleston in the immediate post-war period.<sup>470</sup>

Bell began the painting *Clive Bell and his Family* in London in 1921, working on it sporadically until 1924. It is also a large work, 127cm x 101.5cm. A study for the head

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<sup>464</sup> Roger Fry, *Duncan Grant* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924)

<sup>465</sup> 'Duncan Grant at the Independent Gallery,' *Vogue* London, late June 1923, p.56. It was also illustrated in the review 'Mr. Duncan Grant's Pictures,' *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, July 1923, vol.43, no.244, p.44.

<sup>466</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Hammock, Charleston*, 1921-22, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 147.3cm, sold at Christie's, London, sale no. 5391, 17 December 2008.

<sup>467</sup> Duncan Grant, *Study of Vanessa Bell*, oil on board, sold at Sotheby's, London, 14 November 1984, lot no.75.

<sup>468</sup> Duncan Grant, *Sebastian Sprott Reading*, 1922, oil on board, 27.5 x 35.5cm, exhibited in *Duncan Grant & Bloomsbury*, The Fine Art Society, Edinburgh, 31 May – 28 June 1975, no.13 and at Spink, London, *Duncan Grant & Vanessa Bell, Design and Decoration 1910 - 1960*, October - November 1991, no.50.

<sup>469</sup> Duncan Grant, *Quentin Bell*, oil on board, c.1921, 22.8 x 34.9cm, private collection, reproduced in *A Bloomsbury Canvas*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001) p.37. Also exhibited in *Duncan Grant & Bloomsbury*, The Fine Art Society, Edinburgh, 31 May – 28 June 1975, no.12 and *Duncan Grant, Paintings and Drawings, at the Bloomsbury Workshop*, London, 1990.

<sup>470</sup> Richard Shone, lot notes for the auction of the study for *The Hammock*, Christie's, London, sale no. 5391, 17 December 2008. Shone places *The Hammock* as the last of a trilogy of paintings by Grant preceded by *Interior*, 1918, oil on canvas, 163 x 174.8cm, Ulster Museum, Belfast, and *Bathers by the Pond*, c.1920-1, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 91.5cm, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, which is discussed elsewhere in this chapter and in chapter 3, *Loose covers*.

of Quentin Bell remains at Charleston.<sup>471</sup> Bell sought advice from Roger Fry who “offered precise criticisms” leading Bell to repaint certain parts.<sup>472</sup> The painting is less imbued with the ‘bucolic’ peace of Grant’s *The Hammock*. Frances Spalding complains that the “Dull greens dominate, denying her [Bell’s] gift as a colourist and contributing to the tired, overworked look of the picture as a whole.”<sup>473</sup> Bell wrote to Fry about the inherent problems of painting children: “I have begun working again on my family group, which I think I must soon stop, as all the sitters are changing so much that I shall begin to try and keep up with them if I go on.”<sup>474</sup>

Despite these problems in its creation, its completion inspired Bell to begin two large canvases both five feet in size. She explained her reasoning to Fry: “Do you think me crazy? One is the children on the sand heap and the other the two nudes in your studio. I find it rather a good plan to have two, as when I’ve got rather stale with one I turn on to the other. But it’s entirely your fault really that I embark on these works. If you hadn’t bought the family group I don’t think I should have had the courage to begin other large works.”<sup>475</sup> Fry had purchased Bell’s painting on behalf of the Contemporary Art Society in 1924,<sup>476</sup> who presented to the city art gallery of Leicester in 1927 with the title *Family Group*.<sup>477</sup>

These two paintings demonstrate the artists’ use of the pond as not only a place for experimenting in different formal developments of art production but also as a place for mapping different ideas about self and identity. Both paintings also have striking formal similarities to the eighteenth century genre of domestic painting known as the Conversation Piece, a form of group portrait that concentrated and elevated the familial and the domestic, depicting constructions of familial relationship often presented in outside, domestic spaces that comply within a set of informal rules.

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<sup>471</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Head of Quentin Bell*, c.1920, oil on canvas, 29 x 18.5cm, The Charleston Trust CHA/P/149

<sup>472</sup> Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.178

<sup>473</sup> Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.179

<sup>474</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 27 September 1923, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.274

<sup>475</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 7 September 1924, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.280

<sup>476</sup> For an account of Roger Fry’s involvement in the art market see Craufurd D. Goodwin, ‘An Interpretation: Roger Fry and the Market for Art,’ *Art and the Market: Roger Fry on Commerce in Art*, ed. Craufurd D. Goodwin (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1998) pp.1-61.

Richard Shone has compared a group of Bell's later pictures to the Conversation Piece, works showing groups of people in the Garden Room at Charleston. *An Evening in the Country* (1944-45) shows Grant and Clive Bell; and *Angelica Garnett and her four daughters* (1959) show the artists' daughter and grand-daughters.<sup>478</sup> But it is through the conventions and constructions of the outdoor Conversation Piece that I will view *The Hammock* and *Clive Bell and his Family*.

While the rules for this genre of painting are informal there are conventions that mark it out against other forms of portraiture. Sir Philip Sassoon set the benchmark in the commemorative program for his exhibition entitled *Loan Exhibition of 18th Century English Conversation Pieces*, in March 1930 at his house in Park Lane, London. He described the Conversation Picture as a 'representation of two or more persons in a state of dramatic or psychological relation to each other.'<sup>479</sup> Ralph Edwards, writing just after the Second World War thought, "this definition is too inclusive. The figures should be a good deal smaller than life, represent real people, and be treated less formally than in a portrait group."<sup>480</sup>

In Ellis Waterhouse's, survey of painting in Britain published in 1952 he considered, "The essence of such pictures is that they represent a number of persons, a family or a group of friends, with a certain degree of informality and at ease among themselves, not stiffly posed for the benefit of the painter. They may be represented in their homes or in their gardens."<sup>481</sup> Mario Praz in his major 1971 survey *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America* offers an empirical check list of the Conversation Pieces qualities:

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<sup>477</sup> Reproduced in *Vogue*, London, Early February 1926, p.35

<sup>478</sup> Richard Shone, 'A Note on Vanessa Bell's *An Evening in the Country*,' *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.23, June 1989, pp.40-41. Vanessa Bell, *An Evening in the Country*, 1944-45, oil on canvas, private collection, on loan to the University of London; and Vanessa Bell, *Angelica Garnett and her four daughters*, c.1959, oil on canvas, 100 x 140cm, The Charleston Trust CHA/P/343. *The Garden Room* could also be included in this group, Vanessa Bell, *The Garden Room*, 1951, oil on canvas, 203.2 x 167.6cm, private collection, on loan to the University of London.

<sup>479</sup> Sir Philip Sassoon, *Loan Exhibition of 18th Century English Conversation Pieces*, March 1930

<sup>480</sup> Ralph Edwards, introduction, *English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century*, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1946 p.3

<sup>481</sup> Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530 – 1790* (London: Yale University Press, 1994) p.188

- a. two or more identifiable people, or at least persons appearing as themselves and not as types or fictitious characters,
- b. a background which describes the habitat of the family or group,
- c. action: a gesture signifying conversation or communication of some kind from at least a few of the components of the group,
- d. privacy (i.e. not a public or official function)<sup>482</sup>

But it is the anonymously penned introduction to the 1983 exhibition *Realism Through Informality* that reflects the qualities of *The Hammock* and *Clive Bell and his Family*:

Conversation Pieces should not be understood as Group Portraits, which automatically involve a degree of formality. They are, instead, arrangements of sitters who have stopped their activities for one moment to allow the painter, and hence ourselves, a quick glimpse into their lives. The sitters are usually much 'at home' and informal in their actions, and we must accept an element of the artificial.<sup>483</sup>

Whereas the subjects in these two paintings are not depicted in the throws of verbal conversation they can definitely be viewed as being in the act of communication, demonstrated through their physical proximity. As in Desmond Shawe-Taylor's description of a Conversation Piece as missing 'the formal event,' the paintings depict the gaps in between verbal conversation. The original seventeenth and eighteenth century usage of 'conversation' meant 'social gathering' rather than verbal communication.<sup>484</sup> Conversation Piece has also been used to describe the relationship and dialogue between the painting and the viewer.<sup>485</sup>

These depictions of "the off-duty part of a normal day"<sup>486</sup> have been used to promote a version of the "sacred value" of "the domestic circle,"<sup>487</sup> offering a privileged look into the family's private life. As Mario Praz comments, the figures in such paintings, 'seem

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<sup>482</sup> Mario Praz, *Conversation Pieces: A Survey of the Informal Group Portrait in Europe and America* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971) p.34

<sup>483</sup> *Realism Through Informality: The Conversation Piece in Eighteenth Century Britain*, catalogue for exhibition 12 October -25 November 1983 (London: Leger Galleries, 1983) p.2

<sup>484</sup> Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *The Conversation Piece: Scenes of Fashionable Life* (London: Royal Collection Enterprises, 2009) p.19

<sup>485</sup> Lynn Shepherd, *Clarissa's Painter: Portraiture, Illustration, and Representation in the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.46. Shearer West questions the roots of the category Conversation Piece in Shearer West, 'Public Nature of Private Life: the conversation piece and the fragmented family,' *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol.18 no.2, Autumn 1995, pp.153-172.

<sup>486</sup> Shawe-Taylor, *The Conversation Piece*, 2009, p.14

<sup>487</sup> Shawe-Taylor, *The Conversation Piece*, 2009, p.8

almost to invite the onlooker to share their domestic joys'<sup>488</sup> But these pictorial constructions can provide the viewer with "a particularly rich nexus of contemporary notions of public and private, heroic and domestic, and masculine and feminine."<sup>489</sup> As Richard Brilliant has stated, the subjects in this genre "are not random collections of persons but deliberate constructions of the significant relations between them."<sup>490</sup> Whilst the best English Conversation Pieces have been considered to be "a mixture of magic and indefinable uneasiness"<sup>491</sup> they also reveal disruptions, tensions, "fabrications, disguises, denials, and evasions" which the viewer must attempt to decipher.<sup>492</sup>

The two paintings are demonstrably not recording public events. They are fixed in the private, the domestic. The space that the 'action' occupies is a private space, a garden in a rural landscape. Gardens in Conversation Pieces can be seen to embody "two related virtues... orderly governance and a well-protected haven of peace."<sup>493</sup> The paintings are in a private, domestic garden which, though it butts onto a semi-public space of the lane and is open to the gaze of passers-by it is a space that is an extension of the house and the domestic privacy that that dictates. Like the eighteenth century Conversation Piece the family may be observed by people outside of the group, by gardeners, labourers and others whose presence is necessary for the continuing stability of the scene but who are placed outside or on the edges of the picture plane.

It is at Charleston and around the pond that Woolf imagines her sister in a diary entry for April Fools day 1930. On an unseasonably warm evening in London Woolf evokes her sister's pastoral existence:

Nessa is at Charleston. They will have the windows open; perhaps even sit by the pond. She will think This is what I have made by years of unknown work – my sons, my daughter. She will be perfectly content (as I suppose) Quentin

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<sup>488</sup> Praz, *Conversation Pieces*, 1971, p.22

<sup>489</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa's Painter*, 2009, p.12

<sup>490</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991) pp.92-3

<sup>491</sup> Praz, *Conversation Pieces*, 1971, P.60

<sup>492</sup> Shearer West, 'Framing Hegemony' in *The Rhetoric of the Frame*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.73 See also Shepherd, *Clarissa's Painter*, 2009, p.45

<sup>493</sup> Shawe-Taylor, *The Conversation Piece*, 2009, p.17

fetching bottles; Clive immensely good tempered. They will think of London with dislike.<sup>494</sup>

For Bell the Charleston landscape is the correct setting for her sons, not the town with its rules and regulated spaces. She wrote to Grant about sending Julian and Quentin up to London where they would be subjected to social constraint not felt in the countryside: “it does seem so awful to take them from this all their summer months & put them into streets & traffic & short hair & boots. It’s so lovely here.”<sup>495</sup>

### **Identifiable people:**

*The Hammock* and *Clive Bell and his Family* present two versions of the familial, mapped across the familiar environs of the pond at Charleston. They offer the viewer a public spectacle of the heteronormative family unit in which the paternal is constructed to be placed at the pictorial and social centre of the group. The Conversation Piece elevated the presentation of the informal family while maintaining strict social structures based on gender and class, following the rules.

Mario Praz’s first rule for the Conversation Piece is that it should depict “two or more identifiable people, or at least persons appearing as themselves and not as types or fictitious characters.”<sup>496</sup> When these two paintings entered into the public realm both had titles that were descriptive but hid the identity of the sitters. While the original title of Grant’s *The Hammock* remains intact Bell’s original title, *Family Group*, has, since it entered a public collection changed to identify the central figure as Clive Bell and the surrounding children as his family, echoing the eighteenth century convention in which the patriarch takes the lead in title of the work.

As an anonymous subject Bell’s painting still presents a figure of patriarchy, Grant’s a figure of matriarchy, both central to the structure of the composition as he/she are to the structure of the family. But it is probably impossible to view these two paintings today without the Bloomsbury narrative clouding the viewers’ eyes. The period eye of the person coming in from the street into the Grafton gallery in 1923 would probably have no inkling about the actual relationship between the figures in *The Hammock* nor between the painter and the sitters. They would not know that the small girl is the

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<sup>494</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) pp.298-99

<sup>495</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, July 1919, TGA/DGP

<sup>496</sup> Praz, *Conversation Pieces*, 1971, p.34

illegitimate child of Bell and Grant or that the young man reading was John Maynard Keynes' lover during his engagement to Lydia Lopokova.<sup>497</sup>

The uninitiated spectator would also recognise the figure of Julian Bell as the eldest son. Lynn Shepherd believes that "it is arguable that the Conversation Piece as a whole is 'about' the continuation of the male line, not least because many such pictures represent families... where properties did not descend in an unbroken line."<sup>498</sup> In *Clive Bell and his Family* he occupies the position traditionally held by the eldest son, close to the father, in this case kneeling behind him, his head slightly higher than Bell's. As Kate Retford writes "the family group was usually pictorially categorised according to age and sex and the father was frequently shown in close proximity to and as having a special relationship with his successor."<sup>499</sup> Clive Bell was the second son and had little property to leave his children so Julian's inheritance becomes cultural rather than capital, in the form of the book and the gun.<sup>500</sup> The younger children are below the line of the open book, they can only see the cover not the contents, their cultural inheritance denied them so far.

In the eighteenth century Conversation Piece the eldest son was often seen holding a weapon or some symbol of patriarchy and property.<sup>501</sup> Julian Bell holds a gun, the barrel pointing skywards. Desmond Shawe-Taylor writes "the heir is distinguished, either by stage-management... or through some discreet visual contrivances, like toy horses... to remind us of their status as the 'cavalier' or knight of the younger

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<sup>497</sup> For details on Keynes and Sprotts relationship and its termination see Judith Mackrell, *Bloomsbury Ballerina* (London: Phoenix, 2009) pp.200-204

<sup>498</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa's Painter*, 2009, p.44

<sup>499</sup> Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) p.129. Also See: Calvert, *Children in the House* pp.90-1; Richard D. Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-cultural Formation in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 176; Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), p.122

<sup>500</sup> Julian Bell's career was set to be literary rather than pictorial. During his lifetime he published two volumes of poetry: *Winter Movement and other poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930) and *Work for the Winter and other poems* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1936) as well as editing a volume of essay: *We Did Not Fight: 1914-18 Experiences of War Resisters* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935). An anthology of his work was published posthumously, *Essays, Poems and Letters*, ed. Quentin Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1938). He is the subject of a recent, revised biography by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Julian Bell: from Bloomsbury to the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>501</sup> S. Deucher, *Sporting Art in 18<sup>th</sup> C England*, (New Haven and England, 1988) p.5

generation.”<sup>502</sup> Julian Bell inherited his father’s and his Bell relatives’ interest in blood sports. Clive Bell was described by Thoby Stephen as being a cross between Shelly and a Country Squire.<sup>503</sup> His Grandparent’s home had “hints of blood sports everywhere” with the Hall being “the chief repository of dead stock[...] dedicated to an exhibition of the Bell family’s prowess... the innumerable antlers, stuffed heads, stuffed fish and birds in glass cases, the fox brushes, hooves, lion and tiger skins were all, as you might say, ‘home killed’.”<sup>504</sup> Julian continued the Bell’s interest in blood sports, his brother stating that he “never lost his appetite for shooting and even joined the family when it removed to a Scottish grouse moor.”<sup>505</sup>

Quentin Bell is seated on the ground in the foreground of both compositions, wearing the same shirt “My jersey, worn in all weathers” until it “seemed to be straining with the effort of containing the masses beneath.”<sup>506</sup> He considered himself “the pig in the middle” using the expression as the title of the first chapter of his semi-autobiographical book *Elders and Betters* in which he describes his feelings of being the least loved of Bell’s three children.<sup>507</sup> But his position in *The Hammock* is more central being physically closer to his mother who sits at the matriarchal physical and emotional centre of the picture. Angelica stands between the outstretched legs of Clive Bell (Though not biologically Clive’s child, Angelica was raised as his and given his surname). The only grey area when it comes to people “appearing as themselves” is Angelica being credited as a member of Clive Bell’s family when her biological father was Duncan Grant. Spalding believes that “Vanessa cannot have been aware of the incongruity inherent in her choice of subject. As it is, Angelica remains a little separate, sliced off from the rest by the diagonal which begins with the gun Julian is holding and continues down the through Clive’s knee. If the formal arrangement of the picture encouraged an unconscious admission of difference.”<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Shawe-Taylor, *The Conversation Piece*, 2009, p.16

<sup>503</sup> Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.54

<sup>504</sup> Quentin Bell, *Elders and Betters* (London: John Murray, 1995) p.23

<sup>505</sup> Bell, *Elders and Betters*, 1995, p.24

<sup>506</sup> Quentin Bell, ‘Jane-Simone Bussy,’ *The Charleston Newsletter*, December 1989, No.24, p.11

<sup>507</sup> Bell, *Elders and Betters*, 1995, p.8. Quentin Bell’s resentment of Angelica, breaks her doll “In later years I did still resent being, as I saw it, the least favoured child and this feeling did not entirely vanish until I became aware that Duncan, not Clive, was Angelica’s father,” p.8.

<sup>508</sup> Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.179



### **Patriarchy and children:**

*Clive Bell and his Family* conforms to the Conversation Piece in its emphasis on “the proper structures of patriarchy.”<sup>509</sup> Though Bell is presented more as the late eighteenth Century “affectionate paterfamilias, rather than patriarchal authoritarian”<sup>510</sup> in a style typified by Johan Zoffany and John Singleton Copley in which the patriarch is presented as “the ideal of the tender and devoted father.”<sup>511</sup> Though despite his benevolence the father remains at the pinnacle of the family and the painting.<sup>512</sup> As Kate Retford points out “This expressed his dominance and authority, matching conceptual hierarchy with pictorial order.”<sup>513</sup>

As Praz states the inhabitants of the picture should be “appearing as themselves.” While some considered that “‘fancy’ dress was suitable for women”<sup>514</sup> men were never to be depicted in disguise, or be portrayed “as” anyone other than themselves. *The Artist’s Repository and Drawing Magazine* insisted, ‘it appears[...] to be the effect of a vicious taste, when anyone is painted as it were in a masquerade... [and] this disposition is still less pardonable in the [male] sex.’<sup>515</sup> Lynn Shepherd writes that “contemporary dress was preferable for a man for reasons both of likeness and historical authenticity. In other words, men are portrayed as part of the real ‘authentic’ world, while women are removed from it.”<sup>516</sup> Despite these concerns the portraits were ‘vehicles for the act of self-fashioning’<sup>517</sup> in which painters, sitters, and patrons “collaborated to create visual narrative that modelled themselves on the manifestation of sensibility found in popular sentimental literature.”<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> Kate Retford, ‘Patrilineal Portraiture? Gender and Genealogy in the Eighteenth-Century English Country House,’ in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, ed., John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006) p.317.

<sup>510</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.45

<sup>511</sup> Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 2006, p.116

<sup>512</sup> Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century*, 1975 p.123

<sup>513</sup> Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 2006, p.127

<sup>514</sup> Jonathan Richardson *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London 1785), p.186 quoted in Lynn Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.28

<sup>515</sup> *The Artist’s Repository and Drawing Magazine, Exhibiting the Principles of the Polite Arts*, ed. Charles Taylor (London, [1785]-94), i. 120, quoted in Lynn Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.28

<sup>516</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.28

<sup>517</sup> Kate Retford, ‘Gender and the Marital Portrait in Eighteenth-Century England: ‘A Sort of Sex in Souls’,’ *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, no.27, 2004, p.116

<sup>518</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.12

Certainly there is duality of role taken by Clive Bell; the urban bohemian and the pursuer of field sports. Frederick Etchells captured these seemingly opposing elements in a painting made for Bell. *A Sporting Print* depicts a nineteenth century hunting scene executed in a post-impressionist manner.<sup>519</sup> In 1905 Lytton Strachey described Clive Bell's character as being made up of "several layers,"

There is the country gentleman layer, which makes him retire into the depths of Wiltshire to shoot partridges. There is the Paris decadent layer, which takes him to the quartier latin where he discusses painting and vice with American artists and French models. There is the eighteenth-century layer, which adores Thoby Stephen. There is the layer of innocence which adores Thoby's sister. There is the layer of prostitution, which shows itself in an amazing head of crimped straw-coloured hair. And then there is the layer of stupidity, which runs transversely through all the other layers.<sup>520</sup>

In Vanessa Bell's painting of *Clive Bell and his Family* she seems to have placed him firmly in the role of father but his head again seems to be somewhere else. He looks not at his children but away to his right, to something outside of the frame. *Clive Bell and his Family* was not painted at Charleston but in the artist's studio in London. The background feels disconnected from the sitters, like a painted background as used in *cartes-de-visites*, the popular nineteenth and early twentieth century studio photographic portraiture. In contrast with the group in *The Hammock* this group feels placed in front of the pond, apart from the landscape rather than a part of it.

Bell would show this disconnection between the figure of her husband and the setting of the pond in the c.1950 painting *Charleston (Clive Bell at Charleston)* (fig.2.41) in which Clive Bell's reflection is missing from the pond's surface.<sup>521</sup> Quentin Bell recalls that this absenteeism began in 1916. Previously he and his brother "had a father and a mother who, although they were unfaithful to each other, lived together harmoniously."<sup>522</sup> But from 1916, the year of conscription, Clive was going "through the motions of being an agricultural labourer in an almost ostentatiously comfortable and unheroic manner at Garsington."<sup>523</sup> Clive Bell became a rare though delightful

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<sup>519</sup> Frederick Etchells, *A Sporting Print*, oil on board, 49 x 71cm, The Charleston Trust

<sup>520</sup> Lytton Strachey to Leonard Woolf, 1 July 1905, in *Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999) p.59

<sup>521</sup> Elizabeth P. Richardson, *A Bloomsbury Iconography* (Winchester: St Paul's Biographies, 1989) p.63

<sup>522</sup> Bell, *Elders and Betters*, 1995, p.54

<sup>523</sup> Bell, 'Clive Bell at Charleston,' 1972, p.3

visitor[...] a holiday father: he lived at Charleston in August and September,” a situation that continued after the war.<sup>524</sup>

In her 1914 painting entitled *Conversation Piece* (fig.2.73)<sup>525</sup> Vanessa Bell shows a disconnected Clive Bell. The three figures that sit around the fireplace in the sitting-room at Asheham have been identified by Grant as, from left to right: Adrian Stephens, Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell.<sup>526</sup> Grant also wrote “I should not imagine that Vanessa had any thoughts of including the whole of Clive Bell’s figure in the composition. I think, though I cannot of course be sure, that it amused her to take such things as they came.”<sup>527</sup> The most prominent part of Clive Bell are his feet that occupy the central lower portion of the painting. All that can be seen protruding from the chair is the lower section of his left leg and two feet clad in blue socks. His shoe seems to be dangling off the end of his foot suggesting a relaxed and informal atmosphere. But his head is elsewhere! Though truncated by the painting’s right hand side, Clive Bell’s head appears on the left of the picture reflected in the mirror on the mantelpiece. Vanessa Bell seems to be showing her husband as seeing both sides of the argument or possibly undecided on the position to take. This fractured and partial patriarch is seen in Bell’s preparatory sketches for Clive Bell’s feet. The drawing shows a detailed representation of the right foot and a loose, incomplete rendering of the left (fig.2.74).<sup>528</sup> The right foot is also drawn on it’s own, disconnected from the body (fig.2.75).<sup>529</sup>

Regarding the *Conversation Piece*, Lynn Shepherd invokes Praz’s notion of ‘Privacy’, stating that “The male likeness has, as it were, been ‘privatized’... the virtues displayed are domestic and social, rather than moral and civic.”<sup>530</sup> Bell reinvests in the family group this domestic privacy. She predicts the title of the painting in a letter written to Margery Snowden at Christmas 1923 in which she proclaims: “Here we are spending a very domestic Christmas. Really I think I shall advertise it. ‘Mr and Mrs

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<sup>524</sup> Bell, *Elders and Betters*, 1995, p.54

<sup>525</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Conversation Piece*, 1912, oil on board, 67.5cm x 80cm, University of Hull Art Collection

<sup>526</sup> James Beechey, *The Friday Club 1905-1922* (London: Michael Parkin Gallery, 1996) p.13

<sup>527</sup> Beechey, *The Friday Club 1905-1922*, 1996, p.13

<sup>528</sup> Vanessa Bell, preparatory drawing for *Clive Bell and his Family*, pencil, 27 x 27cm, TCT/TAGG, box.12.

<sup>529</sup> Vanessa Bell, preparatory drawing for *Clive Bell and his Family*, pencil, 27 x 27cm, TCT/TAGG, box.12.

Clive Bell and family at home at Charleston, Christmas 1923 – no one else admitted.”<sup>531</sup> It was the first Christmas that Bell had spent at Charleston since 1918, memorable for the birth of Angelica at which there was no patriarch present. Angelica Bell accuses her mother of reinventing domestic bliss stating that “A new version of paradise was inaugurated...”<sup>532</sup> It is this version that Fry admires so much: “This is the most peaceful domestic existence conceivable; there’s only Clive, Vanessa and the children. It might be held up as a model of what family life ought to be.”<sup>533</sup>

Both pictures were painted in the early 1920s when the memories and effects of World War One were still very raw and present. As with many forms of culture in Britain at that time they act as a hinge between the war and the past and the hopes for a rebuilt future. Ralph Edwards’ observations on Conversation Pieces written just after the end of the Second World War contain a similar search for peace in the paintings: “What a vivid glimpse such pictures afford us of Georgian life – or rather, of one small corner of it, from which everything painful and sordid has been left out.”<sup>534</sup> “These people are represented at ease in a world of unthreatened security, serene, self-sufficient and well content: naturally we look back on them with envy.”<sup>535</sup>

Bell’s painting has an interesting mirroring of the First World War recruitment poster from 1915 in which a father sitting in an armchair is asked by his daughter “Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?” (fig.2.76).<sup>536</sup> The father has a large, open book resting on his daughter’s knees and a distant look in his eyes. The father’s son plays on the floor with toy soldiers and a cannon. Despite the pacifist stance of the Bloomsbury

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<sup>530</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.15

<sup>531</sup> Vanessa Bell to Margery Snowden, Christmas 1923, quoted in Angelica Garnett, *Deceived by Kindness* (London: Pimlico, 1995) p.40

<sup>532</sup> Angelica Garnett, The Earthly Paradise, in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987) p.106

<sup>533</sup> Roger Fry to Helen Anrep 18 April 1925, *Letters of Roger Fry Volume Two*, edited by Denys Sutton (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972) p.564

<sup>534</sup> Ralph Edwards, *English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century* (The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1946) p.3

<sup>535</sup> Ralph Edwards, *English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century*, 1946, p.3

<sup>536</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O74621/poster-daddy-what-did-you-do/> Designed by Savile Lumley, commissioned by The British Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, published 1915. Savile Lumley, c.1914-1915, Colour lithograph on paper, printed by Johnson, Riddle and Co. Ltd for the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, Museum number: CIRC.466-1969 See: Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996) p.78, J. Aulich, *War Posters: Weapons of Mass Communication* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007) p.18 and S.J. Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2007) p.120

group and the Charleston household Julian and Quentin recreated battle scenes at Charleston, using the pond as the site to recreate battles. Quentin Bell recalls constructing “the defences of Charleston,” together with his brother re-enacting scenes from a war despised by their elders for the protection of their home. They dug a trench because “in those days all soldiers had trenches.” It “ran parallel with the margins of the pond and we levelled our wooden rifles across a muddy parapet at the water... Duncan, unaware of our earthworks, wandered and fell into the trench”<sup>537</sup>

### **Matriarchy and children:**

While the title *Clive Bell and his Family* gives identity and familial connection to the sitters, in *The Hammock* they are denied. The textual focus of the work reflects Lynn Shephard’s ideas on the labelling of women in *Conversation Pieces*. She writes about labels that confined the ‘female subjects within the domestic sphere, and undermined their independent identity, seeing them instead merely as vehicles for an abstract idealization of femininity.’<sup>538</sup> Without the presence of a patriarch the paintings title becomes fragmented. It describes one aspect of the picture. But Grant offers a different construction of authority in the image.

It has been considered that in the eighteenth century “it was in the depiction of women with their children that portraitists could most effectively evoke the sentimental delights of familial life.”<sup>539</sup> Grant’s depiction of Vanessa Bell’s “Art of Motherhood”<sup>540</sup> is a twentieth century interpretation. Any allusion to her eighteenth century counterpart is firmly denied. In *The Hammock* Grant has spaced the family across the composition, the triangular grouping of Bell in the eponymous hammock, and Quentin Bell and Sebastian Sprott, balanced by the smaller figures of Angelica Bell on the right and Julian Bell in a boat on the left.<sup>541</sup> As Wendy Hitchmough states “Each of the figures is quite separately enjoying the pleasures of Charleston and yet

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<sup>537</sup> Bell, ‘Charleston Garden,’ 1987, p.92

<sup>538</sup> Shepherd, *Clarissa’s Painter*, 2009, p.24

<sup>539</sup> Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 2006, p.85

<sup>540</sup> Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, 2006, pp.83-114

<sup>541</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the family unit extended to include wards, lodgers, friends, and even servants. See: Naomi Tadmor, ‘The Concept of the Household Family in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 151, 1996, p.139 and Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

they are bound together within Grant's composition."<sup>542</sup> Grant presents family life as a kinship diagram, which has been described as "the abstract version of a family portrait, with the lines of connection and transmission overtly symbolised."<sup>543</sup> This pictorial alternative to a family tree alters conventional anthropological lines. It places Bell at the centre of the "diagram," the ropes that support the hammock stretching across the canvas, connecting the extreme parts, drawing the other elements of the composition into her web. While Quentin Bell connects himself physically with his mother, holding on to the hammock, holding on to his mother's apron strings, her eldest and youngest children find their own space, their individual paths.<sup>544</sup>

A different kinship diagram is demonstrated in a group photograph taken by Vanessa Bell at Charleston. It shows Mary Hutchinson in the hammock (*fig.2.77*).<sup>545</sup> Hutchinson was the lover of Bell's husband, the "lovely companion who," when visiting Charleston with Clive Bell "from her hand bag or her band-box might produce anything from a story-book to a toy theatre."<sup>546</sup> She sits on the edge of the hammock, her hands behind her head lifting herself up, her legs hanging over the edge. She is posing, looking out to the distance at something that Grant is looking at too, but she is conscious of the camera, of the gaze of Vanessa Bell. She contrasts with the relaxed, reclining figure of Bell in *The Hammock*, her position in the kinship tree less secure. Bell inhabits the whole of the hammock, she is supported off the ground, her eyes closed in quiet confidence, she appears oblivious to her surroundings and to the gaze of the artist.

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<sup>542</sup> Wendy Hitchmough, 'Charleston,' TCTA. French translation in *Conversation Anglaise: Le Groupe de Bloomsbury* (Roubaix: Gallimard, 2009) p.78

<sup>543</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,' in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, eds., George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) p.308

<sup>544</sup> Angelica Bell pulls a toy animal on wheels, a similar scene to that depicted by Johan Zoffany in his painting *Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Family*, c.1766 in which a small child pulls a wooden horse.

<sup>545</sup> Reprinted in Bell and Nicholson, *Charleston*, 2004, p.134

<sup>546</sup> Quentin Bell, 'Clive Bell at Charleston', essay in catalogue for *Clive Bell at Charleston*, Gallery Edward Harvane, May-June 1972 (London: Gallery Edward Harvane, 1972) pp.3-4

### Conclusion:

Layered in paint, silver nitrate, the written word and word of mouth, the pond holds a privileged position in the narratives of Charleston. One of the first things described in text and inscribed pictorially by Bell it continued to hold a spell over the inhabitants. I've demonstrated how it continued to act as an agent in the artists' visual culture and was central to a dual project of recording space, each representation contributing to a politics of place in layered map of the geographical and the temporal. I have shown how both Grant and Bell used the pond to explore ideas of the family and alternative forms of society and kinship.

Grant used a hammock to explore an alternative kinship diagram as the setting for a coloured drawing of two men having sex (*fig.2.78*).<sup>547</sup> The next chapter moves away from the geographical to map the corporeal, this meeting of flesh. I now move the focus of the thesis closer to the bodies of the artists, and explore the often-problematic threshold between clothing and skin and the artists' corporeal presence, the politics of the body.

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<sup>547</sup> Duncan Grant, *Lovers in a Hammock*, pencil and watercolour, date unknown, 12.7 x 18.4cm, sold at Christie's, London, 16 October 2003, Sale no.9714, 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Art, lot.no. 342.

### **Chapter 3:** **Loose Covers**

#### **Introduction:**

The focus of this chapter is less about the clothes that Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant wore, it is more about the migration of clothing and cloth, the loosening and unfastening of garments, looking through, the revealing of flesh, the gape. It is concerned with the migration of cloth, the aberration, the rip, the tear, the frayed edge.

This chapter is like a striptease, from the formal to the informal, clothes and bodies relax, informality becomes intimacy. I examine the artists' covering and uncovering of their bodies. It proposes, as Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro have, that "dress foregrounds the difficulty of establishing the body's boundaries," that dress is "an uncertain frame."<sup>548</sup>

Roland Barthes celebrated the rupturing of the body's textile threshold, inviting his reader to consider "the most erotic portion of the body" to be "*where the garment gapes*."<sup>549</sup> I will explore "the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and clothing), between two edges," "the flash[...] which seduces."<sup>550</sup> I examine the threadbare edges, the fragments of cloth that have left the body but maintain a corporeal connection. Barthes proclaimed "What pleasure wants is a site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss."<sup>551</sup>

I continue the process of looking at boundaries, at layers, peeling them back to see what is underneath. I examine the artists' uncertain relationship to cloth, to the delicate threshold between the skin and the air, the skin and clothes, the skin and the fig leaf, the wisps of cloth that drape, the shadow that may be worn like cloth, like skin itself. I look at how this threshold ruptures, how the body leaks, leaving marks and traces, even tracings, of the body. The waste products of striptease, the discarded clothes, the site of

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<sup>548</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998) p.3

<sup>549</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) p.9, italics in original.

<sup>550</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1975, p.10

<sup>551</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1975, p.7



occupation that carries the traces of the wearer with it, the shape of the body and the marks of the body.

Efrat Tseëlon makes the distinction between disguise and masquerade, claiming that “disguise erases from view; masquerade overstates.”<sup>552</sup> I will also explore these borrowed skins, borrowed clothes, and painted bodies that disguise and the subsequent fear of revelation. Also the masqueraded skin that exaggerates, performs and shouts for attention and recognition.

Merleau-Ponty’s last, unfinished work, published in 1964 as *The Visible and the Invisible*, is like an unfinished garment, where the structure is recognisable by the edges left raw, the seams not quite attached, the gape and the gap revealing the body. He conceives of *flesh* as a two-sided boundary, that both the touch and the touched are *flesh*. The skin and the cloth are both *flesh*, one cannot touch the one without a reciprocal touch: “my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping and encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things.”<sup>553</sup> Virginia Woolf predicts Merleau Ponty when she described her sister’s painting as flesh: “If portraits there are, they are pictures of flesh which happens from its texture or its modelling to be aesthetically on an equality with the China pot or the chrysanthemum.”<sup>554</sup>

This chapter is in two parts, the first part focusing on Bell, the second on Grant. But this is not a rigid boundary, both parts are *flesh*, the touch and the text from each touches the other. The text, like the body, is permeable, leaking and oozing back and forth across the chapter, removing clothes and dressing up, revealing and covering, all its covers loose.

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<sup>552</sup> Efrat Tseëlon, ‘Introduction,’ in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, ed. Efrat Tseëlon (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) p.1

<sup>553</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) p.123

<sup>554</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Recent paintings by Vanessa Bell,’ 1930, in S.P. Rosenbaum ed. *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975) p.171

### **Part One - Bell**

#### **Mirror, mirror:**

Tucked in between the pages of one of Virginia Woolf's photograph albums was an image of her sister taken on holiday in Rome (*fig.3.01*).<sup>555</sup> In the spring of 1902 Bell and her stepbrother George Duckworth were visiting Italy, spending three weeks in Rome before moving on to Florence.<sup>556</sup> Bell is posed in the studio of the French society photographer Henri Le Lieure, at 19 Via del Mortaro.<sup>557</sup> Straight backed, almost as stiff as the embossed and coronetted card that the image is mounted on, Bell stands facing the camera/viewer, her mouth slightly turned down, her face with the seriousness of an "old serge skirt."<sup>558</sup> Her hair is immaculate, her body is long and lean, her arms, hanging down by her sides, covered in long, billowing sleeves of a translucent fabric that both covers and reveals her flesh. In her left hand she holds a rose stem, the buds among the foliage beginning to open, the tips of the outer petals slightly peeling back, but still far from in full bloom, a promise of things to come. The flower hang down, contrasting against the dark, velvet material of the body of the dress that pools on floor, arranged on the floral carpet of the photographers studio.

Jane Marcus has described Virginia Woolf as "a guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt," referring to her spirit confined by the social pressures that surrounded her.<sup>559</sup> This description can equally be applied to Bell, both women battling with the social mores of the era that had formed them. While still at Hyde Park Gate in the house of their father, under the charge of their stepbrother George Duckworth, "Victorian skirts" dictated movement, dictated activity, dictated the role to be played. There were

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<sup>555</sup> Vanessa Bell, portrait Rome, Italy, 1902, incorrectly dated as c.1906, photograph on board, gelatin silver print, 26 x 16cm. Photograph found loose between pages 48 and 49 of Virginia Woolf Monk's House Photograph Album (MH-1), (MS Thr 557) Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, [oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/deeplink?\\_collection=oasis&uniqueId=hou02067](http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/deeplink?_collection=oasis&uniqueId=hou02067), accessed 23 August 2011.

<sup>556</sup> The holiday was cut short, Bell and Duckworth returning to England on receiving news that Sir Leslie Stephen had abdominal cancer and was expected to be operated on. See Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2006) p.44.

<sup>557</sup> Henri Le Lieure, born Nantes France, 1831, died Rome, Italy, 19 December 1914.

<sup>558</sup> The sisters 'felt outsiders' because of their seriousness: "Seriousness[...] is just as much out of place here as an old serge skirt." Virginia Woolf, Hyde Park Gate Diary, 15 July 1903: Berg, cited in Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.36.

<sup>559</sup> Jane Marcus, 'Thinking back through our Mothers,' in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981) p.1. Laura Gwyn Edson describes Woolf as "a clothes rebel," see Laura Gwyn Edson, 'Kicking off her Knickers: Virginia Woolf's Rejection of Clothing as Realistic Detail,' in *Virginia Woolf and the Arts: Selected Papers from the Sith Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, eds. Diane F. Gillespie and Leslie K. Hankins (New York: Pace University Press, 1997) pp.119-124.

“daylight” clothes, clothes that looked forward to a Bloomsbury future of personal freedoms; a “blouse and skirt,” “overalls,” a “blue painting smock,” clothes that gave Bell and Woolf the freedom to pursue their own interests, to be themselves. But, at “about 4.30 Victorian society exerted its pressure. Then we must be ‘in’. For at 5 father must be given his tea. And we must be better dressed and tidier, for Mrs Green was coming; Mrs H. Ward was coming.” And by 7.30 “the evening society had all its own way,” when the ritual of changing must be observed, when “Dress and hairdoing became far more important than pictures and Greek.” Woolf describes the ritual of undressing, of removing “day clothes” and removing the day’s dirt, of “shivering in front of washing basins” and of entering the “the drawing room at 8 o’clock in evening dress: arms and neck bare.”<sup>560</sup> Dressed in mourning for the passing of their mother, dressed, as Sir William Rothenstein observed, in “plain black dresses with white lace collars and wrist bands,” dressed in their cultural heritage, “looking as though they had walked straight out of a canvas by Watts or Burne-Jones,” the silent but beautiful young women waited in battle dress.<sup>561</sup>

Maybe the dress that Rothenstein observed Bell wearing was one of Mrs Young’s creations, the “old Scotch dress maker in South Audley Street” that George took her to as described by Bell in her paper *Life at Hyde Park Gate after 1897*, written for the memoir club.<sup>562</sup>

“A dress was ordered, one that could be called mourning, but exquisitely pretty, transparent black over transparent white and all sewn with tiny silver sequins. Mrs Young had genius and even at that worst of all times for dress could invent clothes that were lovely, yet in the height of fashion. I remember that one well, for everyone then wore one dress many times, and though I felt all the thrill of putting on such a frock, still I came to dread the sight of it, so miserable were the many evenings I spent covered in the filmy black and white and sparkling sequins.”<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>560</sup> All quotes from Virginia Woolf, ‘A Sketch of the Past,’ *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: The Sussex University Press, 1976) pp.128-30

<sup>561</sup> William Rothenstein, *Men & Memories: A History of the Arts, 1872-1922* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1940) p.97

<sup>562</sup> Angelica Garnett states that this paper is difficult to date correctly because it exists in two versions, one that refers to Virginia Woolf in the present, so probably written before her death in March 1941, and one annotated with a ball point pen, not produced in the UK until 1945, ee Angelica Garnett, Prologue, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: Pimlico, 1998) pp.10-11.

<sup>563</sup> Vanessa Bell, ‘Life at Hyde Park Gate after 1897,’ *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed., Giachero, 1998, p.75

Bell was covered, smothered in mourning, in convention. Alison Lurie suggests that “To some extent, fabric always stands for the skin of the person beneath it: if it is strikingly slick or woolly, rough or smooth, thick or thin, we unconsciously attribute these characteristics to its wearer.”<sup>564</sup> The textile object, disconnected from its cultural function, pleases Bell for its exquisiteness, for the “thrill of putting on,” for dressing up in. The dress covers the body with transparency, creating a physical, textile barrier, a modest shell that still reveals the body beneath, the body of an eligible young woman, on display, on the market, available for marriage, for inspection. The pedigree of her lineage appears in her name, appears in her face, in her countenance. Her potential as a wife, as a mother, as a trophy is displayed in her clothed body, “covered in the filmy black and white and sparkling sequins” that she would spend “many evenings” of misery in, in the social world of her step-brother. As Nancy E. Green observes, “her youthful beauty subjected to the gimlet eye of the Victorian matrimonial market.”<sup>565</sup>

If, as Alison Lurie has proposed, clothing is a “non-verbal system of communication,” a visual language with its own vocabulary and grammar, one that, “as with human speech, there is not a single language of dress, but many,”<sup>566</sup> then, for Bell her evening dress is a foreign language. When she wears it her own language is muffled, rendering her sitting silently in society, it acts as what Elizabeth Wilson describes as a “frontier between the self and the not-self.”<sup>567</sup> The beautiful young woman “with the quiet courage of her opinions” waited in battle dress, speaking “with the voice of Gauguin.”<sup>568</sup>

As Victorian skirts turned into Edwardian skirts this silent but beautiful young woman is captured on film and caught in paint. Whilst Bell was having her photograph taken in Rome, visitors to the New English Art Club exhibition studied her painted image, where in April 1902 a portrait of the 23 year old Bell, painted by Charles Wellington

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<sup>564</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992) p.232

<sup>565</sup> Nancy E. Green, ‘From Little Holland House to Charleston: Bloomsbury’s Victorian Inheritance,’ in *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, eds. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Ithaca: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 2008) p.30

<sup>566</sup> Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, 1992, p.3

<sup>567</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003) p.3

<sup>568</sup> Rothenstein, *Men & Memories: A History of the Arts, 1872-1922*, 1940, p.53. As Richard Shone points out, “Rothenstein’s implication is clear though Gauguin would have meant nothing to Vanessa in 1903.” Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1993) p.19

Furse occupied “the place of honour at the head of the room”<sup>569</sup> (*fig.3.02*).<sup>570</sup> Bell had been a bridesmaid at the wedding of Furse and Katherine Symonds in October 1900, wearing a different dress charged with different rituals, different conventions. For her painted portrait she wore the same dress as in the photographic, but the resulting version shows a very different woman in a very different pose.

In Furse’s portrait Bell is seen in full length, standing in a fashionable interior, facing to the right of the scene. Her head is turned towards the viewer but her gaze is focused on something further away. She is posed in front of an intricate chinoiserie framed mirror, which reflects the left-hand side of her head and upper body. Her hands are clasped in front of her. As in the photographer’s studio she is surrounded by flowers, the background is made up of floral wallpaper echoed by the flower design on a cushion that lays on a criss-crossed backed chair in the bottom right hand corner.

The painting was bequeathed to Bell in 1937<sup>571</sup> but was lost in the incendiary fire that destroyed Bell’s and Grant’s Fitzroy Street studios in September 1940, a portrait of the past not wanted at Charleston, left behind in the city, not evacuated to the country.<sup>572</sup> Incineration removes a layer but obscures the vision. The image of the painting only survives in a monochrome photograph, the colours of the floral wallpaper and cushion, the gold of the mirror frame and the bloom in Bell’s cheeks flattened by sepia tones, “covered in the filmy black and white,” but losing its “sparkling sequins.”

In 1902 the critic for *The Times* newspaper, though admitting that it was “a matter of taste,” wondered whether “this extremely elegant portrait [was] improved by the mirror and the reflected head and shoulders? The young lady stands close to the glass, so that the two heads are of much the same size, and, as she wears black, the lines of

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<sup>569</sup> ‘The New English Art Club,’ *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1902, p.8

<sup>570</sup> Black and White photograph of Charles Furse’s *Portrait of Miss Vanessa Stephen*, listed as: No.92, Vanessa Bell: portrait, undated, 27 x 12 centimetres. Inscription: VS. Location: Album 1, page 19. Virginia Woolf Monk’s House Photograph Album (MH-1), (MS Thr 557). Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>571</sup> Elizabeth P. Richardson, *A Bloomsbury Iconography* (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1989) states that the painting was “left to Vanessa by George Duckworth in 1937” p.31, but it was Gerald Duckworth who died on 28 September 1937, George died on 27 April 1934, see p.75 of same volume.

<sup>572</sup> In 1939 Bell and Grant sublet their studios at 8 Fitzroy Street. A large amount of paintings were removed to Charleston, in particular work by Grant, but most of Bell’s were left in London. See Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.297.

the upper part of the two figures merge more or less completely into one another.”<sup>573</sup> The critic sees Bell as a polycephalous creature, the close proximity of her chest to its reflection causing the illusion that the figure and its reflected self make one chest with two necks and two heads emerging from it. It casts Bell in the role of Janus, a God of beginnings and of endings, looking backwards and looking forward, back to Burne-Jones, forward to Gauguin.<sup>574</sup> As the art critic for the *Manchester Guardian* observed, “Despite its many fine qualities the effect is a little pale and empty.”<sup>575</sup> He is referring to Furse’s painting but he could be referring to the depiction of Bell whose role as a “guerrilla fighter” is camouflaged under her painted face, with her small, full, glossy lips, large, watery eyes and long, thin neck.

Bell used a similar composition for her 1937 portrait of Dora Morris who is also posed sitting in front of a mirror (*fig.3.03*).<sup>576</sup> Morris’ black cloak has slipped from her shoulders revealing a translucent, short sleeved blouse that reveals her skin through the “filmy black and white” material. Bell avoids the merging of the reflected figure and the referent, making a distinct delineation between the two. Morris holds a string of beads in her left hand, suggesting a moment of private confession and personal reflection in addition to the mechanical one.

### **Spitting Image:**

Bell’s mother, Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen was a renowned beauty, described as “the most beautiful Madonna,”<sup>577</sup> whose daughters were considered “not more beautiful than their mother.”<sup>578</sup> She was a favourite subject of her aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron who made numerous studies of her.<sup>579</sup> Bell was

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<sup>573</sup> ‘Art Exhibitions,’ *The Times*, Monday 7 April 1902, p.5

<sup>574</sup> See C. Scott Littleton, *Gods, Goddesses, and Mythology, Volume 6* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2005) pp.770-774

<sup>575</sup> ‘The New English Art Club,’ *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1902, p.8

<sup>576</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Dora Morris*, c.1937, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5cm Leeds Museum and Art Galleries. Exhibited at The Lefevre Gallery, ‘Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell,’ May 1937 as *Portrait of Miss Dora Morris*.

<sup>577</sup> In a diary entry for 4 May 1928, Woolf recalls meeting a friend of her mothers, who described her as “the most beautiful Madonna & at the same time the most complete woman of the world.” *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three: 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) p.183

<sup>578</sup> Rothenstein, *Men & Memories: A History of the Arts, 1872-1922*, 1940, p.97

<sup>579</sup> See: Sylvia Wolf, *Juliet Margaret Cameron’s Women* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998) pp.66-79; Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Photographers of Genius* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2003) p.54; *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs*, ed., Julian Cox and Colin Ford (London: Thames and

very familiar with Cameron's photographs; she grew up with them, owned them, sold them, kept them in her photograph albums, and hung them on her walls.<sup>580</sup> When she moved with her Stephen siblings to 46 Gordon Square in 1904 she hung them in the entrance hall of the building, a line of seven eminent Victorian men looked across the lobby to "five of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother. They look very beautiful all together."<sup>581</sup> It is an act that Lisa Tickner sees as simultaneously "memorializing" her [mother] while staking a claim to a specifically matrilineal artistic heritage."<sup>582</sup> But, as Reed has highlighted, Bell is also "staking a claim" for an inherited skin, "a heritage of artistry and beauty."<sup>583</sup> Cameron's photographs of "Fair Women" held a shamanic quality for her two daughters. Bell promised that when she was pregnant with a daughter of her own she would "gaze at the most beautiful of Aunt Julia's photographs incessantly" to ensure that the child inherited its looks from her mother's side of the family rather than from Clive Bell's.<sup>584</sup> In an ocular exchange of the "gaze" Bell was hoping to absorb through the retina the "emanation of the referent."<sup>585</sup>

In 1924 Woolf "asserted her maternal heritage"<sup>586</sup> by instigating her own visual echo, a mechanical layering, of both her great aunt's work and her mother's identity, when she was photographed for *Vogue* magazine wearing a dress that had belonged to her

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Hudson, 2003) pp.279-323, 326-333; Elizabeth P. Richardson, *A Bloomsbury Iconography* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1989) Appendix A, pp. 311-316

<sup>580</sup> The photo-historian Helmut Gernsheim bought several photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron from Vanessa Bell during World War II. See Helmut Gernsheim, 'Gernsheim on Gernsheim,' *Image*, vol.27 no.4, 1984, p.5.

<sup>581</sup> Bell described the arrangement to Woolf: "On the right-hand side as you come in I have put a row of celebrities: 1. Herschel - Aunt Julia's photograph. 2. Lowell. 3. Darwin. 4. father. 5. Tennyson. 6. Browning. 7. Meredith - Watts' portrait. Then on the opposite side I have put five of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother." Vanessa Bell to Virginia Woolf, 1 November 1904, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, quoted in Christopher Reed, 'A Room of One's Own,' in Christopher Reed ed. *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) p.148. Also cited in Lisa Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot,' *Art History*, vol.25 no.1, February 2002, p.26

<sup>582</sup> Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot,' 2002, p.26

<sup>583</sup> Reed, 'A Room of One's Own,' 1996, p.148

<sup>584</sup> Vanessa Bell to Virginia Stephen, 11 August 1908, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Regina Marler (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1998) p.67. It would be another ten years until Bell conceived a daughter, not by her husband but by Grant.

<sup>585</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) p.81

<sup>586</sup> Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) p.24

mother.<sup>587</sup> Maggie Humm regards this as an “inability to exclude memory referents” from the photographic image.<sup>588</sup> But these “referents” cast Woolf (and Bell) in a “liminal position between traditions,” as demonstrated by Christopher Reed in his discussion of the positioning of Cameron’s photographs in the hall of 46 Gordon Square.<sup>589</sup>

Woolf wears her mother’s dress as costume, as a form of fancy dress. Maybe it is the same dress that she wore to a Bloomsbury party held at 46 Gordon Square during the first week of 1923 where, she noted in her diary, she was “wearing my mothers lace.”<sup>590</sup> While there is no evidence to show that Bell wore her mother’s clothes she did create visual copies of her mother and of her aunt’s work, taking ownership of the image in her chosen medium, the manipulation of oil paint replacing the sepia, light sensitive silver nitrate of Cameron’s art.<sup>591</sup> Bell’s painting, dated c.1929, is based on a photograph of her mother taken by Cameron in 1864 (*figs.3.04 & 3.05*).<sup>592</sup> It was included in the Hogarth Press’s 1926 volume *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*.<sup>593</sup> It is an almost post-modern re-

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<sup>587</sup> The photograph was printed twice in *Vogue*, two years apart. For its first appearance, in May 1924 it was as part of a portmanteau of people nominated by the magazine for their ‘Hall of Fame.’ The justification for her nomination was as a “daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen” and as “sister of Vanessa Bell” before her work as a writer. When the photograph was published again in May 1926 it filled the page and it was her status as “the most brilliant and enterprising of the writers of the younger generation” that dominated and preceded her parentage (Vanessa Bell was not mentioned).

<sup>588</sup> Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury: The Private Lives of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006) p.16

<sup>589</sup> Reed, ‘A Room of One’s Own,’ 1996, p.148

<sup>590</sup> Sunday 7 January 1923, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two: 1920-1934*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) p.223. Lace collars and trims survive in the archives of the Charleston Trust, see CHA/T/117, CHA/T/118, CHA/T/171a, CHA/T/171b, CHA/T/171c, CHA/T/171d, CHA/T/171e, CHA/T/171f, and CHA/T/171g

<sup>591</sup> Bell could have worn her mother’s clothes as she was the same height as Julia Stephen, see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.22.

<sup>592</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Red Dress*, c.1929, oil on canvas, 73.3 x 60.5cm, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, accession no.FA000394, and Julia Margaret Cameron, *Portrait of Julia Jackson*, c.1864, albumen print from wet collodin glass negative, Victoria and Albert Museum, accession no.213-1969. In August 1921 Bell asked Duncan Grant to ‘bring Aunt Julia’s portrait’ to Charleston, where she hoped to paint from it, see Bell to Grant, 3 August [1921], in *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, Marler ed. 1993, p.254. On 2 June 1926 Woolf wrote to her sister about one of her paintings based on ‘the Aunt Julia photograph’ in the opening exhibition of the London Artists’ Association, see *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three: 1923-1928*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) p.271. Also see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.25-26.

<sup>593</sup> Both Bell and Grant copied photographs taken by Cameron, many of them reproduced in the Hogarth Press’s 1926 volume *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*. See: James Beechey, ‘A Portrait by Derain after Julia Margaret Cameron,’



imagining, a pictorial re-telling in the manner of Strachey's biographical reworkings in *Eminent Victorians*. Bell has re-edited the image, moved the figure to the right of the picture so that it fills the lower portion of the picture plane, reducing the amount of shadow in the background. The title of the painting, *The Red Dress*, directs the viewer's attention to the costume worn by the model rather than the identity of the sitter. Bell has altered the face as you may alter a dress, letting it out at the sides, sharpening the features, and refocusing the abstract look of the original.<sup>594</sup> Tickner describes this re-imagining as "a kind of composite self-portrait: Bell in the guise of her mother."<sup>595</sup> Bell in disguise, wearing her mother's dress, or Bell's mother in disguise, wearing her daughters face? The title *The Red Dress* distances the image from the referent, denies the familial. It was exhibited in Bell's 1934 solo exhibition at the Lefevre gallery where it hung alongside paintings titled after the sitter, *Virginia Woolf* (no.13), *Roger Fry* (no.30), *Eleanor Marshall* (no.22) and *Mrs Grant* (no.20). But the title *The Red Dress* (no.8) positions it alongside less personable, more academic subjects such as the paintings titled *The Model* (no.3), *The Pheasant* (no.18), and *The Red Armchair* (no.36).<sup>596</sup>

This layering of the maternal is present in another depiction of Julia Stephen. She had modelled for the figure of the Virgin in Burne-Jones's *Annunciation*, completed in 1879, the year when she was pregnant with Bell (*fig.3.06*).<sup>597</sup> Penelope Fitzgerald reads the onset of motherhood, claiming that she "appears in all the grave beauty of early pregnancy."<sup>598</sup> Stephen Wildman and John Christian query this, calling it "an appealing idea, but we do not know when she posed during the three years that the

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in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.145, no.1204, July 2003, pp.520-523. As well as Vanessa Bell's *The Red Dress* (plate no.19), see Duncan Grant, *Mrs Leslie Stephen*, c.1934, pastel and gouache, private collection (based on plate no.15) and Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Joachim the violinist*, oil on board, 76.2 x 59.7cm (based on plate no.7). Beechey dates this as being c.1930. When it was exhibited in the 1964 exhibition *Duncan Grant and his Circle* at the Wildenstein Gallery (cat.42), it was dated c.1922, and in the 2005 exhibition *Duncan Grant*, at the Ava Gallery (cat.12), it was dated c.1926

<sup>594</sup> Cameron's subjects have been described as having an "abstracted look" which Ford attributes to the long exposure time needed for the photographic process and the closeness of the lens to the subject. See Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 2003, p.46

<sup>595</sup> Tickner, 'Mediating Generation: the mother-daughter plot,' 2002 p.24

<sup>596</sup> *Catalogue of Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*, March 1934, Alex. Reid & Lefevre Ltd. London.

<sup>597</sup> Edward Coley Burne-Jones, *The Annunciation*, 1876-79, oil on canvas, 250 x 104cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, accession no.LL3634

<sup>598</sup> Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones: A Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1975) p.179

picture was on the easel.” They also speculate that there was more than one model used, suggesting that the Virgin’s head “has a distinct look of Georgie Burne-Jones.”<sup>599</sup>

John Carl Flügel considered the head and the hands, being the only visible parts of the clothed body, “are the most socially expressive parts of our anatomy.”<sup>600</sup> In a press photograph for the Omega Workshops, Bell unwittingly becomes part of a collaged model. While Bell’s clothed body and her hands were still visible her head had been covered, replaced by a photograph of the head of the Omega dressmaker Joy Brown.<sup>601</sup> Judith Collins suggests that the company’s manager Charles Robinson, may have preferred the “conventional good looks of Miss Brown to the pensive, sad eyed face of Vanessa Bell,”<sup>602</sup> an echo of when Lytton Strachey objected to a photograph of her mother, claiming “I don’t like your mother’s character. Her mouth seems complaining.”<sup>603</sup>

The convention of fabric can also be challenged, altered, manipulated to perform like a different head on a different body, changing its shape, changing its function. At the Omega Workshops *Cracow*, described as an ‘Omega Tapestry for Upholstery’ promised to be ‘Extremely durable’ and perfect for curtains, was used for clothing, turned into a tunic.<sup>604</sup>

This is a more successful replaying of Woolf’s choice of fabric a decade earlier for her house dress, worn for dinners at home. Woolf had her dress made of “green stuff bought erratically at a furniture shop – Story’s - because it was cheaper than dress stuff; also more adventurous.” When Woolf came down to dinner her stepbrother

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<sup>599</sup> *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer*, eds., Stephen Wildman and John Christian (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998) p.241

<sup>600</sup> John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>601</sup> Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp.108-9. See also Elizabeth M. Sheehan, ‘Dressmaking at the Omega: Experiments in Art and Fashion’, in *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshops 1913-19*, ed. Alexandra Gerstein (London: Fontanka, 2009) p.58 & n.9

<sup>602</sup> Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1984, p.108

<sup>603</sup> 17 March 1923, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1978) p.239

<sup>604</sup> Omega Workshops Ltd. Catalogue, 1913, p.10, see [www.fulltable.com/vts/o/om/o.htm](http://www.fulltable.com/vts/o/om/o.htm), accessed 13 June 2009. Waistcoat, c.1913, made from *Cracow*, Jacquard woven, block-printed wool and linen, fabric designed by Roger Fry, manufactured by A.H. Lee & Sons, waistcoat made by Joy Brown, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession no.: CIRC.1-1963. See *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of the Omega Workshops 1913-19*, ed. Alexandra Gerstein (London: Fontanka, 2009) p.130

George told her “in that curiously rasping and peevish voice which expressed his serious displeasure” to “Go and tear it up.”<sup>605</sup> John Potvin, discusses the fictional character Scarlett O’Hara’s use of curtain material to make a dress in the film *Gone with the Wind*.<sup>606</sup> Though the green velvet material was not coded exclusively for home furnishing, allowing its re-configuration into “a luxurious and expansive dress befitting her ostensible status” as convincing, Potvin claims that it still “provides for a masquerade on two levels.” It not only hides her poverty, but the phenomenon of masquerade is found in “the unusual and circumstantial use of home furnishings to adorn the body as fashion.”<sup>607</sup> But the material of Woolf’s green dress doesn’t masquerade its origins and its original intent, it deviates too far from the conventional. It is more like the clothes made by Maria in the film *The Sound of Music*, made from old curtains whose pattern is too large for the children’s clothes, too redolent of its origins.<sup>608</sup>

### **“brute, raw fabric”:**

Textile elements drawn from the domestic environment are utilised by the artists in a group of “staged” photographs from one of Bell’s photograph albums that show Bell, Grant, Quentin and Angelica Bell and Angelica’s friend Chattie Salaman posing for the camera (*fig.3.07*).<sup>609</sup> Grouped, paired or solo, the models are inhabiting a role, taking a part. They are, on the whole, ignoring the lens and the viewer’s gaze, but conscious of their pose, directed by an unseen hand, observed by an unseen eye. They are dressed in loose fitting garments, layered in lengths of white cloth like bed sheets, that have been gathered, “drape[d] and arrange[d],”<sup>610</sup> tacked and pinned together. Scarves, cloaks, underwear and simple props are employed to complete their costumes. They are “got up” as figures from biblical stories. The photographs were made as

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<sup>605</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Sussex University Press, 1976) p.130

<sup>606</sup> *Gone With the Wind*, 1939, dir. Victor Fleming

<sup>607</sup> John Potvin, ‘The Velvet Masquerade: Fashion, Interior Design and the Furnished Body,’ in *Fashion, Interior Design and the Contours of Modern Identity*, eds. Alla Myzelev and John Potvin (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) pp.1-2

<sup>608</sup> *The Sound of Music*, 1965, dir. Robert Wise

<sup>609</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Study for the Berwick Murals*, c.1940. Bell’s photograph albums are deposited in the Tate archives at Millbank, London, catalogued as TGA/9020/10, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell’s Family Album*, eds. Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse Ltd. 1981) p.139.

<sup>610</sup> Woolf’s description of the married lives of her aunts, the Prattle sisters. Virginia Woolf, ‘Julia Margaret Cameron,’ in *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*, ed., Tristram Powell (London: Hogarth Press, 1973 (1928)) p.14

reference material, studies for the religious murals for Berwick Church executed during the Second World War.<sup>611</sup>

As in the mural's "domestic pageant" evoked by Simon Watney,<sup>612</sup> this sense of raiding the dressing up box, of play-acting, is echoed in these preparatory photographs taken for the project, reminiscent of earlier photographs taken by Julia Margaret Cameron, whose subjects were "wrapped in rugs" and "wrapped in tinsel."<sup>613</sup> The folds of the makeshift garments hold monochrome memories of the costumes adopted by Cameron in many of her photographic essays, what Helmut Gernsheim described as the "affected, ludicrous and amateur"<sup>614</sup> religious subjects, the repeated images of Mary Hillier as the Madonna made in 1864.<sup>615</sup>

In a pair of photographs from 1867 entitled *After the Manner of the Elgin Marbles* Cameron has arranged the folds of fabric, conspiring to emulate its stone predecessor, to freeze time, to perform frieze. But the fabric remains resolutely fabric, it remains as described by Sylvia Wolf, "frumpy, [...] bunched and twisted," it refuses to create the "wet and revealing" effect of classical sculpture.<sup>616</sup> The stone originals are headless, lacking Flügel's "most socially expressive" parts, the costume standing in for the body which, according to Wolf leaves "their mythological identity forever in question and leaving Cameron free to interpret them at will."<sup>617</sup> Cameron took at least two photographic versions of her models, changing the attitudes of the heads between each version. The interaction between the two figures alters, in one version the heads looking at each other, in the other looking in different directions. The changing of the direction of the heads changes the narrative of the image, the relationship between the two figures and their relationship with the surroundings and the viewer. But in both

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<sup>611</sup> See: Richard Shone, *The Berwick Church Paintings* (Eastbourne: Towner Art Gallery, 1969), Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010) pp.196-200, Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.380-385 and Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, pp.299-301

<sup>612</sup> Simon Watney, 'Two Exhibitions,' *Charleston Magazine*, issue 24, Autumn/Winter 2001, p.47

<sup>613</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Julia Margaret Cameron,' in *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*, 1973, p.18

<sup>614</sup> Helmut Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron: Her Life and Photographic Work* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1975 (1948)) p.83

<sup>615</sup> See *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs*, 2003, pp.129-173

<sup>616</sup> Wolf, *Juliet Margaret Cameron's Women*, 1998, p.57

<sup>617</sup> Wolf, *Juliet Margaret Cameron's Women*, 1998, p.57

images the poses of the bodies and the ‘frumpy’ pleats of the costume that covers them remain the same.<sup>618</sup>

So the models and artists of Charleston commandeer the everyday items borrowed from domesticity to transform them into costume, into layers of another identity. The “brute, raw fabric” is employed by the artists, who, according to Anne Hollander “will see in the bunched folds of a bed sheet the potential elements of a created fiction.”<sup>619</sup> Hollander echoes Roger Fry’s view of the artist, who would bring out “the rhythm of the drapery... by slight amplifications here and retrenchments there, by a greater variety and consistency of accents, and by certain obliterations.”<sup>620</sup> Fry is comparing the painter’s craft to that of the photographer’s, in this case Cameron’s, stating emphatically that the artist’s eye is able to record and improve on what is seen by the camera’s lens. Indeed, Bell and Grants’ drawings based on the photographs of posing figures emphasise and sharpen the pleats made soft by the photographic referent, the pencil emphatically marking the line that the chemical process of photography softens.<sup>621</sup>

### **The Second Grave:**

In one of the Berwick photographs, a “quotation” that could have fallen out of an album by Cameron, it is Vanessa Bell who is subject.<sup>622</sup> She and Chattie Salaman pose together standing on a platform, a model’s throne in the main studio at Charleston (fig.3.08).<sup>623</sup> Bell stands on the right with a garland of dried hydrangeas in her hand, a plant grown in the gardens at Charleston and one that she included in her still-life

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<sup>618</sup> For illustrations of the two Cameron photographs and the original marble sculpture see: Sylvia Wolf, *Juliet Margaret Cameron’s Women*, 1998, p.56

<sup>619</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993) p.2

<sup>620</sup> Roger Fry, ‘Mrs. Cameron’s Photographs,’ in *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*, 1973, pp.26-27

<sup>621</sup> According to Spalding, Bell “received instruction in drapery” at Arthur Cope’s art school, see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.28

<sup>622</sup> Susan Sontag describes photographs as quotations, which “makes a book of photographs like a book of quotations,” Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) p.71

<sup>623</sup> Unknown photographer, *Study for the Berwick Murals*, c.1940, Tate archives, reproduced in Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, plate.200, p.184 and *Vanessa Bell’s Family Album*, 1981, p.142

paintings.<sup>624</sup> Chattie holds the end of a length of ivy that trails down her front and connects the two figures. Both women are in long, white robes that pool at their feet. They seem lost in contemplation, Bell looks out to the right of the scene, Salaman's eyes are lowered. Bell's copy of Willem Drost's *Portrait of a Young Woman* that hung on the studio wall looks into the camera lens.<sup>625</sup> Their pose is not comparable to any of the scenes in the final murals, though the picture, published in 1981, states that they are posing for the Berwick project.<sup>626</sup>

In this "certificate of presence" Bell is obviously taking the lead role. Not only does she dominate the scene, standing to the fore, but her costume is more extravagant than Salaman's, suggesting she occupies a higher status within the narrative. She wears a long, dark cloak that frames her figure, its edges are gathered and fanned. As Woolf wears her mother's dress, as Bell copies her mother's photograph, so the cloak holds an inter-generational connection. It becomes the clothing of the Virgin Mary when Angelica wears it in the photographic study for the *Nativity* (fig.3.07).<sup>627</sup> Bell visually renegotiates the frills and colours of the cloak in the final work to dress Mary in the simple, long blue cloak traditionally connected with the Virgin (fig.3.09).<sup>628</sup>

Possibly she renegotiated the cloak itself. The one she wears in her portrait painted by Grant at Charleston two years later, now in Tate Gallery (fig.3.10) has had its plainness augmented with colourful patterns.<sup>629</sup> Bell is known to have decorated the plain fabrics in her home. Her daughter recalled how she "took an old, white, cotton bedspread" and by "applying woollen shapes which she enriched with delicate embroidery in coloured

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<sup>624</sup> See: Vanessa Bell, *Asters and Hydrangeas*, c.1942, oil on canvas, 55 x 46cm, The Government Art Collection, and Vanessa Bell, *Hydrangeas*, 1946, oil on canvas, 46 x 38cm, Kirkless Museums and Galleries.

<sup>625</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Portrait of a Lady*, c.1936, oil on canvas, 67 x 59cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/232. When Bell made this copy, the original in the National Gallery, London, was presumed to be by Rembrandt but it is now attributed to one of his pupils: Willem Drost, *Portrait of a Young Lady*, 1653-5, oil on canvas, 66 x 58.5cm, accession no. NG237

<sup>626</sup> *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, Bell and Garnett, 1981, p.142. This may have been taken for the proposed scene to be painted by Angelica Bell.

<sup>627</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Study for the Berwick Murals*, c.1940, reproduced in *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*. 1981, p.139.

<sup>628</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Study for the Madonna, Berwick Church*, oil on board, 122.5 x 60cm, TCT/TAGG

<sup>629</sup> Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, 1942, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 61cm, Tate N05405

silks” changed it into “something so original, no conventional interior decorator, house-proud wife or embroideress would have tolerated it for half a minute.”<sup>630</sup>

The cloak can also be seen hanging over the back of the chair in Bell’s painting *Housemaid*, a depiction of the artist’s new bedroom on the ground floor at Charleston, adjacent to the Studio (*fig.3.11*).<sup>631</sup> Bell’s domestic garment, possibly the object she reached for first thing in the morning, or wore at her desk on chilly evenings when writing her letters whilst sitting in her north facing bedroom, enters into a performative status, it acts as costume, a prop, an exhibit. An empty garment speaks of loss, speaks of death. Christian Boltanski sees it as having (like the photograph): “simultaneously presence and absence. They are both an object and a souvenir of a subject, exactly as a cadaver is both an object and a souvenir of a subject.”<sup>632</sup> Carol Mavor echoes this sentiment. She also likens clothing and the photograph, referencing Roland Barthes when she writes, “because clothing is ‘perishable’ and because it takes on the body (it takes form, smells, dirt), ‘it makes second graves for the loved being,’ even before death, but especially after death.”<sup>633</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson expresses the same “sense of the uncanny” experienced “when we gaze at garments that had an intimate relationship with human beings long since gone to their graves.” She continues “they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening; the atrophy of the body, and the evanescence of life.”<sup>634</sup> Woolf encounters this dichotomy of life and death through the worn/unworn object in her first published article from 1904 describing a visit to the Brontë Museum in Haworth:

But the most touching case - so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one's gaze - is that which contains the little personal relics of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the

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<sup>630</sup> Angelica Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987) p.111

<sup>631</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Interior with a Housemaid*, c.1939, oil on canvas, 74 x 54cm, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. Bell had structural changes made at Charleston in 1939 when, with the advent of the Second World War it became the primary home for Bell, Grant and Clive Bell. Bell’s bedroom was made from converting storerooms and a larder and opening up a large window into north wall on the ground floor. See Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.291.

<sup>632</sup> Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1994) p.110

<sup>633</sup> Carol Mavor, ‘Collecting Loss,’ *Cultural Studies*, vol.11, no.1, 1997, p.121

<sup>634</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 2003, p.1

woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and her thin muslin dress have outlived her.<sup>635</sup>

Possibly the sight of Charlotte Brontë's garments brought to mind her parents' clothes, taken from the family home in Hyde Park Gate a few months earlier, stored at Gordon Square to be eventually unpacked, dusted off and worn again. She would return to the theme in her novel *To The Lighthouse* with a description of the Ramsay's summer home after the family's ten year absence. She described "What people had shed and left – a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and wardrobe – those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks and buttons."<sup>636</sup> For R.S. Koppen the clothes that are left behind are "invested with a stronger mnemonic force than other human possessions."<sup>637</sup> These "Clothes without a wearer," according to Elizabeth Wilson, "whether on a second-hand stall, in a glass, or merely a lover's garments strewn on the floor, can affect us unpleasantly, as if a snake had shed its skin."<sup>638</sup>

Grant recorded this absence in a portrait without a body (*fig.3.12*).<sup>639</sup> The extremities of the corporeal experience are present, a hat and a pair of shoes, but the body that would occupy the space in-between is missing. Ownership of the objects remains in the title of the piece, *Maynard Keynes' Hat, Shoes and Pipe*, but the body has been erased, its corporeality replaced by the heavily decorated wool carpet. The hat is upside down as if to emphasis absence, the lack of wearer. The pipe with its promise of oral penetration is removed from the mouth. The extremities of outerwear have different social codings. To remove one's hat is a frequent occurrence, a social obligation, but to remove one's shoes (outside of religious practice) suggests intimacy, domesticity, and informality. It is the start of the disrobing ritual, of the shedding of

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<sup>635</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Haworth, November, 1904,' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, vol.1*, ed. Andrew McNellie (New York: Harcourt, 1987) p.7. First published in *The Guardian*, unsigned, on 21st December, 1904.

<sup>636</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943) p.200

<sup>637</sup> R. S. Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) p.70

<sup>638</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 2003, p.2

<sup>639</sup> Duncan Grant, *Maynard Keynes' Hat, Shoes and Pipe*, 1908, oil on canvas, 22.9 x 28cm, private collection, sold at Sotheby's, London, 21 May 1986, lot no.110. Richard Shone reproduces the painting next to Grant's portrait of Keynes executed in the same year while the pair were on holiday in the Orkneys, in which Keynes is wearing similar footwear, (Duncan Grant, *John Maynard Keynes*, 1908, oil on canvas, 80 c 59.5cm, The Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge). See Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.52.



skins. As Simon Watney observes, “There is also the implication of intimacy, associated with any scene of clothing lying of the floor.”<sup>640</sup>

There are scraps and fragments of shedded skins in the drawer by the armchair where Bell sat in the Garden Room at Charleston (*fig.3.13*).<sup>641</sup> Bachelard has written that, along with “wardrobes with their shelves” and “chests with their false bottoms” “desks with their drawers[...] are veritable organs of the secret psychological life.” Without these objects “our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy.”<sup>642</sup> Bell’s drawer houses her darning equipment, the needles, pins and thread used for altering, mending and sealing aberrations in the cloth, keeping the fabric of her family together. The hooks and eyes, buttons removed from garments, shed skins.

Also in the drawer are name tags, long tapes of white cotton with her eldest son’s name “J. H. Bell” woven continuously into it in red thread. “Woven names” as one of the boxes announces, used for naming and indexing clothes. Like mementoes of the body, that were once part of the body, like hair, baby teeth – the textual name ties the textile slither to the corporeal body of the named one. Even though these labels are unused, still in the small cardboard box of the manufacturer they act as remnants, as what Marcia Pointon describes as the “Bodily trace metamorphosed into document,” the trace of the absent body.<sup>643</sup>

Barthes has written that “the function of any drawer is to ease, to acclimate the death of objects by causing them to pass through a sort of pious site, a dusty chapel, where, in the guise of keeping them alive, we allow them a decent interval of dim agony.”<sup>644</sup> Julian Bell died in 1937, but the name tapes remained in the shallow drawer. Carol Mavor echoes Barthes when she writes: “the drawer of saved objects functions as a space between life and death. For not only do our photographs, our objects, signify death, they also (in the spirit of the fetish) keep death away. Collecting these objects in

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<sup>640</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.26

<sup>641</sup> Photograph by author

<sup>642</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p.78

<sup>643</sup> Marcia Pointon, ‘Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body,’ in eds. Marius Kwant, Christopher Breward, & Jeremy Aynsley, *Material Memories: Design and evocation*. (Oxford: Berg, 1999) p.40 Pointon reflects on the status of objets made from bodily matter, in this case a lock of hair.

<sup>644</sup> *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981) p. 61

the nooks and crannies of our homes keeps them and our memories and ourselves alive. Objects keep death away by helping us to remember.”<sup>645</sup>

### Closet space:

Bell’s “wardrobe[s] with [... its] shelves” also became a repository for shed skins. It still stands in her bedroom at Charleston, decorated in 1917 with, in Angelica Garnett’s opinion a “design [that] implied the amplitude and calm of her [Bell’s] own nature” (*fig.3.14*).<sup>646</sup> The cupboard had originally housed a foldout bed, a temporary piece of furniture providing a temporary space for a body, like an item of clothing that carries the trace of the corporeal that is folded up and put back in the closet.<sup>647</sup> Bell’s daughter remembers that “It was here that, later on, she kept the scraps of material she hoarded over the years, and it was these shelves that I rifled for dressing-up clothes. Textiles left over from the days of the Omega, a hand-painted, silk jacket bound with peacock blue satin, designed by Duncan for the production of *Pelléas and Mélisande*, a saffron skirt from China, a cramoisy brocade from the Roman rag market.”<sup>648</sup> Each garment carries with it its own narrative invested in it by its various wearers.<sup>649</sup>

Bell is drawn to the “ancient pieces of silk or velvet she discovered in some forgotten alley or antique shop.” “No matter how faded or threadbare” these “richly suggestive” textiles enter the home.<sup>650</sup> The gap, the rip, the tear remains a constant event. Worn and frayed fragments are darned with thread or fastened with pins, healing up the gape. When Bell made clothes they “frequently relied on safety pins as fastenings.”<sup>651</sup> Clothes are pinned for public decency, the edges forced together. Grant, evicted from the changing hut on a beach in France without his trousers “had to trot about with his shirt safety-pinned between his legs, to prevent it blowing up.”<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Mavor, ‘Collecting Loss,’ 1997, p.121

<sup>646</sup> Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ 1987, p.107. Nuala Hancock has recently considered Bell’s cupboard, see Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk’s House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2012) pp.134-38.

<sup>647</sup> Cupboard, c.1890, painted wood, manufactured by The Folding Brass Bed Company, Hart Street, London, decorated by Vanessa Bell, c.1917, 219 x 91 x 32cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/F/55

<sup>648</sup> Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ 1987, p.107

<sup>649</sup> For examples of Garnett’s “favourite vice” of “dressing up” see *Vanessa Bell’s Family Album*, 1981, pp.81, 94, 110, 118, 119, 121, and 124.

<sup>650</sup> Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ 1987, pp.107-8

<sup>651</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) p.143

Woolf states that her sister “seems to have slipped civilisation off her back, and splashes about entirely nude, without shame, and enormous spirit.”<sup>653</sup> Civilisation is a cloak, slipped off, hung on the back of a chair. The unclothed body is often “regarded as lacking and unfinished,” for Warwick and Cavallaro clothes have been “assigned the responsibility of transforming the incomplete body into a complete cultural package.”<sup>654</sup> But torn clothes and gaping clothes appear incomplete too, drawing attention to the “lacking and unfinished.” Woolf casts her sister and nephew as Shakespearean characters, fictitious figures: “Nessa will come across with holes in her stockings—Quentin will come across with a hole in his trousers.”<sup>655</sup> She describes the “the combination of shabbiness and splendour” at Charleston, like the combination of silk and gold. Angelica Bell casts her aunt as a Cinderella figure: “It was true that Virginia could not bring herself to mend her clothes and preferred to pin up her silk rags with a gold brooch.”<sup>656</sup> Silk and gold, “shabbiness and splendour,”<sup>657</sup> the trappings of luxury, torn and pinned on the orphaned daughters.

Bell was often in the process of doing “something mysterious with her needle or her scissors.”<sup>658</sup> She manipulated the “cheap printed cotton [bought] from abroad”<sup>659</sup> and “the considerable collection of those large wool or cotton squares printed with traditional Provençal patterns, [that] lay folded on the shelves, and formed an essential, sensuous element in Vanessa’s life.”<sup>660</sup> As with the waistcoat from the Omega Workshops, or Virginia Woolf’s green dress, both made from upholstery material, cloth is used for different purposes than intended. Large squares of printed cotton intended as handkerchiefs or scarves, have their edges sewn together to make cushions

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<sup>652</sup> Alice Phipps, ‘Grace Higgs,’ *Canvas*, issue.17, December 2007, The Charleston Trust, p.4

<sup>653</sup> Virginia Woolf to Violet Dickinson, 10 April 1917. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume II: 1923-1928*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) p.147

<sup>654</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 1998, p.3

<sup>655</sup> Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 2 September 1927. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1923-1928*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) p.416-17

<sup>656</sup> Angelica Garnett, ‘Vanessa Bell,’ *The Bloomsbury Group*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975) p.175

<sup>657</sup> Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, 2 September 1927, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume III: 1923-1928*, 1977, p.416-17

<sup>658</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Old Bloomsbury,’ *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Brighton: Chatto & Windus for Sussex University Press, 1976) p.173

<sup>659</sup> Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ 1987, pp.107-8

<sup>660</sup> Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ 1987, pp.107-8

and bolsters. They also lie on the backs of chairs, post-impressionist echoes of Victorian antimacassars (*fig.3.15*).<sup>661</sup>

Pieces of cloth, unworn sections of abandoned dresses, saved, put away in Bell's large cupboard in her room, were re-employed at a later date to make lampshades, the fraying edges loosely tacked to its wire skeleton (*fig.3.16*).<sup>662</sup> They went to make rag-rugs, made by local women, indexes of worn clothes and cloth, salvaged and reused. Made in the 1950s they look back to the home crafts of the nineteenth century and the artist's artistic history with their designs in keeping with Bell's post-impressionist aesthetic (*fig.3.17*).<sup>663</sup> The memory of fabric and the fabric of memory, these fragments of cloth and clothing, new and used, are in a process of migration, from the cupboard to the body, from the body to the canvas, from the rag-bag to the lampshade and the floor.

### **Fragments:**

Bell favoured red cotton fabric, printed with a decorative repeating pattern. She used similarly designed material for her dresses and also for the curtains in her home. Hanging at the window of the Garden Room at Charleston in Grant's 1917 portrait of Bell can be seen an example of these curtains, the red ground embellished with a floral repeat of loose strokes of paint and feathered leaves (*fig.3.18*).<sup>664</sup> The same fabric can be seen hanging at the window in Bell's painting *View of the Pond at Charleston* (*fig.3.19*).<sup>665</sup> The red fabric marks the delineation between the outside and the inside of the home but it can also mark the threshold of the body. Grant explores this liminality when he draws in the corporeal presence of Bell into a small group of collaged works.

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<sup>661</sup> Cotton square on the back of armchair in the Garden Room, Charleston, CHA/T/111, photograph by author.

<sup>662</sup> Vanessa Bell, Lampshade, c.1935, 10 x 42cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/T/15, photograph by author.

<sup>663</sup> Rag-rugs at Charleston: maker unknown, c.1950, 121 x 196cm, CHA/T/57 and maker unknown, c.1950, 191 x 102cm CHA/T/74. Exhibited in *Fragments*, The Charleston Gallery, Summer 2010, curated by the author. For a concise history of rag rugs see Emma Tennant, *Rag Rugs of England and America* (London: Walker Books, 1992). For a social and literary analysis see Carolyn Steedman, 'What a Rag Rug Means,' in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth Century Interior*, eds. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) pp.18-39

<sup>664</sup> Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, c.1916-17, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.6cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG5541

<sup>665</sup> Vanessa Bell, *View of the Pond at Charleston*, c.1919, 63.5cm x 67.3cm City Art Galleries, Sheffield See: chapter two, *Pond Life*, note.289.

Grant executed three paintings of Bell wearing a dress made of red paisley fabric, two of which incorporated collaged elements.<sup>666</sup> In the version in the National Portrait Gallery, London, the pattern of the material and the construction of the dress have been recreated in paint, Grant echoing “the rhythm of the drapery,” emulating its folds and shadows (*fig.3.20*).<sup>667</sup> In the “second version” Grant introduces sections of the actual material that the dress was made from (*fig.3.21*).<sup>668</sup> The referent becomes the image, but its realness breaks the cohesiveness of the composition, it interrupts the picture’s surface. Frances Spalding considers the interaction of real and painted elements a success claiming that “They act like the statement of a musical theme, the brush elsewhere offering variations upon it in loose imitation of the original pattern.”<sup>669</sup> But as a performance of a painted surface it is lacking the “rhythm” of the painted material, it sits flat on the picture’s surface. Despite some shading added over the top it still lacks the shape of the painted cloth that clings to Bell’s body, it remains an inactivated surface.

The same fabric is used together with one of a pattern of fans to clothe a pair of Caryatids by Grant (*figs.3.22 & 3.23*).<sup>670</sup> These two, large painted images, naked but for their collaged shorts, were rapidly made as temporary decorations for the home.<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> There are several portraits by Grant of Bell wearing red dresses from this period. See *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 55.9cm Scottish National Gallery (see chapter one: *Signature in the Frame*) also *Vanessa Bell at Eleanor*, 1915, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 56cm, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven and *Vanessa Bell at work (on a portrait)* also from behind, exhibited at Agnew’s *Modern British Paintings*, 1986, no.11. In 1914 she wrote to Roger Fry: “Duncan has begun to paint a picture of me in my red evening dress but it hasn’t got very far yet as I don’t sit very often.” *Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry*, 10 September 1914, quoted in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.133.

<sup>667</sup> Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell*, c.1918, oil on canvas, 94 x 60.6cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 4331. The work is more likely to have been painted c.1916 rather than c.1918 as stated on the National Portrait Galleries website [www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mwoo493/Vanessa-Bell-ne-Stephen?LinkID=mp00365&role=sit&rNo=1](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mwoo493/Vanessa-Bell-ne-Stephen?LinkID=mp00365&role=sit&rNo=1)

<sup>668</sup> Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Vanessa Bell*, c.1916, oil and fabric collage, 91.5 x 61cm, collection Mark Lancaster. Richard Shone describes the painting as “the second version” in *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1996, p.148. A third version in which papier collé is used, is in a private collection.

<sup>669</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.151

<sup>670</sup> Duncan Grant, *Caryatid (male)*, c.1913-14, oil, watercolour on paper with fabric collage laid on canvas, 140 x 63cm, private collection, UK, and Duncan Grant, *Caryatid (female)*, c.1917, oil, paper and fabric collaged on canvas, 140.5 x 45.6cm, Manchester City Art Gallery, 1964.286.

<sup>671</sup> The female Caryatid, purchased in 1964 from Grant’s Wildensein exhibition required extensive conservation. See: Maureen Cross and Sarah Skinner, ‘Restoring Spontaneity: Conserving Duncan Grant’s ‘Caryatid’ from the Collection of Manchester City Galleries,’ *Cr: Interdisciplinair Vakblad voor Conservering en Restauratie*, 2004, pp.18-27, and Maureen Cross et al., ‘From Fireplace to Fine Art – The Conservation of Duncan Grant’s Collage,

Grant also utilised solitary textile elements attached to the picture surface during a transient encounter with abstraction. He included a piece of the red fan onto a collaged work (fig.3.24).<sup>672</sup> This highly decorative element sits uncomfortably next to the geometric and abstract pieces of loosely painted and cut paper that surround it. It offers the presence of a nineteenth century Aestheticism, a homage to the influence of Whistler and Wilde and of Japonisme, surrounded by a fractured and pasted modernism.<sup>673</sup> It shows the influence of Grant's encounter with Picasso in Paris the previous year and Picasso use of nineteenth century wallpapers.<sup>674</sup> But the fabric shares the papier collé's roughly hewn edges and ragged and uneven borders. The surface of the fabric has even been marked with daubs of the white paint from the composition's ground, tying the fabric into the picture plane.

*Interior at Gordon Square* is the title applied to two pictures by Grant. Both have the same composition, both were created c.1914-15, both presenting the viewer "an imaginary view based on a real view, in which the various visual components were re-arranged by the artist to make a satisfying picture."<sup>675</sup> The smaller version is executed in oil paint with geometric panels of colour depicting the stacked canvases, furniture and the architectural construction of the room used as a studio at 46 Gordon Square (fig.3.25).<sup>676</sup> In the larger version oil paint has been replaced by strips of paper, painted in various colours, cut or torn to size and collaged onto the board (fig.3.26).<sup>677</sup> These pieces of papier collé have lifted and peeled, the image unravelling, revealing and emphasising the boundaries, leaving the mode of production exposed. Collaging painted paper removes the act of painting, the mechanics of the brush stroke, away from the site of the painting itself.

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Caryatid,' in *IIC Works of Art on Paper: Books, Documents and Photographs, Techniques and Conservation. Baltimore Congress, Baltimore, Maryland, USA, 2-6 September 2002*, ed. V. Daniels, A. Donnithorne and P. Smith, International Institute of Conservation, London, 2002, p.6.

<sup>672</sup> Duncan Grant, *Abstract*, 1915, paint, papier collé and fabric on board. Reproduced in *A Bloomsbury Canvas*, ed. Tony Bradshaw (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001) p.13, no size given.

<sup>673</sup> See Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and nineteenth-century Japan* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Lionel Lambourne, *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings Between Japan and the West* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2005)

<sup>674</sup> See *Introduction*, also Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.45.

<sup>675</sup> David Brown, *Duncan Grant to 1920: The Basic Outline*, The Tate Gallery Archive, 7241.1, p.5, quoted in Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.43.

<sup>676</sup> Duncan Grant, *Interior at Gordon Square*, c.1914, oil on wood, 40 x 32.1cm, Tate, TO1143

<sup>677</sup> Duncan Grant, *Interior at Gordon Square*, 1914-15, paint, papier collé and fabric on board, 76 x 65cm, private collection.

A prefabricated element in the form of a grey upright totem, notched near its top, left side, made of silken material is attached to the lower, right hand section of the picture, forming a shadow or a shard of light from a window or doorway. It substitutes the loose, fragmented white paint of its oil companion and the thin washes of colour on the surrounding papier collé with the consistency and luminosity of a finely woven fabric. But its very construction is exposed in the fraying edges that leave the warp and weft exposed.

In *Abstract Collage* c.1915 Grant has introduced a patterned piece of fabric to the composition, a design of short, twisted abstract lines underneath a regimented grid of thick, black, broken lines (fig.3.27).<sup>678</sup> The patterned textile, along with a piece of marbled paper collaged next to it, marks itself out from the painted papier collé pieces that surround it.

An echo of this isolated addition can be seen in the square of silver foil collaged at some point to Grant's *In Memoriam: Rupert Brooke* (fig.3.28).<sup>679</sup> Executed on hearing of the death of his friend it has been described as "a memorial painting of considerable gravity," by Simon Watney who senses an emotional impetus from Grant's "severely geometric picture, which achieves a strong personal sense through its handling."<sup>680</sup> Watney sees the influence of Juan Gris' use of mirrored glass in the addition of silver foil: "For Grant this can only have been a distorting mirror, or perhaps more likely, a source of continual reflected light, almost like a votive candle, within the picture itself."<sup>681</sup> Christopher Reed sees this site of corporeal absence as being magnified by the homophonic reflective qualities of the foil, he writes: "the absent, reflective center of *In Memoriam* documents the absence of a figure who once was part of this world."<sup>682</sup> These abstracted and geometric elements, the pieces of cloth, the ragged edges of the papier collé, the tin foil paper from a cigarette packet, through the absence

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<sup>678</sup> Duncan Grant, *Abstract Collage*, c.15, paint, papier collé and fabric on board, 63 x 45cm, Hoffmann Collection, Berlin

<sup>679</sup> Duncan Grant, *In Memoriam: Rupert Brooke*, 1915, paint and papier collé on panel, 55 x 30.5cm, Yale Center for British Art. Richard Shone writes that the foil was a "subsequent addition," see Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.138. It was removed during the pictures conservation after Grant's death, see Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.91, n.36, also Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.291, n.31

<sup>680</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.42

<sup>681</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.42

<sup>682</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.161

of the body, standing in for the body, maintain a corporeal presence in the picture plane.<sup>683</sup>

## **Part Two - Grant**

### **“don’t trouble to dress”:**

In a short letter, written by Bell in November 1909 on headed paper from her home at 46 Gordon Square, clothing is used as an indicator of the progress of her relationship with Grant, a textual marker of the beginning of a new stage in the artists’ friendship and emerging partnership:

Dear Duncan  
May I call you so and will you call me Vanessa? It seems rather absurd to begin ‘Dear Mr Grant’ when you dine with us on Tuesday next the 9<sup>th</sup> at 8 o’clock? It will not be a party so don’t trouble to dress unless you like.  
Yours sincerely Vanessa Bell<sup>684</sup>

Intimacy allows informality, in both the names that are used to address each other and in the clothes that are permitted to be worn for social occasions, the textual and the textile.<sup>685</sup> Informality of speech and informality of appearance go hand in hand, like first name terms and daytime clothes. With the choice to dress or not to dress Bell and Bloomsbury apparently permit options rather than rules.<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, pp.157-161

<sup>684</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 3 November 1909, TGA/DGP

<sup>685</sup> Several years later, in 1933, Woolf’s declaration that it was unnecessary to change for dinner needs to be explained. In a type written invitation she states: ‘we shall be unchanged - I mean in clothes,’ added to this is a hand-written clarification, ‘by this I mean that we dont [*sic*] dress.’ Virginia Woolf to Virginia Isham, 4 January 1933, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932-1935*, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) p.145

<sup>686</sup> In David Garnett’s recollection of his introduction to the Bloomsbury group in 1912, when invited to play poker by Adrian Stephen at the house he shared with Virginia he wore “white waistcoat and tails”, both because it made him “acceptable” and because it “was the only well-cut, decent suit I possessed and I knew that I looked my best in it.” He “learnt later that, at the time, Adrian was the only person in the group who did like me and that the others could see no point in me at all, partly because of my habit of appearing week after week in full evening dress. Nobody else ever wore even a dinner-jacket, except Clive, unless some late-comer came on from a seat in the stalls at the Russian Ballet or the Opera.” David Garnett, *The Golden Echo* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1953) p.251-253



In Grant's self-portrait from the same year (*fig.3.29*)<sup>687</sup> the artist's choice of clothes is obscure. His self-defined facial features and large eyes stare out to the viewer from a dark and shadowy background made up of blacks, browns and sombre greens, reminiscent of the backgrounds of earlier paintings, of the Victorian portraits by George Frederick Watts. Grant had studied Watt's painting when he made a copy of a portrait of his Grandfather, Sir John Peter Grant in 1907.<sup>688</sup> In Grant's self-portrait his head is in the upper left hand quarter of the canvas, his neck dissected by the black collar of his clothes, the darkness of the material hiding their identity, loose strokes of paint suggesting but evading the vision of the actual fold, cut and construction of the cloth. John Harvey proposes that the popularity of dark clothes for men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had a dual function and effect. As well as presenting 'sombreness' it also presents "sexual attractiveness" "makes a person thinner, sets off the face, perhaps suggests intensity."<sup>689</sup> In this presentation of the self, the artist denies the viewer a reading of what he wears, his face is visible but his textile identity remains in shadow. A self-portrait from the following year also eludes a textile reading (*fig.3.30*).<sup>690</sup> Though the grey background buildings of Fitzroy Square make distinctive the outline of Grant's dark jacket, its detail is still obscured, the neck tie briefly sketched in with black lines. Elizabeth Wilson has written of how "The fear of depersonalization haunts our culture," and how "The way which we dress may assuage that fear by stabilizing our individual identity."<sup>691</sup> Grant's anonymous clothes reflect the "dislocation" and "fragmentation" of modernity. But even when they are visible and defined his clothes still remain a site of instability.

In 1912 Grant became the subject of a portraitist, the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn. In a series of images the young British artist poses nonchalantly for the camera (*figs.3.31 – 3.40*).<sup>692</sup> Grant may be seen to have lost control of one half of

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<sup>687</sup> Duncan Grant, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas, c.1909, 54.3 x 41.9 cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG5131

<sup>688</sup> See Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.65. Duncan Grant, *Portrait of John Peter Grant*, 1907, oil on canvas, 66 x 53.6cm, National Galleries of Scotland, reproduced in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1976, p.50.

<sup>689</sup> John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995) p.36

<sup>690</sup> Duncan Grant, *Self Portrait*, c.1910, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 29.7cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/65

<sup>691</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreames*, 2003, p.12

<sup>692</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, Ten portraits of *Duncan Grant*, 1912, each one: negative, gelatin on nitrocellulose roll film, 12 x 9cm, George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive, accession nos. 79:3833:0001 – 79:3833:0011 available on-line at: [www.geh.org/ar/celeb/grant\\_sum00001.html](http://www.geh.org/ar/celeb/grant_sum00001.html)

the creative act, while he remains the subject of the *portrait* he loses the *self* of the creator. But to sit for a photographer is to be complicit in the process. Grant doesn't appear to be troubled by the "inauthenticity" that troubles Barthes, who, when "Posing in front of the lens" feels compelled to "instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image." Grant doesn't express the mortified body feared by Barthes, who does not "know how to work upon my skin from within."<sup>693</sup> Grant appears relaxed and supple in his skin, he looks to the right, he looks to the left, he looks at the camera's lens, he turns away.

These chemical impressions contrast with Grant's painted self-portraits. His clothing is visible, the various items from his wardrobe readily identifiable. But what we see is a study in dark garments; a dark jacket over a dark shirt, with a dark tie and a dark cardigan with all of its buttons buttoned. In this version of Grant clothes enclose the body, secured by knots and fasteners. The only glimpse of pattern, of light, is a flash of a sock, in a pose in which he sits crossed legged, his hands lodged behind his knees (*fig.3.39*). A very different persona to Coburn's portrait of Wyndham Lewis from 1916 in which the artist sits at a slight angle on a chair (*fig.3.41*).<sup>694</sup> His legs are wide apart, one hand on one knee, the other holding a pipe, the corner of the chair and the chair leg pointing down between his legs; the artist as a system of phallic angles in a pose praised by Coburn for its "defiant attitude."<sup>695</sup>

Simon Watney, though admitting that the Coburn images of Grant "show a startlingly handsome young man whose beauty appealed to women and men alike," states emphatically that "What they do not show is a dandy." For Watney, Grant is "decidedly un-fin-de-siècle,"<sup>696</sup> he has rejected the image and the persona, the clothes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthete in a "personal reaction to the homosexual style of

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<sup>693</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1981, pp.10-11

<sup>694</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, Portrait of Wyndham Lewis, London, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1916, published in *More Men of Mark* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922) available on-line at: [http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection\\_list=Boo ksbyAlvinLangdonC&col\\_id=210](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection_list=Boo ksbyAlvinLangdonC&col_id=210)

<sup>695</sup> Alvin Langdon Coburn, introduction to *More Men of Mark*, 1922. Lewis' image consciousness was witnessed by Winnifred Gill at the Omega Workshops: "Wyndham Lewis, thinking the room was empty, came in swaggering with a new black and white checked cloth cap, strutting and posturing in front of the mirror, saluting himself and trying it on this way and that." See Pamela Fry, 'Recollections of the Omega,' *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920* (London: Anthony d'Offay, 1984) p.9. For Lewis' opposition to Bloomsbury see Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.4.

<sup>696</sup> Simon Watney, 'Duncan Grant and Queer Bloomsbury,' in *Canvas* issue 14, 2005, The Charleston Trust, pp.4-5

Wildean aestheticism.” Watney positions Grant outside of a homosexual dandy heritage, a drop-out in the lineage of an externalised queerness that would resurface in a younger, post-war group of homosexual men related to the Bloomsbury group.<sup>697</sup> Grant rejects what Alan Sinfield terms the “queer *bricolage* of effeminacy,” itself set in opposition to the “mainstream working-class values”<sup>698</sup> which Grant seems to embrace in the dark wool of his clothes. He re-engages with what Flügel terms “The Great Masculine Renunciation,” a rejection of the extravagant and an adoption of the sombre.<sup>699</sup>

Warwick and Cavallaro consider how “Dress *represents* the body as a fundamentally liminal phenomenon by stressing its precarious location on the threshold between the physical and the abstract, the literal and the metaphorical.”<sup>700</sup> While Grant’s clothes sit on a threshold between the queer bricolage and Lewis’s straight defiance they remain a site of queer transgression. Throughout the series of photographs the tie, tied in a small knot at Grant’s neck, instead of hanging down the front of his body, marking the

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<sup>697</sup> Christopher Reed has demonstrated the influence of Wilde’s aesthetic theories on the development of Bloomsbury thought and visual culture, see ‘Making History: The Bloomsbury Group’s Construction as Aesthetic and Sexual Identity,’ in *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (New York, London and Norwood (Australia): Harrington Park Press, 1994) pp.203-217. Stephen Barker has shown how Grant’s cousin Lytton Strachey was positioned as the inheritor of a Wildean personal aesthetic. Barker charts responses to Strachey’s homosexuality and its apparent manifestation in his dress: “A contiguous metonymic chain in which ‘Strachey’ stand in for ‘Bloomsbury,’ which in turn functions as a code word for vilified effeminate homosexuality emerges at the outset in personal memoirs about the group (by people outside it) and in public criticism of its works.” Stephen Barker, ‘Lip-reading: Woolf’s Secret Encounters,’ in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997) p.415. Barker quotes David Elbery who describes Strachey as “a visibly effeminate man whose mannerisms came to encode homosexual recognition in a hostile society for the next two generations.” See David Elbery, ‘Taking It All Out: Homosexual Disclosure in Woolf,’ in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations. Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Vara Neveroe-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993) p.129. Elements of a Wildean legacy emerge in some aspects of Grant’s dress. Paul Roche recalls shopping for a suit at the department store C&A, Marble Arch, London for Grant in 1973: “He fancies himself in black velvet. Luckily, this is one of the suits he cannot get into.” See Paul Roche, *With Duncan Grant in Southern Turkey* (Renfrew: Honeyglenn Publishing, 1982) p.8 The garment is reminiscent of the “suit of black velvet” Wilde commissioned in New York to wear on his American lecture tour in 1882, see John Harvey, *Men in Black*, 1995, p.36.

<sup>698</sup> Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, (London: Cassell, 1994) p.146. Sinfield demonstrates how the manner and appearance of Wilde and his circle did not signify homosexuality at the time of his arrest and trial, he writes how “effeminacy was still flexible, with the potential to refute homosexuality, as well as to imply it.” p.93. Neil Bartlett describes the trial of Wilde as “a contrived spectacle” that sparked “the ‘discovery’ of homosexuality in London,” see Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1988) p.128.

<sup>699</sup> Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 1971, p.11

<sup>700</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 1998, p.7

centre, veers to the right, it is off centre. In one (*fig.3.31*) Grant leans to the left, his face in profile, his chin supported by his left hand, his left elbow supported by his right hand. A wide section of the cuff of the left sleeve of his shirt is visible at his wrist. A slither of lighter coloured wool, the cuff of his cardigan, makes a band, a break between the shirt and the jacket, a tricolour of material, a layering of fabric. On Grant's right sleeve, the shirt is hidden, the cuff of the cardigan covering the cuff of the shirt, connecting hand to jacket. Grant's clothes sit unequal, asymmetrically on his body, twisting, extending, escaping, the layers shifting. There is a queerness barely concealed in Grant's dark clothes, what Hal Fischer describes as the "semiotics intended both for identification and/or invisibility within the larger culture."<sup>701</sup>

Clothes do not sit easily on his frame, the "skin from within," the queer body pushes to assert itself in quiet defiance. In further painted self-portraits from this period Grant presents himself without day clothes, the darkness of the cloth removed to present the skin. In *Self-portrait in a Turban*, the body and its adornments are missing, it is the head that dominates the picture (*fig.3.42*).<sup>702</sup> Filling the top two thirds of the canvas is a turban made of striped fabric wound round into a blunt point, one end of the long fabric hanging down Grant's right-hand side. At the lower edge of the image is his naked neck truncated by the canvas' edge. In a larger painting, *Study for Composition (Self-Portrait in a Turban)* (*fig.3.43*),<sup>703</sup> Grant presents his naked upper torso, his right arm stretching up above his head. Richard Shone writes that "Pentimenti reveal that originally Grant held a basket on his head."<sup>704</sup> The tall basket has been replaced by a low turban, leaving Grant's slender, androgynous arm dissecting the picture space in a dissident pose, left supporting what is absent.

### **Striptease:**

Grant garnered a reputation for neglecting his clothes, for neglecting his appearance. Richard Shone could confidently write: "he was quite without personal vanity, often

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<sup>701</sup> Hal Fischer, *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding among Homosexual Men* (San Francisco: NSF Press, 1977). Available at: <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/HalPages/GaySempg2.html>

<sup>702</sup> Duncan Grant, *Self-portrait in a Turban*, c.1909-10, oil on panel, 20.2 x 12.7cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/310. The painting was given to Bell by Grant, see Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999 p.94.

<sup>703</sup> Duncan Grant, *Study for Composition (Self-Portrait in a Turban)*, 1910, oil on board, 76 x 63.5cm, private collection. The painting stayed in Grant's possession until 1964 when it was first exhibited and sold at Wildenstein's exhibition *Duncan Grant and his Circle*.

<sup>704</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p.67. Shone also claims that it may be the surviving portion of a larger composition.

appearing in a grotesque assortment of other people's cast-off cloths"<sup>705</sup> and "a topic of conversation and hilarity."<sup>706</sup> The clothes were too big, they belonged to someone else, they were borrowed, they already had an owner, an identity. They were a loose skin, an uncertain shell. Grant lacked commitment to this ill-fitting layer, the clothes seeming to be straining to escape his body. Clothes seem to be repelled by Grant's body, as Woolf described: "He was rigged out by his friends in clothes, which seemed always to be falling to the floor."<sup>707</sup> Bell wrote that his "clothes were grotesque. All belonged either to Adrian or his deceased uncle and were of course miles too large."<sup>708</sup> Dora Carrington described Grant's appearance as "a young butler in his stolen master's clothes seeking a situation."<sup>709</sup>

Bell describes him at the wedding of Virginia and Leonard Woolf's in August 1912, when he arrived "in a *very* shabby tail coat and silk hat all belonging to other people."<sup>710</sup> According to Woolf's recollection Grant borrowed clothes once owned by Sir Leslie Stephen, she claimed he wore "my father's old trousers to go to parties in."<sup>711</sup> Grant seems to have no respect for the one that "wears the trousers," "the dominant member of the household,"<sup>712</sup> the figure that imparted awe to one sister and horror to the other. According to Woolf, he "ruined the trousers by jumping into the Cam to rescue a child."<sup>713</sup> Grant temporally lost his trousers when they were stolen by a housemaid Emily Paton, only to be flung at Bell when her bag was searched on her dismissal.<sup>714</sup>

Bell wrote to Woolf from Loire describing her and Grant's dishevelled state: "He has no ties, no buttons to his shirts and usually no socks. I have lost my only decent pair of shoes and wear red espadrilles, and my hat flew off yesterday and was picked up by a

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<sup>705</sup> Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, 1999, p94

<sup>706</sup> Shone, *Bloomsbury Portrait*, 1993, p.87

<sup>707</sup> Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 1976, p.176

<sup>708</sup> Vanessa Bell to Clive Bell, 1910, quoted in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portrait*, 1993, p.87

<sup>709</sup> Dora Carrington to Lytton Strachey, Quoted in Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (New York and London: Routledge 1991) p.16

<sup>710</sup> Vanessa Bell to Margaret Snowden, 20 August 1912, quoted in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portrait*, 1993, p.87

<sup>711</sup> Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 1976, p.176

<sup>712</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/206795?redirectedFrom=wears%20the%20trousers>

<sup>713</sup> Woolf, *Moments of Being* 1976, p. 176

dog who bit Duncan when he tried to take it from him.”<sup>715</sup> Describing his appearance in the 1950s, Spalding writes that he “had a certain distinction, though everything about him seemed an attempt to deny it: increasingly he wore good clothes badly and often used a tie in place of a belt. As a result his trousers once fell down when he was judging the children’s fancy-dress competition at a Firle fete.”<sup>716</sup> Watney recollection of Grant on their first meeting “his shirt-tail refused to stay in its allocated place, hung down between the back of his jacket and the inside of his knees.”<sup>717</sup>

Quentin Bell considers this type of wardrobe malfunction, the “discover[ing] that we have been wearing odd socks, or worse still confusion when we find that our flies have been undone (even though nothing of consequence has been revealed) has something of the quality of guilt... Our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul.”<sup>718</sup> He echoes William Makepeace Thackeray who wrote “A man who is not strictly neat in his person is not an honest man... his moral character takes invariably some of his slatternliness and looseness of his costume.”<sup>719</sup> Luckily Grant’s ‘soul’ seems to remain intact. When Roy Strong met Grant for the first time in April 1968 at a luncheon given by Ava, Lady Waverley described as “a great snob,” Strong was struck by the artist’s “conspicuous” and informal appearance when compared with the rest of the company. He wrote in his diary that Grant had “lank hair” and was “not wearing a suit.”<sup>720</sup> At the age of “eighty-three [he] flouted every convention, arriving in crumpled jacket and trousers.”<sup>721</sup> On visiting Charleston for the first time in June 1968 he described the appearance of his octogenarian host: “In dress he is very untidy, wearing a striped navy and white tee-shirt, a check sportscoat, brown trousers and canvas shoes. There was a slightly

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<sup>714</sup> *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Marler, 1998, p.230, n.3

<sup>715</sup> Vanessa Bell to Virginia Woolf, quoted in Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians*, 2003, pp.136-37

<sup>716</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.422-23

<sup>717</sup> Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, 1990, p.14

<sup>718</sup> Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976) p.19

<sup>719</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, ‘Men and Coats,’ in *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray, in Thirteen Volumes, vol. XIII* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1891) p.334. Quoted in Alice Crossley, ‘The Performance of Privacy: Dandyism in W.M. Thackeray’s *Pendennis*,’ in *Victorian Network* vol.3, no.2, winter 2011, pp.30-51

<sup>720</sup> Roy Strong, ‘A Memory of Duncan Grant.’ in *The Charleston Newsletter*, no. 13, December 1985, p.17

<sup>721</sup> Roy Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries 1967-1987* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997) p.13

feminine quality in his manner gentle and with a great twinkle and sense of fun and humour.”<sup>722</sup> Ivry Freyberg encountered a similarly dressed Grant in July of the following year, she recalled “Duncan was a little bowed in the shoulders, a fact that was largely concealed by a navy blue blazer and a white tee-shirt striped in blue and red. He wore navy and white canvas slip-on shoes.”<sup>723</sup> Cecil Beaton photographed Grant in 1967 at Charleston wearing a striped shirt (*fig.3.44*).<sup>724</sup> Beaton recorded his visit in his diary comparing Grant’s neglected appearance, and how he worried about “even finding time to shave himself or have his hair dyed black.” with the shabby appearance of Charleston that was “peeling and fading in mildew.”<sup>725</sup>

Gaps, and gapes, bare feet, no hat, civilisation slipping off his back, Grant’s buttoned up persona as presented to Coburn’s camera breaks down, clothes continue to leave his body, the buttons that contain it desert him, the tie around his neck has gone. Grant’s borrowed and “conspicuous” clothes, loose fitting garments, that slip and gape, verge on being costume, like the borrowed clothes worn at fancy dress parties, for play acting and for practical jokes. Grant, like other members of the Bloomsbury group, also engaged in disguise, masquerade and fancy dress.<sup>726</sup> This often involved adapting and distorting clothing. David Garnett recalls Grant’s impersonation of eminent Victorian Sydney Waterlow during a game of charade’s “with a cushioned corpulence and important manner and a large black velvet bow drooping from his lip as Waterlow’s cavalry moustache.”<sup>727</sup> Utilising fabric, soft furnishings and haberdashery Grant extends and alters the appearance of his body by altering his clothes.

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<sup>722</sup> Roy Strong, *The Charleston Newsletter*, 1985, p.17, also in a slightly revised version in Roy Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries 1967-1987*, 1997, p.21

<sup>723</sup> Ivry Freyberg, ‘Duncan Grant, 1969,’ *The Charleston Newsletter*, no.13, December 1985, p.11

<sup>724</sup> Cecil Beaton, *Duncan Grant*, bromide print on white card mount, 1967, 15.8 x 23.4cm, The National Portrait Gallery, given by Cecil Beaton 1968, accession no. NPGx14087. Shone describes one of Grant’s earliest memories: “sitting on a fence in the Himalayas in a blue and white striped jersey,” Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.38.

<sup>725</sup> *Beaton in the Sixties: More Unexpurgated Diaries*, ed. Hugo Vickers (London: Phoenix, 2004) p.212

<sup>726</sup> Dadie Rylands recalls how Bloomsbury “parties were mostly fancy-dress parties, and there were charades, and people wrote plays for them. They went on absolutely all night, and were very enjoyable. I can remember a marvellous party, called the Sailors’ Party, in which we all had to go wearing naval costume. I went as a lower-deck type, and Lytton went as a full Admiral of the Fleet. As you can imagine, with his beard and his cocked hat and his sword he was impressive.” *Recollections of Virginia Woolf by her Contemporaries*, ed. Joan R. Noble, (London: Peter Owen, 1972) pp.140-141

<sup>727</sup> David Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955) p.162

Grace Higgins, the housekeeper at Charleston, recorded in her diary whilst on holiday with Grant, Bell and her children in France in 1921 how Grant borrowed the 13 year old Julian Bell's overcoat. She wrote "I do not think I ever laughed so much, as it reached not quite to his knees, & fitted him so tightly round the waist, so as to show off his figure as if he wore corsets."<sup>728</sup> A child's garment is transformed into an item of female intimate apparel, Grant manipulates the gender coding of the garment, of his body. Three years later he uses clothing to transform species, Grace wrote "Duncan Grant the Artist, thinking to frighten us dressed up in some weird clothes and hobbled about, Louie thought he was a cow, Mrs Vanessa Bell was very amused."<sup>729</sup>

According Efrat Tseëlon's defining work, Grant seems to move easily between disguise and masquerade. Tseëlon defines disguise as something "meant to hide, conceal, pass as something one is not," while masquerade is "a statement about the wearer. It is pleasurable, excessive, sometimes subversive."<sup>730</sup> Tseëlon continues "The paradox of the masquerade appears to be that it presents the truth in the shape of deception... it reveals in the process of concealing."<sup>731</sup> For masquerade the person remains recognisable, known, even if their features are covered, indistinguishable. It is the clothes that perform.

Grant used disguise, something that "erases from view,"<sup>732</sup> when he played a trick on his Aunt Lady Jane Strachey, with whom he lived while at school in London. David Garnett described how:

he dressed up as an old lady and called upon her on the afternoon when she was at home. He gave a German name and was ushered into the drawing-room and announced by the housemaid. The name he had given meant nothing to Lady Strachey, but he explained in guttural accents that he was the friend of a certain Fraulein Grüner, a formidable and highbrow schoolmistress acquaintance of Lady Strachey's. He then entered into a lively conversation with the visitors round the tea-table and eventually got up and took his departure without his aunt having the slightest suspicion that her visitor was not what she had appeared.<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>728</sup> Alice Phipps, 'Grace Higgins,' *Canvas*, issue.17, December 2007, The Charleston Trust, p.4

<sup>729</sup> Phipps, 'Grace Higgins,' 2007, p.4

<sup>730</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.2

<sup>731</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.5

<sup>732</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.1

<sup>733</sup> David Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest*, 1955, p.30



Dressed to amuse, Grant re-enacts this scene some years later, but with the performance and knowing of masquerade. He was captured in the clothes of a Victorian lady by Julian Bell's camera. The photographs, taken at Charleston sometime in the early 1930s include a full-length portrait of Grant standing at the front of the house by the pond (*fig.3.45*).<sup>734</sup> He is wearing a long, dark dress, with long sleeves and a high collar, visual echoes of the mature Julia Stephen or of Aunt Jane Strachey. On his head is a dark coloured bonnet. His hands are clasped across his stomach supporting a large, padded chest adorned by a flower. In another photograph Grant is at a tea table in the walled garden surrounded by others in fancy dress (*fig.3.46*).<sup>735</sup> Sat next to Grant is a figure in a similar dress, dark and encompassing with long sleeves, also a necklace. Grant has removed his hat, the balding patch on the top of his head revealed, any question of his gender removed. The figure next to him still wears a large brimmed hat, the face is obscured by the ivy garland on the head of the figure sitting in the foreground. We can only read the clothes, presume the gender, but identity remains obscure. Koppen notes that at "fancy dress parties hierarchies are staged and unsettled in carnivalesque manner, the remains of the past recycled as pastiche and parody" allowing the participants permission to laugh "at authority and pomposity, at unthinking adherence to institutions, conventions, social and sexual mores, at the euphemisms and hyperboles of the nineteenth century and those who are still clinging to them."<sup>736</sup>

### **Disguise Craze:**

Grant and Bloomsbury could be seen to have been partly responsible for a pre-First World War "Disguise Craze."<sup>737</sup> Disguise was central to the events surrounding the Dreadnought Hoax, played out on 7 February 1910. The participants, Grant, Adrian and Virginia Stephen, Henry Cole, Anthony Buxton and Guy Ridley travelled to Weymouth to "play a practical joke"<sup>738</sup> on the Navy. Four of the party including

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<sup>734</sup> Possibly taken by Julian Bell, *Duncan Grant*, c.1933, black and white print, 11 x 6.6cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.

<sup>735</sup> Possibly taken by Julian Bell, *Duncan Grant and group taking tea at Charleston*, c.1933, black and white print, 6.6 x 11cm, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued.

<sup>736</sup> Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity*, 2009, pp.26-27

<sup>737</sup> 'Disguise Craze Grows Common,' *The Daily Mirror*, 3 September 1913, p.5. The article reports on the increase in middle class people adopting disguises, particularly as people from lower classes either for practical jokes or to get under cover evidence for divorce proceedings.

<sup>738</sup> Adrian Stephen to Duncan Grant February 1910, TCTA, Box A5, no.4 & 7. There are two letters of invitation from Stephen to Grant to participate in the hoax, both written on headed paper from 29 Fitzroy Square. Both have very similar text with slight variations, both referring to a previous telegram. This duality of text (triatlity if one includes the lost telegram) with it's

Virginia Stephen and Grant were disguised as Abyssinian princes accompanied by their two interpreters. They wished to visit the *Dreadnought*, the new warship recently acquired by the Navy. The group was successful in their deception and were received with military honours. Cole leaked the story to the press together with a photograph of the disguised group and for a time the incident garnered much press coverage and became the subject of music hall songs and routines (*fig.3.47*).<sup>739</sup>

Central to the creation of the group's disguise was Willy Clarkson, "Perruquier and Costumier to her Majesty Queen Victoria, Empress of India and Queen of Great Britain and Ireland."<sup>740</sup> His name and reputation were so well known that Adrian Stephen only needs to refer to him by his surname when inviting Grant to partake in the proceedings.<sup>741</sup> Clarkson's involvement emphasises the theatricality of the Hoax, dressing the 'princes' in "a bizarre and gaudy collection of outfits more suited to a pantomine [sic] dame than a prince, and quite unlike the restrained and elegant dress of a real Abyssinian."<sup>742</sup> Clarkson also did the group's makeup and would later describe his experiments on Woolf:

Her first make-up was a failure, the project was almost abandoned; but I felt piqued at being thwarted from an effect I knew could be obtained and made a fresh start. This time the result was astounding in its realism. The beautiful girl had vanished, and in her place was a slim, dignified, dusky nobleman with a sombre countenance and a flowing regal beard.<sup>743</sup>

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slight variations suggests the role of disguise as copying, of mirroring, a duality of image with slight variations.

<sup>739</sup> Lafayette Ltd, *The dreadnought Hoax*, 7 February 1910, matt bromide print, 17.6 x 22.3cm, The National Portrait Gallery, NPG P1293.

The story of the Dreadnought Hoax has been retold several times since 1910. The Woolfs' Hogarth Press published Adrian Stephen's account in 1936. Woolf chose the subject of the Hoax for her talk to the Women's Institute in Rodmell village hall on Tuesday 23 July 1940, a talk she repeated, in her opinion "not very well" at a "skeleton" meeting of the Memoir Club at Charleston on Sunday 2 September. The talk is mentioned in her diary entry for Wednesday 24 July 1940. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume Five*, edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1985) note.7, p.303. See also Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp. 85-89. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (London, 1972), 1:157-158, 213-216, and Peter Stansky, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and its intimate world* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997) pp.17-46.

<sup>740</sup> See Macdonald Hastings, 'Willy Clarkson, Wigmaker Extraordinary,' *The Times Christmas Review*, Friday 24 December 1976, p.7. Also Angus McLaren, 'Smoke and Mirrors: Willy Clarkson and the Role of Disguises in Inter-War England,' *Journal of Social History*, vol.40, no.3, Spring 2007, pp.597-618.

<sup>741</sup> Adrian Stephen to Duncan Grant February 1910, TCTA, Box A5, no.4 & 7.

<sup>742</sup> Martyn Downer, *The Sultan of Zanzibar* (London: Black Spring Press, 2011) p.101

<sup>743</sup> Quoted in Downer, *The Sultan of Zanzibar*, 2011, p.106

A year later Grant, Adrian and Virginia Stephen would again colour their skin, this time alongside Vanessa and Clive Bell, Roger Fry and James Strachey, when they “dressed more or less like figures from Gauguin,”<sup>744</sup> for the Post-Impressionist Ball, held at the Crosby Hall to celebrate the end of the exhibition *Manet and the Post Impressionists* at the Grafton Gallery.<sup>745</sup> The partygoers were also dressed in “poinsettias made of scarlet plush” and “dresses of the printed cotton that is specially loved of by negroes.”<sup>746</sup> More skin was exposed than for the Dreadnought Hoax, as Bell described: “we browned our legs and arms and had very little on beneath the draperies.”<sup>747</sup> Koppen notes that “the costume combined the double affront of nudity and primitivism that had proved so disturbing to the critics of the Post-Impressionist show.”<sup>748</sup>

But these lengths of “printed cotton” that the group used to dress themselves with were, like the costumes for the Berwick murals, borrowed from the domestic space, “stuffs” that Bell had bought “at Burnetts’ [*sic*] made for natives in Africa.”<sup>749</sup> B. Burnet & Co., ‘Art Furnishers & Upholsterers’ of 22 Garrick Street, WC2, “had a reputation for their bold and colourful fabrics, and did a considerable trade with the theatre.”<sup>750</sup> They had contributed costumes to the Ballets Russes when in London.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>744</sup> Vanessa Bell, ‘Memories of Roger Fry,’ *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: Pimlico, 1998) p.133. In his biography of Woolf, Quentin Bell does not mention that the two sisters were accompanied by the men to the party, only describing Bell and Woolf as “bare-shouldered bare-legged Gauguin girls, almost – as it seemed to the indignant ladies who swept out in protest – almost naked.” Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography, 1882-1912* (St Albans: Paladin, 1976) p.170. Hermione Lee is also exclusive in her biography of Woolf: “the Stephen girls appeared as ‘indecent’ Gauguin girls.” Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996) p.291.

<sup>745</sup> Jeanne Schulkind incorrectly dates the incident as being at a Ball arranged for the Second Post Impressionist Exhibition in 1912 rather than to celebrate the end of the First Exhibition in March 1911. See Virginia Woolf, ‘Old Bloomsbury,’ *Moments of Being* ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Sussex University Press, 1976) p.178, note.

<sup>746</sup> Woolf, ‘Old Bloomsbury,’ 1976, p.178

<sup>747</sup> Bell, ‘Memories of Roger Fry,’ 1998, p.133

<sup>748</sup> R.S. Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity*, 2009, p.25. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina charts the members of Bloomsbury’s responses to race in: Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, ‘Bushmen and Blackface: Bloomsbury and ‘Race’’, in *The South Carolina Review*, no.38, 2006, pp.46-64

<sup>749</sup> Vanessa Bell, ‘Memories of Roger Fry,’ 1998, p.133. For an account of the production of fabrics for export to Africa see Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp.435-9

<sup>750</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume One 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt inc., 1977) p.134, n.9.

The name became a byword for post-impressionist textiles. In Woolf's description of Barbara Bagnal's Hampstead studio flat, that she found "almost too perfect an illustration of the post-impressionist spirit" the list of fashionable items includes "Burnet for the covers."<sup>752</sup> Bell continued using fabrics from Burnet's after the First World War.<sup>753</sup>

Bell's 1912 painting *Self-Portrait at the Easel* (fig.3.48) positions a length of material, possibly bought at Burnet's, in the foreground of the painting and in the heart of her domestic environment.<sup>754</sup> Bell paints herself sitting on a sofa in front of a large ornate fireplace and a packed bookcase, her right hand reaching out to the canvas resting on the easel that is seen as a slither of brown on the left hand side of the composition. It is a painting that, as Christopher Reed writes "encapsulates her aspirations for Post-Impressionism,"<sup>755</sup> demonstrated in the inclusion in the painting and in her home of a fabric that would not have looked out of place in the Grafton Gallery. Indeed at the close of the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1913 the *Manchester Guardian* reported on "the great deal of attention" paid to "a strongly coloured covering" that had been draped over a settee during the show. With its "ground" of "blue and green spots studded with large spiky conventional flowers with red centres" the reporter claimed that "indeed, some visitors seemed to prefer it to the pictures." The fabric was revealed to have been made for export and not usually sold in England. Its exoticness is emphasised in that "It was designed by a Chinese artist and made in Manchester for the native East African trade."<sup>756</sup> The fabric in Bell's self-portrait has been identified as being one of these export pieces, "Manufactured by Foxton's of Manchester for the African Market" and bought by Roger Fry later to be sold at the Omega Workshops.<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>751</sup> "Here, amongst other things, the decorations of lozenges was painted onto the tights Idzikowsky wore for the role of Harlequin in Le Carnaval." [www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/diaghilev-london-walk/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/diaghilev-london-walk/) accessed 13 May 2012.

<sup>752</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume One 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 1977, p.134

<sup>753</sup> 7 May 1919, "The floors strewn with Burnet stuffs for the Flat." Bell bought material from Burnet's to decorate her flat at 36 Regent Square, see *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume One 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell, 1977, p.270

<sup>754</sup> Vanessa Bell, *Self-portrait at her Easel*, 1912, oil, private collection. Reproduced in colour in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.86, and *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) Plate. 3.

<sup>755</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.86

<sup>756</sup> 'A Post-Impressionist Fabric,' *The Manchester Guardian*, Saturday 8 February 1913, p.8

<sup>757</sup> Diane F. Gillespie, 'Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Painting,' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) p.127. Information provided by Sandra Lummis (formerly of Sandra Lummis Fine Art), email (16 February 2008), see p.136, f/n.9.

From the same period as Bell's self-portrait the same textile design appears hanging in Grant's studio at 38 Brunswick Square. The chequered material becomes elevated to art object rather than subject, hung like a painting on the wall. It can be seen in Grant's photographs of George Mallory posing nude, a background for his athletic body (fig.3.49 & 3.50).<sup>758</sup> The collaboration of fabric intended for Africa in juxtaposition with European skin is an echo of Strachey's textual portrait of Mallory three years earlier in which he is described in international terms: "with the body of an athlete by Praxiteles[...] the mystery of Botticelli, the refinement and delicacy of a Chinese print, the youth and piquancy of an imaginable English Boy."<sup>759</sup> Grant also painted the naked Mallory (fig.3.51).<sup>760</sup> David Mellor sees Grant's use of short dabs of paint that build up the image, a technique described by Bell as his "leopard manner" as symbolic of the subject's "wild body temporarily in repose."<sup>761</sup> For Mellor, the photographed Mallory, rather than suggesting the heights of Greek or Renaissance cultures, is "an elevated primitive,"<sup>762</sup> an echo of the effect that the group "dressed more or less like figures from Gauguin" at the Post-Impressionist Ball seem to have intended.

Wearing the "caricature" of "masquerade,"<sup>763</sup> there was no attempt by the partygoers at the Post-Impressionist Ball to disguise their identity. Indeed the group revelled in recognition. As they "arrived in a body[...] the dancers stopped and applauded"<sup>764</sup> and

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<sup>758</sup> Duncan Grant, *George Mallory*, c.1912, black and white photographs, Tate Archives, AD12 and AD24, reproduced in Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.100 & p.101 respectively.

<sup>759</sup> Lytton Strachey to Clive and Vanessa Bell, 21 May 1909, quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994) p.206.

<sup>760</sup> Duncan Grant, *George Leigh Mallory*, oil on panel, 1912-13, 77.5 x 53cm, The National Portrait Gallery, NPG5802. See also Duncan Grant, *Portrait of George Mallory*, c.1911-12, oil on panel, 54 x 48cm, private collection, reproduced in catalogue *Duncan Grant: Paintings from 1905 to the 1970s*, Ava Gallery, 2005, cat.4 and Duncan Grant, *George Mallory*, 1913, 21 x 25 in. Southeby & Co., London, reproduced in monochrome in Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1976, p.94.

<sup>761</sup> David Alan Mellor, 'The Phoenix of English Painting': Figures of the Body in Duncan Grant, 1908-20, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 13:1, 2012, p.45. Mellor cites Michael Anton Budd who "has pointed out, the leopard skin was an indispensable part of the iconography of contemporary Western physical culture." See Michael Anton Budd, *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) p.ix.

<sup>762</sup> David Alan Mellor, 'The Phoenix of English Painting,' 2012, p.45

<sup>763</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.1

<sup>764</sup> Vanessa Bell, 'Memories of Roger Fry,' *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, ed. Lia Giachero (London: Pimlico, 1998) p.34

the group “careered round Crosby Hall.”<sup>765</sup> Bell remarks on the effect on Fry’s reputation “already shaky from his enthusiasm for the Post-Impressionists, must have suffered another shock.”<sup>766</sup> These fancy dress outfits were not a disguise as Efrat Tseëlon would define it, as something “meant to hide, conceal, pass as something one is not.”<sup>767</sup> They were not like the costumes for the Dreadnought Hoax in which the wearers’ identity had to be subsumed. With their long robes, gloves, beards and turbans and made-up faces the counterfeit Abyssians were in disguise, but one gap, one gape in the makeup would reveal a different identity, not just for the individual exposed but for the whole party.

Clarkson acted like the fairy Godmother figure in the folk story Cinderella who transformed the heroine’s appearance but with certain conditions. While Cinderella was warned that her disguise/costume would revert to her day clothes at midnight, for Woolf and her patriots Clarkson’s warning was, “but remember this; if you eat or drink you’re done. For any liquid or food warmth will make the dye run. So on pain of our lives we could neither eat nor drink.”<sup>768</sup> Fear of skin showing through, of the disguise rupturing percolates the Dreadnought Hoax narratives. Woolf describes the uncertainty she felt when her false beard blew in the wind and her relief when, on “caressing it” she found that “it was quite firm”:

But to my horror I saw that Duncan Grant’s moustaches were waving wildly in the wind. I saw that one of them had parted from his lip. A space of pale skin showed underneath. I nudged my brother [who] led him aside into a dark corner. There he hastily dabbed the flying moustache into position. Happily it stuck; and that danger was over.<sup>769</sup>

Disguise and identity pervade military narrative. The invader or traitor disguised as a Nun became a recurring figure in First and Second World War mythology entering into the collective conscience. In the Ministry of Information’s monitoring of civilian conversation carried out during the summer of 1940 there were numerous stories of

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<sup>765</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Old Bloomsbury,’ *Moments of Being* ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Sussex University Press, 1976) p.178

<sup>766</sup> Bell, ‘Memories of Roger Fry,’ 1998, p.134

<sup>767</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.5

<sup>768</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Dreadnought Hoax Talk*, in *The Platform of Time*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2008) p.189

<sup>769</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Dreadnought Hoax Talk*, 2008, pp.191-92, also reported in Adrian Stephen, *The ‘Dreadnought’ Hoax* (London: Chatto & Windus/The Hogarth Press, 1986) pp.44-45.

“hairy handed nuns,”<sup>770</sup> German spies dressed as nuns infiltrating British society. Even Woolf wrote in her diary on 25 May 1940, “Today’s rumour is the Nun in the bus who pays her fare with a mans hand.”<sup>771</sup> So frequent were the reports that the M.O.I. adopted an unofficial “nun index,” taking the number of spying nun stories in circulation as an indicator of the general level of rumour-mongering.<sup>772</sup> The image becomes a staple of wartime visual culture as in the 1941 cartoon by Osbert Lancaster (fig.3.52).<sup>773</sup>

According to Bell, Charleston’s gardener had been “taken up as a spy[...] at his mother’s funeral,” a situation she predicted would be repeated when he joined the home guard.<sup>774</sup> In 1915, while Grant was at West Wittering he “was rumoured by the locals to be a spy because of his darkish appearance and Scottish accent.”<sup>775</sup> At Plymouth while working as a war artist in May 1940 Grant had been advised to avoid working in the naval yard because security was so great owing to the fear of spying. It was while searching for a suitable subject for his WAAC commission that Grant experienced a mirroring of events thirty years earlier in Weymouth, as he described to Bell:

One of the things we did was to go on board the ‘Hood’<sup>776</sup> an immense & very impressive battle cruiser that was bombed inefficiently the other day. Afterwards I went off again to see Lush to tell him I would like to paint in the Dockyard. He greeted me with ‘I’m afraid you got rather a setback this afternoon on the ‘Hood’ I protested that I had not been on the ‘Hood’ since the morning whereupon his jaw dropped in abject terror & he became very severe & said ‘Do you mean you have not been there this afternoon?’ I again said no. Whereupon his female secretary was told immediately to ring up & the Intelligence Depart. & I was told there was probably someone impersonating

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<sup>770</sup> *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May-September 1940*, ed. Paul Addison and Jeremy A Crang (London: Bodley Head, 2010) p.28

<sup>771</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume Five 1936-1941*, edited by Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie, (New York: Harvest, 1985) p.288

<sup>772</sup> *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May-September 1940*, ed. Paul Addison and Jeremy A Crang, 2010, p.3, p.24, p.28, p.36, p.44, p.58, p.63, p.67, and p.75.

<sup>773</sup> Osbert Lancaster, originally printed in the *Daily Express*, 31 March 1941, reprinted in *Signs of the Times 1939-1961*, (London: John Murray, 1961) p.17

<sup>774</sup> Vanessa Bell to Duncan Grant, 21 May 1940, TGA/DGP

<sup>775</sup> Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.138, Clive Bell was also suspected of being a spy.

<sup>776</sup> HMS Hood was refitted at Plymouth between 4 April and 12 June 1940. She was lost the following year on 24 May 1941, in the Battle of the Denmark Strait. See Bruce Taylor, *The Battlecruiser HMS Hood: An Illustrated Biography, 1916–1941*. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008)

me. It was all quite a ludicrous mistake as it turned out, but you see how jumpy they are.<sup>777</sup>

Maybe it was Grant's reputation for impersonation that made the Navy so "jumpy." As I have shown, Grant would frequently adopt varying elements of disguise and/or masquerade. Probably Grant's most celebrated performance occurred on Sunday 30 August 1936 with a manipulation of gender and disguise in the walled garden at Charleston. Grant's contribution to the entertainment for Quentin Bell's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday party was to dress as a Spanish dancer.<sup>778</sup> Bell described the costume to her son Julian:

However I think the turn of the evening will probably Duncan's. I have never seen anything quite so indecent. He has made himself a figure in cardboard of a nude female, which is none too securely attached by tapes to his own figure, and then he wears a simpering mask, a black wig and Spanish comb and mantilla, which partly conceals and reveals the obscene figure, while a Spanish air is played on the gramophone and Duncan flirts gracefully with a fan. I can't imagine what the audience will think of it.<sup>779</sup>

Unlike previous costumes, which relied on clothing and make-up covering the body to present an alternative identity, this time Grant replaces the vision of his skin with the painted image of skin, he wears nudity. As Reed observes, "even the gendered nude body becomes a form of costume, easily donned or doffed in the interest of particular performances."<sup>780</sup> The costume is as flat as the fragments of paisley fabric collaged to Grant's portrait of Bell, but it celebrates as overstated caricature, the tradition of the academic female nude (*figs.* 3.53, 3.54 & 3.55).<sup>781</sup> Bell highlights the contradiction

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<sup>777</sup> Duncan Grant to Vanessa Bell 18 May 1940, Special Collections, Sussex University, DGV630

<sup>778</sup> Quentin Bell was also in drag for a sketch he had written in which he played an American tourist visiting Charleston in the future when it had become a museum in his play *A Hundred Years After or Ladies and Gentlemen*. In an echo of Woolf and Bell's manipulation of their mother's clothes Quentin Bell wore his mother's fur coat. See Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, 29 August 1936, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Marler, 1998, p.419. For a description of the party see Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, pp.267-268. For other incidences of transvestism in Bloomsbury see a party hosted by Adrian Stephen in 1914, in which Grant "appeared as a heavily pregnant whore and Marjorie Strachey wore nothing but a miniature of the Prince Consort," and a party in which a farce by Lytton Strachey entitled *The Unfortunate Lovers or Truth Will Out*, was performed, that with "a great deal of transvestism helped to explain in very theatrical terms certain current liaisons within Bloomsbury," Shone, *Bloomsbury Portrait*, 1993, pp.119-20.

<sup>779</sup> Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, 29 August 1936, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed Regina Marler, 1998, p.419. Grant had previously made life-size cardboard marionettes for a performance of Racine's *Bérénice*. See Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1984, p.102.

<sup>780</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.243

<sup>781</sup> Duncan Grant, Costume in three parts, 1936, gouache on card, 116 x 65cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/453



writing that she “had to be dressing or undressing Duncan in his obscene cardboard figure.”<sup>782</sup> Charlotte Sutherell proposes that clothing is a communicating layer, that “What we wear on our bodies becomes part of the transactional relationship we have with the world.”<sup>783</sup> Grant breaks this contract, covering nudity with nudity, the “only concession to propriety was a fan and a black lace mantilla.”<sup>784</sup>

Tseëlon notes how “Masquerade unsettles and disrupts the fantasy of coherent, unitary, stable, mutually exclusive divisions.”<sup>785</sup> Grant highlights, in Butlerian terms, the performance of gender, playing out both female and male on the same body, demonstrating how “*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself.*”<sup>786</sup> Marjorie Garber has noted how cross-dressing provides “a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural.”<sup>787</sup> Grant performs a “subversive bodily act,”<sup>788</sup> that through masquerade “reveals in the process of concealing.”<sup>789</sup> Wearing the tropes of sexualised attraction, the naked legs, arms, breasts, the thinly veiled genitals, Grant challenges received notions of male and female, he manipulates heteronormative displays of the erotic and sexuality.

There was a general consensus that Grant’s costume and accompanying performance was “the last word in obscenity,” and Bell was concerned about the photographs she had taken, writing, “I’m rather uncertain how or where to get the ones of Duncan developed they’re so indecent.”<sup>790</sup> The image selected by Quentin Bell and Angelica Garnett for inclusion in their book of their mother’s photographs is described as a “modest pose” that “give[s] but little notion of his scandalously indecent appearance,”

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<sup>782</sup> Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, 5 September 1936, TGA, 9311/58

<sup>783</sup> Charlotte Sutherell, *Unzipping Gender: Sex, Cross-Dressing and Culture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004) p.15

<sup>784</sup> Angelica Garnett, ‘The Earthly Paradise,’ in *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987) p.119

<sup>785</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.3

<sup>786</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2007) p. 187, italics in original

<sup>787</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992) p.10

<sup>788</sup> Title of chapter three: Subversive Bodily Acts, in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2007, pp.107-193

<sup>789</sup> Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on gender, sexuality, and marginality*, 2001, p.5

<sup>790</sup> Vanessa Bell to Julian Bell, 5 September 1936 (Tate/Bell/9311/58)

(fig.3.56).<sup>791</sup> While Reed reproduces a more revealing image in *Bloomsbury Rooms* with Grant's full costume revealed and the open fan positioned over the groin (fig.3.57).<sup>792</sup> Grant performs elements of striptease, as Barthes states, an act in which "all the excitement is concentrated in the *hope* of seeing the genitals (the schoolboy's dream) or of knowing the end of the story (the novelistic satisfaction)."<sup>793</sup> Grant's veiling and revealing of the pretend body, what Linda Williams, following David James, describes as the "continual oscillation between exposure and concealment"<sup>794</sup> that defines striptease cannot result in full disclosure. Even when the veil is lifted, the shawl removed the masquerade remains, the cardboard epidermis of the painted lady.

Natalie Davis has demonstrated how cross-dressing has often accompanied festive misrule,<sup>795</sup> and Peter Ackroyd notes the "seasonal festivities in which transvestism was an indispensable element."<sup>796</sup> Possibly Grant was reliving the scenes of misrule he witnessed in Berlin, where, as Clive Bell described, "young men in low-necked dresses and feathers sing Carmen."<sup>797</sup> Eddy Sackville-West described a similar scene to E.M. Forster: "There are even large dance places for inverters. And some of the people one sees - huge men with breasts like women and faces like Ottoline, dressed as female Spanish dancers"<sup>798</sup> The description could apply to Grant's painting executed the following year. The figure in *Woman in a Mantilla* has the solidity, the broadness of

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<sup>791</sup> Garnett and Bell, eds., *Vanessa Bell's Family Album*, 1981, p.127. Also reproduced in Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, p.177

<sup>792</sup> Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, fig.186, p.244

<sup>793</sup> Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 1975, p.10

<sup>794</sup> Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible,'* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999 (1990)) p. 77

<sup>795</sup> See Natalie Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975) p.129

<sup>796</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) pp.89-90

<sup>797</sup> Clive Bell to Virginia Woolf, 3 February 1928, MHP, Sussex, quoted in Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 1996, p.521. Grant and Bell visited drag bars in Berlin in the spring of 1929, with Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West and Eddy Sackville-West.

<sup>798</sup> Michael De-la-Noy, *Eddy: the Life of Edward Sackville-West* (London: Arcadia Books, 1999) p.117. Ottoline Morrell was a friend and patron of the Bloomsbury group renowned for her extravagant dress, see Miranda Seymour, *Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale* (Sevenoaks: Sceptre, 1993) pp.98-101. As the finale to Quentin Bell's birthday party Bell appeared dressed as Morrell "in red wool wig and a hat trimmed with artichoke leaves," see Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.268

“huge men” (*fig.3.58*).<sup>799</sup> She wears gloves the same colour as her skin, which, like Grant’s costume, creates an uncertainty to the barrier of real flesh and pretend flesh. Richard Shone considers it “an imaginary portrait,” which emphasises the element of masquerade.<sup>800</sup> There is a striking similarity to another painting from the same period, exhibited at the same exhibition in 1931 under the title *The Policeman* (*fig.3.59*).<sup>801</sup> As well as the mirroring of the composition, with a similar angle to the head in a portrait of the upper body, there is the same corpulence, to the face, gravity to the body. The roles that the figures play are also both defined by their clothes, their uniform.

Alongside *Woman in a Mantilla* Grant also exhibited *Portrait of Vanessa Bell in Fancy Dress* a title that emphasises the construction of the image (*fig.3.60*).<sup>802</sup> The portrait is based on Bell’s costume for a cross-dressing party she had attended the year before which she described to her younger son:

we went to a party given by Eddy Sackville-West, one of those parties where the ladies dress as men, and vice versa. I put on a lovely male mask but otherwise was very female – or so I should have thought – wearing a crinoline and red silk coat and an Italian hat. However such was the effect of the mask that the moment I entered the room I was seized on by E. Gathorne-Hardy (whom I had never met before) and who whirled me round in the dance and was so much intrigued he tried to get the mask off. I prevented him and managed to escape unscathed and unknown, but of course had to come down to my real female self later, as masks are too hot to wear for long. The odd thing was that a moustache was enough to make several people convinced I was a man. Never shall I have such a success again, I fear!<sup>803</sup>

At a party of “misrule” a person wearing female coded clothing is assumed to be male.

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<sup>799</sup> Duncan Grant, *Woman in a Mantilla*, 1931, oil on board, 77 x 59.9cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/P/66. Used to illustrate a review of Grant’s Cooling Gallery exhibition, June-July 1931 see ‘Duncan Grant by John Piper,’ *The Listener*, 24 June 1931, pp.1058-59.

<sup>800</sup> Richard Shone, *Portraits by Duncan Grant*, catalogue for Arts Council Exhibition, 1969, no.35 *The Spanish Lady*

<sup>801</sup> Duncan Grant, *Police Constable Harry Daley*, 1930, oil on canvas, 76 x 51cm, City of London Corporation. Titled *The Policeman* when first exhibited at The Cooling Galleries, June-July 1931, ‘Recent Paintings by Duncan Grant.’ Harry Daley was introduced to the Bloomsbury group through his brief affair with E.M. Forster. His memoirs, written in the early 1950s, were published in 1986 and remain a valuable account of homosexual society in early 20<sup>th</sup> century England, see Harry Daley, *This Small Cloud: A Personal Memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)

<sup>802</sup> Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Vanessa Bell in Fancy Dress*, 1930, oil on panel, 116.8 x 61.3cm, private collection. First exhibited at The Cooling Galleries, June-July 1931, ‘Recent Paintings by Duncan Grant,’ when titled *Portrait of V.B. in Fancy Dress*, also see Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.309

<sup>803</sup> Vanessa Bell to Quentin Bell, 22 June 1930, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.354

Bell illustrated her letter with a line drawing of herself in costume (*fig.3.61*).<sup>804</sup> Grant painted Bell without her masque or moustache. He lowered the neckline of her dress, emphasising her cleavage and décolletage, the female body under the disguise. The *Fancy Dress* of the picture's title refers to adoption of a different nationality rather than a different gender. Spanish and Mediterranean influences are indicated in Bell's costume, complete with large sun hat and black fan, set against a blue sky and desert scene. There are echoes of earlier paintings. In 1912 Grant and Bell both painted from the same model dressed in identifiable Spanish clothes (*figs.3.62 & 3.63*).<sup>805</sup> The artists engaged in a prevailing fashion, described as an obsession, for Spain and the figure of the Spanish Gypsy. Lou Charnon-Deutsch charts this flourishing of representations of Spanish gypsies within Europe and Great Britain, particularly noticeable from the late nineteenth century up to the 1930s.<sup>806</sup> Kirstie Blair has highlighted the appeal of this Gypsy role model that "appeared to resist neat definitions" of gender and presented a resistance of heteronormative roles, something particularly appealing to lesbians and redolent in the work and relationship of Woolf and Vita Sackville-West.<sup>807</sup>

In one of a series of photographs taken by Grant in Bell's studio in her home at 46 Gordon Square, nudity and Spanish costume create a precedent for Grant's later masquerade. A naked female faces the camera, rather than covering herself with the large, fringed, patterned shawl, she holds it high up in the air behind her (*fig.3.64*).<sup>808</sup> The figure is possibly Vanessa Bell but as the shutter opened the camera had moved and the image is blurred.<sup>809</sup> Identity, like the image, is distorted, the edges of the figure, its boundaries are blurred, shattered, as if the skin is breaking down, breaking

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<sup>804</sup> Reproduced in *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.355

<sup>805</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Spanish Lady*, 1912, oil on millboard, 75.6 x 53cm, Leicester Arts and Museums Service. Exhibited at the Second Post Impressionist exhibition Grafton Galleries, October – December 1912 as *The Spanish Model* and Duncan Grant, *The Spanish Model (Mantilla)*, 1912, oil on panel, 54 x 48cm, private collection.

<sup>806</sup> Lou Charnon-Deutsch, *The Spanish Gypsy: The History of a European Obsession* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004)

<sup>807</sup> Kirstie Blair, 'Gypsies and Lesbian Desire: Vita Sackville-West, Violet Trefusis, and Virginia Woolf,' *Twentieth Century Literature* vol.50, no.2, 2004, pp.141-166

<sup>808</sup> Possibly taken by Duncan Grant, photograph of Vanessa Bell or Molly MacCarthy, c.1913, 10.9 x 8.5cm, black and white print, The Charleston Trust, un-catalogued, in folder of photographs marked as being owned by Clive Bell

<sup>809</sup> Photographs of Vanessa Bell and Molly MacCarthy posing naked together were first reprinted in Richard Shone, 'Bloomsbury Nude: Some Hitherto Unpublished Photographs,' *The Charleston Magazine*, issue 16, Autumn/Winter 1997, The Charleston Trust, p.32. The photograph on the bottom right was reprinted along with a solo image of MacCarthy in Maggie Humm, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*, 2006, pp.106-107, the photograph on the bottom left in Richard Shone's revised version of *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.121.

out, away from the body. In the background is a large design by Bell for a fire surround composed of two monumental nude women, the figure on the left (hidden by the breathing nude) is seated on the corner of the mantelpiece, her back to the room, whilst her companion on the right stands full frontal. She is the precursor of a figure in a decoration begun in 1917 for the artists' new home at Charleston.<sup>810</sup>

The painting now known as *The Tub* (fig.3.65)<sup>811</sup> is a large work, 180.3 x 166.4cm.<sup>812</sup> The composition was described by Bell as "a bath and a semi-nude female rather too like Mary and the pond seen through the window."<sup>813</sup> A naked female figure, posed for by Mary Hutchinson, dominates the right hand side of the picture, the large tub of the title on the left.<sup>814</sup> Bell made several changes to the composition, evident from the numerous pentimenti that are readily visible. Simon Watney believes that these "reinforce the significance of the act of undressing before us, a curiously apt metaphor for this further paring down of her pictorial vocabulary, allowing her to pursue that distinctive dramatisation of the qualities of related brush-marks in the context of an extremely personal iconography which abstraction could never have allowed."<sup>815</sup> But abstraction enters at the edges. As with the blurred photographic nude, the boundaries of Bell's bathing figure are uncertain, fractured and fractious and "unclear boundaries disturb us."<sup>816</sup> The skin tones echo those of the floor that rise up behind her, making the contours of the body fade in and out of focus. It corrupts "the symbolic surface between the self and the world" that Claudia Benthien considers skin's function.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> For the oil sketch of the design see *Vanessa Bell, design for fireplace mural, 46 Gordon Square, 1912*, oil on paper, 76.2 x 55.9cm in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.151.

<sup>811</sup> Vanessa Bell, *The Tub*, 1917, oil and gouache on canvas, 180.3 x 166.4cm, Tate, accession no. T02010. Though dated by the Tate as 1917 Bell was still working on the picture at the beginning of 1918, as described in a letter to Roger Fry from January of that year, see Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, Tuesday January 1918, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.209

<sup>812</sup> Bell's *The Tub* has received a lot of attention, see in particular: Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.194-95; Angelica Garnett, *Deceived With Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.165-66; Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.164;

<sup>813</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry May 1917, TGA, quoted in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, p.193

<sup>814</sup> Mary Hutchinson was having an affair Clive Bell, described by Jane Dunn as "the woman who was to endure in his life for longer than any other mistress," Jane Dunn, *Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, A Very Close Conspiracy* (London: Virago Press, 2000) p.184

<sup>815</sup> Simon Watney *English Post-Impressionism* (London: Studio Vista, 1980) p.103.

<sup>816</sup> Watson, *Adorned in Dreams* (London) pp.2-3

<sup>817</sup> Claudia Benthien, *Skin on the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) p.1

### Revealed:

An earlier version of *The Tub* is seen in the background of a photograph of Mary Hutchinson taken by Bell (*fig.3.66*).<sup>818</sup> The painting is attached to the wall of Bell's first floor studio at Charleston. The figure is wearing a chemise, a white shift with shoulder straps, open at the front. Whilst suggesting modesty by covering the breasts, the gaping front creates a sense of performativity, the two sides of the garment acting like curtains that present and focus attention on the model's vagina, on her nudity and her sexuality. Bell later wrote to Fry stating that she had "taken out the woman's chemise and in consequence she is quite nude and much more decent."<sup>819</sup>

A process of veiling and unveiling continues throughout Grant's work. After the Second World War the artist accumulated a number of physical culture magazines, many sent by Paul Roche when he was working in America in the 1950s<sup>820</sup> but also similar British publications. Genital nudity was banned, the models wearing posing pouches or swimwear in full frontal poses, though often naked in poses where the genitals were obscured.<sup>821</sup> Douglas Blair Turnbaugh describes how Grant "had some amusement in 'restoring' male genitals. He liked to paint penises and testicles on photographs, over the cache-sex of otherwise nude models."<sup>822</sup> Grant's painted genitals both covered and removed the model's textile fig leaf, an act described as *Regenitalization*.<sup>823</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> TGA, reproduced in Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 1993, p.169, fig.124, and Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 2004, fig.144, p.195

<sup>819</sup> Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, Tuesday January 1918, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*, ed. Marler, 1998, p.209

<sup>820</sup> Email to author from Simon Watney, 27 January 2012

<sup>821</sup> In a discussion on Jasper Johns' painting *Target*, Gavin Butt notes how in popular culture 'physical representations' of the penis, whilst often suggested or inferred, were never explicit, "The penis was always hidden behind a posing pouch or some other accoutrements of the photographic *mise en scène*. It was not until 1965 that the drapes came off in short-lived titles, such as *Butch*, *Tiger*, and *Rugged*. Readers of *Physique Pictorial* had to wait four more years still for the posing pouch to finally disappear from its pages." Gavin Butt, 'Queering Disclosure in the Art of Jasper Johns,' *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) p.243

<sup>822</sup> Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant 1885-1978* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1989) p.16

<sup>823</sup> *Regenitalization* is the title given to an example of Grant's altered photographs exhibited in *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, eds. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) no.199 Duncan Grant, 1960s, oil on magazine cover, 7 x 5 ¾ inches, p.270

The cover of a 1951 edition of the British magazine *Health and Strength* shows the flexing figure of body builder Tay Teo Chuan (fig.3.67).<sup>824</sup> In Grant's *regenitalization* the black, high-waisted swimming trunks have been painted over, and a penis and testicles and a neat patch of pubic hair added (fig.3.68).<sup>825</sup> Grant may have been covering what was not there. Possibly it is the limited palette and crudity of the two-tone printing process, but the trunks in the untouched cover appear to be painted on, the blackness appears too solid and un-variegated, the outline too defined, the crotch too low. In a monochrome portrait reproduced in the American publication *Physique Pictorial*, Grant has painted over the posing poach and the supporting straps and re-imagined the genitals of model Nelson Herle (figs.3.69 & 3.70).<sup>826</sup> From the same magazine Grant has *regenitalized* the model Steven Wengryn who occupies a phallic space in the body of the pages text (figs.3.71 & 3.72).<sup>827</sup>

An early example of Grant's *Regenitalization* occurred during the winter of 1904-05 when the nineteen-year-old art student was in Florence with his mother.<sup>828</sup> He recalled in an interview more than half a century later that the weather was "bitterly cold... I remember the wind simply cutting through one's boots."<sup>829</sup> He regularly visited the Uffizi, making copies of, amongst others, Piero della Francesca's Duke of Urbino, Federigo da Montefeltro.<sup>830</sup> Grant recalled the scaldino, "a little pot with burning charcoal which you sat over, it just kept you sufficiently warm to paint a little. Otherwise the galleries were like icicle houses, frightful places."<sup>831</sup> It must have been equally if not more cold in Santa Maria del Carmine, the church on the south side of the Arno that houses the Brancacci Chapel and the fresco cycle by Masaccio, Masolino

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<sup>824</sup> *Health and Strength*, July 26, 1951, vol.80, no.15

<sup>825</sup> Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1951, 21.5 x 14cm, private collection

<sup>826</sup> *Physique Pictorial*, Summer 1957, vol.7, no.2, p.11, reproduced in *The Complete Reprint of Physique Pictorial*, (Köln: Taschen, 1997) and Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1960, private collection

<sup>827</sup> *Physique Pictorial*, Summer 1957, vol.7, no.2, p.5, reproduced in *The Complete Reprint of Physique Pictorial*, 1997, and Duncan Grant, *Regenitalization*, c.1960, private collection

<sup>828</sup> See Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.32-33

<sup>829</sup> Duncan Grant interviewed by Quentin Bell for the Christopher Mason film, *Duncan Grant at Charleston*, 1969, tape 2, track 3, TCTA

<sup>830</sup> The painting remains at Charleston. Duncan Grant, *Duke of Urbino*, c.1904, oil on canvas, 40.6cm x 31.5cm, CHA/P/226

<sup>831</sup> Duncan Grant interviewed by Quentin Bell for the Christopher Mason film, *Duncan Grant at Charleston*, 1969, tape 2, track 3, TCTA

da Panicale and Filippino Lippi.<sup>832</sup> It was here that Grant copied Masaccio's interpretation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve, a commission from Harry Strachey, cousin of Grant's cousin Lytton Strachey (*figs.3.73 & fig.3.74*).<sup>833</sup>

In the weeks leading up to Grant's visit the series of frescoes had been cleaned. The previous year it was recommended that what was needed was "a scrupulously careful dusting to liberate the frescoes from the layer of dirt that in some areas actually hides essential parts of the compositions."<sup>834</sup> Despite this removal of dust, completed on 29 November 1904,<sup>835</sup> the frescoes were still stained brown by centuries of candle smoke, from a major fire in 1771 and the subsequent 'beverone' varnish, a combination of egg and milk that was used to conserve the work but which led to mould growth and further staining.<sup>836</sup>

In a surviving oil sketch copy of Masaccio's Adam and Eve, Grant has copied not only the contraposto shapes of the expelled figures, their hands covering their shame, Eve her breasts and vagina, Adam using both hands to hide his face, but also the brown and grey hues of their bodies and the background (*fig.3.75*).<sup>837</sup> While Grant did not live to see the restored fresco and its vibrant colours revealed in the late 1980s he did predict an element of the restoration programme.<sup>838</sup> Sometime after 1652 a bough of green leaves was added curling around the waists of Adam and Eve, hiding their genitals.<sup>839</sup> These prurient additions were removed in the major restoration of the chapel. Martha Holland has pointed out how "Masaccio combines different moments in the story." He

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<sup>832</sup> For the history and analysis of the fresco cycle see Umberto Baldini and Ornella Gasazza, *The Brancacci Chapel Frescoes*, trans. Lysa Hochroth with Marion L. Grayson. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992)

<sup>833</sup> Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence, Italy, before and after restoration,

<sup>834</sup> A status report from the Regional Office to the prefect of the Commune in July/August 1903 quoted in Baldini and Gasazza, 1992. p.314

<sup>835</sup> Baldini and Gasazza, 1992, pp.314-15

<sup>836</sup> Baldini and Gasazza, 1992, p.325-327

<sup>837</sup> Duncan Grant, *Adam and Eve – After Masaccio*, c.1905, oil on panel, 23cm x 14cm, verso: inscribed and dated Florence (in error) c.1902, private collection.

<sup>838</sup> For an account of the restored frescos see Baldini and Gasazza, 1992. pp.325-333, and Keith Christiansen, 'Some observations on the Brancacci Chapel frescoes after their cleaning,' in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol.133, no.1054, January 1991, pp. 4-20.

<sup>839</sup> Baldini and Gasazza, 1992, p.308-9 & p.330. Masolino's Temptation of Adam and Eve that faces the Masaccio was also altered at this time. This was not a singular case, see Baldini and Gasazza, 1992, fn.15, p.334. For an account of the use of fig leaves see Theresa Sanders, *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eve in Popular Culture* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) pp.63-90.



layers narrative and experience. Holland continues: "In the Biblical text, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." (Genesis 3:7) Yet Masaccio chose to paint them already fallen but without these accessories of sexual modesty."<sup>840</sup> Grant paints the figures without leaves, he acts like the "infrared reflectography" that the restorers used to look through these later additions, "showing the bodies as completely nude."<sup>841</sup>

James Clifton has made the argument that while in "images prior to Masaccio's painting the couple during the Expulsion had been shown in a variety of poses, they very often shared a similar or common pose," the couple reflecting their shame in each others poses.<sup>842</sup> Clifton identifies the pose of Masaccio's Adam and Eve as representing the shame as understood in the social context of fifteenth-century Italy. As Martha Hollander summarises, "The gender differences are important: the man, a rational being, covers his face, experiencing spiritual shame while the woman, a carnal, biological being, covers her genitals because her shame is more directly sexual."<sup>843</sup> Clifton points out that "In 15th-century Italy, women's public nudity would never be tolerated; so both gestures of the figures are in keeping with this notion of dishonour [...] Masaccio's Adam, unconcerned about the exposure of his body, evinces dishonour by avoiding a public display of his face."<sup>844</sup>

Angelica Garnett recalled that one of Grant's "favourite maxims was never to be ashamed."<sup>845</sup> But there was a reserve, a variant of shame in his censoring of photographs taken by John Maynard Keynes of him posing naked whilst the two were on holiday in Greece in March 1910. Keynes wrote to Grant, "I developed Apollo in

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<sup>840</sup> Martha Holland, 'Losses of Face: Rembrandt, Masaccio and the Drama of Shame,' *Social Research*, vol.70, no.4, Winter 2003, p.1343

<sup>841</sup> Baldini and Gasazza, 1992, p.309

<sup>842</sup> James Clifton, 'Gender and Shame in Masaccio's Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,' *Art History*, vol. 22, no.5, December 1999, pp. 637-655

<sup>843</sup> Martha Holland, 'Losses of Face: Rembrandt, Masaccio and the Drama of Shame,' *Social Research*, vol.70, no.4, Winter 2003, p.1346

<sup>844</sup> James Clifton, 'Gender and Shame in Masaccio's Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,' *Art History*, vol.22, no.5, December 1999, p.651

<sup>845</sup> Angelica Garnett, introduction to *Duncan Grant: Works on Paper*, catalogue to an exhibition held at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery: 25 November – 18 December 1981. Also quoted in Spalding, *Vanessa Bell*, 2006, p.120.

his temple at Bassae yesterday and printed him to-day.”<sup>846</sup> Grant permitted Keynes to only show the photographs of Grant’s back, and then only to intimate friends, but to keep the subject’s identity secret instructing him “you must say that it was a shepherd or something and that no-one wears clothes in Arcadia.”<sup>847</sup> Like Masaccio’s Adam, Grant keeps his face concealed, and like Eve he hides his genitals, described by Margaret Walters as “still the exclusive focus of our shame and curiosity, the center of the body.”<sup>848</sup>

During the same period that Grant was restoring the genitals to the monochrome and sepia men posing in physique magazines, the artists were being forced to cover up the subjects of more public work. Bell and Grant were commissioned in 1950 to provide decorated tiles for the common areas of the new Garden Hostel Annexe, King’s College, Cambridge, designed by Geddes (Paul) Hyslop.<sup>849</sup> Bell proposed an allegorical interpretation of the four seasons and Grant a depiction of *Hylas and the water Nymphs* (fig.3.76).<sup>850</sup> Both artists had included full frontal nudity in their schemes, which was rejected by “the Provost and a number of worthy dons.”<sup>851</sup> Bell told Angelica, “but ours are refused on the grounds that being figures the undergraduates will scribble over them. It’s absurd for one can’t scribble over tiles, or if one does it’s easy to wash off. However we shall have to try some others of such unexciting subjects as flowers and landscapes.”<sup>852</sup> The authorities were afraid that the students would alter gender, replace the loss, *regentalize* the figures.

Bell covered her figures for the four seasons but Grant changed his design completely. Instead of the naked Hylas being pulled into the water by three voluptuous nymphs, he presents a blonde haired young man sat by an ornate fountain. The figure appears

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<sup>846</sup> John Maynard Keynes to Duncan Grant 30 May 1910, DGP quoted in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.95

<sup>847</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.95

<sup>848</sup> Margaret Walters, *The Nude Male: A New Perspective* (New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd, 1978) p.85

<sup>849</sup> See Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, pp.410-411. Quentin Bell was also commissioned and contributed an uncontroversial still life design.

<sup>850</sup> Richard Shone, lot note for Grant, *Hylas and the water Nymphs*, c.1950, ink and oil on paper, 64.3 x 47.7cm, sold at Christie’s, South Kensington, London, 17 December 2008 [www.christies.com/lotfinder/duncan-grant-hylas-and-the-water-nymphs/5164823](http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/duncan-grant-hylas-and-the-water-nymphs/5164823), accessed 23 February 2012

<sup>851</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.410

<sup>852</sup> Vanessa Bell to Angelica Garnett, 26 March 1950 in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.410

naked, his genitals covered by a large book whose pages cascade open like the jets of water cascading behind him (*fig.3.77*).<sup>853</sup>

Another example of Grant covering the genitals of his models can be observed some forty years earlier. In one of the two large murals he contributed to Roger Fry's Borough Polytechnic scheme in 1911, now titled *Bathing*, seven men are seen in various poses as they progress across the Serpentine, first diving, then swimming and eventually climbing into a boat (*fig.3.78*).<sup>854</sup> For six of the figures, while naked, their activity obscures their genitals, they appear side on or from behind, or their bodies are twisted away from the viewer. One figure, in the lower right-hand corner, faces the viewer, his right arm stretching forward, his left stretching back, caught in mid stroke, revealing the full length of his body. He wears a pair of red bathing trunks, cut high over his thighs, a thin waistband with a large pouch. This swatch of material, whilst covering, also highlights the genital area, the attention of the viewer further caught by the vibrant red colour of the fabric.

A "constellation" of red trunks appears throughout Grant's work.<sup>855</sup> In *Bathers by the Pond* the seated figure on the right wears red trunks that mark him out from the naked figures that surround him (*fig.3.79*).<sup>856</sup> He appears as the more sociable counterpart to Seurat's urban red short wearing seated figure on the bank of the Seine in *Bathers Asnières*, whose isolated, pale and closed-in posture contrasts with the open and reclining figure in Grant's painting (*fig.3.80*).<sup>857</sup>

In a later painting on the same theme Grant presents a group of nine naked men seen in various poses in and around the pond at Charleston. *The Bathers*, c.1926-33, (*figs.3.81 & 3.82*)<sup>858</sup> exists in two versions, both compositions almost identical. But while in the

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<sup>853</sup> Duncan Grant, design for tiled mural, 1950, gouache of paper, 99 x 76.5cm, TCT/TAGG

<sup>854</sup> Duncan Grant, *Bathing*, 1911, 228.6 x 306.1cm, Tate, N04567

<sup>855</sup> Merleau-Ponty states that red cannot be perceived in isolation, that "this red is what it is only by connecting it up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation," Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968, p.132.

<sup>856</sup> Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond*, c.1920-21, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 91.5cm, Pallant House Gallery. See chapter two, *Pond Life* for an analysis of this painting.

<sup>857</sup> Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières*, 1884, oil on canvas, 201 x 300cm, The National Gallery, London, NG3908

<sup>858</sup> Duncan Grant, *The Bathers*, c.1926-1933, oil on paper on plywood, 138.4cm x 152.8cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, accession number 1824-4 and Duncan Grant, *Bathers*, 1927, oil on canvas, 132.1x152.5cm, private collection, sold at Christie's, London, 21 November 2003

version that now resides in Australia all the figures are naked, in the second version that Grant kept in his possession the figure on the left who observes a wrestling scene is wearing a long pair of red shorts. The only clothed figure in the group, the shading around the crotch highlights and emphasises the model's genitals.

The colour red and things that are of a red colour hold a special place within most societies.<sup>859</sup> Alexander Theroux has written of how "Red was the very first colour to be designated by name in virtually all primitive languages – the name of Adam, the first man, means, according to ancient Hebrew tradition, both 'alive' and 'red.'"<sup>860</sup> Studies have shown that heterosexual men and women are subconsciously attracted to people of the opposite sex wearing red over those wearing other colours.<sup>861</sup> Theroux has written of how "red has the strongest chroma and the greatest power of attraction,"<sup>862</sup> how "It is the colour of excitement, hypertension and cardiovascular changes, of nervous and glandular activity, of vital force, of the Pentecostal flame, of sex."<sup>863</sup> There is a deviance associated with the colour red. The wearing of a red tie by homosexual men in the 1920s became a recognisable marker of their sexual orientation.<sup>864</sup> Hal Fischer, exploring the gay semiotics of the clothes worn by men in 1970s San Francisco explains how "Red handkerchiefs are used as signifiers for behavior that is often regarded as deviant or abnormal. A red handkerchief located in the right hip pocket implies that the wearer takes the passive role in anal/hand insertion. A red handkerchief placed in the left hip pocket suggests that the wearer

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<sup>859</sup> For an historical, social, religious, anthropological and psychological survey of the colour red see St  phanie Busuttill-C  sar, *Red* (New York: Assouline, 2000), also Belinda Recio, *The Essence of Red* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1996)

<sup>860</sup> Alexander Theroux, *The Primary Colours: Three Essays* (London: Picador, 1995) p.155

<sup>861</sup> See Andrew J. Elliot and Daniela Ni  sta, 'Romantic red: red enhances men's attraction to women,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.95, no.5, 2008, pp.1150-64 and Andrew J. Elliot, Daniela Ni  sta Kayser, Tobias Greitemeyer, Stephanie Lichtenfeld, Richard H. Gramzow, Markus A. Maier, and Huijun Liu, 'Red, rank, and romance in women viewing men,' *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, vol.139, no.3, 2010, pp.399-417. While these two related surveys conclude that "Red did not influence men's perception of other men" (Elliot et al, 2010) homosexual men were excluded from the experiment (Elliot and Ni  sta, 2008). See also S. Craig Roberts, Roy C. Owen and Jan Havlicek, 'Distinguishing Between Perceiver and Wearer Effects in Clothing Color - Associated Attributions,' *Evolutionary Psychology*, vol.8, no.3, 2010, pp.350-364.

<sup>862</sup> Theroux, *The Primary Colour*, 1995, p.155.

<sup>863</sup> Theroux, *The Primary Colours*, 1995, p.257

<sup>864</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) p.146. Houlbrook suggests that this was influenced by New York fashions. George Chauncey also notes the use of red ties worn by gay men in pre-Second World War New York that "boldly announced their presence." George

plays the active role in anal/hand insertion.”<sup>865</sup> Theroux writes that “the libido is all mixed up with red, and, all things considered, it is not surprising to learn that Priapus was known as the Red God.”<sup>866</sup>

In an oil sketch of two wrestlers Grant clothes the black figure in tight green trunks and his white opponent in red (*fig.3.83*).<sup>867</sup> Research has shown that “wearing red is consistently associated with a higher probability of winning” in physical contests.<sup>868</sup> This has led to the conclusion “that sexual selection may have influenced the evolution of human response to colours.”<sup>869</sup> This research is backed up by a comparison of the “dominance signalling” of red versus blue which demonstrated “that red is seen as more likely to win in physical competitions, [it is] more aggressive and more dominant than blue.”<sup>870</sup>

In another wrestling scene, this time drawn on a scrap piece of paper Grant has made explicit the actions and intentions of his models (*figs.3.84 & 3.85*).<sup>871</sup> A figure stands with his legs slightly bent and akimbo supporting the second figure whom he holds bent double. Arms, legs and torsos are twisted and entwined together. The couple have their antecedents in Vincenzo de’ Rosso sculpture in the Salon dei Cinquecento of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (*fig.3.86*).<sup>872</sup> One of twelve of the Labours of Hercules it depicts Hercules holding King Diomedes upside-down whilst Diomedes grabs Hercules’ genitals. In Grant’s reworking the standing figure masturbates the inverted figure who in turn fellates his companion.

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Chauncey, *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (London: Flamingo, 1995) p.3.

<sup>865</sup> Hal Fischer, *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding among Homosexual Men* (San Francisco: NSF Press, 1977) Available at <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/HalPages/GaySemIndx.html>

<sup>866</sup> Theroux, *The Primary Colours*, 1995, p.231

<sup>867</sup> Duncan Grant, untitled study of wrestlers, c.1950, oil on paper, 62 x 43cm, TCT/TAGG, box.35.

<sup>868</sup> Russell A. Hill and Robert A. Barton, ‘Red enhances human performance in contests,’ *Nature*, vol.435, 19 May 2005, p.293

<sup>869</sup> Russell A. Hill and Robert A. Barton, ‘Red enhances human performance in contests,’ p.293

<sup>870</sup> Anthony C. Little, and Russell A. Hill, ‘Social perception of red suggests special role in dominance signalling,’ *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, vol.1, no.4, pp.161-168

<sup>871</sup> Duncan Grant, untitled study of wrestlers, c.1960, oil on paper, 25.5 x 27cm, TCT/TAGG

<sup>872</sup> Vincenzo de’ Rosso, *Hercules and King Diomedes*, c.1550, Salon dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy

Grant has drawn the picture twice, tracing the image from one side of the paper to the other. In one version both models are naked, though their flesh has been coloured in. The ethnicity of the standing figure becomes black, his exposed head and limbs filled in with a darker wash of paint from the second's lighter, caucasian wash. On the other side of the paper there is hardly any addition of flesh tones, just some light highlights on the second figure, otherwise both men are as white as the paper. But they have been partially clothed, the standing figure wears blue trunks, his companion red trunks that barely cover his raised buttock and testicles. Grant once again covers and uncovers in a "corporeal striptease,"<sup>873</sup> defining then defying borders.

### **Petite Morte:**

This drawing belongs to a private body of work by Grant, not revealed publicly until after his death, and kept hidden away during his lifetime. Turnbaugh describes a large collection of erotic drawings in a "mouse-chewed and ratty" cardboard box under the bed of Grant's London flat in the 1970s.<sup>874</sup> Grant gave an earlier collection to his friend and fellow artist Edward le Bas for safekeeping. These were thought to have been destroyed by le Bas' sister on his death in 1966, though, as Turnbaugh wrote in 1989 "there is a rumour that another friend rescued the collection and that it will surface again one day."<sup>875</sup> Thankfully the collection has survived, like "pages passed from hand to hand," through generations of gay men and remains in a private collection.<sup>876</sup>

Christopher Reed regards the often "furtive and hasty production" of Grant's hidden pictures, frequently executed "in ballpoint pen on scraps of paper" as "undercut[ting]" the "fanciful erotica" that "At Grant's best" combine "sexual exuberance with dancing lines and splashes of colour."<sup>877</sup> But these rapid and ragged lines show the bodies' boundaries breaking out and opening up. They illustrate the contrast that Elizabeth

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<sup>873</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 1975, p.8

<sup>874</sup> Christopher Reed, 'Only Collect: Bloomsbury Art in North America,' in *A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections*, eds. Nancy E. Green and Christopher Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) p.73

<sup>875</sup> Douglas Blair Turnbaugh, *Private: The Erotic Art of Duncan Grant* (London: The Gay Men's Press, 1989) p.11

<sup>876</sup> In this collection of writings Mitchell and Leavitt develop a theme of the passing on of literary works from one generation of homosexuals to another, see *Pages Passed from Hand to Hand: The Hidden Tradition of Homosexual Literature in English from 1748 to 1914*, eds. Mark Mitchell and David Leavitt (London: Vintage, 1999)

<sup>877</sup> Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p.135

Grosz proposes between the “sealed-up, impermeable body” of the heterosexual man, and that of the queer body that offers the possibility of being “not only an active agent in the transmission of flow, but also a passive receptacle.”<sup>878</sup>

Paul Roche positions his body as “impermeable” in his explanation of the sexual element in his and Grant’s relationship. Asking “What can a homosexual do for a heterosexual?” he proceeds to cast the homosexual Grant in the role of a proxy who can “save me the bother of finding a girl to make love for just by tossing me off.” Roche views this as a mutually beneficial arrangement as “the homosexual has the enjoyment of tossing off the heterosexual.” But Roche’s summing up of the arrangement as “give and take” maintains a heterosexual discourse and denies Grosz’s concept of a two-way flow.<sup>879</sup>

William Miller proposes that “Semen has the extraordinary power conferred on it by patriarchy to feminize whatever it comes into contact with. In a sense, semen is more feminizing than the vagina itself. Whatever receives it is made woman. The feminizing power of semen can reduce men to women.”<sup>880</sup> Grant plays the role in the arrangement as proxy female, but he is also able to perform in a “sealed-up, impermeable body.” While Grant was in the centre of a ménage à trois between Vanessa Bell and David ‘Bunny’ Garnett he wrote in his diary: “I copulated on Saturday with her [Bell] with great satisfaction to myself physically. It is a convenient way the females have of letting off one’s spunk – and comfortable. Also the pleasure it gives is reassuring.” Grant finds the predominately heterosexual Garnett’s “impermeable body” as not receiving of the flow, writing “You don’t get this dumb misunderstanding body of a

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<sup>878</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) p.201

<sup>879</sup> Paul Roche, interviewed by author, Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2007, Tape 6, 43.19 – 44.13, TCTA. ‘Toss’ and ‘Tossing’ as slang words for masturbation were established terms among the lexicon of the Bloomsbury group. The second example cited in the Oxford English Dictionary is from a letter of literary criticism by Lytton Strachey to E.M. Forster regarding the unpublished novel *Maurice*. Referring to the main character’s shame at masturbation Strachey writes “À propos of Maurice tossing himself off.” OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press, accessed 22 June 2012, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/Entry/203762>. Lytton Strachey to E.M. Forster, 12 March 1915, in P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life (Volume Two: Polycrates’ Ring 1914-1970)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) p.16. Also see *The Letters of Lytton Strachey*, ed. Paul Levy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005) p.246.

<sup>880</sup> William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997) p.103

person who isn't a bugger. That's one for you Bunny. Not that my god I don't enjoy the excitement of it myself."<sup>881</sup>

One of Grant's erotic drawing sessions is recorded in a story "passed from hand to hand." Written down by Francis King in his autobiography, told to him by his partner David who had posed with a black friend for Grant at Charleston where "they were soon invited to strip off and to glue themselves together in increasingly provocative embraces."<sup>882</sup> Grant is cast in the role of seducer who, on the couple's next visit encourages the models to enact scenes of sado-masochism. King describes how "Duncan then produced a cane and asked first the black boy to give David 'a whack' and then David to give the black boy one" while "Duncan was sketching frenziedly." The climax of King's story comes when:

Finally Duncan got to his feet and, lowering his trousers, asked David to give him 'a whack' too – 'But mind my balls,' he added. To receive this 'whack', he bent over the back of a chair. David was extremely reluctant: but, at Duncan's insistent urgings, eventually complied. He gave a small tap. 'Ouch!' Duncan let out a gasp. His body was briefly convulsed. Then he straightened up. 'Oh God! Look what I've done to that loose cover!'<sup>883</sup>

The stained fabric has its antecedents at the dawn of Bloomsbury's sexual awakening, at least for Virginia Woolf. Written in 1922 for the amusement of her friends and quoted innumerable times since its publication in 1972, Woolf recalled an epoch making event:

Suddenly the door opened and the long, sinister figure of Mr Lytton Strachey stood on the threshold. He pointed his finger at a stain on Vanessa's white dress. 'Semen?' he said. Can one really say it? I thought and burst out laughing. With that one word all barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of the sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us.<sup>884</sup>

But it was in May 1912, at the conclusion of the World premiere in Paris of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, the first ballet choreographed by Nijinsky, that the audience pointed

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<sup>881</sup> Duncan Grant's diary, quoted in Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.201

<sup>882</sup> Francis King, *Yesterday Came Suddenly* (London: Constable, 1993) p.265

<sup>883</sup> King, *Yesterday Came Suddenly*, 1993, pp.265-66

<sup>884</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Old Bloomsbury', *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (Brighton: Chatto & Windus for Sussex University Press, 1976) p.54. (Granada) 183-207. First quoted in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography vol.1* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972) p.124. Karyn Sproles misquotes Woolf and Strachey, replacing the word 'Semen' with 'Sperm.' See Karyn Z. Sproles, *Desiring Women: The Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville West* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2006) p.4



at the exhausted and spent figure of the dancer lying on a length of cloth and enquired ‘semen?’<sup>885</sup> Cyril Beaumont attended the London premier in February 1913 at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. In his memoirs he described the final scenes of the production. Nijinsky as the faune after surprising a group of nymphs, carries back to his rock a veil that one of them has dropped. Beaumont wrote:

At the end of the ballet, the Faun returned to his fastness, bearing on his outstretched arms the scarf left by the leader of the nymphs. When he had caressed the extended scarf, and, with infinite care, lowered it to the ground, the symbolism was plain. And when Nijinsky proceeded slowly to recline, facing downwards, on the scarf, the implication was obvious. I well remember the gasp that went up from the audience at Nijinsky’s audacity. Yet the movements and poses were performed so quietly, so impersonally, that their true character, with their power to offend, was almost smoothed away. It was an intriguing study in erotic symbolism.<sup>886</sup>

This final act of petite mort both outraged and delighted the audiences and launched a “flood of the sacred fluid” not in the private, domestic space of the living room but in public. A half a century later, in front of a photograph of Nijinsky who looked out at the scene (*fig.3.87*),<sup>887</sup> Grant acts as the Faun, he reacts to his two models balletic contortions, movements and poses that he choreographed. The result is the ‘gasp’ of Grant echoing the ‘gasp’ of Nijinsky’s audience. In Richard Buckle’s description of Nijinsky’s final movements with the scarf, he writes of how the dancer “consummates his union with it, taut on the ground, by a convulsive jerk,”<sup>888</sup> Grant’s ‘briefly convulsed’ body and the depositing of semen onto cloth, all have echoes of Nijinsky’s

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<sup>885</sup> Unlike the mixed reception the ballet received in Paris, (see Buckle, *Nijinsky* (New York: Avon Books, 1975) pp.240-46) the London production was received with general enthusiasm, the premiere being “received with rapturous enthusiasm mingled with some hisses” (Beaumont, *The Dhiaghilev Ballet in London*, 1940, p.54) and getting positive reviews from *The Times* (18 February 1913, p.8) and the *Daily Mirror* and was deemed suitable for Royalty with Queen Alexandra seeing a performance on the 19 February (see Buckle, *Nijinsky* 1975 p.275).

<sup>886</sup> Cyril W. Beaumont, *Diahilev Ballet in London* (London: Putnam, 1940) p.55 At the premier in Paris the previous year the final movements are reported to have been more explicit. Richard Buckle suggests Nijinsky may have been lying on his right arm, thus appearing to be masturbating (Buckle, *Nijinsky*, 1975, p.284). Based on Nijinsky’s rejection of gesture in his choreography and celebration of ‘absence’ Ramsay Burt thinks “it is unlikely that Nijinsky actually made any masturbatory gesture at the end of the ballet” Ramsay Burt, ‘Modernism, Masculinity and Sexuality in Nijinsky’s L’Après-Midi d’un Faune,’ in Valerie A. Briginshaw and Ramsay Burt, *Writing Dancing Together* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.39

<sup>887</sup> Eugene Druet, Nijinsky, dressed for the ‘danse Siamoise’ from the Ballets Russes’ production of *Les Orientales*, c.1911, photograph, 26.5cm x 43.6cm, The Charleston Trust, CHA/PH/2. For the Bloomsbury Group and the Ballets Russes see Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp.314-29, Christopher Reed explores the influence of the Ballets Russes on Bell and Grant in Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, pp.95-106.

<sup>888</sup> Buckle, *Nijinsky*, 1975, p.284

‘climax.’ Lynn Garafola considers the dancers use of the scarf for his “last spasmodic movement” as demonstrating “a deep-rooted ambivalence towards men and women alike” leading him to opt “for the safe haven of self-gratification.”<sup>889</sup> I would read the act of both artists as an autoerotic display of resistance to heteronormative sexuality and sexual acts,<sup>890</sup> what Penny Farfan presents as “a case study of how modernist performance practice disrupted normative sex and gender roles.”<sup>891</sup>

Leo Bakst’s costumes for Nijinsky, with their ‘intense feeling for sex’<sup>892</sup> also resisted neat classification. Romola Nijinsky described the Faun’s “closely fitting tights which came up to his neck and around the arms. It was painted by Bakst in a coffee colour with big brown spots, which were disposed in such a manner, continuing on to the bare arms and hands, as to give the impression it was the skin of a Faun itself, and the difference between flesh and costume could not be discovered.”<sup>893</sup> Boundaries between clothing and skin, like species, like sexuality, are blurred. Penny Farfan considers the “confusion of the boundary between body and costume” as being “analogous to the persistent confusion of artist and character in both popular and critical discourse on Nijinsky.”<sup>894</sup> Lynn Garafola writes of how “The roles that Nijinsky played “traced a spectrum of male role possibilities that transcended conventions of gender. The attraction of the Ballets Russes for Bloomsbury rested, in part, on the image of sexual heterodoxy projected by Nijinsky, a subject, however, that memories of Oscar Wilde confined to the hush of private discourse.”<sup>895</sup> The Bloomsbury group of friends, as the champions of a European avant garde in art and at an avant garde in gender politics

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<sup>889</sup> Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, 1989, p.57

<sup>890</sup> Kevin Kopelson charts the influence of the life and work of Nijinsky on subsequent generations of gay men in *The Queer Afterlife of Vaslav Nijinsky* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997). For *L’Après-midi d’un faune* see pp.157-172. See also Lynn Garafola, ‘Reconfiguring the Sexes,’ in *The Ballets Russes and Its World*. Eds. Lynn Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999 and Garafola, Lynn. “The Sexual Iconography of the Ballets Russes.” *Ballet Review* 28.3(Fall 2000): 70-77. Also Peter Stonely, ‘Chapter 4: Queer Modernity’, in *A Queer History of Ballet* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007) pp.66-92 which also focuses on the influence of Diaghilev’ and the Ballets Russes.

<sup>891</sup> Penny Farfan, ‘Man as Beast: Nijinsky’s Faun’, *South Central Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring 2008, p.77

<sup>892</sup> Huntley Carter, *The New Age*, 1912, quoted in Ramsay Burt, ‘Modernism, Masculinity and Sexuality in Nijinsky’s *L’Après-Midi d’un Faune*,’, 2009, p.33.

<sup>893</sup> Romola Nijinsky, *Nijinsky* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1970 (1933)) p.141

<sup>894</sup> Penny Farfan, ‘Man as Beast: Nijinsky’s Faun’, 2008, p.85

<sup>895</sup> Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p.342. Lynn Garafola has written extensively on sexuality and the Ballets Russes, see also “Reconfiguring the Sexes,” in *The Ballets Russes and Its World*. Eds. Lynn Garafola and

were drawn to the Ballets Russes and socialised with its stars. Grant met Nijinsky at least twice in Ottoline Morrell's company, the first time in the company of other 'young artists,' the second time invited on his own.<sup>896</sup>

In Leo Baskt illustration of his costume design a vine of leaves curls around Nijinsky's waist, like the leaves that curled around the waist of Masaccio's Adam and Eve in the pre-restored Brancucci chapel (*fig.3.88*).<sup>897</sup> In Baskt's illustration for the poster of the ballet the scarf that the faun ejaculates onto folds around and behind the costumed dancer, like a 'flood of the sacred fluid' that both enfolds and threatens.

Foliage played around the buttocks of cupid in the National Gallery where Grant would also experience a private breaking through of clothing's boundary in a public space. Mark Turner considers "Queer experiences" in corporeal terms, things that "have always been remembered, if remembered, as fragments and traces."<sup>898</sup> Grant remembered an episode, recalled in a private memoir for Paul Roche, in which his body transgressed the boundary of his clothes, the boundary of acceptable behaviour, became the site of *regenitalization*. The teenage Grant was in the National Gallery, London, in front of Bronzino's *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (*fig.3.89*).<sup>899</sup> While looking at the painting the young Grant was approached by a man:

He had his hands in his pockets and coming very close rubbed his hand against my penis. This rather had the effect of exciting me, and he said something about the picture, did I not find it very fine? He then said let us go downstairs and look

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Nancy Van Norman Baer. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999 and "The Sexual Iconography of the Ballets Russes." *Ballet Review* 28.3(Fall 2000): 70-77.

<sup>896</sup> *Ottoline: The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*, ed. Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) p.239

<sup>897</sup> Leo Baskt, poster for L'Après-Midi d'un Faune, 1911

<sup>898</sup> Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion, 2003) p.43

<sup>899</sup> Bronzino, *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c.1545, oil on wood, 146.1 x 116.2cm, The National Gallery, London, NG651. Will Fisher has argued for a reading of the painting that recognises "the voyeuristic pleasures that it offers" and that by "incorporating an eroticized male figure and an eroticized female figure into the same frame" Bronzino intended the "erotic continuity between the desire for women and the desire for boys," to be recognised by the viewer, p.156. See Will Fisher, 'Peaches and figs: bisexual eroticism in the paintings and burlesque poetry of Bronzino', in *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy: Practice, Performance, Perversion, Punishment*, ed. Allison Levy (London: Ashgate, 2010) pp.151-164. Recent research has demonstrated the painting as a warning of syphilis see Christopher Cook, 'An Allegory with Venus and Cupid: A story of Syphilis,' *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1 November 2010, vol.103, no.11, pp.458-460 its historic status echoed in the choice of recent imagery for safe sex advertising see S. Porter and C. Kelly, 'Bronzino's 'Allegory of Venus and Cupid': an exemplary image for contemporary sexual health promotion?' *International Journal of STD and AIDS*, October 2009 vol.20 no.10, pp.726-731.

at the watercolours – in those days there was a series of small rooms in the basement hung with watercolours. We were alone in a room – he pulled out my cock and very soon I came onto the floor. I rubbed the mess with my foot when the guardian came in and asked what it was on the floor. I quickly said I had a cough and could not help spitting on the floor. He had to be satisfied with my explanation.<sup>900</sup>

This event is repeated “in various places” including “among the crowd of people listening to the sermons in Hyde Park. Here people stood so close to each other that it was easy to have contact without being seen.”<sup>901</sup>

Just as Grant had seen Masaccio’s *Adam and Eve* obscured by later, prurient additions, so the Bronzino in the National Gallery had also been modified, made suitable for public viewing. The photogravure of the painting published in the National Galleries catalogue (*fig.3.90*)<sup>902</sup> shows it before its restoration, in the state that Grant and his fellow queer viewers would have seen it. The painting shows Venus and her son Cupid in a sensuous embrace surrounded by various figures reacting and commenting on the couple. Grant would have observed the transparent veil that clung to Venus’s crotch, barely concealing the hairless vagina. He would have seen the bow of myrtle leaves that whilst covering also caresses Cupid’s buttocks.<sup>903</sup>

Further, more intrusive changes, were made when the painting entered the collection of National Gallery in 1860.<sup>904</sup> The painting was ‘put in order’ under instructions from Director Charles Eastlake, made suitable for public exhibition. Two of the areas where the body’s boundaries are broken were covered, de-sexualised and de-sensitised.<sup>905</sup> Venus’s tongue, that flits delicately from her mouth to that of Cupid’s, was over-painted so that it is only their lips that barley brush against each other. Also Venus’s

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<sup>900</sup> Unpublished memoir notes, quoted in Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.28

<sup>901</sup> Unpublished memoir notes, quoted in Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.28

<sup>902</sup> *National Gallery Illustrations: Italian Schools* (London: National Gallery, 1937) p.68

<sup>903</sup> Jaynie Anderson has charted the alterations to and restoration of the work and suggests that these additions were added “probably during the reign of Louis XIV.” See Jaynie Anderson, ‘A most improper picture’: transformations of Bronzino’s erotic allegory’, *Apollo*, vol.139, February 1994, pp.19-28

<sup>904</sup> The Bronzino was one of 47 works purchased from the collection of Eduard Beaucousin in Paris. See Jaynie Anderson, 1994, p.19

<sup>905</sup> The lengths that Eastlake went to, to remove the sensuality and sexuality from the painting extended to the official title or description of the work given by the gallery in which the word ‘sensual’ was disallowed. See Jaynie Anderson, 1994, p.22.

left nipple which nestles in the crook of the third and fourth finger of cupid's right hand was also adjusted, changing the act from caressing and arousing to covering.<sup>906</sup>

Even with these prurient additions to the painting, it still allowed for mutual looking and queer engagement, the allegorical conceit of the composition permitting an extended gaze. This circumstance is echoed in the British Museum. Matt Cook describes how the statue galleries were "a place where it was legitimate to look at sculptures of naked men: they were associated with an Hellenic ethos of self-realisation and control rather than 'modern' urban debauchery."<sup>907</sup> Part of an "historical homosexual identity similarly formed as *bricolage* out of the available aesthetic codes" as described by Peter Horne.<sup>908</sup> Here "a middle-aged gentleman" engaged Grant in conversation as the artist was copying the sculpture *Discobolus*.<sup>909</sup> This saw the beginning of a short-lived sexual affair.<sup>910</sup>

The liquefied origins of the watercolours on the walls of the National Galleries basement rooms reflect the transgressing of Grant's textile border. The changing nature of matter, from soft to hard, from dry to wet, from wet to dry.<sup>911</sup> Grant leeks, spills his seed in an Onanistic act on the gallery floor. The semen, previously held

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<sup>906</sup> The painting was restored in 1958 when Venus's tongue and nipple were uncovered and the cloth over her vagina and the myrtle bow covering Cupid's bottom were removed. See Jaynie Anderson, 1994, p.21

<sup>907</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.33. Cook dedicates a chapter on queer culture and the Hellenistic ideal, see Chapter 5, *The Hellenic City*, pp.122-142

<sup>908</sup> Peter Horne, 'Sodomy and Salome: Camp revisions of modernism, modernity and masquerade,' *Modern Times: Reflections on a century of English modernity*, eds. Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p.131

<sup>909</sup> *Discobolus*, Roman marble copy of a bronze original of the 5th century BC, Height: 1.700 m. From Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, Lazio, Italy. British Museum, Townley Collection, GR 1805.7-3.43 (Sculpture 250). See Ian Jenkins, *The Discobolus* (London, The British Museum Press, 2012). Neil Bartlett notes how late nineteenth century homosexual men "searched for proofs of their own existence, ransacking their libraries with a scholarly enthusiasm for Classical or Renaissance culture, reciting the names of their ancestors, proving their own existence."<sup>11</sup> Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde*, 1988, pp.226-7. Peter Horne describes this process as "constructing a sense of identity out of the residues of culture." See Peter Horne, 'Sodomy and Salome: Camp revisions of modernism, modernity and masquerade,' 1996, p.129

<sup>910</sup> Spalding, *Duncan Grant*, 1998, p.31.

<sup>911</sup> For an account of the theory of semen and ejaculation see the introduction to Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 2007) pp.xiii - xxv

inside Grant, pollutes the space.<sup>912</sup> It masquerades as another leaking fluid, phlegm, a comparison made in ancient Greece.<sup>913</sup>

Its physical presence is an inconvenience, Semen, once ejaculated from the body, becomes a waste product, to be tossed away, like Grant's ejaculate left on the chair in the studio at Charleston, or on the floor of the National Gallery, on or in the "misunderstanding body of a person who isn't a bugger," part of a post-coital tristesse. In a ribald story told to Leonard Woolf, Strachey describes a scene of group anal sex among school boys in the toilet of a railway carriage that leaves the floor "inches thick in semen," on which "the boys slipped about, one on top of the other" and the final participant had to swim "through the ocean to the appointed spot."<sup>914</sup> Semen is challenging.

John Paul Ricco highlights how semen transgresses the body's boundaries, which itself is something 'fluid,' how it "has the potential to defy the limits of strict definition (proper spaces), to subvert meanings, and put into question the logic of identity and signification."<sup>915</sup>

Warwick and Cavallaro note "that the breach of bodily boundaries is a recurrent topos in contemporary Western society."<sup>916</sup> William Ian Miller writes of how "Semen evokes disgust[...] because its appearance is accompanied by a little death, an orgasm, which is a loss of self-control" which is accompanied by "undignified" "facial expressions."<sup>917</sup> As Elizabeth Grosz write, bodily fluids "attest to the permeability of the body."<sup>918</sup>

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<sup>912</sup> Mary Douglas aligned semen as a polluting substances alongside menstrual blood. See: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) p.3

<sup>913</sup> "semen is the secretion of an excrement and in its nature resembles phlegm," Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problems*, 1.50.865a33f. cited in Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990) p.35 & p.254, n.26

<sup>914</sup> Lytton Strachey to Leonard Woolf, 15 February 1905, *The Letters of Lytton Strachey*, ed. Paul Levy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005) p.52

<sup>915</sup> John Paul Ricco, 'Queering Boundaries: Semen and Visual Representations from the Middle Ages and in the Era of the AIDS Crisis,' *Gay and Lesbian Studies in Art History*, ed. Whitney Davis (Binghamton: Harrington Park Press, 1994) p.60

<sup>916</sup> Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame*, 1998, p.5

<sup>917</sup> Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, 1997, p.103

<sup>918</sup> Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 1994, p.193

This permeability can reveal itself through scent. Semen also has a distinctive smell, so that even when unseen it can make its presence felt. Lytton Strachey on discovering that John Maynard Keynes and Grant had been having an affair wrote to his brother “He [Maynard] has come to me reeking with that semen he has never thought that I should know.”<sup>919</sup> Grant’s semen becomes his identifying scent, his musk, marking Keynes out.<sup>920</sup> Clothes are no barrier for the body.

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<sup>919</sup> Lytton Strachey to James Strachey, 15 July 1908, *The Letters of Lytton Strachey*, ed. Paul Levy, 2005, pp.143-4; also quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 1994, p.181

<sup>920</sup> In a paper delivered to the Apostles he imagines ‘the officials’ complaining that “Mr Swinburne’s poems are indecent!” that they are “reeking with semen.” See Lytton Strachey, *The Really Interesting Question, and other papers*, ed. Paul Levy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972) p.78

### Conclusion:

My intention in this thesis was to re-asses the partnership of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. In doing so I have acted like Vita Sackville West and have “encouraged a collage rather than matrimony.”<sup>921</sup> Through exploring variants of layering I have presented Bell and Grant’s partnership neither as hierarchical nor as equivalent but like the elements of a collage, as a series of layers that both cover and reveal. Using the rescued fragments of these layers I have collaged a picture, not all at once coherent, but revealing and resonant.

A consideration of the body of literature on Bell and Grant and the Bloomsbury group revealed gaps within the established histories. These gaps, like Roland Barthes’ gape, created for me an excitement, they revealed flashes of unexplored territory. By focusing on specific sites of political discourse I have examined some of the spoken and the unspoken principles inherent in Bell and Grant’s artistic and domestic activity.

In this collage the first layer to be considered was often the final layer, the name of the artists in the form of their signature. The politics of identity dominated this first chapter as I explored the various ways that the artists signed their work. Dare we enter into graphology and read these signatures as character traits, Bell’s upright and reliable, Grant’s languid and playful, slipping and unreliable? That would be too simple and lure us into the well-worn dichotomy of partnership. By examining the various ways that Bell and Grant had of signing and of not signing, and the use and function of the mechanically reproduced signature, I demonstrated the uneasy relationship that can occur between objects, names and signatures, the slipping between layers and the uneasy partnership of image, object and text.

The politics of place took centre stage in chapter two in the form of Charleston, or more specifically the pond that lies at the front of the house. Woolf imagined the pond as a layered space of “all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences,” but while these layers slide one “over the other silently and orderly as fish not impeding each other”<sup>922</sup> Bell and Grant’s visual conversations with the pond overlap and often contradict. They tell different stories, presenting the same space as a setting for different ideas of

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<sup>921</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: the Life of V. Sackville-West* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1983) p.185

<sup>922</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘The Fascination of the Pool’, c.1929, ed. Susan Dick, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) pp.220-21



society, sexuality and family. They hint at different lives that slide over each other, but unlike fish they often touch, often impede. Yet they have moments of choreographed order, of synchronicity. In these representations of layered topography other politics come into play, those of gender, queerness and familial relationships.

Questions of gender and queerness dominate the final chapter when related to the politics of the body. By picking at the edges and pulling at loose threads, I trespassed over boundaries and thresholds, removing transient and loose layers. Bell and Grant's textile layers cover and uncover, they reveal things unintentionally and reveal intention. In this Bloomsbury striptease of looseness and leaking, of gaping that thrills, that seduces, that gives pleasure, it is not the body but the traces of the body that reveals more.

Through layering and collaging, peeling back and un-picking these three areas of personal politics, of identity, place and body, I have gone some way in reconceptualising the partnership of Bell and Grant. But it is still a partnership that refuses to stay still, to rest in peace.

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Divided into:

Archives

Bloomsbury related sources

Non-Bloomsbury related sources

Exhibition Catalogues

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Miscellany

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