

GILES AUTY FURIOSO

“We have noticed a marked decline in deference.”

– *The Spectator*, 1997

“I think continually of those who were truly great,”
someone said, but I like to think of things like
the *erased de Kooning*, as considered by, say, Giles Auty.

I’m funny that way.
I’m funny like that.
That way I’m funny.
(Etc.)

– Sol Le Witt

I used to find amusing the idea of
Donald Brook greeting Cy Twombly –
like King George. *Scribble, scribble, scribble,*
eh Mr Twombly.

But, as the artist’s funny name
has become more prominent the anecdote
about Gibbon & George
has been forgotten.

I can’t *do* that
any more

Without entering the realm
of the private joke

– sometimes my favourite realm.

Are you with me? There’s no point. I can’t
make sense much longer –

Cochise?

– **Who, me?**

Yes. Take this nail & hit it into my forehead.
Firmly.

– **You crazy, boss!**

When

I feel like this I read the poems of Ron Padgett
– NO OFFENCE! –

I jump down, turn around

pick a bale of cotton

A little wine in the morning,
a little breakfast at night.

Where *is* the great
but absent art of our age, Giles Auty,
huh?

Take your hands out of your pocket when you
talk to me, son!

Crusty old fool
you sketchy cruiser

To the right of the critic – the picture is on the left,
large, smudged – to *the right* the wainscot drifts away
& becomes, after a passage of irresolute drawing,

sand – there stands the figure of Napoleon.
And he is in one helluva mood, as always. His
function is purely allegorical – as we must point out
to him. He represents the mood
of Mr Auty, on a relatively bad day – the tide of history,
the impoverished taste of most of this century. What
am I even *doing* in this allegory, he thinks –
Napoleon is drawn weakly, as if by
some amateur – say Victor Hugo,
inspired but easy, an *idea*, not a figure observed.
Though it's Napoleon alright, & stormy clouds of brushed ink
loom immediately right of him, ineptly complementing
the vague grey,
at left, of *the erased de Kooning*.

Further right –
what is this, a bad dream!? – some vacant fool like
Larry Rivers is fucking a chair. Must I be
associated with this? What is this called,
An Allegorical Disparaging of Giles Auty? Yep.

The Raft of the Medusa.

... for me the rot sets in sometime after Delacroix –
he had colour. Ingres had “the probity of drawing”.
But look at Chassériau ... & then
the Symbolists came along & it's been downhill
ever since. That dill for instance – Puvis de
Chavannes!

& yet, could we have had Gauguin
without him? I would prefer to.

Just as I would

prefer the late Derain without the earlier –
though *that is his whole point*. Why couldn't Bonnard
be stronger – couldn't he see where it led?
Hard to approve the politics of David,
or even Caravaggio – a lout probably – I can't see him
reading *The Spectator*. Was there no one round
like me to listen to? Or is that the point, not listening?
The whole thing becomes pretty terminally ill
with Duchamp. Just look at the deleterious effects
his permission had on lesser talents – Picabia, Arp –
though this gives Duchamp credit for talent
he never had.

It leads directly to all this nonsense with
Sherrie Levine, Daniel Buren – art as
mere conceptual gesture – in this country John Nixon,
the idiotic self portraits of Mike Parr (drawn as if
from a funny angle – what is the point of the
anamorphosis, somewhere different to stand in the gallery?
squinting, backing into sculpture?), the grandiosities
of Imants Tillers. *Young man, the academicians
were right!* Look at Sickert – & go back from there,
being selective, avoiding the mistakes of Turner, for what
was good about him, yet not so far as Poussin; Velasquez
was a high point, if only generous in very small measure.
Hard men, he & I. Let me introduce myself,
Giles Auty – my eyes narrowed, my jaw firm – doomed
to wander, through time, homeless, a brooding figure,
part Napoleon, part Goofy, caped. I'm right. You
do know that. I used to write for *The Spectator*.

Johann Winckelmann

Notes

- “A marked decline in deference”. This decline the *Spectator* noted as it became apparent to even *its* readers that (John Major’s) Tories would be defeated at the next election. *The Spectator* is home to Peregrine Worsthorne, Auberon Waugh & others of Auty’s ilk who’ve been trotted out to the colonies from time to time – to ginger things up with their ebullient views.
- “I think continually of those who were truly great” – a line from Spender, I think.
- Robert Rauschenberg erased a de Kooning drawing – a kind of ‘significant gesture’ ironising the gestural artist’s endeavour, erasing it, doubling it etc.
- Cy Twombly – the odd, but not so odd, monicker of a European-based US artist whose works are often described as pure mark-making, codeless meaning, automatism, & delectable, moody & poignant.
- *Scribble, scribble, scribble – eh Mr Gibbon!* – King George’s response to Gibbon upon publication of the latter’s *Decline & Fall*.
- Donald Brook – cool & mocking doubter of all things expressionistic, transcendent & idealist in art – in fact rather doubtful of art itself. Excepting art-as-properly-so-called.
- Cochise – in this poem the American Indian – *any* American Indian – as traduced by that country’s cowboy-&-injun movies of the 50s, once a staple of daytime TV.
- Ron Padgett – in many ways the leading US poet of his generation.
- from “jump down, turn around” to “hands out of my pocket” are quotes from, respectively, Leadbelly, Lou Reed, Clement Greenberg, Otis Spann.
- “Crusty old fool, sketchy cruiser” – Adelaide teen street argot, circa 1997.
- Victor Hugo – people forget the windbag’s efforts as watercolorist & draughtsperson.
- “fucking a chair” – Larry Rivers, perhaps the leading US artist of his generation: a later work represents (i.e., depicts) this harmless adolescent activity of the artist’s.
- *An Allegorical Disparaging of Giles Auty* – I think this must be the alternative title or job description of the poem – though “Allegorical” aspires to airs.
- *The Wreck of the Medusa* – why do people unflinchingly say ‘Raft’? – is a painting by Gericault.
- Delacroix – had colour.
- Ingres – had the probity of drawing. (Or was drawing “the crucible of his style”?)
- Chassériau – tried some of both. (These entries are sourced from *The Dictionary Of Received Ideas*.)
- Puvis (de Chavannes) – solemn, hilarious, he had something though.
- Gauguin – was played by Anthony Quinn in that movie about the life of the other guy.
- Derain – part of the Return to Order.
- David – Jacques-Louis David, hot-head radical.
- Caravaggio – we actually know that Caravaggio subscribed in his Roman years (nothing is known certainly of those following) to *The Lanced Tumour Review*, *We’re Dirt & Easy Chicken*. Caravaggio contributed to the second & third issues of *Modern Painters* – *A letter from Parma & A letter from Venice* (though he is not thought to have visited Venice). He appears never to have been paid.



- “Sculpture? – something you back into while looking at painting.” – Ad Reinhardt’s view. Actually he had backed into the critic, Hilton Kramer.
- Auty “protests too much”? (Shakespeare) I’m not so sure Auty did write for the *Spectator*.

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