



## Managing 'modern foreign' art: an extension at the Tate Gallery

THE COMBINATION OF PRIVATE WEALTH AND STATE AUTHORITY that gave legitimacy to London's national galleries in the nineteenth century also became the formula deployed throughout the twentieth. And yet in its inner quality that formula was changing fast. The last two decades of the nineteenth century had seen a consolidation of the legislative apparatus surrounding everyday life: housing, recreation, wages, insurance and much more.<sup>1</sup> 'Management' in all the professions was also becoming widespread, with the difference that it was now increasingly a meritocratic and upper-middle-class preserve, one which at the same time needed to normalise its relations with both a declining aristocracy and a relatively passivised working class. As we saw in the last chapter, the National Gallery of British Art very adequately fulfilled that role.

Artistically, the great explosion that was to disturb this consensus was 'modern' and specifically 'modern foreign' art. With the modernisation of at least a powerful fraction of the art profession in the later years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, a struggle emerged between two alternative ways of seeing and knowing: one that inaugurated a powerful shift away from the narrow parameters of 'national' art that had dominated the proceedings at Millbank in 1897. The social significance of this struggle is that it occurred not between or among classes, but in the ranks of the governing class itself: a consequence was that working-class participation in the national culture ceased to be an issue of importance in the years leading up to the opening of the new galleries at Millbank in 1926. On to centre stage now came the question of how to accommodate the 'modern' art of France.

It must be clear at once that this first encounter with 'modern foreign' art was at the same time a diplomatic and even military one. Before 1870–71 Britain's major artistic, architectural, religious and political affiliations had lain with Germany, but the Franco-Prussian war generated sympathy for the French, and the indirect result had been a wave of artistic francophilia, beginning with a show of Impressionist painting in 1870 at Paul Durand-Ruel's gallery at 168 New Bond Street, continuing at the New English Art Club, the Goupil Gallery and the International Society, and culminating in Durand-Ruel's massive exhibition of 315

paintings by Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley at the Grafton Galleries in the spring of 1905. A second wave of enthusiasm – for Post-Impressionism – would soon surface in London in the work of the Camden Town Group and the London Group, to climax before the public at Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibitions at the Grafton Galleries in 1910–11 and 1912. Of course German art had its followers in this period too, particularly those associated with Alfred Orage and his journal *The New Age*, for whom spiritual and emotional 'expression', often with a revolutionary political dimension, provided the most important and innovative art of the day.<sup>2</sup> But such formations were grossly unequal in social and cultural power. Ultimately, my thesis will be that a new set of relationships was consolidated in the public culture of the visual arts in London between the turn of the century and 1926, confirming the absorption into the British art establishment not only of a francophilic concept of 'artist' and of European art, but a disposition to regard the arts as a culture of the professionalised middle classes alone.

What is perhaps unfamiliar about my account is that military and diplomatic relations with continental countries emerge as central determinants of the trend. The terms of resolution of the war of 1914–18, particularly, required that cultural relations were handled with both subtlety and urgency as the British 'nation' after 1918 was jolted out of its complacency and forced to adapt to a modernised, industrialised Europe in which the historical antagonism between France and Germany played a central part.

### The New Critics and the Curzon Report

In the final years of the nineteenth century French Impressionism had met with two main – and opposed – reactions in London. In the first, transgressions of naturalistic form and colour, of a painting's narrative accuracy and naturalism, had been singled out for attack. Conservative critics such as F. G. Stephens, Ebenezer Wake Cook, J. A. Spender and Harry Quilter (he had endorsed Henry Tate) lent support to home-bred artists who produced for the Royal Academy paintings of legible stories, familiar scenes and historical events. Resistance to the new French art could quickly turn into explicit vituperation, as in Wake Cook's equation of progressive art with political revolution in his book *Anarchism in Art and Chaos in Criticism* (1904). Inspired by Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, published in English in 1895, Cook equated an interest in French art with 'anti-patriotism' and with sympathy for 'a French Revolution which shall begin by guillotining Academicians and other guardians of law and orderly development'.<sup>3</sup>

The second, or progressive reaction, however, held out for Impressionism's directness and efficiency of surface; for its ability to depict 'natural' effects in non-conventional ways, and for stimulating new types of pleasure in the adventurous viewer of art. English artists grouped around the New English Art Club (founded 1886) had travelled to France and had made the acquaintance of several French

artists. The 'New Critics' of the day – principally Frederick Wedmore, R. A. M. Stevenson, Frank Rutter and D. S. MacColl – supported the new painting with a kind of light-hearted eloquence that was in itself significant of new attitudes to pleasure, nature and painterly technique. Frederick Wedmore, in the first full-length article on Impressionism to appear in England, had complained that 'too much of what [England] gives us from her painters of modern life is familiar, tawdry, *banal*', whereas Monet (to take an exemplary case) 'sees with fresh eyes his autumn foliage, his shadows and cliffs on brilliant summer waters', even if at some cost to the 'moral force or moral beauty' of the subject. Degas and Renoir were highly admired; as Wedmore himself expressed it: 'the final basis of Degas' reputation is not the subject which is treated, but the capacity to treat it'.<sup>4</sup> R. A. M. Stevenson's influential book *Veldzquez*, published in 1895, extolled 'impressionistic technique ... a running, slippery touch' in painting, and in so doing extended a vogue already under way for the art of Whistler and Corot.<sup>5</sup> Frank Rutter, an eloquent champion of both Impressionist and Expressionist modernism, art critic of the *Sunday Times* from 1903 and curator of Leeds City Art Gallery from 1912 to 1917, looking back upon the period from the 1930s, recalled what in some quarters still expresses a conventional way of looking at Impressionism today. Sisley, Renoir and Pissarro

searched out the positive colour in shadows, rejoiced in the prismatic sparkle of reflected lights; but nobody rejoiced so light-heartedly, so gaily and spontaneously, as Monet. Sisley was perhaps even sweeter in his lyricism; Pissarro more learned and scientific ... But Monet gave them something to a higher degree than any of them – and that was a sense of exhilaration ... His joy in Nature was as innocent and disinterested as a lark singing in the sky. His landscapes are not pictures that calm us down: on the contrary, they lift us up ... 'What can be more beautiful', asked my friend [the art critic Paul] Konody 'than a glimpse of real sparkling sunlight, bodily taken from open Nature and magically transplanted on to canvas?' ... The human qualities in Renoir we could recognise at once. He *did* love girls! He loved sunlight also: but he loved it best when it was shining on young flesh.<sup>6</sup>

Rutter pointed out that with the exception of a single work – Degas' *The Ballet from Robert the Devil* (1876) in the South Kensington Museum (after 1901 the Victoria and Albert Museum) – none of the London art museums possessed a single modern French painting by 1905. 'I raged with indignation [he wrote] ... I agitated for all I was worth. I wrote article after article on the subject'.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of Durand-Ruel's Impressionist show at the Grafton Galleries of that year, Rutter organised a public subscription and for £160 bought Boudin's *The Entrance to Trouville Harbour* (1888) for the nation – a demonstration of the new taste, but a painting that a still reluctant National Gallery took much persuading to accept.

Much of even the best New Criticism – and I include Rutter's enthusiasms in this – was not always able to make its mind up on how the subject of modern art should be described: for example how so tragic a figure as the drinker in Degas'

*L'Absinthe* could be reconciled with the painting's almost exemplary technique.<sup>8</sup> And some of the advocacy for Impressionism was undoubtedly crude: I am thinking of Wynford Dewhurst's book *Impressionist Painting* (1904), which ascribed the invention of Impressionism to Constable, Turner, Bonington and the Norwich School, concluding that 'as the genius of the dying Turner flickered out, English art reached its deepest degradation. The official art of the Great Exhibition of 1851 has become a byword and a reproach. In English minds it stands for everything that is insincere, tawdry and trivial'.<sup>9</sup> But there was some sensitive advocacy too, of which Dugald MacColl may be taken as the best representative. Trained as a painter under Frederick Brown at the Westminster School of Art – Brown was Legros' successor at the Slade and later taught Orpen and John – MacColl exhibited with the New English Art Club and wrote for *The Spectator* from 1890 to 1896, then for the *Saturday Review*, and for the *Architectural Review* from 1901 to 1905, before becoming Keeper of the Tate Gallery in 1906 – a post which he held until 1911 (though he returned as Trustee between 1917 and 1927). MacColl curated an early exhibition that defined nineteenth-century European art as a successful conjunction of British and French technique. Staged in 1900, the Glasgow International Exhibition scarcely deserved its middle name: only a handful of Dutch paintings intruded into an otherwise exclusively Franco-British affair. Yet in his 1902 book *Nineteenth Century Art*, based on that exhibition, MacColl eloquently argued that the best art of the nineteenth century was 'free, that is private, so little a thing of command, or even wide consent' – a latitude that coincided with the sudden decline of common artistic languages and a stable religious canon to 'leave individual inspiration to its own fires, langours and eccentricities ... a picture of the relevant sort was the expression of an artist's uncommissioned mood'.<sup>10</sup>

The apotheosis of that tendency was Impressionism, MacColl said – what he calls art conducted 'in the open air'.<sup>11</sup> Monet and Pissarro, who together in London in 1870 had looked admiringly at Turner's snow and sunset paintings, had found not only a summary notation of form, an interest in reflected light and an 'anxiety to seize the character of a conjunction of tones in the short space of time in which it exists', but a positive 'journal of effects noted in shorthand' while in the open air.<sup>12</sup> But MacColl saw in Impressionism something deeper, something more articulate about the modern. Here was a demonstration of how to select and abstract, a capacity attractive to anyone not concerned with pure camera vision. Camera vision is the practical optic of the farmer or the hunter, says MacColl, for whom the smallest variation in the visual array may be important; whereas abstraction applies to 'the modern [who], using his sight for a particular end, abstracts it into a shorthand notation as ruthlessly as any primitive artist'.

Take as an example the vision of a businessman hurrying to catch a train in the morning, and thinking of his engagements for the day. If one could note down what he sees of the familiar street it would be a vague of space [sic] out of which a few signs of distance, of turning places would emerge, a minimum of signals and recognitions

by which he finds himself guided to the platform of his station. He sees, out of what falls on his retina, what his mind requires of it. Practical, business vision, therefore, is a wild form of impressionism.<sup>13</sup>

Monet was the exemplar of how technique and subject could interact. He matched the *procedures* of painting to modern phenomena: the hurry and the effort of painting, the pressing of that effort up against the limits of the medium; an engagement with extremity and climax; selection, incompleteness and so on. MacColl's book (if not the exhibition it derived from) was within reach of the sophisticated part of the metropolitan readership. New Criticism was advancing philosophical and moral claims for the new French art that made narrative painting look tarnished and stale.

French art would soon come on to the London market in some quantity through the agency of the likes of Durand-Ruel. By the time of MacColl's book, however, the Tate Gallery, already once extended to the rear of the 1897 building, was becoming the focus of an attempt to rewrite the relationship between British art and that of the rest of Europe along largely francophile lines. In the eyes of the New Critics, British art of the kind celebrated by Henry Tate's collection – largely from the Royal Academy – was due for relative devaluation and decline. The Royal Academy, for its supporters, retained the prestige and authority of an ancient body. The stage was therefore set for a radically revised relationship between the Tate and the Royal Academy over what was the legitimate European art of the day. At the same time, the introduction of 'the modern' at Millbank would unsettle the Tate's relationship to the National Gallery – two institutions (still administratively linked) which had recently stabilised a division of the cultural continuum around British art at Millbank and European old masters at Trafalgar Square.

MacColl's decisive move was to orchestrate a growing dissatisfaction among the New Critics and their followers against the administration of the Chantrey Bequest, which until this time had been dominated overwhelmingly by an investment in paintings from successive Royal Academy summer exhibitions. Since 1897 Chantrey purchases had been given to the Tate in order to satisfy Chantrey's wish and intention

that the works of art so purchased ... shall be collected for the purposes of forging and establishing a public national collection of British Fine Art ... in the confident expectation that whenever the collection shall become or be considered of sufficient importance the Government or the country will provide a suitable building or accommodation.<sup>14</sup>

Chantrey's will had indeed specified that purchases be made by the President and Council of the Royal Academy 'for the encouragement of British Fine Art in painting and sculpture', but had by no means insisted that purchases from dealers, private owners, artists outside London and foreigners working in Britain be excluded from consideration. MacColl engineered virtually singlehandedly the House of Lords Select Committee inquiry (headed by Lord Crewe) of 1904,

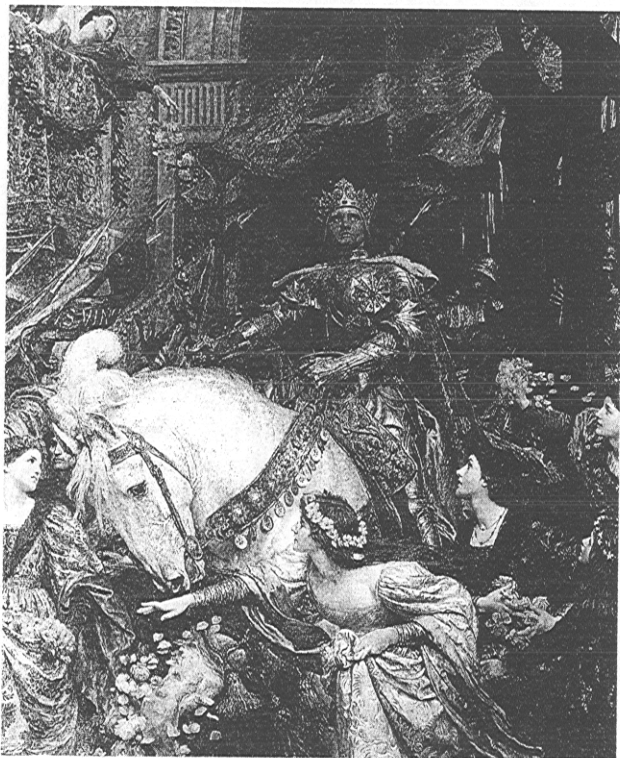
whose main conclusion – that the Chantrey Bequest should liberalise the selection of works and purchase works by foreign artists – he pressed independently in a series of articles for the *Saturday Review* which were published together as a book in the same year.

It was an effective intervention. Accusing the Chantrey Trustees of 'grave delinquency', MacColl cited Chantrey's original words to the effect that the Trust should purchase works 'of the highest merit in painting and sculpture that can be obtained either already executed or which may hereafter be executed by Artists of any nation Provided such Artists shall have actually resided in Great Britain during the executing and completing of such Works', claiming that foreign artists who had worked in Britain, such as Dalou, Legros, Fantin-Latour, Whistler, Degas, Matthew Maris and Manet – not to mention Pissarro, Monet and Van Gogh – be considered.<sup>15</sup> Here was a reading of Chantrey's wording which attempted to shift the whole balance of the fund's purchasing away from the British artistic establishment and towards the works of younger and less traditional artists 'of any nation', including those working in modern techniques and styles. By targeting the Chantrey Bequest MacColl also brought to light the fact that purchasing funds from government were scarce to the point of virtual non-existence: the Chantrey was a private bequest. MacColl's other line of argument was that Chantrey's will had specified that 'preference shall on all occasions be given to works of the highest merit that can be obtained', which he felt the Academy had not complied with in acquiring works by the likes of 'Joseph Clark, Val Prinsep, Walter Hunt, W. Small, P. H. Calderon, A. Hacker, G. Cockram, L. Rivers, H. S. Hopwood, Mildred Butler, Lucy Kemp-Welsh, A. Glendening, Chas Maundrell and others'.<sup>16</sup> MacColl was straightforward:

If the Trustees are of opinion that their recent performance in the purchase of Mr Dicksee's Two Crowns (£2000) [Figure 59] fulfills the conditions [of the Bequest], the view is shared by no critic who has a reputation to lose. The Trust is being administered purely to forward exhibitors in current Academy exhibitions.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of the London press subscribed to MacColl's line. The critic Roger Fry used his column in *The Athenaeum* in 1903 and 1904 to press home MacColl's attack.<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, *Contemporary Review*, *Truth*, *The Spectator* and *Magazine of Art* all rallied to the cause, while sympathetic echoes could be heard from the *Westminster Gazette*, *Pall Mall Gazette* and *The Saturday Review*. Following the recommendations of the House of Lords Report, the Royal Academy Council the next year appointed two committees to recommend purchases of paintings and sculptures respectively. Yet to judge from the purchases actually made, the argument on behalf of foreign artists had been accepted in letter only; the first works by an artist of foreign birth to be purchased by the Academy were Lucien Pissarro's *All Saints' Church, Hastings* (1918) and *April, Epping* (1894) for £131.5.0 and £157.10.0 respectively in 1934 – and Pissarro had lived for most of his life in England. Otherwise

59 Frank Dicksee,  
*Two Crowns*, 1900,  
oil on canvas,  
231.1 x 184.2 cm.



the style and type of painting purchased under the Chantrey fund was destined to remain more or less unchanged for at least fifty years.<sup>19</sup>

By 1905 or so Post-Impressionism had begun to make its appearance in England. In 1908 the International Society exhibition showed works by Signac, Cross, Denis, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse. The Camden Town Group in London was vigorously championing the new work. But simultaneously, a concern was growing in the London art world over the number of old-master paintings from British collections being sold abroad, particularly to the wealthy American collectors such as Mrs Gardner, P. A. B. Widener, J. P. Morgan, H. C. Frick, W. B. Kickerman, J. G. Johnson, B. Altmann, J. H. McFadden, H. E. Huntingdon and C. P. Huntington, not to mention major foreign museums such as the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Germany and the Metropolitan Museum in New York; the Harcourt budget of 1894 having introduced death duties on all forms of property, which led owners to divest themselves of works of art rather than submit to tax.<sup>20</sup> A committee set up in 1911 by the National Gallery Trustees under Earl Curzon of Kedleston and consisting of Sir Edgar Vincent (later Lord D'Abernon), Robert H. Benson (a Trustee) and the Director, Sir Charles Holroyd,

quickly found that the problem of retaining old masters ramified into questions of purchasing and display policy, gaps in the national collections, the workings of the Chantrey Bequest and the absence of modern works by 'foreign artists' for permanent exhibition in England, not to mention a suitable gallery in the capital in which to hang them.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the mid-nineteenth-century government inquiries into audiences, class and conservation, the Curzon Committee had questions of management to settle; questions of the identity of the national collection at a time of military crisis and economic change. The terms of public access to the collections were scarcely discussed. The Curzon Committee when it reported in 1915 concluded that funds for the purchase of 'modern foreign' art by the National Gallery budget (the only source of revenue for the Tate until 1917) were sparse. Curzon's *Report* admitted that in contrast to the policy of other European countries vis-à-vis foreign works of art (including British) 'we in this country appear to possess neither policy nor method'.<sup>22</sup> The terms of Tate's own bequest did not appear to permit such works being hung at Millbank; yet now there was intense pressure for change. The Committee was told in evidence that 'there was no system of acquiring modern foreign paintings in comparison to Germany and other foreign countries' (Sir Sidney Colvin, formerly Keeper of Prints at the British Museum); that there should be 'a separate gallery for modern foreign sculpture and paintings' (Charles Aitken, Director and Keeper at the Tate); that England was 'dangerously isolated ... [it was] bad for art that it has not a knowledge of what is really happening on the continent' (the critic Arthur Clutton-Brock); that Barbizon paintings should be purchased because 'they educate taste, but without dragging people away into new fashions and fads of execution' (Sir Walter Armstrong, Director of the National Gallery of Ireland); that the National Gallery should be subsidised 'for the important and pressing task of forming a representative collection of modern British and foreign art' (Roger Fry); and that a separate 'modern foreign' gallery ought to be set up immediately under the directorship of the wealthy young Irish art collector Hugh Lane, to make good the opportunities that had already slipped away (MacColl).<sup>23</sup> MacColl and Fry, particularly, continued to urge radical reform of the Chantrey purchase fund.

The Curzon Committee approached the formation of a 'modern foreign' collection with some caution: 'we have not in our mind any idea of experimentalising by rash purchase in the occasionally ill-disciplined productions of some contemporaneous continental schools, whose work might exercise a disturbing and even deleterious influence upon our younger painters' - a reference to Italian and Russian Futurism, French Cubism, and 'primitivism' of every shade. 'But the opposite theory that no foreign art of the present day is worthy of purchase is one which it is impossible to sustain', said Curzon's *Report*.<sup>24</sup> It was an attractive compromise, and one which seemed to open the door to foreign purchases without the burden of a commitment to contemporary art. It reflected Walter Armstrong's evidence: he was 'suspicious' of the sort of picture being produced in France and



Germany, but felt 'there ought to be a certain number, just to act as a stimulus, and let people see what foreigners are doing, but I do not think a great, separate gallery filled with specimens of Continental art would be a good thing for our art'.<sup>25</sup> In the light of such opinion, the *Report's* conclusion that the formation of a 'modern foreign' collection was 'not merely a duty imposed upon us by the wise example of foreign countries, but ... also essential to the artistic development of the nation',<sup>26</sup> might conceivably gratify the old guard as well as the new.

Yet clearly there was a problem about the purchase of German paintings in the midst of military hostilities. Thus the *Report's* list of artists 'unrepresented in the National Gallery' were mostly early and mid nineteenth-century French names, of which Manet, Monet, Degas and Daumier were the youngest. MacColl, having given evidence to the Curzon inquiry, published his own conclusions independently in the same year; arguing against the acquisition of more old masters for Trafalgar Square and in favour of more selective and nationally segregated displays – Italian and Spanish at Trafalgar Square, Flemish, German and Dutch at the National Portrait Gallery, and British at the Tate. 'The French School would then fall to the Keeper of the Modern Foreign Gallery', argued MacColl, 'an independent establishment with a building and Keeper of its own'.<sup>27</sup> It was another step towards the canonisation of French art as the only serious art of the mid and later nineteenth century – MacColl mentions Millet, Daumier, Monticelli, Monet, Degas and Ingres, to add to the names of Delacroix and Ricard which he had given in his evidence to the Committee.<sup>28</sup>

What is significant about this debate is that the dynamic of progressive taste in art is already dovetailing neatly with events on the international stage: between the beginning and end of the Curzon Committee's work the war with Germany had erupted, bringing pro-French and anti-German sentiments to the fore. Diplomatically the process had been gathering steam for some time: the Anglo-French *entente* of 1904, followed by an *entente* with Russia against the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy. Diplomatic crises in the Balkans and in Morocco, and the heightening of tension in a Europe divided by the growth of national stereotypes, had given impetus to the trend. The state in the form of its civil service clearly needed to manage such a development and give it cultural form.<sup>29</sup> By 1915 the momentum towards the assembling of a new collection seemed irresistible. Yet a problem addressed in the Curzon *Report* was that potential donors of 'modern foreign' works were being deterred by the lack of any gallery in London in which to put them – a government purchase grant was not, given the war situation, expected. The best that could be hoped for was a further extension of the Tate rearwards from the river, initially housing 'modern foreign' pictures from Trafalgar Square and the Victoria and Albert Museum, in the expectation that donors of other paintings and sculptures might come forward. The *Report* further speculated that ultimately a 'modern foreign' collection might assume such importance as to justify moving it to a separate and independent building, in which case the new extension at Millbank would revert to becoming

a gallery for British art (it would take nearly a century for that to occur). 'The only alternative to this suggestion', the *Report* concluded, 'is that some wealthy lover of the arts should be found who will relieve us of the responsibility of providing the funds for the erection of a modern foreign gallery'.<sup>30</sup>

### Hugh Lane, Joseph Duveen and the plan for a new gallery

Two events now occurred that had a momentous impact upon the development of art in London and played directly into the hands of the National Gallery Trustees. The first of these was the torpedoing by German U-boats of the *Lusitania* on its return from New York on 7 May 1915, bringing with it the death of the wealthy young Irish collector Hugh Lane, who in 1903 had helped initiate the exhibiting of modern art in Dublin and had in 1912 given a group of 39 paintings to the Corporation of Dublin on condition that 'a new and suitable' gallery be provided. Following disagreements about the funding of a building, Lane had sent his collection to be established in London in an effort to make the Dublin Corporation see sense, backing the loan by a new will dated 11 October 1913 bequeathing the pictures 'to found a Collection of Modern Continental Art in London'.<sup>31</sup> A date had been set – 20 January 1914 – for the pictures to open to the public in a room set aside in Trafalgar Square. The National Gallery, however, refused to exhibit all the pictures without a legally drafted bequest, and over half the pictures remained in store for several years – Lane had again felt mistreated.

Lane was already well known in both Dublin and London and formed part of the circle of George Moore, Orpen, Tonks, Wilson Steer, Sickert and MacColl; they can be seen together in Orpen's 1909 painting, now in Manchester (Plate 10), which pays homage to Manet through his portrait of Eva Gonzales, already in the Lane collection following its purchase from Durand-Ruel in 1906. Lane's collection of paintings by Renoir, Camille Pissarro and others was exemplary and unique. Yet his untimely death now precipitated a lengthy and bitter feud. Lane's sympathies for Dublin had returned following the Trafalgar Square debacle, and by a codicil of 3 February 1915 he had requested that his pictures go not to London but to Dublin: however the codicil had been signed but not witnessed, and on Lane's death its validity was immediately contested.<sup>32</sup> An Irish group including Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats began to press the Dublin case; yet it was strenuously argued by Lord Curzon of the National Gallery Trustees, following legal advice, that the Irish argument was null and void. The *Report* of Curzon's own Committee clearly had Lane (at least) in mind in speaking of 'some wealthy lover of the arts' who might come forward as a patron. Against vigorous opposition from Dublin and the Irish supporters in London, English francophile modernists such as Aitken, MacColl, Witt (and Curzon himself) spared no efforts to keep the pictures in the English capital for subsequent permanent exhibition.<sup>33</sup>

A second development was equally in line with the spirit and wording of the Curzon *Report*. The young collector and dealer Joseph Duveen had already

mentioned his interest in funding a gallery for 'modern foreign' art at the time of the opening of the Turner Galleries at the Tate in 1910 – the Galleries had been provided by his father Joseph Joel Duveen. He had mentioned it to Lord Esher, Charles Holroyd, Lewis Harcourt and MacColl, so that the possibility of a new building was already semi-public knowledge, at least within the Curzon group.

A little biography will help resuscitate an almost forgotten figure (Figure 60). Born to a family of art dealers headed by his father Joel, who had died in 1910



60 Sir Joseph Duveen (1869–1939) and his wife Elsie, née Salamon (1881–1963), photographed by Kazamian, c. 1912.

shortly before the opening of the Turner rooms, Joseph had been sent to America in 1886 at the age of 17 to work for his brother Henry. He had assisted in the servicing of America's wealthy new patrons with valuable paintings and works of art from European collections: as Behrmann notes in his biography, it was Joseph Duveen who first noticed that Europe had many paintings and America much money<sup>34</sup> – the Harcourt budget already mentioned forced them increasingly on to the market. A mixture of hard-headed business drive and a charismatic personality had made Duveen successful with the Fricks, the Mellons and others. Frequently accused of over-restoring, attributing works to invented artists and even fraud, Duveen was by all accounts determined not merely to dominate the family dynasty but – like William Roscoe and other patrons before him – to become the Lorenzo de Medici of his day.<sup>35</sup>

With the impetus added by the *Curzon Report* and with the opportunity suggested by Hugh Lane's demise, Duveen was now ready to agree the terms under which he would endow a new extension to the Tate specifically for 'modern foreign' art. He wrote to the Chairman of the National Gallery Trustees, Lord D'Abernon, from New York in August 1916, stating his pleasure in D'Abernon's acceptance of his plan, 'especially in such times as those we are now passing through'. 'Contemporary foreign art is not well represented in England', Duveen emphasised, 'and I am very anxious to have this remedied'. But Duveen stipulated that his name 'should not be mentioned in connection with the new gallery scheme whilst there is enemy occupation in any part of France or Belgium' – a stipulation repeated in a further letter to the National Gallery Board written from his suite at Claridge's on 3 November 1916 at the time the agreement was finally signed.<sup>36</sup> Duveen himself was made an Associate of the Gallery – along with Lady Tate and Mrs Watts – with the formation of a separate Tate Gallery Board of Trustees in May 1917.

By this date a plan was being formulated by the Trustees indicating the period to be covered by a gallery of 'modern foreign' painting and the extent of pictures already available. The document in question (undated but perhaps of early 1917) effectively canonises modern art as predominantly and almost exclusively French. Artists who died after 1820 were to be included, divided into four periods: the David period, the Romantics, the Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists. On the basis of a nucleus of 119 oil paintings and 31 watercolours and drawings from the Salting and Lane bequests – overwhelmingly French, plus Goya – the Trustees now drew up a list of painters 'unrepresented, or at present inadequately represented ... whose work it would be desirable to secure for the new Gallery'. To 5 Belgians, 2 Danes, 10 Germans, 10 Dutchmen, 3 Italians, 2 Norwegians and Swedes, 5 Spaniards, 2 Swiss and no Russians (unsurprising given the alarm of the British establishment at 'Bolshevist insanity') were added no less than 85 French artists from the early nineteenth century down to the generation of Boudin, Degas, Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Signac and Seurat – even Picasso appears in the French list.<sup>37</sup> Now, with the end of hostilities in 1918 and in the midst of the complex diplomatic situation opened up by the preparation of the Versailles Peace Treaty, the

New Critics' advocacy for French pictures dovetailed exactly with a national mood in favour of France and antagonistic to the Germans. A Tate Gallery statement of 1918 made the matter clear enough:

Mr Duveen's gift at the present moment is particularly well-timed as it marks the increasing unity of the Allied Nations, for with the exception of neutral Holland, when we speak of modern foreign art, it is predominantly of the paintings and sculptures of our allies and above all of the French that we are thinking.<sup>38</sup>

### Forming a canon of 'modern' art

That was only the first step in the creation of both a gallery and an audience for modern art. It has been asserted already that the 'modern foreign' pictures assembled at the Tate after 1918 gave an ordering of modern art predominantly if not consistently centred upon France (the exception was the Drucker Bequest of Dutch pictures which had been given in 1910). To the Salting Bequest of Barbizon paintings, also given in 1910, were added works by Ingres, Delacroix, Monet and Forain from the Degas sale in 1918. The Lane Bequest (as it was contentiously called) supplied pictures which with the exception of works by Jongkind, Madrazo, Mancini, Jacob Maris and Alfred Stevens were all from France: Barye, Bonvin, Boudin, John Lewis Brown, Corot, Courbet, Daubigny, Daumier, Degas, de la Pena, Fantin-Latour, Forain, Fromentin, Gérôme, Ingres, Manet, Monet, Monticelli, Pissarro, Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir, Rousseau and Vuillard. To these were added two Gauguins, one presented by the Contemporary Art Society in 1917 and the other by Duveen in 1919<sup>39</sup> – the list shows how canonical those names were becoming and yet how abruptly the canon stopped short of the more adventurous and problematic productions of Matisse, Picasso and Braque.

At the same time, the Samuel Courtauld gift of £50,000 to the Tate Gallery in 1923 represents a further instance of well-to-do entrepreneurial patronage that explicitly asserted the stylistic superiority of French art and made a certain reading of its principal artists canonical in the early 1920s. Since at least the time of his appointment as joint managing director of the very successful international family textile firm in 1917 (he was appointed chairman in 1921), Courtauld had developed beliefs about the efficacy of art in the business world that were not dissimilar from those of nineteenth-century industrialists with a philanthropic approach to art. Like Henry Tate, Courtauld and his parents were Unitarians, in whom had been born a belief in progressive self-enlightenment combined with public duty. At the foundation of this thinking was the conviction that outright materialism (the profit motive) was harmful on its own: both monopolistic capitalism and socialism were to be abhorred.

Equally, Courtauld was concerned at what he believed to be a low level of artistic awareness among the English middle and lower classes. In his later years as an industrial grandee (Figure 61) Courtauld reflected how the Parisian working class

on a Sunday afternoon at the Louvre could be 'shrewd' in discussion and knowledgeable about pictures, while a comparable British crowd would talk only about subject matter and anecdote.<sup>40</sup> Art of a certain kind, for Courtauld, was backed by claims of universalising relevance and efficacy, and could in the best circumstances function as a kind of balm: 'the most civilising influence which mankind has ever known ... it is universal and eternal; it ties race to race, and epoch to epoch. It overleaps divisions, and unites men in one all-embracing and disinterested and living pursuit',<sup>41</sup> resulting eventually (here he echoes Redgrave and Cole) in an improvement in design and the industrial process.

From the earliest days, Courtauld's tastes in paintings centred upon French art of the late nineteenth century to the virtual exclusion of other schools. He wrote how, on return from his first visit to Italy (and after his second in 1901), it had seemed to him that 'British art had died. I felt nothing but artificiality and convention, and could detect no progress in technique'.<sup>42</sup> Even by that time his tastes were for early and mid-period Impressionism (in Renoir's case nothing after 1880), with selections from Post-Impressionist art up to and including Cézanne. By the

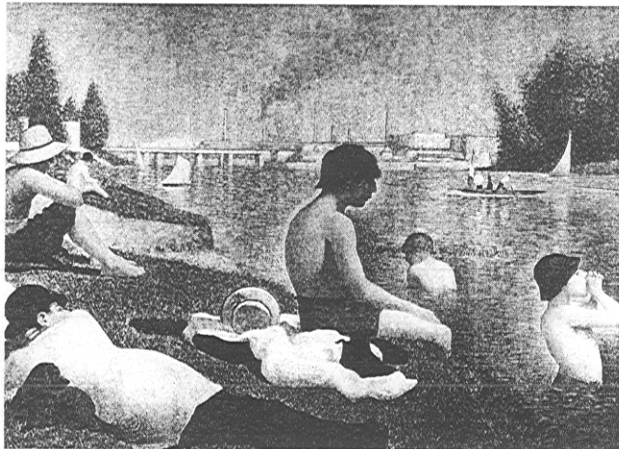


61 Samuel Courtauld IV, July 1936.  
Photograph by  
Barry Finch.

time of his 1923 gift Courtauld had evolved a view of the grand procession of European art history according to which it marched directly from the Italian old masters to the French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists with precious little between or afterwards. As Courtauld said in a covering letter to Charles Aitken, by that time Director of the Tate, 'In my own mind the central men of the movement are Manet, Renoir, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh'. An appended list, representing 'the modern movement from its inception to the present time', mentioned 35 artists from Chardin through Géricault and Delacroix to the Post-Impressionists and finally Picasso and Matisse – though as Courtauld recognised, 'the fund will not be large enough to secure examples of them all'.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Courtauld's tastes drew much from the formalist tendencies of the Bloomsbury group and its critical champions, Clive Bell and Roger Fry; yet while Fry confined his most powerful advocacy to the Post-Impressionists, Courtauld's preferences stopped short of the wilder shores of Cézannism which Fry so famously espoused.<sup>44</sup> 'They [the Impressionists] have taught me to see nature in pictures and pictures in nature, and I have derived infinite pleasure from this', Courtauld later wrote.<sup>45</sup> Manet's *La Servante de Bocks* of 1878 or 1879, purchased from Knoedlers for £10,000, was one of the Fund's earliest and most expensive acquisitions. Seurat's *Bathers at Asnières* of 1883–84 (Figure 62) was another. In practice, the Fund did not extend to all 35 artists listed in the Trust Deed but still managed to acquire major works by 'the men of the movement', namely Manet, Monet, Renoir, Degas, Sisley, Pissarro, Seurat, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Utrillo, Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec.<sup>46</sup>

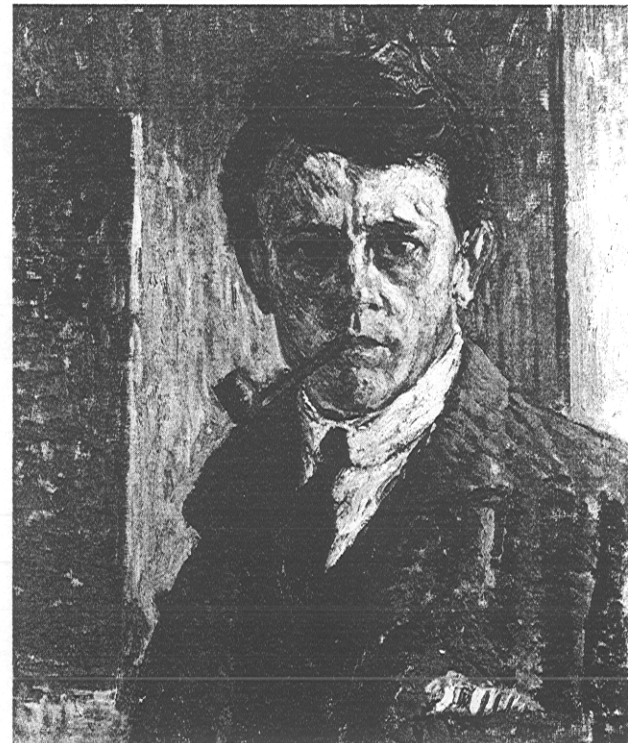
Other personalities played their parts too, and their preferences form vital elements of the Tate's outlook upon foreign art in the period leading up to the opening of the new Modern Foreign and Sargent galleries in June 1926. There is the spinsterish, celibate Aitken, New English Art Club member and Keeper at the

62 Georges Seurat,  
*Bathers at Asnières*,  
1883–84,  
oil on canvas,  
201 x 300 cm  
(Courtauld Fund).



Tate in succession to MacColl: 'prim in manner, he might well have been mistaken for a church warden ... he did not like anything that was contemporary or foreign; his taste was for the crucifixion and the annunciation of the early Italian painters, and the Pre-Raphaelites'.<sup>47</sup> This was the man whom James Bolivar Manson sought to convert to Impressionism (and some Post-Impressionism) after the latter's appointment as assistant at the Tate in 1912 – and who remained aesthetically loyal to his younger painter-colleague throughout the period leading up to the opening of the Modern Foreign wing. Kenneth Clark probably overstates the case in saying that in the 1920s and early 1930s Aitken and Manson 'set their faces against all Post-Impressionist painting, and did their best to prevent such pictures entering the Gallery, even as gifts'.<sup>48</sup> In a text of 1926 Aitken claimed that he wanted to steer 'a discreet *via media*' between the 'right' and 'left' wings of opinion, between the view that 'dangerous modern experiments are being encouraged', and the view that 'interesting developments are not being adequately handled'.<sup>49</sup>

A more important figure was Manson himself (Figure 63). He had gone as a painter to Heatherley's, the Lambeth School of Art and the Académie Julian in Paris, had met Lucien Pissarro in London in 1910 and joined Sickert's Fitzroy



63 James Bolivar  
Manson, *Self Portrait*,  
1912, oil on canvas,  
50.8 x 40.7 cm.



Street group, then the Camden Town Group and the London Group, became Assistant Keeper at the Tate in 1917 and finally founded the 'Monarro' group (from the names of Monet and Pissarro) in 1919.<sup>50</sup> He exhibited at the Leicester and Wildenstein galleries and the New English Art Club, and was a competent if unwavering Impressionist painter in the English manner: he never went as far as to admire Cubism. In a guide to the collection published in 1926, Manson would acknowledge the familiar narrative that British art stretched from Hogarth through Blake and Constable to the Pre-Raphaelites, followed by such later nineteenth-century painters as Orchardson, Clausen, Leighton, Poynter, Waterhouse and Legros. However, for Manson this development involved a fall from grace – and an increasing disregard of the effects of light and shade. 'There is a romantic quality and a certain carelessness in English painting ... a vigorous breadth ... the English, generally speaking, are too impatient to practice the more precise and careful detail of the Dutch.'<sup>51</sup>

By Constable or Crome's standards of bucolic informality artists such as Holman Hunt and Lord Leighton came off badly in Manson's account: Hunt was 'not a good artist ... stodgy, heavy and dull, never clear-cut and decisive', while in Leighton there was 'no artistic merit ... [only] relentless power of rendering what is called finish ... sickly prettiness not surpassed even by ... Bouguereau'.<sup>52</sup> About Orchardson Manson said that his art resulted

from his patron's demand for sentiment ... no changes of mood, no variety of technique ... not enough essential realism to stir even the ghost of an emotion ... the chief purchasers of pictures at the time were rich merchants and manufacturers, who still enjoyed the fruits of the peace and prosperity of the Victorian era'.<sup>53</sup>

The key distinction for Manson was between 'painting picturesque scenes to illustrate interesting stories according to a definite formula' (English art) and the realisation – matchlessly exemplified by the Impressionists in France and a handful of their English precursors – that 'the aim of the artist is to express his own personal emotion', the signal discovery that led to the real 'awakening of modern art'. And yet the English accommodation to modernism needed to be one of cautious good judgement in the face of continental excess and exuberance. The wilder and more recent kind of artist – Cézanne and Van Gogh – take as their purpose 'the expression of emotion aroused ... by the contemplation of nature'; in them it is 'purely modern feeling ... the direct expression of life [in which] technique and intuition are ... inseparable'. But for Manson this would ultimately remain a continental task. 'No English painter could have discovered Impressionism or invented Cubism'.<sup>54</sup>

### France as a 'supplement'

The opening of the Modern Foreign galleries at the Tate Gallery on 26 June 1926 expressed the insertion of French modern art into British cultural life at the

officially sanctioned level of the national institution, the state and the monarch: yet the nature of that *entente* needs making plain. Since Lane's pictures could not be put on show because the case was still allegedly *sub judice* – even though a House of Lords Committee had in fact already prepared a report – a loan collection was quickly assembled including works owned by Fry, Clive Bell, John Maynard Keynes, Sir Michael Sadler, W. Burrell and the Davies sisters. Some works from the Courtauld Fund were put on display. For this temporary show the Impressionist canon was extended to Post-Impressionism and beyond: from his own collection Courtauld contributed Marchand's *Saint-Paul* of 1921 (a small Cézannist landscape that stood out from the rest of his purchases). There were works by Derain, Gauguin, Seurat, Matisse, Van Gogh, even a single Picasso *Still Life* from the collection of Clive Bell. Sculpture by Rodin and Degas, and a substantial drawings display, were added.<sup>55</sup> A statement released to the press shortly before the opening had promised that when complete, 'London will possess one of the largest art galleries in Europe ... and the largest gallery in the world devoted to modern art'.<sup>56</sup> Notes written for the guests themselves elided the terms 'modern foreign' and 'recent ... continental art',<sup>57</sup> suggesting 'modern art' to be not only European but virtually equivalent to that of the French.

Having shown the King and Queen round the new galleries (Figure 64), the company assembled in the Turner galleries (Room VI) for the official speeches – the scene was painted twice at Duveen's request by John Lavery (Plate 11).<sup>58</sup> Chairman of the Tate Trustees Lord D'Abernon read an address, probably drafted for him by MacColl, in which he said that 'for many years the masters of the later continental schools and preeminently the French painters and sculptors of the nineteenth century had been calling for representation'. D'Abernon referred to the gift of Samuel Courtauld, 'who had not hesitated to pay the ransom for deficiencies in the past' and had now 'supplied students with examples of certain artists



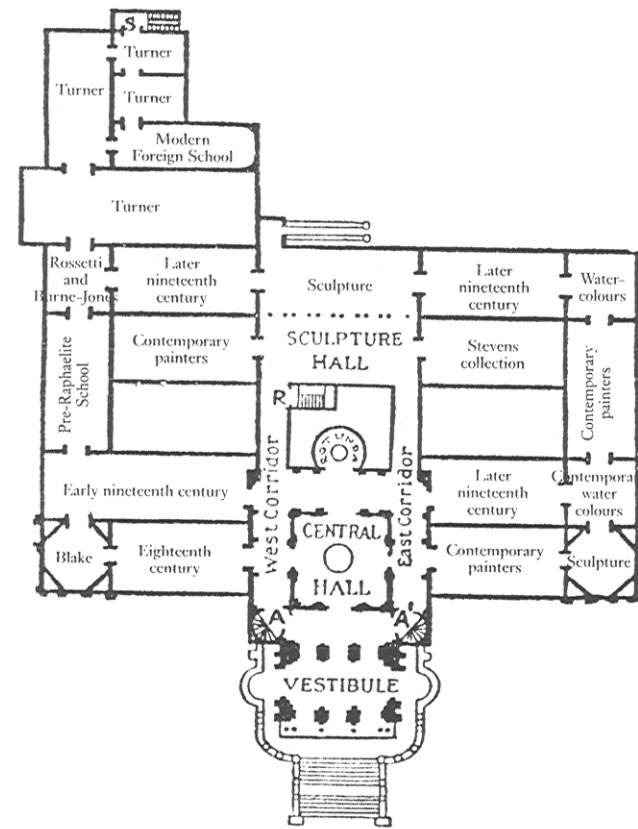
64 Opening of the Modern Foreign and Sargent galleries, Tate Gallery, 1926: the King and Queen, accompanied by Lord D'Abernon.



who, despised and rejected in their lifetime, have peculiarly interested the present generation'.<sup>59</sup> But it was the King himself who gave voice to a central axis of the new relationship, when he spoke of 'the satisfactory completion of the British collection, and the timely addition of the Continental masters'. The King described the new galleries as 'a very welcome and necessary undertaking ... the establishment in London of a permanent collection of fine pictures by the great Continental painters cannot fail in many ways to exercise a beneficial influence'. The Tate collection, not yet 30 years old, 'can now be regarded as so fully representative of modern British art that the Trustees feel justified in supplementing it with a collection of paintings of modern schools in foreign countries'.<sup>60</sup> The *imprimatur* bestowed by royalty is the important ingredient here. 'Supplement' lies close to the dictionary definition of 'a part added to complete a ... work', 'something added to supply a deficiency'; but also 'an auxiliary means, an aid' – a double term that captures effectively the role of continental art vis-à-vis the British. 'Foreign', too, interestingly inhabits a bipartite term: both 'proceeding from other persons or things', 'not of one's family', but also 'alien in character ... irrelevant, dissimilar, inappropriate ... not belonging to the place in which it is found'.<sup>61</sup>

It was a duplicity captured efficiently by the architecture too. In a further metaphor, *The Times* reported that the new galleries 'lie beyond' and 'communicate with' the galleries erected by Tate and Joel Duveen<sup>62</sup> – a supportive yet super-numerary function that is graphically echoed in successive plans for the galleries. An 'evolutionary' hang, either 'on-the-line' within single rooms or providing a sequence for the gallery as a whole, had by the early 1920s become standard in both the National Gallery and the Tate (transported from French and German practice of more than 60 years before). A kind of pre-script for an evolutionary chronology had been written into the enlarged Tate Gallery of 1899–1910, pulling apart the individual collections in favour of a chronology of British art from Fuseli and Blake to the later nineteenth century; but the first unabashedly chronological script had been deployed at Millbank once the pictures were back from wartime storage in the tunnels of the London Underground in 1921. It provided a layout later officially described as a 'fully chronological survey round the edge of the gallery' of English art from Gainsborough and Hogarth through later nineteenth-century art to 'contemporary' paintings, sculpture and drawings (Figure 65).<sup>63</sup> Here for the first time was a museal 'text' for British art history in the form of a processional route unfolding clockwise through the building, coeval with the physical compass of the Gallery and with the viewer's likely encounter with it.

To this basic historical chronology three smaller 'supplements' to this route are already visible on the 1921 plan: sculpture, (room XVI), a refreshment room at the basement level in the Gallery's centre, and the Turner Wing containing Turner's paintings and a now single 'Modern Foreign School' room (VIII) leading from (and returning to) a small display of Rossetti and Burne-Jones on the north-western corner of the building. Since its completion in 1910 the Turner Wing had leapt off from a group of mid-nineteenth-century drawings, paintings and watercolours.



65 Plan of the Tate Gallery, main floor, 1921.

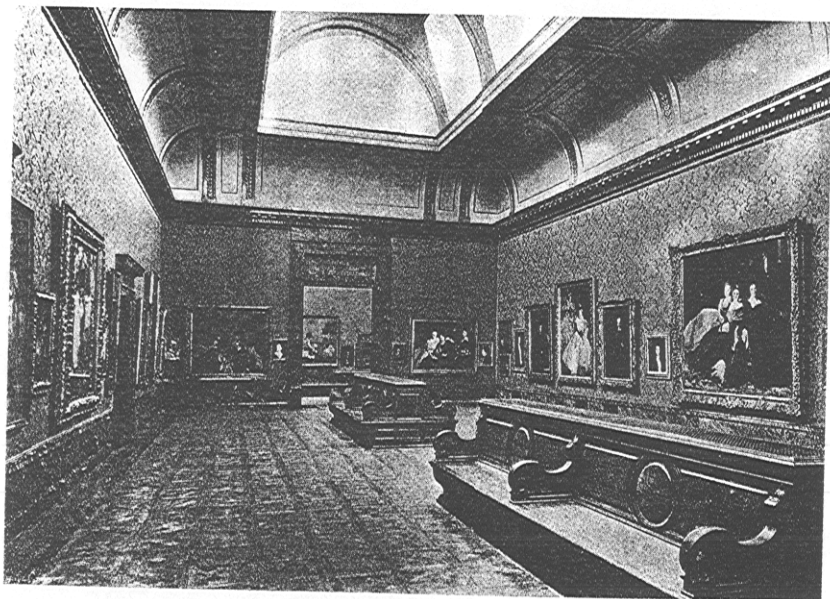
By 1921 Turner and his 'modern foreign' confrères appear as additional to, yet part of, the great pageant of British painting unfolding from Gainsborough and Hogarth to the modern day: Rossetti and Burne-Jones were two artists who by 1921 were widely seen as constituting a kind of cul-de-sac into which British painting had run technically in the 1860s, and from which Turner and the 'moderns' provided a temporary escape. Having seen how Turner and 'modern foreign' painting strayed into technical experiment conducted in the open air, the visitor could be reintroduced to the sturdier spectacle of later British nineteenth-century art, aware, perhaps, not only of its limitations but of the dangers of exceeding those limitations by going 'too far'.

What occurred with the opening of the 'Modern Foreign' galleries in Millbank's north-west corner in 1926 – the temporary loan collection was replaced in October of that year with the Gallery's own works – was a deepening of the museal unconscious established in 1921: not just Turner and a handful of foreign

painters, but an entire suite of Turner rooms opening out onto a 'Modern Foreign' suite of three galleries capped by a single Sargent room, also donated by Duveen and housing *inter alia* the 1922 gift by Alfred Wertheimer of paintings by Sargent, at the very furthest stage (Figure 66). Now, the 'supplemental' additions to the great pageant of British art were in place. Even though the basic linearity of British art was emphasised repeatedly – the visitor could 'follow the course of British art from Hogarth to the present day' in 'a continuous outer line'<sup>64</sup> – it was now supplemented at least twice: once by Turner, and for a second time by the French modern masters whom Turner by implication had inspired (Figure 67).<sup>65</sup>

Those relationships of identity and difference were celebrated in various ways. *The Times* took it upon itself to make a general point:

Nobody can pass through the British rooms at the Tate Gallery to the new foreign section without seeing that, allowing for the increased cosmopolitanism of art throughout the world, British art has well marked characters. Broadly, in landscape and in figure painting, they amount to an emphasis upon subject interest. Whether or not these [British] characters are 'artistic' is an idle question. They are ours; and if the opportunity for comparison afforded by the foreign section drives home the truth that, in the long run ... British art gains when its characters are accepted and loses when they are self-consciously avoided, a very useful purpose will be served. In any case the broader view cannot fail to stimulate interest in British art'.<sup>66</sup>

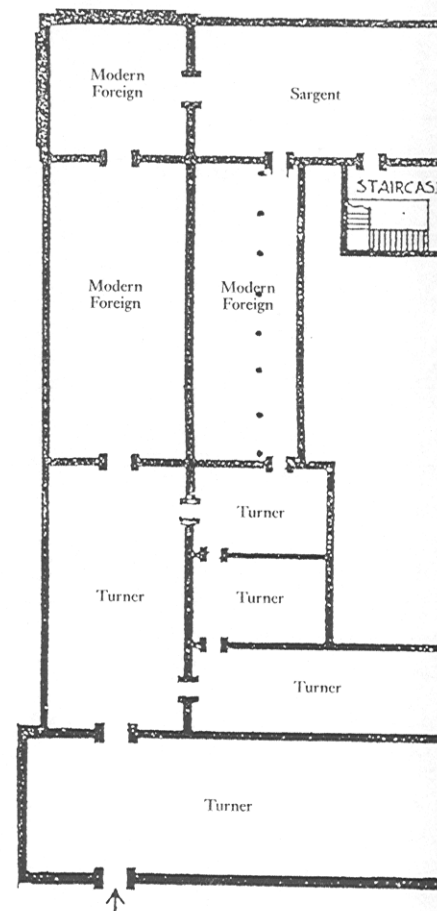


66 Tate Gallery: Modern Foreign and Sargent galleries (Sargent Gallery, Room XIV, looking towards the Modern Foreign Galleries), 1926.

Above all, the diplomatic view taken of the French needed to converge, at least, with the cultural. The military *entente* signed between Britain and France in April 1904 had been strikingly successful. Wartime alliance, despite regular diplomatic disagreements, had held sufficiently well to last until the unified command under Foch of March 1918. After Versailles and at least up to the settlement of the disputed Rhineland territories in 1925, relations between France and Britain had remained firm in the face of suspicions on both sides. Britain had been generally for loose interpretation of the Versailles conditions, especially those relating to reparations payments, while France was always insistent on a firm line. 'Collusion' between Britain and Germany was sometimes claimed; yet the prior need was always to remain vigilant about Germany's longer-term aims.<sup>67</sup> So while it cannot be stated that Anglo-French diplomatic relations were always unblemished, the wider culture already contained enough caricatures of the national eccentricities of the three nations to make certain kinds of comparison inevitable. The Armistice had encouraged a negative view taken of German modernism in general and Expressionism in particular (the art of Scandinavia, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium and Russia lay well outside the frame). But to look at

Lord Curzon's interventions or Lord D'Abernon's is to observe a gradual knitting together of *realpolitik* with the cultural sphere. Curzon had been Parliamentary Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs under Lord Salisbury, Viceroy of India, Chancellor of Oxford University, Leader of the Lords and Foreign Secretary, before being narrowly passed over when Baldwin became Prime Minister in 1923. In D'Abernon's words, he was

born grandiloquent ... dignified, ostentatious, ... an aristocrat of the English eighteenth century ... [who] already spoke like a Prime Minister when still an undergraduate ... [and whose report on the National Gallery] constitutes an epitome of all that administrative wisdom and an instructed taste could suggest.<sup>68</sup>



67 Plan of the Modern Foreign, Sargent and Turner galleries, Tate Gallery, 1926.

D'Abernon himself was Ambassador to Germany from 1920 to 1926 after a career in politics and diplomacy, and handled the reparations negotiations and the Treaty of Locarno in 1925, which settled the question of French security after years of lingering post-Versailles animosity from the Germans. D'Abernon had been close to 'the Souls', an intellectual group of the 1890s comprising Arthur Balfour and George Curzon (its leaders), Margot Tennant, Haldane, George Wyndham and Henry Cust, possessed of 'a passion for education and reading – an appreciation of verbal felicity – enjoyment of literary style – affinity to French culture – a taste for introspection and self-analysis'.<sup>69</sup> It was a group which, in common with the Crabbet Club, had in its heyday glorified in after-dinner sophistry and brilliant conversation against the conventional grain. Yet imperialists and Tories its members mostly were; and in their later careers came to wield enormous power and influence in government, the civil service and the cultural world.<sup>70</sup> The domination by Lords Curzon and D'Abernon of the Government committees on art and of the Boards of Trustees at Trafalgar Square and Millbank had made them, in effect, the real power-brokers of post-war British art.

D'Abernon in particular came to hold a view of French culture *vis-à-vis* the British which chimed exactly with the imperatives of the 'modern foreign' project at Millbank. In applied arts as well as fine, they had a gift for the 'light and fanciful, the graces of life, the intimate scene'; the two nations together have a 'peculiar reciprocal trust'. The Germans, on the other hand, were unattractive but great. The French have suavity and grace. The Germans were sturdy, hard-working, thorough, earnest plodders; nature-loving and sporting, they took copious libations, possessed a predilection for discipline and precision, and were tolerant of pain (they needed less anaesthetic than the English); they were erudite, lacking in political instinct, naturally envious, mentally encyclopaedic, exhaustively thorough, dry, objective: they were 'reliable and Doric', as D'Abernon finally puts it. As for the French, 'there is no nation in the world that better knows how to enjoy life; perhaps another way of saying that there is no nation more intelligent'. They are more civilised, more logical, more given to finesse and irony, have 'supreme manners'; they have refinement; are amused by immorality (when not actually immoral themselves); they are also instinctive and pleasure-seeking, and have a 'feminine bias in the French nature, a bias which pervades their whole attitude to life'.

Self-satisfaction is so natural in them as to cease to be offensive; there is no bravado; no assumption; merely the recognition of their own conviction of superiority. In the cult of Narcissus they are past masters, and we have much to learn from them. [They are] ... blithely and justifiably free of interest in other countries. Why trouble about what less polite, less cultivated nations have done or are doing? Is not Paris the centre of light for the universe?

As for the British, D'Abernon needed merely to say that his countrymen 'have a vague consciousness that together [with France] we stand for the strongest

elements of European culture and civilisation', borne of the knowledge that we have been 'fighting on the same battlefields since the eleventh century'.<sup>71</sup>

### An audience for modern art?

So far as the public for modern art is concerned, matters are considerably more complex. In the first place there is little documentary evidence of exactly who visited the Tate Gallery in 1926 or what they saw or felt once there. On the other hand a variety of texts can be assembled that reveal how far the constitution of a London art public had evolved since 1897. These texts are various and contradictory: from them one can deduce a conflicting play of expectations, demands and self-identifications, from which several publics within the middle and upper classes begin tentatively to emerge.

It should be remembered that not all published opinions on modern art were enthusiastic or even temperate. To the *Morning Post* the Tate was a 'a dump for work of those addicted to isms of international art anarchy', while patrons and collectors like Sir Michael Sadler or Lord Henry Bentinck were part of a 'precious bolshevik art set'.<sup>72</sup> 'If the artist does not paint for the public, for whom does he paint?' asked the *Morning Post* in 1923:

today the walls of picture galleries are defaced with graphic aberrations which are not pictures, and which are not art. They have nothing to do with art. They are destitute alike of drawing, design, and true colour. They are extremely ugly, and sometimes worse than ugly. But the public are told by persons who assert their authority that these horrible objects are the fashion. Hence the public declines to buy any pictures at all. They will not waste their money on futurist, jazz, cubist, and other forms of insanity ... the degradation which has befallen British art is appalling to contemplate ... It is of no use to try to cast the blame on the foreign eccentrics, Gauguin and Matisse and the rest of the Bolsheviks in art. They have nothing to do with England; and English artists have never yet achieved any good by imitating foreign fashions, which are derided even in their country of origins ... It is impossible to paint a state of mind; though the enterprise is frequently attempted in lunatic asylums, as any mental specialist will testify. Our Bolshevik practitioners would find it greatly to the benefit of their health to dig in the garden, or break stones, or do anything else in the open air which was both honest and fatiguing.<sup>73</sup>

*Morning Post* aesthetics were evidently familiar to E. Wake Cook, who followed his 1904 book *Anarchy in Art and Chaos in Criticism* with a new critique entitled *Regression in Art and the Suicide of the Royal Academy* (1924). Cook, who had been founder of the Victorian Artists' Society and Secretary of the Royal British-Colonial Society of Artists, fulminated splenetically against the 'Inversionists', 'Newists' and others (mostly members of the New English Art Club) whom he accused of encouraging fashionable and even degenerate work. The reader may be entertained by Cook's description of an 'Inversionist':

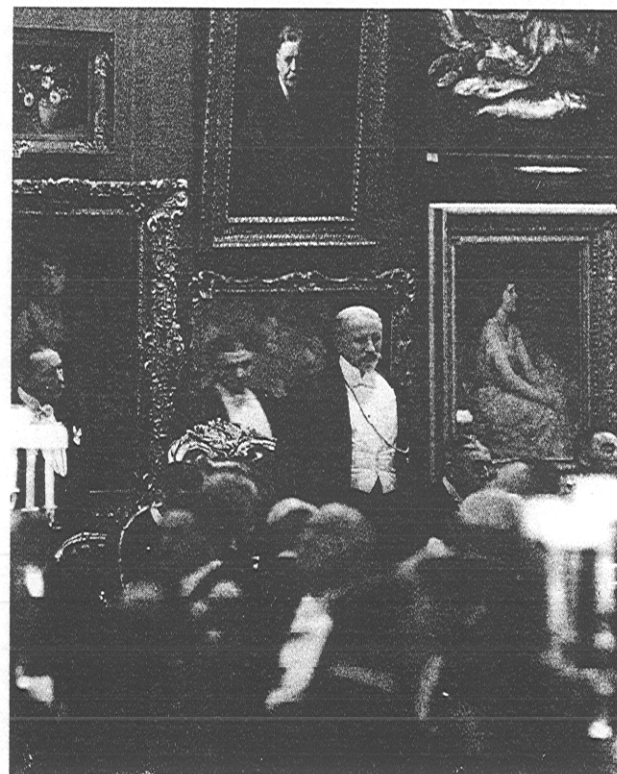
When once a person gets caught in the whirl of 'Modernity' he has partaken of 'the insane root that takes the reason prisoner', and 'fair is foul, and foul is fair' to these Inversionists. The pathological aspect of such abnormal tastes is like those cases shown by Dr. Soltau Fenwick quoted in the *Morning Post*, where people eat paper, hair, thread, varnish, polish, mud, clay, soot, sand, glass, and live fish. There have been dirt-eating epidemics, as described by Hunter; and the Inversionists who prefer mud to colour, and deformity (bad drawing) to beauty, are equally abnormal. Then there is Satanism and the Black Mass by the Inversionist in religion; and the burlesquing of all things hitherto held sacred, by the Bolsheviks in Russia. All these are forms of the same disease.<sup>74</sup>

Of course, when the *Morning Post* lambasted 'anarchy' or when Wake Cook insisted that gallery directors exhibiting 'deformities' should be given 'half a century's leave of absence to recover their normality', each was using colourful rhetoric much closer to everyday speech (and much less vulnerable to libel) than would be acceptable now. But the close correspondence between the views of a very conservative middle and lower-middle-class newspaper and a cantankerous *retardataire* watercolourist demonstrates an important cross-class alliance against the freedoms of modern art. Importantly, a less extreme version of that alliance could be easily detected within the Royal Academy of Arts. Following a degree of liberalisation between 1921 and 1924 at the hands of Sir Aston Webb, Frank Dicksee, already a beneficiary of the Chantrey Bequest and President of the Royal Academy from 1924 to 1928, pulled in the reins once more to counsel a frankly imperialist approach to the practice of art. 'You of the British race, do not consent to be dragged by the heels behind continental dealers', he urged the Academy's students in 1925; the best works of art of the past 'are surely better guides than those false prophets who cry aloud to Baal'. Identifying true art with 'inner spirit' and erecting standards of 'absolute beauty' based on classical and high Renaissance masters, Dicksee chastised artistic 'primitivism' that came from the era of the cave-dwellers to find its contemporary expression in modern 'foreign' art from Van Gogh to Cézanne:

Our ideal of beauty must be the white man's; the Hottentot Venus has no charms for us, and the elaborate tattooing of the New Zealand Maoris does not, to our thinking, enhance the beauty of the human form; so in spite of some modern tendencies, if we have to bear 'the white man's burden', in Heaven's name let us at least keep his ideals!<sup>75</sup>

Dicksee at least recognised that the recent world war had constituted a 'ruthless mutilation' on the face of civilisation, and that for some it had issued in calls for new standards of beauty to correct the perceived prettiness of some Victorian art. Yet by 1927, the year following the launching of the new galleries at the Tate, he was repeating his counsel that 'deviating from nature' was 'morbid', 'unwholesome' and 'contorted', proclaiming that the new order of beauty 'founded on a negroid or other barbaric type' was akin to an 'unclean presence' or 'miasma' that 'has been spread around [and] from which it is difficult to escape – it affects the temperature, and in the sum of things lowers the average'.<sup>76</sup>

Like Wake Cook, Dicksee was an establishment figure who knew that his voice was being heard. The Royal Academy particularly could be likened to a public platform from which important pronouncements could be made (Figure 68). As he put it in a toast preceding the 1927 Academy Dinner, 'we have always found ... the greatest in the land at this table, representing the Sovereign, the State in all its many Departments, distinguished representatives of foreign Nations and the leaders in all the Arts and Sciences and mental activities that contribute to the age in which we live'.<sup>77</sup> Dicksee clearly knew that the sovereign had opened the Tate's modern galleries the previous year. The point is that two establishments in British culture were now in existence; two major institutions with their own methods of articulation and appeal, each intent on garnering an audience and instructing that audience in generally divergent ways; a higher and modernist audience predominantly from the educated upper middle class, and a residual and larger – but arguable less powerful – lower audience formed out of an alliance of plain men, patriots, imperialists and political traditionalists whose first duty was to 'the countryside', to 'England', and to 'the nation'.



68 Sir Frank Dicksee, President, speaking at the Royal Academy Dinner, 2 May 1925, photograph.



Native Englishmen and visitors alike were seemingly obsessed in the early years of the 1920s by what England had become within a rapidly modernised and still modernising world. Anxiety about the particular survival of the 'English character' could take an overtly nostalgic, idealising form. From George Santayana's *Soliloquies in England* (1922) through Stanley Baldwin's prime-ministerial *On England* (1926) to J. B. Priestley's *Good Companions* (1930) or his *English Journey* (1934) the nation was reminded of characterisations of Englishness that for that lower and plainer constituency had an enduring appeal. They ranged from Santayana's defence of the Englishman's snobbery, caution, simplicity and cleanliness – his 'weather in the soul' – to Baldwin's passionate conservatism, his love of moderation and the Worcestershire countryside, to Priestley's middlebrow tales of ordinary folk and their suspicions of the city, of trade, of artistic sophistication in any form.<sup>78</sup> Above all, according to Baldwin,

England is the country, and the country is England ... The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the cornerake on a dewy morning, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that has been seen since England was a land, and may be seen in England long after the Empire has perished and every works in England has ceased to function, for centuries the one eternal sight of England. The wild anenomes in the woods in April, the last load at night of hay being drawn down a lane as the twilight comes on ... these things strike down into the very depths of our nature, and touch chords that go back to the beginning of time and the human race'.<sup>79</sup>

Tension between industrial modernity and cleavage to a national past was arguably near its height in the spring and summer of 1926. The BBC had recently announced ten million listeners within range of a transmitter: what was still the British Broadcasting Company in 1926 was to become the Corporation by the following year. Baird's principle of transmitting motion pictures – television – was demonstrated at the Royal Institution in London in January. For nine days in May 1926 the Trades Union Congress announced a general strike. Stanley Baldwin's announcement on 12 May – on the radio – that the strike was over was followed by the sounds of a choir singing 'Jerusalem'. Baldwin himself had just given a speech to the dinner of the Royal Society of British Sculptors at which he had hoped that English town and countryside

should be permanently beautified by whatever art in its proper place has to offer, [and that] that art should be our own native British art. I hope, in spite of some evidence to the contrary, that we may pass through that curious snobbish subjection to foreign names and tastes which has been rife in this country so long.<sup>80</sup>

As his speech 'England' had reminded the nation (it had been published to popular acclaim just before the General Strike and would become a staple of popular patriotism right up until the eve of the Second World War):

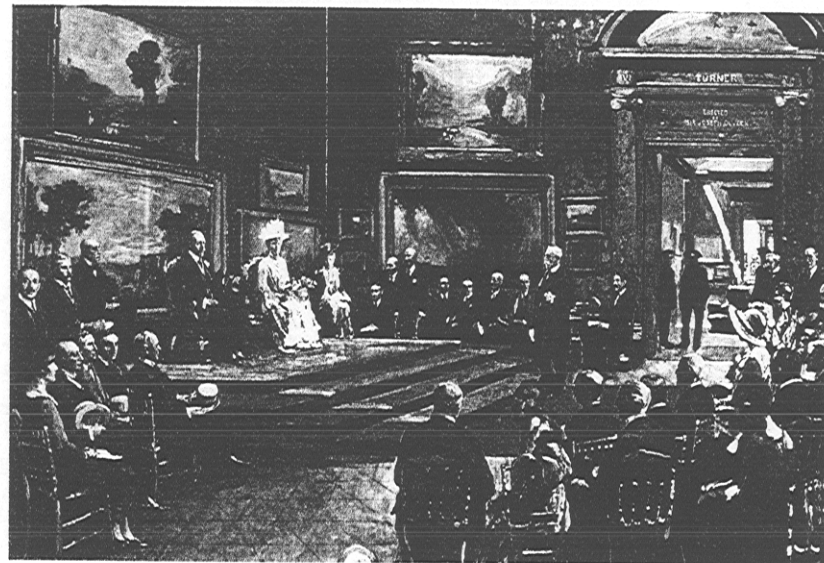


Plate 11 John Lavery, *King George accompanied by Queen Mary at the Opening of the Modern Foreign and Sargeant Galleries at the Tate, 1926* (also shows Phillip Sassoon, D. S. McColl, J. B. Manson, Charles Aitken), oil on canvas, 85.7 x 116.8 cm.

Plate 12 Alfred Munnings, *Does the Subject Matter?*, 1956, oil on canvas, 78.8 x 106.7 cm.

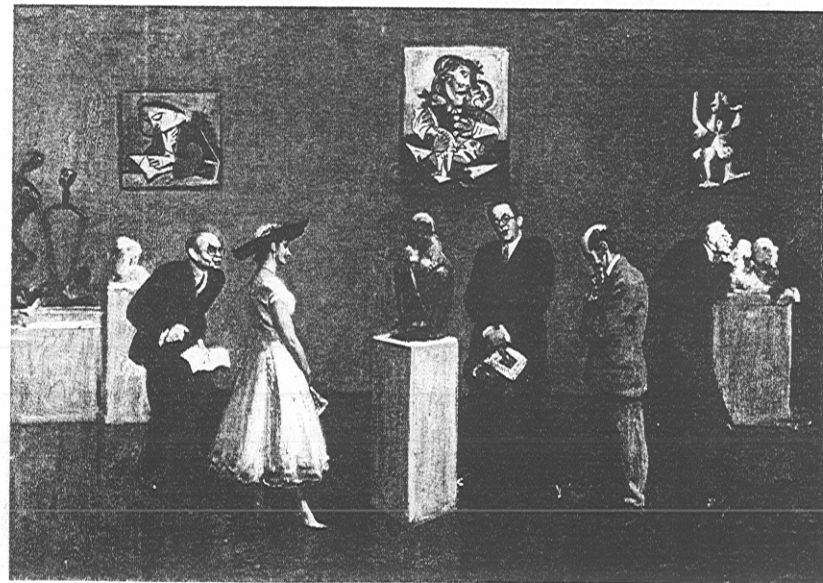




Plate 13  
Festival of Britain,  
1951: left, the Sea and  
Ships Pavilion with  
Siegfried Charoux's  
*The Islanders* facing  
the river; right, the  
Dome of Discovery;  
background left, the  
Skylon by Powell and  
Moya.



Plate 14 John Hilliard, *Ten Runs past a Fixed Point (3)*, 1/500 to 1 second, 1971, and *Sixty Seconds of Light*, 1970–71, photographs, 'The New Art', Hayward Gallery, 1972.

There are chronicles ... who said it was the apeing of the French manners by our English ancestors that made us the prey of William the Norman, and led to our defeat at Hastings. Let that be a warning to us not to ape any foreign country. Let us be content to trust ourselves and to be ourselves.<sup>81</sup>

Writers on the city of London, meanwhile, did their patriotic best to transport picturesque notions of 'nation' to the heart of the industrial metropolis. St John Adcock's three-volume *Wonderful London*, published for a home audience in 1926, contained short essays and photographs on the 'variety', 'charm', 'elusive beauty', 'strangeness' and 'fascination ... that so many realise, but so few feel able to put into words' concerning 'the greatest city the world has ever seen'.<sup>82</sup> The poet Alfred Noyes painted a verbal picture that attempted to dispel a lingering image of cosiness, tradition and the 'olde worlde'. The fogs were 'only the outward and visible sign of [London's] inscrutable character', Noyes said; 'it is the deepest city in the world. No one has ever fathomed its mind or heart ... [a city] of bigness and substantiality', a world capital that did not mind being indifferent to the individual – indeed it was the 'bigness and substantiality' of the place 'upon which most of our individual freedom depends. And there is no freedom for the individual like that which is bestowed upon him by the indifference of London'.<sup>83</sup> It was a place of rapidly multiplying possibilities, a city that would not blush at the sight of 'an Oriental potentate ... striding along a London pavement, or a visitor riding a camel down Piccadilly'; a city of the Mother of Parliament, of Chaucer, the Crusades, the Golden Hind, Shakespeare and his plays, an 'authentic fairyland, and all the more indubitable for its solidity and even its grossness', replete not only with the dew-drop pretences of the pantomime but with the 'more substantial nutriment [of] steak and kidney puddings [and] a tankard of proper ale'.<sup>84</sup> In 1926 – the year of *Bye Bye Blackbird*, the first traffic lights in Piccadilly Circus and the General Strike – London was a city in which all classes and ethnic types, all degrees of wealth, refinement, criminality, trade or occupation could be found together: London was a city of boatmen, flowergirls, charladies, urchins, street musicians, hawkers, harpists, Punch-and-Judy shows, cats and dogs – all were celebrated affectionately in photographs and text (Figure 69).

Of course little could be done that would reconcile the London of urchins and flowergirls with the audience projected by Duveen's new galleries. Indeed, a remarkable result of the drive for 'modern foreign' art was that the lower-class residuum that had been so important to the Barnetts and the Rossiters in the 1890s fell out of consideration; the battle for audience definition was increasingly confined to the internally differentiated spectrum of the middle class.

Few things exemplify the struggle between modernity and tradition so well as the new building itself (Figures 70, 71). Perhaps it was obvious from the beginning that a 'modern foreign' gallery at Millbank would require resolution of at least three potentially conflicting demands: continuity with the existing edifice, a sense of up-to-dateness in the decor, and what Duveen himself (as the donor) was inclined to



Concertinas can be played well by skilled hands, but an organ depends on maker rather than player. At one time the Italian organ grinder with his monkey in fez and jacket was a familiar sight; he is gone to-day, but this patriarch carries on the tradition without simian aid.



Some street musicians make their appeal by the sweetness of the strains they produce: some, one would think, by blackmail. "Till enough has been subscribed, 'O public, endure us!'" Nor would Pharaoh have hardened his heart before an ill-played concertina.



SOME OF THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS THAT LIVEN LONDON STREETS

Curbside hawkers are to be found wherever shoppers congregate, but Holborn at Christmas-time is a favourite pitch of theirs. With their pecking dolls and aerolastic toys—mechanisms that never appear to function so deftly after purchase—they are often a greater joy to children than all the expensively garnished shop-windows on the other side of the pavement. The gramophone charioted in a perambulator seems the last and most sordid victory of the age of science. Even a barrel-organ, they say, needs some skill in the grinding.

<sup>69</sup> 'Some of the Sights and Sounds that liven London Streets', from A. St John Adcock (ed.), *Wonderful London*, 3 vols, 1926–27, vol. I, p. 221.

decree in terms of architectural scale and size. The 'progressive' reaction against late Victorian wall coverings in red, mauve and green that had been urged by Morris and the Aesthetic Movement, tending towards lighter wall surfaces and sparser picture arrangements, had only selectively been adopted in England in the first decade of the century. However, a 'modern' decor had been adopted for the redecoration of most of the Tate Gallery after its reopening in 1921:

for the most part, Sundour fabrics, with broken texture but without pattern, for all hangings; pale neutral tones, as a rule, being selected for the modern Impressionist pictures; darker dawn shades for the eighteenth and early nineteenth century pictures and a reddish-purple for the pre-Raphaelites.<sup>85</sup>

Yet Duveen, who knew the Turner Wing had met with opprobrium in this respect, still favoured richness and grandiosity for the new building: it was not only his taste, but his experience of how the modern American collections were being hung. There had followed a lengthy and acrimonious disagreement between Duveen and the Gallery. Duveen wanted Verde Antique marbling; the Tate wanted the quieter Tinos marble. Duveen wanted lofty doorways and a high cornice; the Tate wanted continuity with the existing building and a less grandiose appearance. The lighting and roof structure were also disputed. Early in the project Aitken wrote to Lord D'Abernon complaining that Duveen's architect W. H. Romaine Walker 'seems to have almost an obsession with height ... he also favours a somewhat ornate scheme of decoration ... his style seems to me neither good in itself nor even the *dernier cri* of the taste of the moment'.<sup>86</sup> The resulting compromise merged the grandiose impulses of the transatlantic collector and the 'moderating' influence of the English artistic establishment, with relatively liberal use of wall space for the pictures. The press statement announcing the opening of the new galleries claimed that 'no money has been spared in the decoration ... the green marble doorways, silk wall hangings, painted and gilt ceilings, walnut seats and marble-bordered polished parquet floors creating an atmosphere reminiscent of old Italian palaces', while the lighting system, based on principles devised by S. Hurst Seager, was claimed to 'eliminate the bright illumination of the floor which caused dark and low-toned paintings to become merely mirrors for the spectators'. For the ventilation, 'the whole of the air in these galleries is washed and purified ... In fact it would be possible to entirely eliminate the glazing of the pictures, as in these galleries ordinary London atmosphere with its well known detrimental effects, will no longer exist'.<sup>87</sup>

The point is that such a space, structured architecturally around a compromise between British aestheticism and Duveen's transatlantic Mogul style (or what he could get of it) made for a particular ambience: on the one hand sufficiently 'modern' to sustain brightly coloured paintings in a visibly post-Victorian space; on the other, an evident nod in the direction of the opulent vulgarity which Duveen believed was *au courant* at the time. In 1926 it was surely an ambience suggestive of a particular audience for paintings and the life-styles and acquisitive interests implied by them. Authoritative if vulgar classicism, spacious country-house

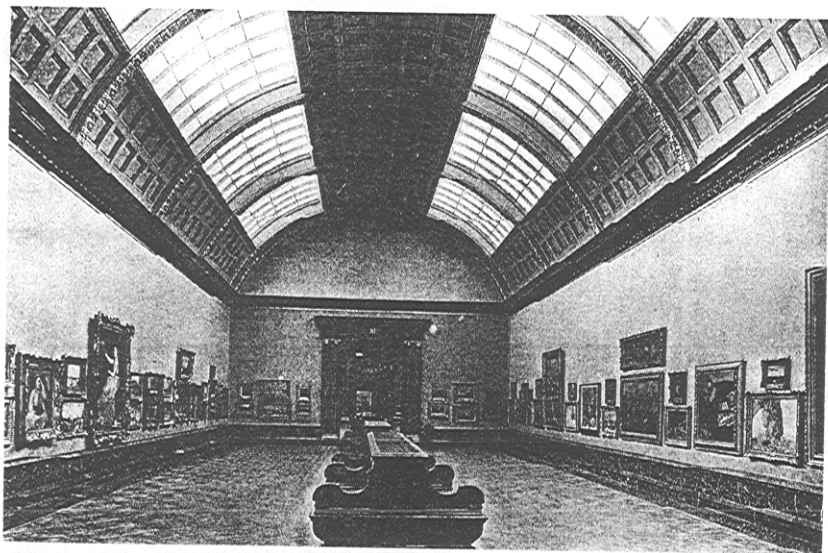
dimensions and a set of 'classics' of modern French painting could connote travel, sophistication and Britain's membership in a new if still unstable European order within a wider world.

What positioned and distinguished the truly 'modern' observer in 1926, perhaps – what lent at least the illusion of participation in that wider world – was a degree of cognitive and perceptual risk. Indeed there are signs in the later part of the decade that a more 'primitive' account of 'modern foreign' art was being contemplated: signs that the projected audience for modern culture could define its identity by incorporation of a more dangerous, libidinous art. To isolate one important symptom: a split emerges in the later 1920s in the very language with which paintings are described: between the laconic, ratiocinative taxonomy of the catalogue descriptions, and what was permitted in that very different interface between the Gallery and the public, the guide–lecturer's speech. Thus Monet's *Beach at Trouville*, purchased through the Courtauld Fund in 1924, reads in the words of the Gallery's *Catalogue* for 1926 like a coastguard's or a meteorologist's report:

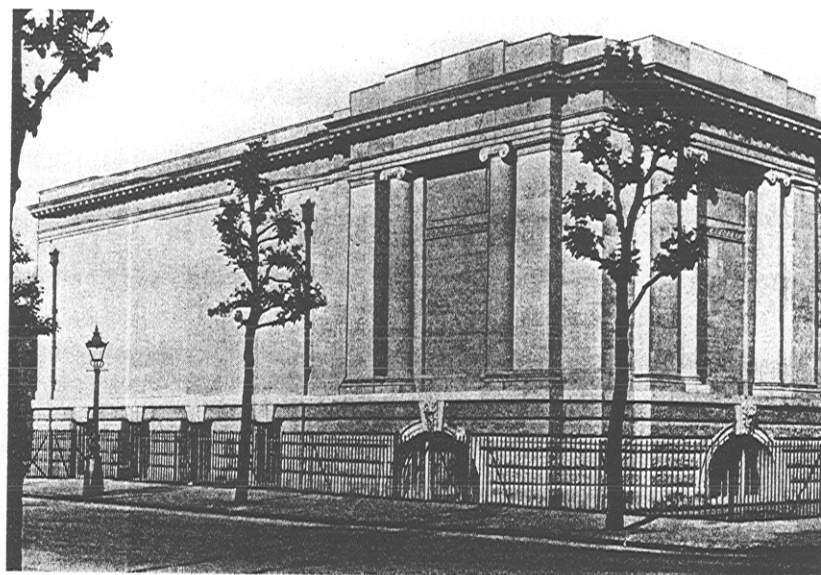
Foreground, left, a woman in white, seated, three quarters length, facing right and holding a blue parasol; a hat with flowers; right, a woman in black, three quarters length ... black hat and black parasol; background ... the sea; cloudy sky with glimpses of blue. Signed 'C.I.M.70'.

Or the same artist's *Vétheuil: Sunshine and Snow*:

Right, cottages and poplars on a river bank sloping left to water with a boat, sunlit hills beyond; all under snow, clear blue and primrose sky.<sup>88</sup>



70 New Duveen Wing: Modern French gallery, *The Builder*, 9 July 1926.



71 New Duveen Wing: South Pavilion, *The Builder*, 9 July 1926.

By contrast, Edwin Fagg's little book *Modern Foreign Masters* of four years later – he had been appointed the first guide–lecturer to the Tate in 1927 – describes the latter work in terms of

mature purpose ... great sincerity and often great beauty... the charm of the painting's light was feelingly analysed and lived again in [Monet's] discerning studies; the exquisite moments yielded their colour secrets to his sympathy, penetration and method. And it is obvious that his method was strictly appropriate to his end; the broken surface, the bold touches of colour in juxtaposition bring with them the glamour of sunshine and snow with a power that could not be surpassed. Over the river bank, and the water and the sunlit hills beyond, against the pallor of the sky, the brilliant light vibrates in tones of rose and gold; cool shadows echo a luminous cobalt, with here and there a touch of green and violet.<sup>89</sup>

Fagg's language is suddenly sensuous and climactic, suggestive of a rich observation of 'nature' which the visitor will appreciate and understand. The passage brings us directly to Van Gogh and Gauguin, two artists who were accepted into the fold of 'modern foreign' painting relatively late in the day. Van Gogh's *Yellow Chair*, also purchased by the Courtauld Fund in 1924 (Figure 72), was described efficiently in the 1926 *Catalogue* as 'a yellow rush-bottomed chair with an ornamental clay pipe and an open packet of tobacco on it', with the artist himself perfunctorily as 'Dutch school, painter of still life'.<sup>90</sup> Yet in guide–lecturer's prose the two painters become



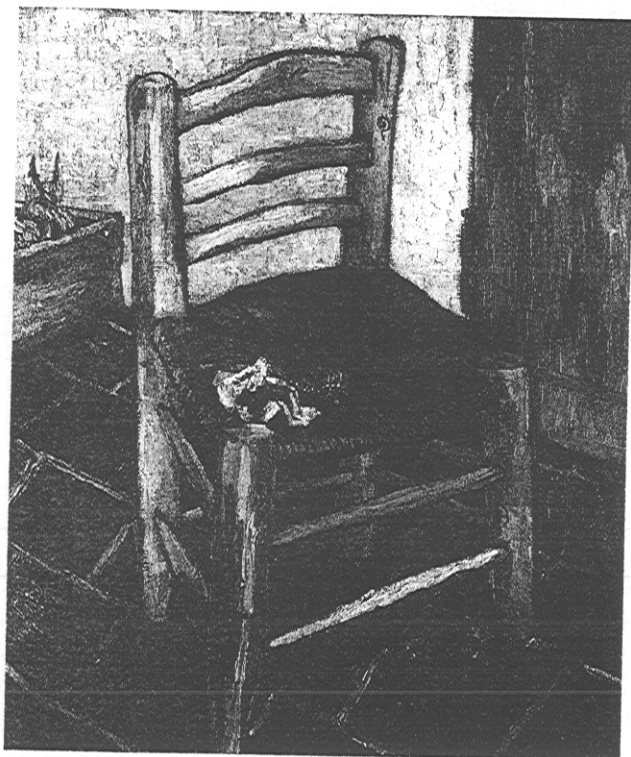
those strangely romantic men, the first with some of the qualities of a saint, the second with a stronger dose of the devil in his nature. [They are] both true Bohemians – that is to say, most unpleasant fellows, but each with the instinct for some fundamental in painting, and an enemy to its pedantries.

Van Gogh's moods were 'double-edged', now 'engaging and simple', now 'flaming and ecstatic'. The *Yellow Chair* – the painting that Wake Cook and other traditionalists had so roundly condemned – now became

neither merely illustrative nor tamely decorative; it has received a bold treatment, in tune with [Van Gogh's] heightened feeling, which makes it actual and not merely a discreet abstraction; in the painter's vision its rusticity had become heroic, evoking the luminous pigment, lifting the yellow chair, red tiles, blue-green door, and white-washed wall to the level of his rare emotion.<sup>91</sup>

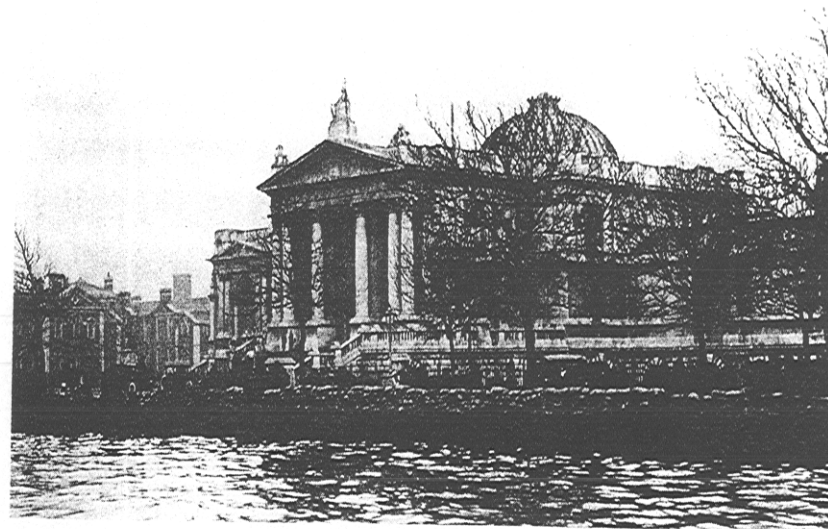
By extension Gauguin – at least his Tahitian world – is 'primitive, remote, and above all calm, with the static note which invites rich pigment to rise to barbaric splendour', and in which the artist is given to 'primitive work [whose] strong

72 Vincent Van Gogh,  
*The Yellow Chair*,  
1888–89, oil on  
canvas, 91.8 x 73 cm,  
purchased by the  
Courtauld Fund,  
1924.



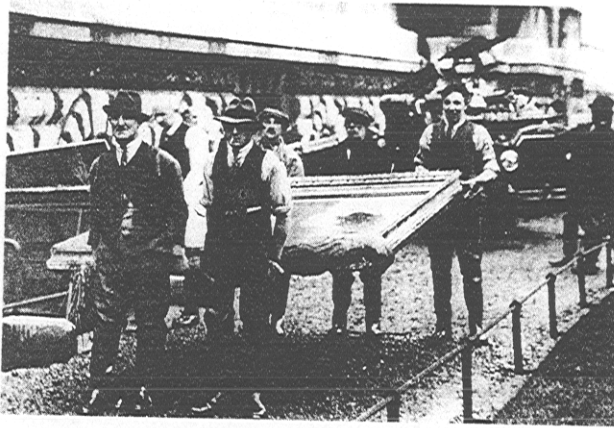
appeal which outlasts the moment lies in the fact that the artist is saying only what he really wants to say'.<sup>92</sup> Myths of the 'primitive' creativity of the modern artist were born in these years, while comforting narratives of hearth and home, such as had been provided by Tate and the Chantrey Bequest a mere thirty years before, were being expunged from the sophisticated metropolitan and national psyche.

In a literal sense this was effected in the early hours of Saturday, 7 January 1928, when a flood tide on the Thames – in some reports a surge from upstream – caused the river to burst its banks in central London, first near Lambeth Bridge and again directly opposite the entrance to the Tate at Millbank (Figure 73), flooding the basement to a depth of five and a half feet in the front of the Gallery, and to eight and a half feet in the Turner and Modern Foreign galleries at the rear. Director Charles Aitken, roused at five a.m. with Sir Robert Witt and Jim Ede, commandeered pumps and salvage equipment and with the help of workmen lifted most of the submerged pictures to safety on the upper floors (Figure 74). By the Gallery's own account of the flood, of the 234 oil paintings imperilled, 197 suffered no or only slight damage, 27 were seriously damaged and 18 were 'completely spoiled'. But these were mainly Victorian paintings of the kind that by 1928 did nothing for the dominant part of the national psyche: a verbal report in Parliament on 9 February said of the badly damaged paintings that they 'belong, almost without exception, to the mid-Victorian period, and none of them can be regarded as of primary importance ... All the most important pictures in the gallery, being hung on the ground floor, remained unaffected by the flood'.<sup>93</sup> The Gallery's own report confirmed that 'few [of the destroyed pictures], which included works by Archer, Davis, Delaroche,



73 The Thames at Millbank during the flood of January 1928, photograph.

74 Pictures being taken to safety following the flood at the Tate Gallery, London, January 1928, photograph.



Harding, Hilton, Lance, Landseer, Leighton, Martin, Philip, Smirke, E. M. Ward, J. Ward and West would be regarded as of primary importance from an artistic point of view'.<sup>94</sup> At issue in the framing of such descriptions is the outcome of the struggle already joined: on the one hand, the values of Victorian art still championed by cultural traditionalists, pitched against the modernisers who wanted a special kind of accommodation to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture of the French – or the 'primitivising' part of it that could function as a supplement to a more traditional sense of national identity at home.

Yet it should be remembered that those myths of primitivism were themselves keyed to the dynamics of the competitive industrial world. 'Never before', Manson wrote unwittingly in his guide to the Tate Gallery of 1926, 'have men, who had been guilty of foisting new ideas on a reluctant world, been so conclusively vindicated': Degas, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro 'though willing to starve for their principles, lived to see their derided works competed for by collectors and galleries ... for sums of which they little dreamed in those early days',<sup>95</sup> that is, very close to the way in which the Victorian business world had evolved through individual invention, persistence and raw determination in the face of hostile opinion. Attempts to consolidate an idea of 'nation' around Baldwin's speeches or the remnants of empire were not, after all, likely to be successful in the longer run. The Wembley Empire Exhibition of 1924–25 and the activities of the Empire Day Movement, both bolstered by the nascent patriotism of the BBC and directed especially at the young, had gone off like damp squibs.<sup>96</sup> The cultural modernisers felt they had a solution: the arts could propose a new relationship with the continent, and with France in particular, such that 'Britain' as a concept would emerge as an entity all the more secure. A result of this dialectic would be that battle lines between the Royal Academy and the Tate Gallery would become even more certainly defined in the years to come: what remained of 'the public' as a body would participate, first in the spectacle of its own division and fragmentation, then in its eventual decay.



## Post-war positions: Arts Council, LCC and ICA

IN THE YEARS 1945–49, the state attempted to assume far greater responsibility for (if not direct control of) the conditions of public culture than in pre-war days. The Labour victory of 1945 presaged a kind of nationalisation of culture as well as of education, transport and the major industries. There are reasons why this should have been so: the nation that emerged victorious from the experience of war was arguably better disposed towards concepts of cultural democracy and shareable values than the class-fragmented society of the 1920s or 1930s.

There indeed occurred a vigorous and often shrill debate in the national press and media in those years which gave every appearance of first intensifying and then resolving the battle between a 'modern' and a 'traditionalist' public for art that had erupted in the ranks of the middle classes over a generation before. Yet now both the context and content of the discussion was different. First, the number of national or quasi-national bodies in the public space of art was greater than before: the Arts Council of Great Britain and then the Institute of Contemporary Arts joined the dialogue between the Academy and the Tate that, already frenzied enough, would reach a kind of *dénouement* in 1949. Secondly, the extension of reading, listening and viewing downwards and horizontally across the classes lent to the cultural debate a quality that was altogether new. The national press and media treated the already fragmented middle 'public' to a spectacle of identification and dis-identification which allowed citizens access to the debate on artistic values to an unprecedented degree. Cartoons and newspaper correspondence indicated habits of appearance, attitude and allegiance (frequently with both position and counter-position on display). An enlarged audience was brought into the debate by staged discussions on radio and TV. Yet the terms of that access are inevitably controversial: how it affected the quality and make-up of the London public is the question to be examined here.

### War-time energies

After 1945, many 'insider' observers confidently claimed to have noticed a real growth of interest in the visual arts since 1939. John Rothenstein, appointed