



- Welcome, this is a two-hour session and I will take a short break in the middle. I am happy to take questions at any time and if there is a lot of discussion that will be good.
- Today we are looking at a brother and sister who started out together in Tenby, Wales, went to the Slade together and later took very different paths. I will be talking about the two artists and then I will show you the work of Gwen John in chronological sequence followed by the work of Augustus John. To avoid confusion I will call them 'Gwen' and 'Augustus'.
- Let us look at their self-portraits ...

NOTES

- There are few brother and sister artists. The most famous are perhaps Rosa Bonheur and her less well-known brother Auguste, an animal painter. John Brett, the Pre-Raphaelite-style artist and his sister Rosa Brett. Hilda Carline, first wife of Stanley Spencer, had two brothers who were artists, Richard and Sydney. Marcel Duchamp had a sister Suzanne who was a Dada artist. Anne, Barbara, Charlotte, Jane and Patrick Nasmyth were all artists and children of artist Alexander Nasmyth. There was also the Peale family of American artists.

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Gwen John (1876-1939), *Self-Portrait*, 1902, 44.8 x 34.9 cm, Tate



Augustus John (1878-1961), *Tete Farouche (or Portrait of the Artist)*, c. 1900, 28.40 x 22.50 cm, Scottish National Gallery

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Self-Portrait*, 1902, 44.8 x 34.9 cm, Tate

Augustus John (1878-1961), *Tete Farouche* (literally 'Wild Head' or *Portrait of the Artist*), c. 1900, etching on paper, 28.40 x 22.50 cm, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art

- In these self-portraits Gwen appears quiet and self-contained and Augustus intense and out-going but let us look at their early life more closely.
- Gwen, Augustus and their two siblings were Welsh. Their **mother Augusta** (1848-1884) was often ill and died when Gwen was eight which is when they moved to Tenby. Their **father Edwin** (1847-1938) was a solicitor and cold and distant although not uncaring. Gwen did not go to his funeral as she lived a quiet life in France although he used to write to her frequently.
- Augustus attended a **private school in Tenby**. He was mischievous and it was at school that a teacher hit him so hard round the head the he remained **partially deaf** all his life. Later he briefly attended **Tenby School of Art** and then went on to the **Slade when he was 17** (in 1894). He was an immediate hit because of his drawing skills. Gwen eventually got permission from her father and went to the Slade later the same year when she was 19.
- There was then a strange event. In his early days at the Slade, Augustus '**appeared a neat, timid, unremarkable personality**', but after injuring his head diving into the sea when he returned to Tenby in 1897 he became a dramatically changed figure, described by Wyndham Lewis as '**a great man of action into whose hands the fairies had placed a paintbrush**'

instead of a sword'.

- He had red hair and grew a red beard and became the very image of the unpredictable bohemian artist. His work, too, changed dramatically: previously it had been described by his tutor Henry Tonks as **'methodical', but it became lively and spontaneous**, especially in his brilliant drawings—his draughtsmanship was already legendary by the time he left the Slade.
- By the time he was **twenty-five**, Augustus had become the **most famous British artist of the day**. His talent as an artist was compared with that of **Michelangelo, Gauguin and Matisse** and he became **legendary** for his bohemian lifestyle and celebrity circle of friends. But, since his death, his reputation has declined.
- Augustus wrote an interesting analysis, **"Gwen and I were not opposites, but much the same really, but we took a different attitude. I am rarely 'exuberant'. She was always so; latterly in a tragic way. She wasn't chaste or subdued, but amorous and proud. She didn't steal through life, but preserved a haughty independence which some people mistook for humility. Her passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational. She was never 'unnoticed' by those who had access to her."**
- He would peer obsessively at her pictures and when the critics ignored her work at one exhibition he wrote, **"To me the little pictures are almost painfully charged with feeling, even as their neighbours are empty of it. Gwen's pictures are simply staggering."** By contrast Gwen was largely ignored by the critics until about 1926. Augustus once said **"Fifty years after my death [2011] I shall be remembered as Gwen John's brother."** He was right, she is now regarded as one of the **most important British artists of the 20th century** and he has been largely forgotten to the extent that the retrospective at the Tate in 2004 felt that it had to reclaim Augustus's reputation.
- Commentators often emphasise their differences and describe Gwen as a recluse who had an affair with Rodin and painted quiet interiors with solitary women and Augustus as a wild bohemian, a society portrait painter who is rumoured to have fathered over 100 children through his numerous affairs.
- This is correct as far as it goes but the reality was far more complex ...

NOTES

- Thornton John was the eldest, then Gwen, then Augustus and the youngest was Winifred.

- 'Following a **long and obsessive love affair with Rodin** in Paris, she increasingly searched for isolation and solitude which was illustrated in her intensely personal studies of interiors and solitary figures. Her methodical technique and palette of subtle mauves and blue-greys is in direct contrast with the bravura and brilliance of Augustus' colours.' (Tate, Gwen John and Augustus John exhibition 2004-2005, website)
- 'Gwen John trained at the Slade School of Art in London. As a woman in a career still largely dominated by men, including her successful brother Augustus, Gwen had to struggle for recognition. It has been suggested that the self-scrutinising intensity of this image, and the isolation of the figure, registers this, but the figure retains its privacy. In recent years, her reputation has grown and now eclipses that of Augustus.' (Tate display caption)
- Gwen John's work never exhibits any flashiness or contrived effects; it is always simple, plain yet deeply moving. This portrait was described by one critic [T. Martin Wood in Studio] as 'one of the greatest achievements in this exhibition because of its sincerity' and in 1926 she was described as 'a sort of modern Vermeer'. One reviewer [Nigel Gosling, 1968, Observer Review] 'The force of this almost obsessive reticence is astonishing ... the extreme subtlety and reticence of the exquisite tonal arrangements ... is a chief source of delight ... Its power within awesomely restricted means is reminiscent of Morandi's.'

BIO:JOHN,GWEN

- **Gwendolen Mary John (22 June 1876 - 18 September 1939, died aged 63)** was a Welsh artist who worked in France most of her life. She trained at the Slade School of Art from 1895 to 1898 where her younger brother, Augustus John, had already begun his studies. She lived with Augustus and other students at 21 Fitzroy Street which was an ex-brothel. The landlady was an eccentric mature student at the Slade. They lived together on fruit and nuts and even as students her brother's personal glamour made him a celebrity. Her friends included **Ida Nettleship, Ursula Tyrwhitt, Edna Waugh and Gwen Salmond**. The group were known as the 'nursery' as they acted in a childlike manner—they gave each other names from Jungle Book. Ida was at the Slade for six years, in Italy in 1897 and in Paris with Gwen in 1898. She was engaged to Clement Salmond but switched to Augustus who she married in 1901. Ursula was the daughter of a clergyman and her father sent her to Paris when he thought she was getting too close to Augustus. Edna Waugh (1879-1979) was the most. Beautiful and talented. She started at the Slade when she was 14 and won many prizes. She married but her husband would not let her continue with her art. She had a nervous breakdown and he relented. She had her own studio, exhibited, was described as the 'most imaginative artist in England' and

lived till she was 100.

- Gwen neglected her health throughout her life and in 1900-01 she lived as a squatter in a derelict building. She and was taught in the traditional manner, which involved copying Old Master paintings. This training shows in the naturalism and carefully controlled colour range of this picture. As a woman in a career still largely dominated by men, including her successful brother Augustus, Gwen had to struggle for recognition. The self-scrutinising intensity of this image, and the isolation of the figure, registers some sense of this struggle.
- She went to Paris in 1898 and attended James McNeill Whistler's Académie Carmen and was influenced by his tonal approach. She settled in Paris in 1904 and worked as a model, becoming Rodin's mistress and immersing herself in the artistic world of the metropolis. Rodin stopped seeing Gwen in about 1913 and he died in 1917. She always referred to herself as his 'little wife'. She lived in France for the rest of her life, exhibiting on both sides of the Channel.
- From 1910 to 1924 nearly all her work was purchased by her patron John Quinn an American art collector and this freed her from having to work as a model, mostly for women artists. The majority of her work is portraits, mainly of female sitters and her oeuvre is small, consisting of only 158 oil paintings.
- She drew thousands of drawings and thought a painting should be finished in one or two sittings and 'For that one must paint a lot of canvases probably and waste them'. Her meticulous preparation shows the influence of Whistler. She developed a complex numerical system for describing tones which has still not been fully decoded by scholars.
- Like many women artists she tried drawing her own body in the mirror but she complained in a letter to her brother about how difficult it was. Even the Slade imposed restrictions of women drawing from female models and so friends would draw each other but kept silent about the practice as 'the respectability of these middle-class women students would have been jeopardised if they had acknowledged at the time that they had worked from studies of their own bodies rather than those of anonymous working-class models'.
- When she lived in Paris she had to work as a model to survive. She posed nude for Auguste Rodin and for other artists, mostly women. In her dairies she wrote of many occasions when, working as a model, she felt harassed or abused by both men and women artists. For example, one of her clients, a woman artist, was kissing a man all afternoon and then told her not to tell anyone if she wanted to keep her job as a model, treating her as a child and discussing her as if she was not there. As a model she would be kept waiting for hours, shouted at, ignored, given no breaks, and propositioned by male artists. She developed fierce

attachments to both men and women that worried some people and she later became Rodin's lover.

- In 1911 she moved to a top-floor flat at 29 rue Terre Neuve in Meudon, about five miles from the Eiffel Tower. She was frugal and solitary and Rodin was reducing her visits. She became a Roman Catholic. She exhibited in Paris for the first time in 1919 at the Salon d'Automne, and exhibited regularly until the mid-1920s, after which time she became increasingly reclusive and painted less.
- She had only one solo exhibition in her lifetime, in London in 1926 and that confirmed her reputation as a leading twentieth-century artist. With the money from the sales she purchased a bungalow in Meudon and built a wall round it. In December 1926, distraught after the death of her old friend Rilke, she met and sought religious guidance from her neighbour, the neo-Thomist (Thomas Aquinas) Catholic theologist Jacques Maritain. She also met Maritain's sister-in-law, **Vera Oumançoff** (pronounced 'oo-man-soff'), with whom she fell passionately in love although it is unlikely it had physical expression. Gwen was never attracted physically or emotionally by lesbians although they found her attractive. The relationship ended in 1931 and in the last eight years of her life she lived as a recluse. She only had her cats for company and eat so little she could hardly stand. Her last dated work is a drawing of 20 March 1933, and no evidence suggests that she drew or painted during the remainder of her life. In 1939 not wishing to live in another war-torn country she travelled to Dieppe en route to England but she fell ill on the way and died and was buried as a pauper in an unmarked grave.
- Quotes
 - "I think if we are to do beautiful pictures, we ought to be free from family conventions and ties"
 - She wrote to Rodin, "If you chide me do it gently as to a child."
 - "In talking, shyness and timidity distort the very meaning of my words, I don't pretend to know anybody well. People are like shadows to me and I am like a shadow."
 - She told a friend: "When I was a child, I used to cry all the time."

BIO:AUGUSTUS JOHN

- **Augustus Edwin John (4 January 1878 - 31 October 1961, died aged 83)** was born in Tenby, the younger brother of Gwen John by two years. His father was a solicitor and his mother died when he was six but she had instilled a love of drawing in both children.
- When he was seventeen he briefly attended Tenby School of Art before

studying at the Slade. He became a star pupil and was regarded as the most talented draughtsman of his generation. When he was 19 he had a serious accident in the sea at Tenby by during his convalescence his artistic development progressed quickly. The following year he won first prize at the Slade for *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*. He studied independently in Paris and in 1901 married Ida Nettleship (1877-1907) the daughter of an artist and a fellow student at the Slade.

- He married Ida Nettleship (1877-1907 age 30) in 1901. Between 1901 and 1903 he accepted a teaching post at the University of Liverpool to secure his financial position. From 1905 to her death in 1907 they lived in Paris with Dorothy "Dorelia" McNeill (1881-1969). Following Ida's death John lived with Dorothy for the rest of his life and they had four children—David (1902), Casper (1903), Robin (1904), Edwin (1905) and Henry (1907). He had many children by other women who went on to become famous. It is said he **fathered as many as 100 children** although is more legend than verified fact.
- In 1903 he started a relationship with Dorothy McNeill (1881-1969 age 87), a typist from Camberwell. Her taste for dressing in 'artistic' clothes caused him to fantasise that she had gypsy ancestors and he renamed her Dorelia. He had four children by Dorelia—Pyramus (1905), Romilly (1906), Elizabeth (1912, 'Poppet', her step-daughter Talitha Pol married John Paul Getty Jr.) and the well-known artists Vivien John (1915-1994).
- That year he started a Chelsea Art School which ran until 1907 (not the Chelsea Art School).
- In 1910 he discovered and fell in love with Martigues in France. Between 1910 and 1912 he painted in Snowdonia with his friend James Dickson Innes.
- Throughout his life he was interested in the Romani people whom he called 'Gypsies'. He sought them out across the UK and Europe and learnt to speak their language. For a time, shortly after his marriage, he and his family, which included his wife Ida, mistress Dorothy (Dorelia) McNeill, and John's children by both women, **travelled in a caravan**, in gypsy fashion. His biographer speculated that his love of the gypsy life derived from his father, who hated gypsies, warning to him that he would be kidnapped and brought up by gypsies. His father didn't know that Augustus longed to leave home and wished he would be kidnapped by gypsies.
- In 1910 he fell in love with the town **Martigues in Provence** as soon as he first saw it. His love of the town continued until 1928 when he felt the town had lost its charm.
- In 1917 he was a war artist with the Canadian forces and he was allowed to keep his beard making him the only serving officer, other than the

King, with a beard. He started his largest mural for Lord Beaverbrook but the work was never completed. After two months in France he took part in a brawl and was sent home in disgrace and it was only Lord Beaverbrook that saved him from a court-martial.

- Most of his later work after the war was portraits and those of his two wives and children are regarded as his best. He was known for the cruel psychological truth of his portraits. Lord Leverhulme was so incensed by his portrait that he cut out the head but the remainder of the painting was returned to John in error and this created an international outcry.
- In the 1920s John took over from John Singer Sargent as the leading portrait painter in the country. He painted many famous sitters including, **T. E. Lawrence**, Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats, Aleister Crowley, George Bernard Shaw and perhaps his most famous, **Dylan Thomas**.
- In 1928 he was made an Associate of the Royal Academy and in 1938 a full Academician. He resigned but rejoined and in 1944 he was almost voted in as President of the Royal Academy. Some critics complained that his later work had degenerated and **become flashy and over inflated**. However, in 1937 his trip to Jamaica resulted in some of his finest work. In 1944, Sir **Bernard Montgomery** commissioned a portrait of himself, but rejected the completed work "because it was not like me"; it was subsequently purchased by the Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow.
- In 1937 he was elected President of the Gypsy Lore Society with the Romany name Gustavus Janik. He remained President until his death in 1961.
- In later life he wrote two autobiographies and was **still greatly revered and loved by the public** but he was no longer a force in moving modern British art forward. On his death in 1961 The New York Times described him as "**the grand old man of British painting, and as one of the greatest in British history**".
- Quotes
 - "I felt at last that I was living in a kind of mortuary where everything was dead, from the stuffed doves in their glass domes, fleshless as the abominable skeleton clock on the mantelpiece. it all reflected the frozen immobility of its curator's [their father's] mind.' The whole family was tormented by "gloom by day and horror at night'.
 - He described his father as a 'revolting personage'.
 - Augustus wrote that on the beach at Tenby: "Gwen and I, full of curiosity, would approach as near as we dared, to watch the mystery of painting. Even at that early age we were vaguely aware

of Art and Beauty."

- "Gwen and I were not opposites but much the same really, but we took a different attitude".
- He wrote of Gwen's pictures, "To me the little pictures are almost painfully charged with feeling, even as their neighbours are empty of it. Gwen's pictures are simply staggering."
- "Loneliness is a great thing. Decidedly, it is inspiring to lie alone at times. I fear continued cosiness is risky."
- "Gwen utterly neglects herself for some bloody mystical reason".
- "I am in a curious state, wondering who I am. I watch myself closely without yet being able to classify myself. I evade definition – and that must mean I have no character. Do you understand yours?" (to a friend)

COMPARISON

- Essay on Gwen John by John Rothenstein commented that they were "in every respect the opposite" but Augustus disagreed and he wrote:
 - Common contempt for sentimentality
 - Augustus is not 'exuberant' she was always so, latterly in a tragic way
 - Gwen was not chaste or subdued but amorous and proud
 - She preserved a haughty independence which some thought was humility
 - Her passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational
 - She was never 'unnoticed' by those who met her
- Both were confident in their talent and both went to the Slade
- Both followed a traditional path after the Slade based on portraiture
- Both rejected realism and believed they must take their cue from the subject
- Both followed their imagination and both looked for escape
- Both produced works of passion based on a selfish preoccupation with their own ideas
- Gwen was introvert, Augustus extrovert but both sought to find areas not occupied by others
- Look at their drawing of each other and of their closest friends

- Look at portraits of Dorelia:
 - Augustus - gypsy, exterior, distant, landscape, a before story has begun
 - Gwen - refuge, retreat, interior, closed room, story after it has been told

TIMELINE

- Augustus - praised from 1899, compared with Sickert, declined around 1916 in the eyes of critics but he was still a fashionable portrait painter
- Gwen was largely ignored
- 1899 finish Slade
- 1903 both go to Paris and do not mix with trendy modern artist, later Augustus meets Modigliani and Epstein.
- 1902-03 Dorelia McNeill (1881-1969, outlives them), menage á quatre
- 1904 Dorelia and Gwen go on a walking tour to Toulouse (Rome was the aim), they then go on the Paris. Dorelia 'elopes' with a Belgian artist to Brussels. Gwen writes to Augustus and he goes to Brussels and takes her back to Essex. Gwen stays in Paris. There is a manage á trois of Augustus, Ida and Dorelia.
- 1905 Augustus, Ida and Dorelia go to Paris.
- 1903-08 Gwen didn't exhibit because of her affair with Rodin (he was 64 and she was 28).
- 1907-14 Augustus triumphs, Gwen does some of her best work but unrecognised. 1907 Ida dies leaving five children. Dorelia brings them up plus her two and two more later. Gwen went her seaprate way.
- 1910 American patron John Quinn funds Gwen.
- 1911 Gwen goes to Meudon (just outside Paris) and becomes deeply involved with religion.
- 1926 Gwen is increasingly admired ('a sort of modern Vermeer') and Augustus is in decline with the critics but still a famous society portrait painter.

HISTORY OF THE LIFE CLASS

- Hogarth has male and female models.
- The Royal Academy had female models from the beginning (1769) but only for men over 20 or married. There were four male models to every one female model and the female model cost double the male. On the continent there were only male models.

- In 1841 the census had 278 professional women artists and by the 1871 census there were 1,069.
- The first woman student was Laura Herford in 1860. She only got in because she signed the application form L. Herford. They wanted to exclude her but discovered nothing in the rules excluded women so more women students joined over the years. In 1893 women could draw the draped male model but in a different room from men. This changed to the male nude in 1903.
- The Schools of Design. Had only plaster casts to draw.
- In 1871 the Slade opened for male and female students. 1871-75 Poynter ran it, and from 1875 Legros. By the 1890s two-thirds of the students were women. Men and women drew statues together but the life class was segregated. For women the male model was draped but the female model was nude.



Gwen John (1876–1939), *Landscape at Tenby with Figures*, c. 1896-97, 46 x 57 cm, Tenby Museum & Art Gallery



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, 1898, 149.9 x W 213.4 cm, UCL Art Museum, Summer Composition, First prize, 1898

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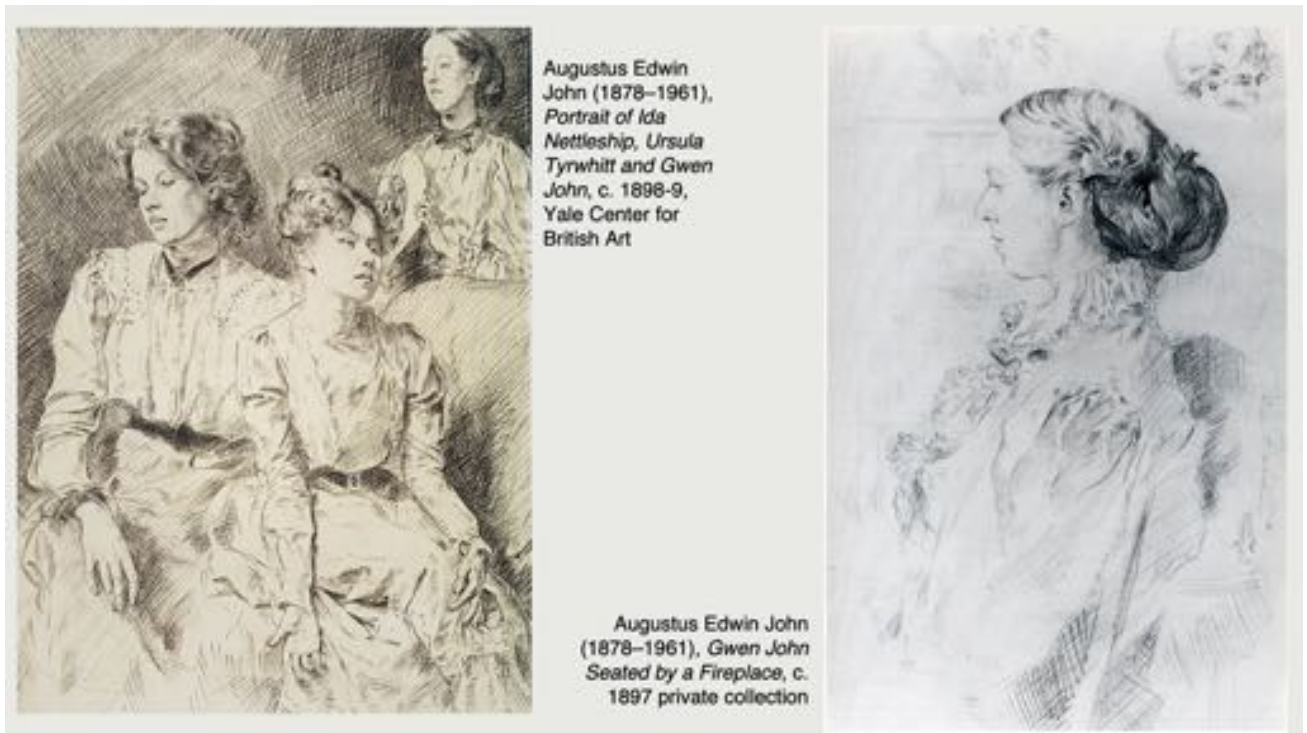
- **In 1898 Augustus won first prize for this biblical painting on the right.** The Slade was traditional in the sense that it taught drawing, composition and perspective but it was unconventionally modern in the way it taught men and women equally. It was the only art school in the UK at the time that allowed female students.
- This is the **earliest known painting by Gwen** and she probably painted it in 1896 when she returned briefly to Tenby. The older women in the picture is her younger sister Winifred and this is not a typical painting by Gwen. (CLICK) This is a photograph to show that although the landscape is roughly topographical she has used chiaroscuro (contrasting light and dark) to create drama but also, contradictorily a sense of peace and timelessness. The upturned face of the child creates a central pivot and focus point.
- Neither of these works is typical of their later style but it shows how they started.

NOTES

- Their parents were Edwin William John and his wife Augusta (née Smith).

They had four children Thornton, Gwen, Augustus and Winifred. Their Edwin was a dour solicitor who cast a chill over the family. Their mother Augusta suffered from ill health and was often absent leaving the two girls to look after the family. Augusta was an amateur water-colourist and both parents encouraged their children's interest in art and literature. Augusta died in 1884 when Gwen was eight and the family moved to Tenby where Gwen and Winifred were taught by a governess. The children often went to the coast to sketch gulls, shells and fish but we don't have examples of their early work.

- The above painting by Gwen John is the only known picture of her hometown, Tenby.



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Portrait of Ida Nettleship, Ursula Tyrwhitt and Gwen John*, c. 1898-9, Yale Center for British Art

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Gwen John Seated by a Fireplace*, c. 1897 private collection

- **Augustus was the star pupil** at the Slade and his drawings were regarded as the best since Michelangelo. These three women on the left were the closest to Augustus when he was at the Slade. In the centre is Ursula Tyrwhitt with whom he became infatuated. Ursula was best friends with Ida Nettleship on the left and Augustus transferred his affection to her and married her in January 1901. People have speculated about whether his true feelings can be discerned from this drawing.
- His sister Gwen was drawn later in the background holding the back of a chair.
- The delicate shading is reminiscent of 18th-century French drawing and this technique was taught at the Slade. Augustus was an admirer of Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) and won a competition that involved copying his drawings.
- The drawing on the right is the same period and is called *Gwen John Seated by a Fireplace*. It sold at Christie's in 2005 for £60,000, a high price for a drawing by Augustus John.

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Augustus John (1878-1961), *An Old Lady*, c. 1898-99, 68.6 x 55.8 cm, Tate

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Portrait of Mrs Atkinson*, c. 1897-98, 30.5 x 31.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Augustus John (1878-1961), *An Old Lady*, c. 1898-99, 68.6 x 55.8 cm, Tate

- From 1897 to 1898 they lived together at **21 Fitzroy Street** (now an office block nestling below the BT Tower) which may be where the picture of **Mrs Atkinson was painted**. It is a tonal painting which means she used a limited palette, here rich earth colours, and varied the **tonal value**. This is an important point in understanding Gwen's later paintings. She used a limited colour palette but varied the tone, that is how light or dark she made the colours. There are three technical things the artist needs to consider:
 - First, **the colour** which is more accurately known as the **hue**.
 - Second, **the tone**, that is how light or dark it is. If we take a hue and add white it is called a **tint**. If we add black it is called a **shade** and adding grey creates a tone. A wide range of tones of a single hue is used by Gwen to give visual depth.
 - Finally, there is **the chroma**, also called the **saturation or intensity** of the hue. This is also called the **purity of the hue** and is changed by adding grey of the same tone. If we add grey of the same tone the intensity or chroma of the hue is reduced. I think you can see that all three **hue, tone and chroma** are interrelated and the artist controls those elements to create a picture of a certain feel.

- The paintings show the similarities between them but the **story behind the painting by Augustus** illustrates the difference between them. This was his first commission and he painted it at the sitter's house. He did not know her and abandoned the painting as incomplete partly because **he did not get on with her** and partly from his own impatience. **The fee was £40 a remarkable sum for an unknown artist** who was clearly making an impression early on. Although the hands are not finished the portrait is remarkable for its realism. The plainness, the simple pose and the book are more like an early portrait by Gwen.
- If we compare the two we see that at this stage they are painting in a **very similar manner**. But notice the difference, Augustus was working on commission but he never finished it and left it with the sitter. Gwen's was not a commission. She exhibited it at the **New English Art Club** in 1900 where it was bought by a fellow student. However, we shall see later that she was not happy with painting to a deadline for an exhibition and stopped exhibiting. From 1910, an American patron, called John Quinn, bought most of her work.

NOTES

- **Hue** is what we normally call colour. Value or **tone** is how light or dark it is, and **chroma** or saturation or intensity is the purity of the colour, think of the effect of adding grey of the same value as a colour to change its chroma.
- If white is added to a colour the result is called a **tint**. If black is added to a colour the result is called a **shade**. Adding grey creates a tone. A wide range of tones of a colour will often give visual depth even when a limited palette of colours is used.
- It is a sheep skull on the mantelpiece next to Mrs Atkinson. Simon Schama wrote that she is "glancing anxiously sideways, uncertain of what is wanted of her." (*The Face of Britain: A History of the Nation Through Its Portraits*, 2016)

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Augustus John (1878-1961),
Woman Smiling, 1908-9,
221 x 123.8 cm, Tate

Augustus John (1878-1961), *Woman Smiling*, 1908-9, 221 x 123.8 cm, Tate

- Early in 1901, **John married Ida Nettleship** (1877-1907), daughter of the artist John (Trivett) Nettleship, and a fellow student at the Slade. She quickly became pregnant and found being a mother a full-time job which meant she had to stop painting. She was described as a 'Wild Thing' and a 'Witch' and said she was not born to be a mother. There were strains in their relationship and in **1903, Gwen met Dorothy McNeill** (1881-1969, outlives them both) known as Dorelia, and **introduced her to Augustus**.
- This portrait is Dorelia **dressed as a gypsy**. Throughout his life Augustus John was interested in Romani people whom he referred to as gypsies. He learnt their language, travelled the country in a **gypsy caravan**, sought them out and dressed his partners as gypsies. Later he even became President of the **Gypsy Lore Society** (1937-1961).
- Roger Fry (1866-1934, painter and critic) wrote about this picture '**The vitality of this gypsy Gioconda is fierce, disquieting, emphatic.**' (*The Burlington Magazine*, May 1909).
- You may be surprised at what happened next. **Gwen 'eloped' with Dorelia** and they planned to walk through France and Italy to Rome. They started at Bordeaux and walked 150 miles to Toulouse sleeping rough. They returned to Paris where they **shared quarters and in 1904** Dorelia left with a Belgian artist. In a panic Gwen wrote to Augustus who rushed over from England and persuaded Dorelia to come back with him. Augustus, his wife

Ida and Dorelia then lived in a *menage á trois* travelling around in a gypsy caravan.

- Ida had five children, all sons, and from 1905 until her death in 1907 she lived in Paris with Augustus and Dorelia. **She died of an infection** (puerperal fever, pronounced 'pyoo-ur-puh-ruhl') following the birth of her fifth son and Augustus lived for the rest of his life with Dorelia and they had four children together, though they never married. Dorelia looked after Ida's children and her own. One of his sons by Ida became a prominent **British Admiral and First Sea Lord Sir Caspar John** and his daughter with Dorelia, **Vivien John (1915–1994) became a notable painter.**
- Every article about Augustus John mentions him having **fathered over a hundred children** but there are few facts to substantiate that number. In 1911, he said to Dorelia "**Am I a Don Juan? How sad!**" Although later in Chelsea it is said he used to pat the head of all the children he passed in case it was his child.

NOTES

- Augustus John (1878-1961), was a Welsh painter who for a short time around 1910 was an important exponent of Post-Impressionism. He was the younger brother of the acclaimed artist Gwen John. He briefly attended the Tenby School of Art before leaving for the Slade School of Art in London. He became the star pupil of the drawing teacher Henry Tonks and was recognised as the most talented draughtsman of his generation.
- 'Augustus John, the most highly-regarded British artist of his day, painted this jaunty portrait of his second partner, Dorelia McNeill (1881-1969), for the annual exhibition, Fair Women organised by the International Society. These exhibitions included old masters as well as modern portraits, and reviewers compared John's picture to works by van Dyck and Manet. McNeill designed her own dress with high waist and long skirt and set a fashion for bohemian costume. This portrait was the first purchase by the Contemporary Art Society, although it was not allocated to Tate until 1917. Roger Fry dubbed it a 'gypsy Gioconda', mixing together McNeill's Romany costume with the 'Mona Lisa'.' (Tate display caption)
- Dorelia McNeill met Gwen John while attending the Westminster School of Art in 1903 and she introduced her to Augustus. She has also been described as a typist from Camberwell. McNeill became Augustus John's mistress in a ménage à trois with his wife, the artist Ida Nettleship (1877-1907). Ida Nettleship had five sons and Dorelia McNeill had two children but Nettleship died of puerperal fever after the birth of her fifth son in 1907. All the children were brought up by McNeill and in John's

memoirs written in 1952 there is not a single mention of his wife and mother of five of his children. McNeill had two more children and lived with John until his death in 1961.

- In 1897 he was seriously injured while swimming and his lengthy convalescence accelerated his artistic development. He studied in Paris, married in 1901 and started teaching at the University of Liverpool. He fell in love with the town Martigues in Provence and lived there from 1910 to 1928. Throughout his life he was interested in painting the Romani people (whom he called gypsies) and for a short time travelled round Britain in a caravan with his wife, mistress (who in 1907 became his second wife on the death of his first) and the children of both women.
- During World War I he painted two huge murals but they remained unfinished. The bulk of his later work consist of portraits. He was known for the psychological insight of his portraits, many of which were considered 'cruel' for the truth of the depiction. There was an international outcry when Lord Leverhulme cut out the head of his portrait to hide it in his vault. Perhaps Lever was shocked because he appears not confident and bold but reflective and sad. The painting was reassembled in 1954 and is in the Leverhulme Gallery, Liverpool.
- By the 1920s Augustus John was the leading British portrait painter replacing John Singer Sargent. His most famous portrait is of Dylan Thomas.
- One critic has claimed that "the painterly brilliance of his early work degenerated into flashiness and bombast, and the second half of his long career added little to his achievement."
- Augustus John's promiscuity gave rise to rumours that he had fathered as many as 100 children over the course of his life.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-woman-smiling-n03171>



Augustus John (1878-1961), *Woman Smiling*, 1908-9, 221 x 123.8 cm, Tate
 John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* (1864 - 1932), 1892, 127 x 101 cm, National Gallery of Scotland

- I wanted to show you a typical portrait of the period we can see what Augustus was doing more clearly.
- This is John Singer Sargent's portrait of Lady Agnew of Lochnaw. He was **the leading society painter** at this time. Her fine clothing, brooch and expensive chair is what would be expected but **Sargent was a controversial artist** and shows her with a **direct gaze** and informal pose, emphasised by the flowing fabric and lilac sash of her dress all of which ensure the portrait's **striking impact**. You can also see that Sargent painted the dress very loosely creating the texture and materials using just a few brushstrokes.
- (The painting was commissioned by her husband Andrew Noel Agnew, a barrister who had inherited the baronetcy and estates of Lochnaw in Galloway, She is his young wife Gertrude Vernon (1864-1932) and it was painted in 1892 when she was 28.)
- It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1893 and added to Sargent's reputation. Portrait commissions poured in and Sargent enjoyed something of a cult following in Edwardian society. It also launched Lady Agnew as a society beauty. The sculptor Rodin described Sargent as '**the Van Dyck of our times**', the same comparison **Augustus was later to receive for**

Woman Smiling.

- Visitors to an exhibition **expected portraits to be of people of rank or fortune**, Lady Agnew is both, but **Dorelia is neither**. Her clothing would have been associated with gypsies, which Augustus intended. He had learnt the Romani language to better understand their way of life. He would even write love letters to Dorelia in Romani and provide her with a word list so she could translate.
- Let us now compare Augustus's portrait to one by Gwen a few years earlier...

NOTES

- Lady Agnew's direct gaze and informal pose, emphasised by the flowing fabric and lilac sash of her dress ensure the portrait's striking impact. Andrew Noel Agnew, a barrister who had inherited the baronetcy and estates of Lochnaw in Galloway, commissioned this painting of his young wife, Gertrude Vernon (1864-1932), in 1892. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1893 and made Sargent's name. The sculptor Rodin described him as 'the Van Dyck of our times'. Portrait commissions poured in and Sargent enjoyed something of a cult following in Edwardian society. It also launched Lady Agnew as a society beauty.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-woman-smiling-n03171>



Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Student*, 1903-4, 56.1 x 33.1 cm, Manchester City Art Galleries

James McNeill Whistler (1834-1904), *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*, 1871, 144.3 x 162.4 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- The model for both was Dorelia but they are very different. Unlike the society portrait we just saw **neither portrait gives us a clue about the rank and status** of the sitter. Neither names the sitter and so they could be assumed to represent a type of person rather than a particular person.
- To begin with **her face looks thinner in Gwen's version**. This was because, as I said, Gwen and Dorelia had eloped together to hike to Rome. They walked a hundred and fifty miles to Toulouse before ending their journey. On the way Gwen insisted that Dorelia carry all her equipment so that her artist's hands would not be damaged. They had little money and so there was not much food to eat and they slept in barns. I did that once and I can assure you very large rats come out at night. When they reached Toulouse they rented a cheap room where this and three other pictures were painted.
- Gwen's Dorelia wears a simple dress buttoned up to the neck and tied at the waist. There are two large books on the table and we can see the top one is called '**La Russie**' or '**Russia**'. She holds a third book loosely by her side. A black garment on the table and a yellowish light, perhaps from a candle or table lamp lights her face from below. She is quieter, contemplative,

studious and immersed in thought. We expect her to sit down and start reading.

- Augustus's **Dorelia is plumper**, in fact he wrote "**Your fat excites me enormously**". One of his great skills was his ability to bring the sitter alive. There is a sense of a lively, active person about to speak to us.
- **An important difference between the artists is that we get the feeling that everything in a painting by Augustus is about to happen and in Gwen's it happened long ago.** In other words an Augustus painting is the beginning of a story and a painting by Gwen it all happened long ago. This feeling of timelessness we also find in **Vermeer** which is why she has been compared with him.
- You can also see from this pair of paintings that **Dorelia was an excellent model** as she could adopt the personality required by the artist.
- But was Gwen trying to **capture character**? In 1898 Gwen attended American artist James McNeill Whistler's art school in Paris. When **Whistler met Augustus** in the Louvre, Augustus asked him whether he agreed that Gwen was skilled in capturing character. '**Character?**' retorted Whistler, who had taught Gwen the art of tonal relationships, '**What's that? Your sister has a fine sense of tone**'. (CLICK) So, like Whistler's painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* colloquially known as *Whistler's Mother*, it might simply be an arrangement of tones.
- It has been suggested that women, like Dorelia, who are posing in picturesque clothing for an artist become **simply accessories** to, and symbols of, male genius. In this context Gwen's picture of a woman **wearing everyday clothes** does not label her as a model but as another person. In addition, she is a studious and intellectual woman.
- After Gwen died in 1939 Dorelia said, "**She was extremely strange and hard ...always attracted to the wrong people for their beauty alone. But her work was more important than anyone.**" (Augustus's biography by Michael Holroyd)
- There is a final comparison I would like to make...



Alfred Munnings (1878-1959), *Epsom Downs - City and Suburban Day*, 1919, 79.4 x 128.3 cm, Tate



Augustus John (1878-1961),
Woman Smiling, 1908-9,
221 x 123.8 cm, Tate

Alfred Munnings (1878-1959), *Epsom Downs - City and Suburban Day*, 1919, 79.4 x 128.3 cm, Tate

- This is by Alfred Munnings. He **had no particular love of the Romani way of life**. He made sketches at the Epsom Spring Meeting in 1919, and painted this in Hampshire the following autumn. Yet, it is an accurate portrayal of a Romani camp. Augustus spent his life interested in the Romani, in fact he learnt the language and was later President of the Gypsy Lore Society, but his gypsy is Dorelia posing as a gypsy. He complained that when he asked gypsies to sit for him they would adopt a pose.
- **Munnings did love horses** and is regarded as one of England's finest painters of horses. He grew up around horses in Norfolk and attended the Norwich School of Art. He painted many scenes of horses such as his series of paintings and studies of the racing at Epsom and at Newmarket and he also often painted gypsies and horses. In this painting the **people seem static** and all the **personality and energy is centred on the horse**. Munnings received a number of prestigious commissions during the First World War and after the war he became wealthy from further commissions.

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Interior with Figures*, c. 1898-99, 46 x 33.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne, Australia



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Interior with Figures*, c. 1898-99, 46 x 33.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne, Australia

- That ends the introduction and I will now go through Gwen's life showing a selection of typical paintings and after the break Augustus's paintings.
- This is an early picture painted during her **last year at the Slade** School of Art or the following year. She painted fewer than **200 paintings in her lifetime** and several thousand drawings. Her technique involved careful planning and many sketches. She would then paint rapidly and if she was not happy with the result start again.
- Her pictures are all modest and unassuming and they derive their power from their **quiet presence. The palette is restricted and they are small in size.** The subject matter is restricted mostly consisting of a single girl or woman or a small group in an interior space. There is no obvious story or message or symbolism. They are the timeless statement of a quiet moment.
- She wrote, "**As to whether I have anything worth expressing ... I may never have anything to express except this desire for a more interior life.**" [1]

NOTES

- More than a third of her paintings are in public collections and more than 1,000 drawings are at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. Most of her letters and papers are preserved in public collections.

REFERENCES

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/4091/>

[1] Letter of 4 September 1912(?) to Ursula Tyrwhitt



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Dorelia in a Black Dress*, 1903-04, Tate

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), *Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière*, 1806, 100 × 70 cm, Louvre

- Gwen painted this at the end of their journey through France, sleeping rough and earning money from sketching and singing. By the end of their journey they were exhausted and undernourished. This was painted during their three months' stay in Toulouse with another called *Dorelia by Lamplight, at Toulouse*. Both were painted directly on to the canvas without any underdrawing.
- (CLICK) It may have been inspired by this painting of Mademoiselle Caroline Rivière by Ingres in the Louvre. She would have seen the painting and the angle of the body and the sloping shoulders echo that painting.

NOTES

- *Dorelia by Lamplight, at Toulouse* sold at Sotheby's in 2014 for \$509,000 against an estimate of \$120,000-180,000.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-dorelia-in-a-black-dress-n05910>



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Chloë Boughton-Leigh*, 1904-8, 58.4 (x) 38.1 cm, Tate

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Chloë Boughton-Leigh*, 1904-8, 58.4 × 38.1 cm, Tate

- One commentator wrote, '**Intensity**' - '**this quality, so uncommon in English painting, she retained all her life, and it was present in everything she did**' (Allan Gwynne-Jones)
- Some feel her pictures of solitary female figures are imbued with sadness but I feel they are neither sad nor happy figures but a moment in time between emotions. Like Vermeer to whom she has been compared she captures a moment in time and holds it up to us so there is nothing before and nothing after that moment. As T.S. Eliot wrote, it is, '**At the still point of the turning world**' ('Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets*).
- Boughton-Leigh was a good friend of Gwen and we think this was painted in Gwen's attic room in Paris. She uses a painting technique taught at the Slade which she attended from 1894 to 1897. She uses **opaque oil colours but dilutes them** giving them a soft translucency. Note she added a **strip of wood at the bottom** so she could show the whole of her hands and the piece of paper.
- Chloë, who was christened Ellen, had a sister Maude who was at the Slade with Gwen. Chloë is lost in thought, perhaps thinking of what was written in the note. She is alert and could snap out of her reverie at any moment and engage with us.
- Gwen John wrote in her notebooks '**I don't live when I spend time**

without thought.'

- A woman sitting alone in an interior is typical of most of the paintings of Gwen John. This has been interpreted as reflecting Gwen's own introverted character although it is always dangerous to jump to such conclusions. **Augustus described Gwen as haughty not retiring.**
- Chloë was favourably received when it was exhibited at the New English Art Club in 1908 and was described by T. Martin Wood as '**one of the greatest achievements in the exhibition because of [its] sincerity**'.

NOTES

- Excerpt from BURNT NORTON (No. 1 of 'Four Quartets') by T.S. Eliot
*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.*
- This is Chloë Boughton-Leigh who is wearing a similar dress to the one Dorelia was wearing in *The Student*. It is not as high round the neck and there is no waistband but critics have wondered whether it is a dress that Gwen asked her sitters to wear.
- The New English Art Club (NEAC) was founded in 1885 as an alternative to the Royal Academy and it continues to exhibit annually at the Mall Galleries (pronounced mæl, æ as in 'trap', not 'mawl'). It was created by British artists returning from Paris so was influenced by Impressionism. Today the roles are reversed and the NEAC shows realistic, figurative style and the Royal Academy abstract and conceptual art.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-chloe-boughton-leigh-n04088>



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Milkmaid*, c. 1657-58, 45.5 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Gwen John (1876-1939), *Chloë Boughton-Leigh*, 1904-8, 58.4 (x) 38.1 cm, Tate



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Chloë Boughton-Leigh*, 1910-14, 60.3 x 38.1 cm, Leeds Art Gallery



Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964), *Still Life*, 1946, 37.5 x 45.7 cm, Tate

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Chloë Boughton-Leigh*, 1910-14, 60.3 x 38.1 cm, Leeds Art Gallery

Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964), *Still Life*, 1946, 37.5 x 45.7 cm, Tate

Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Milkmaid*, c. 1657-58, 45.5 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

- This second portrait of Boughton-Leigh was painted three years after the first. As I said, she drew thousands of drawings and thought a painting should be finished in one or two sittings and '**For that one must paint a lot of canvases probably and waste them**'. Her meticulous preparation and rapid creation shows the influence of James McNeill Whistler who she trained under in Paris at the Académie Carmen.
- In 1910, John Quinn, an American art collector became her patron and continued supporting her until his death in 1924. During this period he purchased the majority of her works. His support freed her from having to work as a model, and enabled her to devote herself to her work. She exhibited fairly regularly but was ambivalence. She wrote in 1911, "**I paint a good deal, but I don't often get a picture done—that requires, for me, a very long time of a quiet mind, and never to think of exhibitions.**"
- (CLICK) In 1926 she was described as '**a sort of modern Vermeer**'.
- One reviewer [Nigel Gosling, 1968, *Observer Review*] '**The force of this**

almost obsessive reticence is astonishing ... the extreme subtlety and reticence of the exquisite tonal arrangements ... is a chief source of delight ... Its power within awesomely restricted means is reminiscent of Morandi's.'

- (CLICK) This is an example of Giorgio Morandi's art at the Tate so you can see what he meant about restricted means and subtle tonal arrangement. (CLICK)

NOTES

- **John Quinn** (1870-1924) was an Irish-American, New York lawyer who was an important patron of Post-impressionism and literary Modernism. He was a friend and gave financial assistance to Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. In 1913 he helped organise a huge and controversial event, the 1913 Armory Show (officially The International Exhibition of Modern Art) in New York City included examples of Symbolism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Cubism. Quinn opened the exhibition. He died aged 54 of intestinal cancer.



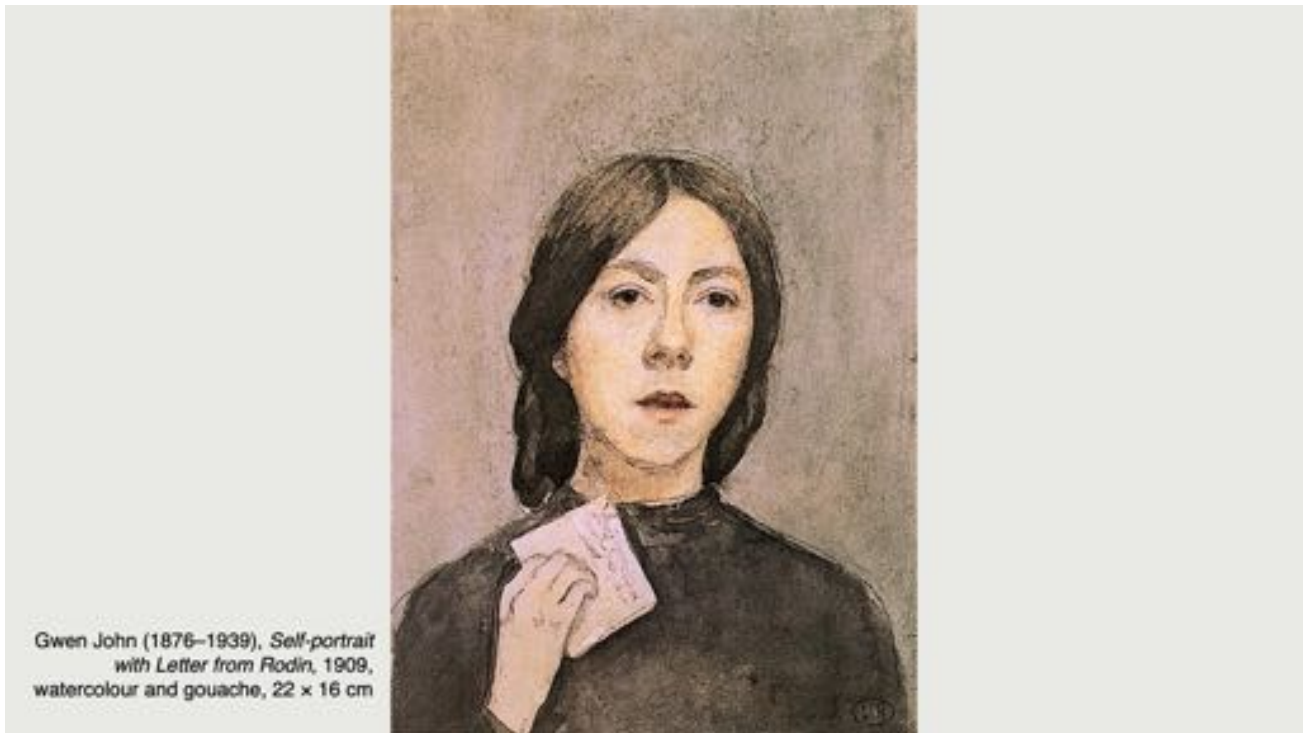
Gwen John (1876-1939), *Cat*, c.1904-8, 11.1 x 13.7 cm, Tate

- Gwen loved cats and she acquired this **tortoiseshell cat** in 1904. She named her **Edgar Quinet** after the street in which she was living at the time. This cat, occasionally with her kittens, is the subject of most of the cat drawings for which the artist is now known. The cat disappeared in 1908 and Gwen was inspired to write a poem that included the line "**little mysterious soul in the body of a cat**".
- "These evocative, spontaneous drawings were done from life, often capturing poses that could not have lasted more than a moment. They are executed in a fluid pencil line, frequently reinforced by broadly applied colour washes. The technique is strongly reminiscent of that of Rodin's drawings of the 1890s and 1900s." [1]
- The majority of her pictures are portraits, but she also painted still-lives, interiors and a few landscapes. She wrote, "**...a cat or a man, it's the same thing ... it's an affair of volumes ... the object is of no importance.**"

REFERENCES

[1] David Jenkins and Chris Stephens (Eds.), *Gwen John and Augustus John*, p. 84

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-cat-n05154>



Gwen John (1876–1939), *Self-portrait with Letter from Rodin*, 1909, watercolour and gouache, 22 × 16 cm

Gwen John (1876–1939), *Self-portrait with Letter from Rodin*, 1909, watercolour and gouache, 22 × 16 cm

- I skipped over a very important period of her life. When she first came to Paris she supported herself by **modelling** and that is how **she met Auguste Rodin** (1840-1917) in 1904. He was the **most famous artist** in the world at the time and she was the sort of person that could become **deeply obsessed** with another person, male or female. She was 28 and he was 64. She became his lover and was deeply obsessed with him and wrote him literally thousands of letters to the extent that her friends and family worried about the consequences.
- Rodin distanced himself from her from about **1912 onwards** until it was ended in 1914. Although Rodin liked her in the end he used his secretary and assistants to avoid seeing her. When the affair ended she became a Catholic and spent the rest of her life alone in a Paris suburb working as what she called '**God's little artist**'.

NOTES

- **Gwen John** (1876-1939) became Rodin's lover in about 1904 and Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) had other lovers. His first was **Rose Beuret** (1844-1917) who first met Rodin in 1864 and they became life long partners. They married in 1917 16 days before she died.
- Another famous lover was the sculptor **Camille Claudel** (1864-1943) who

was his mistress from 1883 when she was 19 to 1892 although they continued to see each other until 1898 when he went back to Beuret. Claudel was committed to an asylum in 1913 by a doctor and her brother. Although the doctors tried to convince the family she did not need to be there the family refused to release her and she remained incarcerated for 30 years. For a while, the press accused her family of committing a sculptor of genius. Her mother forbade her to receive mail from anyone other than her brother. The hospital staff regularly proposed to her family that Claudel be released, but her mother adamantly refused each time.

- **Claire Coudert** (1864-1919) was the eldest daughter of a well-known New York lawyer. The family was originally French but moved to America in 1824. She married the Marquis (later Duc) in 1891 and later became the **La Duchesse de Choiseul** and moved to France. She enjoyed a close friendship with Rodin from about 1904 until he ended their relationship in 1912.



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Girl with Bare Shoulders*, 1909-10?, 43.4 x 26 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Nude Girl*, 1909-10, 44.5 x 27.9 cm, presented by the Contemporary Art Society 1917

Francisco Goya (1746-1828), *La maja vestida* ('The Clothed Maja') and *La maja desnuda* ('The Nude Maja'), both c. 1797-1800, 97 x 190 cm, Prado, Madrid

- The woman is Fenella Lovell, an acquaintance of Gwen. (CLICK) The two paintings have been seen as a modern equivalent of Goya's *Maja Vestida* (pronounced 'ma-ha') and *Maja Desnuda*—these two paintings. (CLICK).
- An art critic (Robert Rosenblum) wrote that like Stanley Spencer and Lucian Freud some of her paintings "**reveal the volcano beneath the placid surface**". Augustus wrote that his sister's "**passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational**". However, I am not sure that is the case here, Gwen intensely disliked the model. In a letter to a friend (Ursula Tyrwhitt, Sept 1909) she wrote, "**It is a great strain doing Fenella. It is a pretty little face but she is dreadful.**" In another letter she wrote, "**Why I want to send the two paintings [to the New English Art Club] is because I may sell them and then I shall pay her what I owe and never see her again.**" The paintings were exhibited but were not sold. *Nude Girl* began with the model clothed but it was altered as the painting progressed.

- We are used to seeing female nudes painted by men. Here we have a naked woman. Kenneth Clark in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1953) wrote that to be naked is to be deprived of clothes, and implies embarrassment and shame, while a nude, as a work of art, has no such connotations but John Berger wrote that the word '**naked**' means '**to be oneself, to be without disguise**' (*Ways of Seeing*, 1972), which is what we have here. Berger wrote that a nude is a naked body turned into an object.
- Gwen John's work never exhibits any flashiness or contrived effects; it is always simple, plain yet deeply moving. This portrait was described by one critic [T. Martin Wood in *The Studio*] as '**one of the greatest achievements in this exhibition** [at the NEAC] **because of its sincerity**'.
- A profoundly deliberate painter, Gwen John offers the viewer an audacious view of womanhood stripped bare, and it is calculated to shock. The nude was considered, at the time, to be an **unsuitable subject for women painters** yet John boldly paints flaunting her nakedness. Skinny, ascetic, with skin the colour of alabaster, **Fenella Lovell** is depicted against a dingy wall, the unwilling victim of Gwen John's gaze. **She is not nude, but naked**, a lean-faced pale creature trapped in John's paired down palette of foggy greys, greens and yellows. As a female painter her perception of the nude was very different from that of a male artist. This is **not painted as a conventional female beauty** or an object of admiration or fantasy. **It is simply a woman without her clothes on**. This painting was made between 1909 and 1910, three years into John's love affair with Auguste Rodin and five years after her insane mission to **walk to Rome, which reduced her to a half-crazed, half-starved wreck**.
- **The human body**, a traditional theme in western art, was a tricky subject for women artists at the turn of the century because of questions of **morality and decorum**. By using a narrow colour range and minimal setting, and suppressing biographical details, John draws attention to the naked body. At the same time, the character of the model, Fenella Lovell, comes across powerfully. So the viewer experiences this painting, disconcertingly, as a portrait of a contemporary woman with no clothes on, who seems to be uncomfortable that we are looking at her.
- It was **difficult for Gwen to find models**. Like many women artists **she tried drawing her own body in the mirror**, but she complained in a letter to her brother about how difficult it was. Even the Slade imposed restrictions of women drawing from female models and so **friends would draw each other but kept silent** about the practice as '**the respectability of these middle-class women students would have been jeopardised if they had acknowledged at the time that**

they had worked from studies of their own bodies rather than those of anonymous working-class models’.

- When she lived in Paris she had to work as a model to survive. She posed nude for Auguste Rodin and for other artists, mostly women. In her dairies she wrote of many occasions when, working as a model, she **felt harassed or abused by both men and women artists**. For example, one of her clients, **a woman artist, was kissing a man all afternoon** and then told her not to tell anyone if she wanted to keep her job as a model, **treating her as a child** and discussing her as if she was not there. As a model she would be **kept waiting for hours, shouted at, ignored, given no breaks, and propositioned by male artists**.

NOTES

- 'Gwen John trained at the Slade School of Art in London. As a woman in a career still largely dominated by men, including her successful brother Augustus, Gwen had to struggle for recognition. It has been suggested that the self-scrutinising intensity of this image, and the isolation of the figure, registers this, but the figure retains its privacy. In recent years, her reputation has grown and now eclipses that of Augustus.' (Tate display caption)
- It was bought by the Contemporary Art Society in 1911 and presented to the Tate in 1917. It was the first of her paintings to enter a public art collection. The clothed portrait has an unflinching gaze but the nude girl has a greater intensity.

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<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-self-portrait-n05366>

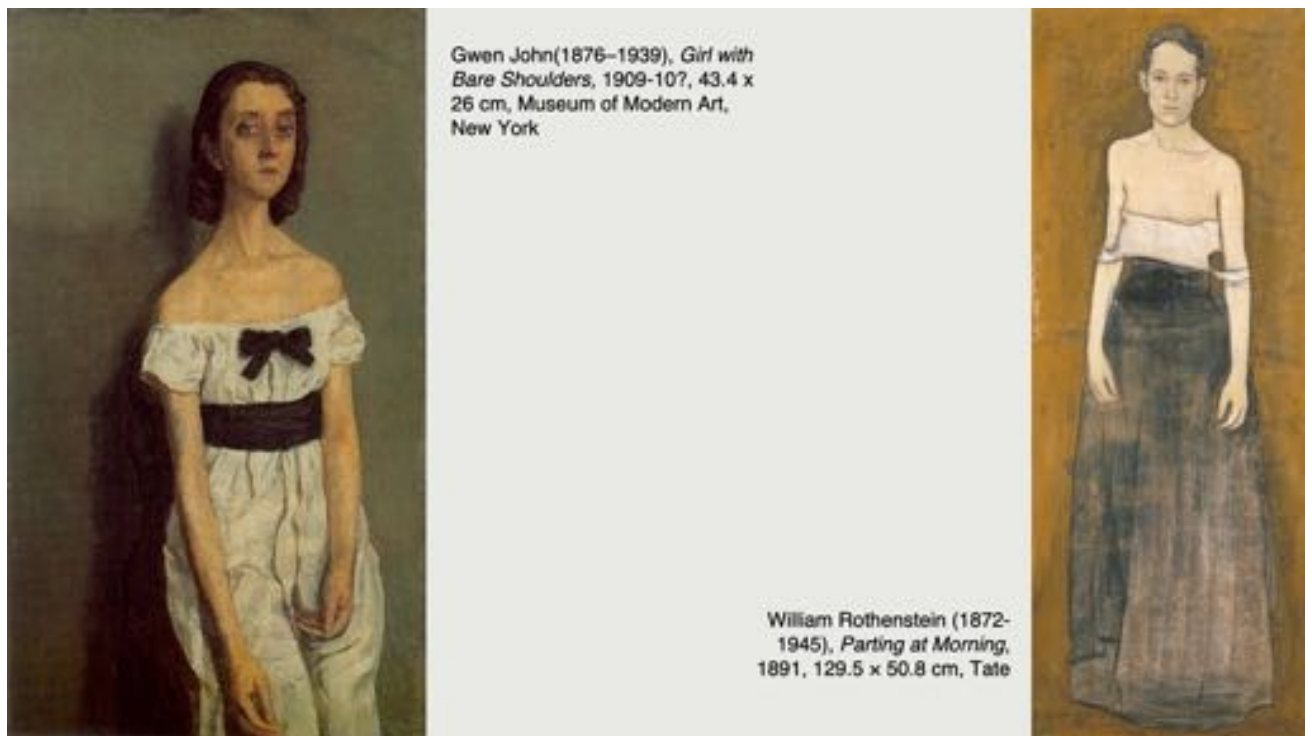
<http://www.artfund.org/what-to-see/london/ten-london-masterpieces>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-nude-girl-n03173>

<http://www.moma.org/collection/works/78904?locale=en>

<http://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/wales/articles/gwen-john-serene-art-unruly-life/>

Kenneth Clark in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* was a A.W. Mellon lecture delivered in 1953 and first published in 1956



Gwen John(1876–1939), *Girl with Bare Shoulders*, 1909-10?, 43.4 x 26 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

William Rothenstein (1872-1945), *Parting at Morning*, 1891, 129.5 x 50.8 cm, Tate

- It is worth comparing Gwen's portrait with one by William Rothenstein which is in the Tate.
- Rothenstein's picture represents a scene from a poem by Robert Browning called *Parting at Morning*. This is the second part of a two-part poem in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). The first part 'Meeting at Night' is about a long, hard journey ending with the meeting of two lovers. In the morning they must part and the need for the man to return to 'the world of men' leaving the woman behind.

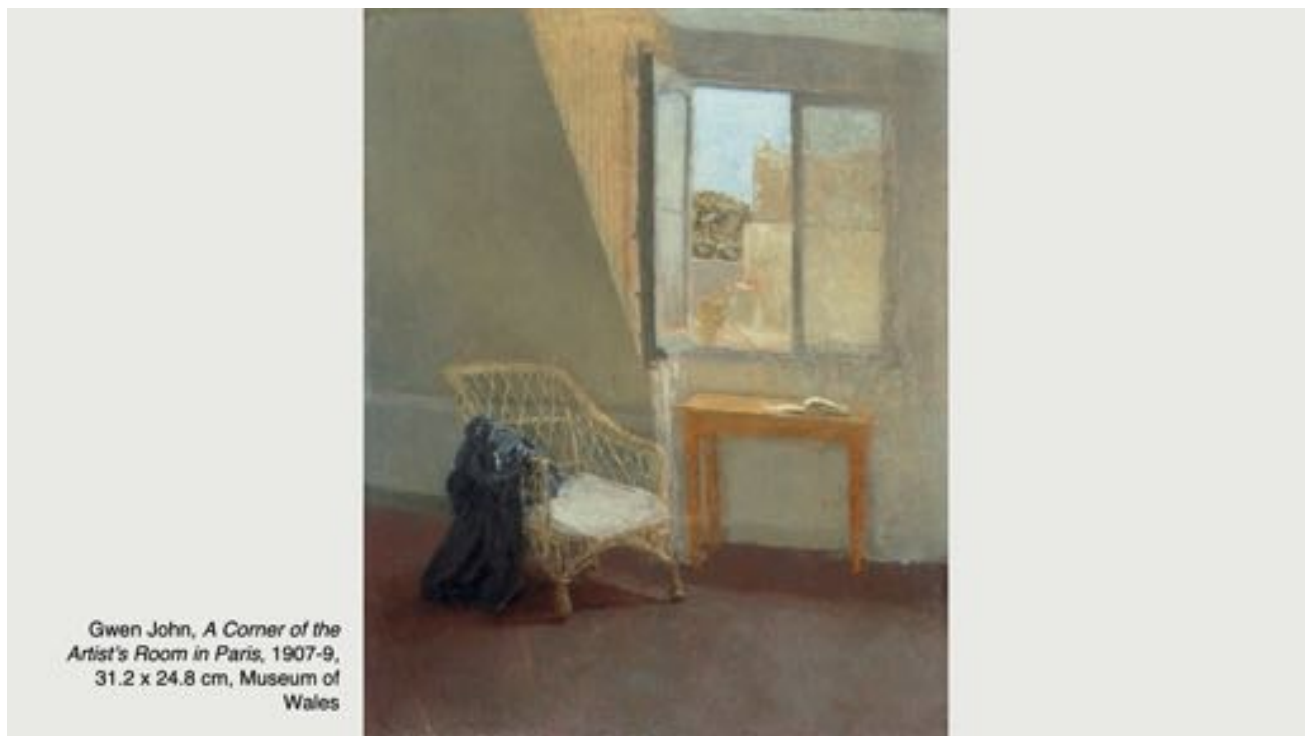
NOTES

- In 1892, Toulouse-Lautrec persuaded the dealer Père Thomas, who specialised in Impressionist paintings, to put on a show of works by Rothenstein. This drawing was included and it attracted some favourable press attention and was admired by Whistler and Degas.
- The verse inscribed at the bottom right is a quotation of Robert Browning's poem of the same title (Rothenstein substitutes 'cliff' for Browning's 'cape'):
*Round the cliff on a sudden came the sea,
 And the sun looked over the Mountain's rim:*

*And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.*

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rothenstein-parting-at-morning-t07283>



Gwen John (1876–1939), , *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.2 x 24.8 cm, Museum of Wales

Purchased with the assistance of the Derek Williams Trust and the Estate of Mrs J. Green

- This is the **interior of her bare room in Paris**. It is an attic room in an eighteenth century house in the Rue du Cherche Midi near the **Luxembourg Gardens, where she lived from spring 1907 to autumn 1909**. On hot summer nights she would creep into the Luxembourg Gardens and **sleep under the stars with her cat Tiger**. She spent all her money on paints and treats for her cat while living on nuts and fruit.
- **She was no recluse**, she had friends and contacts in the Paris art world and she stayed in touch with her brother and his family. In her letters she talks of her friends, of boat trips on the Seine, of visiting galleries and sitting drawing in pavement cafes.
- In this picture the outside world does intrude, **the window is open, the sun is shining** and her outside clothes are waiting on the wicker chair. It was painted at a time when her love affair with the sculptor **Auguste Rodin** was declining and some have interpreted the empty chair as signifying his absence and her sadness but it can be seen as a scene of contentment and quiet joy.

REFERENCES

<https://museum.wales/articles/2180/Gwen-John-Its-tone-that-matters-Part-1-/>



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Van Gogh's Chair*, 1888, 91.8 x 73 cm, National Gallery



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Gauguin's Chair*, 1888, 90.5 x 72.7 cm, Van Gogh Museum



Gwen John, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.2 x 24.8 cm, Museum of Wales

Gwen John, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.2 x 24.8 cm, Museum of Wales. Purchased with the assistance of the Derek Williams Trust and the Estate of Mrs J. Green

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Van Gogh's Chair*, 1888, 91.8 x 73 cm, National Gallery

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Gauguin's Chair*, 1888, 90.5 x 72.7 cm, Van Gogh Museum

- **Van Gogh painted two chairs, his and Gauguin's.** Both chairs function as surrogate portraits, representing the personalities and distinct artistic outlooks of the two artists. While **Van Gogh's chair is simple and functional, Gauguin's is an elegant and finely carved armchair.** Van Gogh's chair, on which he placed his pipe and tobacco, is shown in bright daylight. Gauguin's, with two novels on its seat, was painted at night and is illuminated by a candle and gas light." (National Gallery website)
- If we now compare **Gwen's chair is it more feminine** and the other two more masculine as some have suggested? I am **not inclined to assign a gender** to the chair. It is for me more a **sign of absence**.

NOTES

- "This painting of a simple chair set on a bare floor of terracotta tiles is one of Van Gogh's most iconic images. It was painted in late 1888, soon after fellow artist Paul Gauguin had joined him in Arles in the south of France. The

picture was a pair to another painting, *Gauguin's Chair* (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). They were to be hung together, with one chair turned to the right, the other to the left.

REFERENCES

<https://museum.wales/articles/2180/Gwen-John-Its-tone-that-matters-Part-1-/>

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/vincent-van-gogh-van-goghs-chair>



Gwen John (1876–1939), *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.7 x 26.7 cm, Sheffield Museum



Gwen John, *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.2 x 24.8 cm, Museum of Wales

Gwen John (1876–1939), *A Corner of the Artist's Room in Paris*, 1907-9, 31.7 x 26.7 cm, Sheffield Museum

- It is also interesting to compare the interior with another painting by Gwen of about the same time. The window is closed and the curtain pulled. There is an umbrella leaning against the chair and the light is more subdued. The open book has been replaced by a vase of flowers but otherwise the room is similar.

Gwen John (1876–1939), *Girl Reading at a Window*, 1911, 40.9 × 25.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Gwen John (1876–1939), *Girl Reading at a Window*, 1911, 40.9 × 25.3 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- The American collector **John Quinn** was John's only patron. He eventually owned at least eighteen of her paintings and fifty drawings and he included her painting *Girl Reading at the Window* in the seminal **Armory Show**, America's first 'modern art' exhibition, in New York in 1913.
- In the years between 1914 and 1925 she devoted her life to painting and religion. She sold pictures to her American patron John Quinn until his death in 1924, and exhibited and sold at the Paris Salons from 1919.
- Quinn's sponsorship enabled her to live a simple but independent life. She had only **one solo exhibition** in her lifetime, at the New Chenil Gallery in **London in 1926 and that confirmed her reputation** as a leading twentieth-century artist. In that same year she **purchased a bungalow in Meudon with the proceeds** and built a wall round it.
- Her attitude toward her work was both self-effacing and confident. After viewing an exhibition of watercolours by Cézanne she remarked: "**These are very good, but I prefer my own.**"

REFERENCES

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79663>

<http://goldenagepaintings.blogspot.com/2013/11/girl-reading-at-window->

[1911-gwen-john.html](#)



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Girl in a Blue Dress*, 1914-15, 34.3 × 26.7 cm, National Museum of Wales

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Study of a Seated Nude Girl*, c.1920s, 32.4 x 24.1 cm, Museum of Wales

- "From the **mid-1910s onwards**, we see this technique change quite **dramatically**. John moves almost exclusively to **female portraits** and to applying paint much more **sparingly**, and with no upper layers or varnishes. **Brush strokes become visible** and compositions are flatter and less smooth. Again, we see John shift with the artistic movements around her as other artists in Europe were working with similar techniques." [1]
- The **mood** she creates is partly based on the **technique** she used. (CLICK) This unfinished work tells us more of her technique. **She worked from the edges inwards** with very little preliminary sketching. This is difficult to do as it requires a strong sense of **spatial awareness** to create a cohesive, balanced work. It also meant that she does not distinguish the background from the sitter, both are treated equally and both are equally important.
- From 1915 onwards she developed a dry painting technique first seen in this painting. If we look at the painting in **raking light** we can see she created a textured surface using a mixture of animal glue and chalk and she then applied the paint very dryly and thinly. If a light is shone through the canvas we can see just how little paint she used and how skilful she was to create a mood using hardly any paint at all.(CLICK)

- This is **one of eight almost identical pictures**, one of the earliest and largest of her series of pictures on a theme. In some the dress is plain blue in other spotted and in some the stool is more clearly visible. Gwen used a restricted palette and a simple composition. The lighting is soft and generalised and she used dry, chalky colours like a fresco. The brushstrokes are small and deliberate. In these terms she resembles her contemporary artists of the Camden School, Walter Sickert and Harold Gilman.
- We do not know the name of the model but she was frequently used and was described by Gwen as 'just a Meudon neighbour'. She is often called 'the convalescent' because she posed for a series of paintings on the theme of the convalescent.

REFERENCES

David Jenkins and Chris Stephens (Eds.), *Gwen John and Augustus John*, p. 150

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/girl-in-a-blue-dress-holding-a-piece-of-sewing-1105>

https://museum.wales/art/online/?action=show_item&item=1018

[1] <https://museum.wales/articles/2181/Gwen-John-Its-tone-that-matters-Part-2/>



Gwen John (1876–1939), *The Brown Tea Pot*, 1915–16, 33.5 × 23.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art

- Gwen wrote of her '**scorching, exalting**' passion for Rodin but she avoided what she called the '**ultimate impediment**' of domesticity.
- She wrote to Ursula Tyrwhitt, probably in 1910: '**I think to do beautiful pictures we ought to be free from family conventions as ties... I think the family has had its day. We don't go to Heaven in families now, but one by one**'.
- Gwen was domesticated to the extent that she kept her room '**fresh and pretty**' for Rodin, who paid her rent, and her pleasure in it is a constant refrain in her letters to him. She felt that it was '**so delicious after a whole day outside, it seems to me that I am not myself except in my room**', and the paintings of her interiors, redolent with her presence, do have something of the quality of a self-portrait.
- "But she told him that she could not understand why people wanted to have children: beautiful monuments were erected to artists who created great works; nobody ever erected a monument to anyone for having children." [1]

REFERENCES

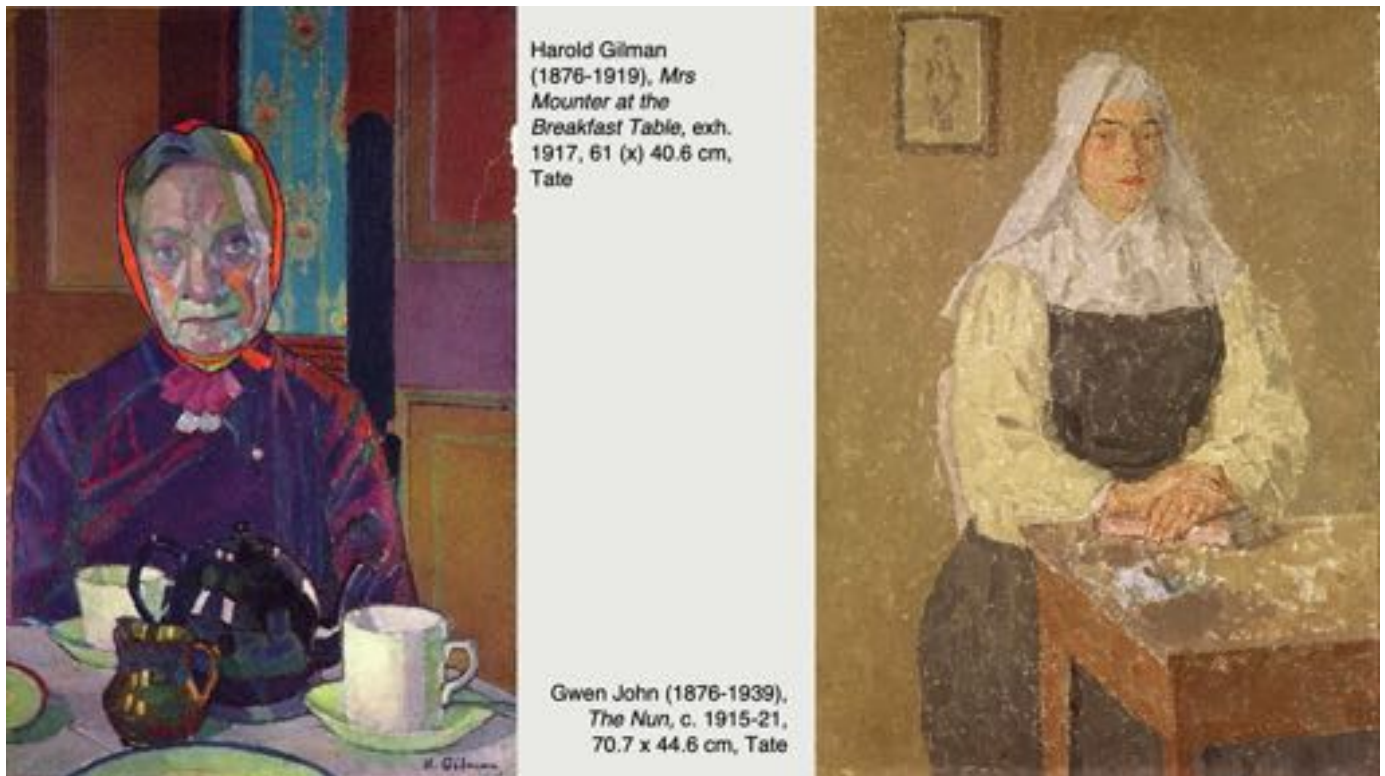
[1] David Jenkins and Chris Stephens (Eds.), *Gwen John and Augustus John*, p. 37

<https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:38720> (no commentary)



Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Nun*, c. 1915-21, 70.7 x 44.6 cm, Tate

- After she left Rodin she became a **Roman Catholic in 1913**. She met the Mother Superior of the orphanage of the Sisters of Charity in Meudon a town on the outskirts of Paris where she had moved in 1910. She promised to paint **portraits of the founder of the order** Mère Poussepin (1653-1744) working from a printed prayer card and using two nuns from the order as models. It took her seven years to complete this, the first painting of the series.
- She became intensely religious and wrote, '**My religion and my art are my entire life.**' (Gwen John)
- Unlike her brother who, in his portraits of friends, brought out their individual characteristics, Gwen used non-professional models in order to **create archetypal images**. That is to say that her interest lay in the **condition of being a nun** rather than in the personality of one specific nun. Nevertheless, I think her portraits show she captures a particular person as well.



Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Nun*, c. 1915-21, 70.7 x 44.6 cm, Tate

Harold Gilman (1876-1919), *Mrs Mounter at the Breakfast Table*, exh. 1917, 61 (x) 40.6 cm, Tate

- According to contemporary critics, Gilman's desire '**to seize the essence of a character in real life and exhibit it on canvas in all its bearings**' was most successfully realised in his 1916-17 paintings of Mrs Mounter his daily help. Gilman was a friend of Walter Sickert who said serious art should '**avoid the drawing room and stick to the kitchen**'. That was forty years before kitchen sink realism.
- As I said earlier, when Whistler met Augustus in the Louvre, Augustus asked him whether he agreed that Gwen was skilled in capturing character. '**Character?**' retorted Whistler, who had taught Gwen the art of tonal relationships, '**What's that? Your sister has a fine sense of tone**'.

NOTES

- Harold Gilman's father was a rector and Harold was born in Somerset but grew up in Kent. He went to Oxford University for a year before working as a tutor in Odessa in the Ukraine. He then trained at the Hastings School of Art before going to the Slade from 1897 to 1901. In 1902 he went to Spain for a year to study Velázquez and Goya. There he met an American artist Grace Cornelia Canedy and they married and settled in London and had five children. In 1907 he met Walter Sickert and they founded the Fitzroy Group

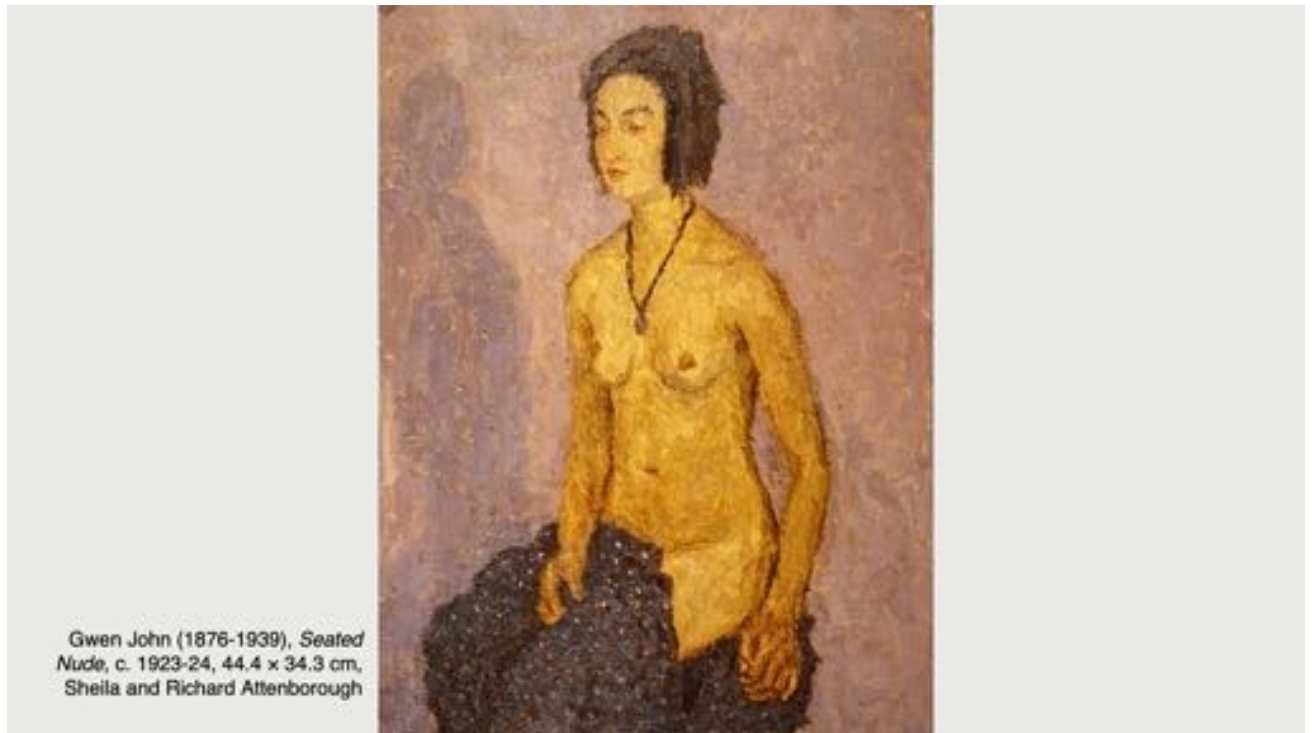
and the Camden Town Group. She left him in 1909 and took her three children back to Chicago and they later divorced. He then married (Dorothy) Sylvia Hardy, an artist. She had his child in 1917 and they married in 1918. He died in 1919 of the Spanish Flu and Sylvia married his brother in 1921.

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<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gilman-mrs-mounter-at-the-breakfast-table-n05317>

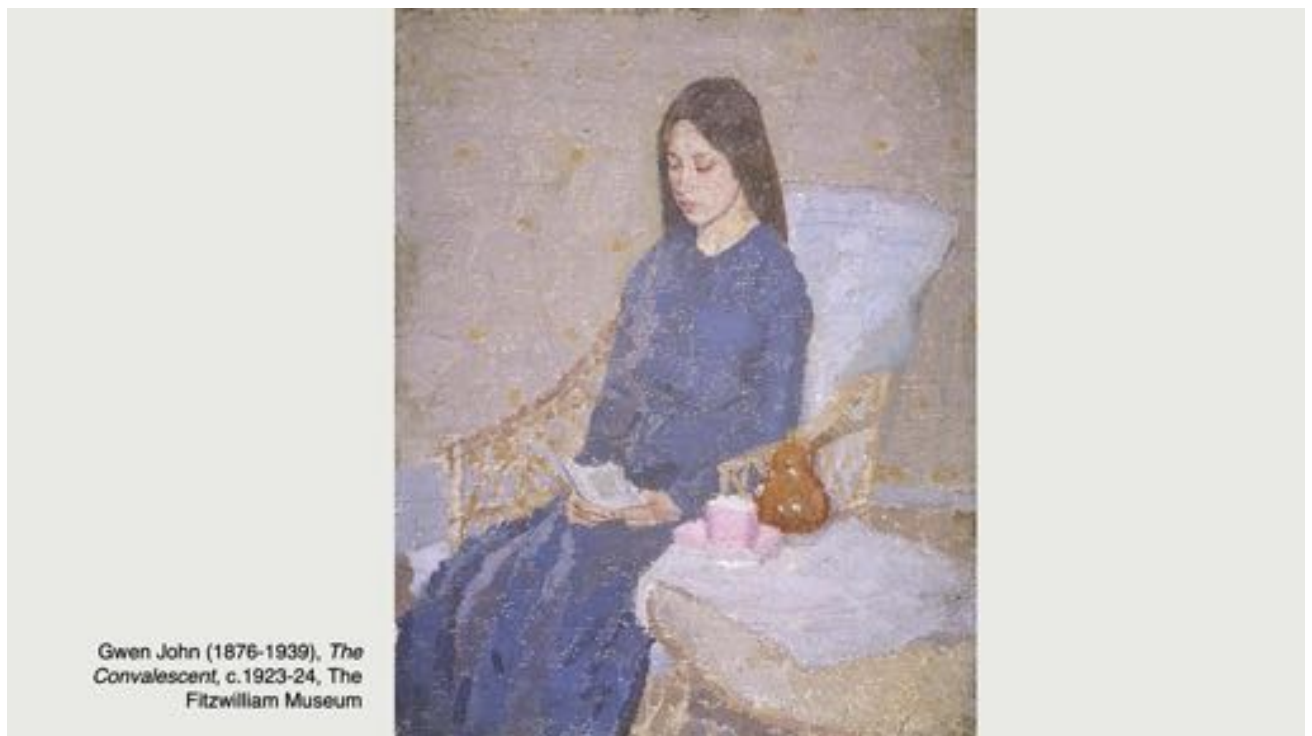
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Gilman

<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/six-of-the-best-how-harold-gilman-shaped-british-painting>



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Seated Nude*, c. 1923-24, 44.4 × 34.3 cm, Sheila and Richard Attenborough

- The unidentified model **posed for six paintings several unfinished**. We know from her letter to John Quinn that in the autumn of 1923 she was working on this and another, now lost, nude painting. She finished soon after and then sent them both to John Quinn who acknowledged their receipt in March 1924.



Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Convalescent*, c.1923-24, The Fitzwilliam Museum

Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Convalescent*, c.1923-24, The Fitzwilliam Museum

- This is **one of ten** very similar paintings of the same girl sitting in a room with soft, pale light.
- Gwen John first painted a version of this in 1919 for her friend, the American artist Isabel Bowser, for whom she herself had modelled. In a letter to another friend from the time she explains:
 - **I will finish the little painting. It is called *The Convalescent*. I was going to say to Isabel, 'It doesn't matter about the title does it, Isabel? No doubt she was cured by Christian Science.' That was a sort of joke.**
- The joke was an affectionate one as her friend had recently embraced Christian Science. Christian Science followers refused conventional medical treatments and believed in spiritual healing. Unfortunately the joke fell flat as her friend died of cancer before the painting was finished. **"It was the second death of a close friend in two years, for in November 1917 the great French sculptor Auguste Rodin, with whom Gwen was deeply in love, had died after a stroke."** [1]

REFERENCES

[1] <https://fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/objects-and-artworks/highlights/PD24-1951>



Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920), *Jeanne Hebuterne, seated*, 1918, 92 x 60 cm, Merzbacher Kunststiftung

Gwen John (1876-1939), *Girl with a Blue Scarf*, c. 1923-24, Museum of Modern Art, New York

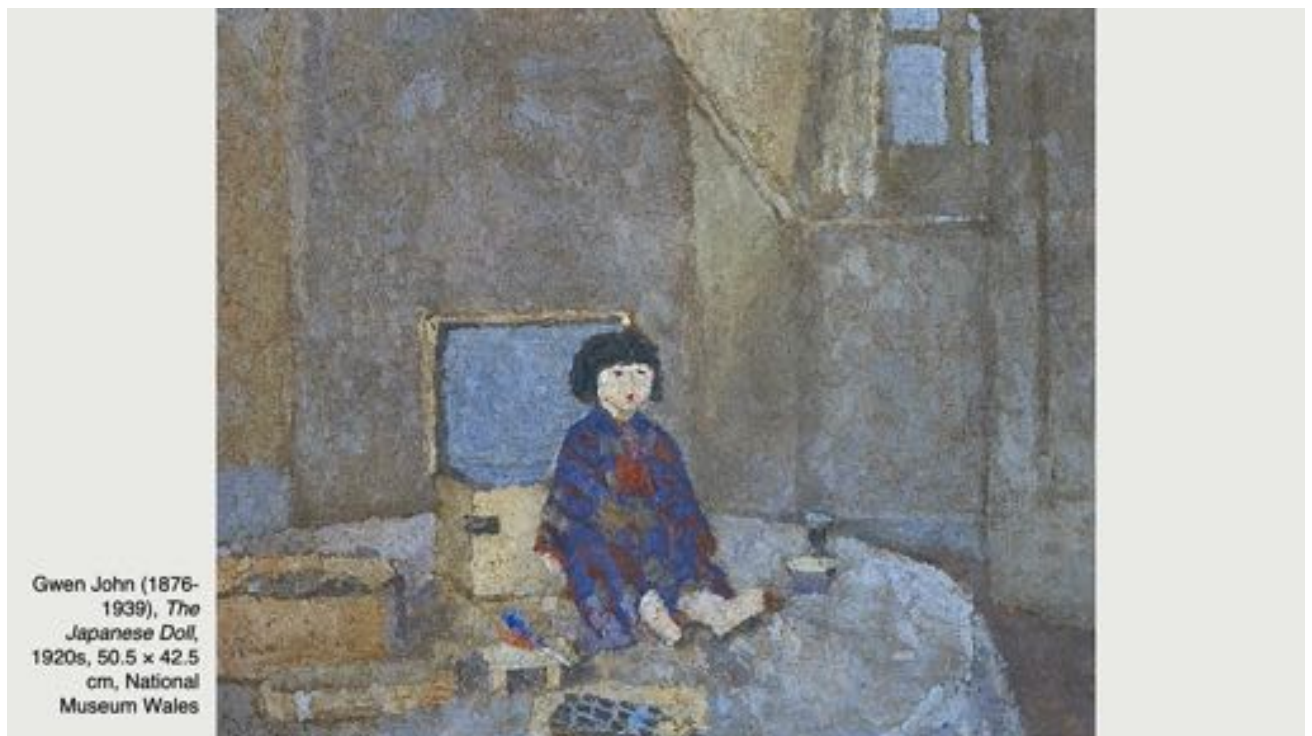
Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920), *Jeanne Hebuterne, seated*, 1918, 92 x 60 cm, Merzbacher Kunststiftung

- **From about 1923 her paintings changed again** and her palette has a new mauvish cast and the contrast has strengthened. Paint is more boldly applied and dragged onto the canvas.
- (CLICK) She is still painting **single women** but their **outline is rougher**, their faces more stylised with high set eyes and well-defined noses.
- (CLICK) There are similarities with the work of Amedeo Modigliani of the late 1910s. She never mentioned him in her letters but she knew his work and he was a friend of her brother. (CLICK)

REFERENCES

David Jenkins and Chris Stephens (Eds.), *Gwen John and Augustus John*, p. 178

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79624> (no commentary)



Gwen John (1876-1939), *The Japanese Doll*, 1920s, 50.5 x 42.5 cm, National Museum Wales

- This is one of two nearly identical compositions. It is thought that the sister of her patron John Quinn, **Julia Quinn Anderson** must have acquired it after **no earlier than 1928**. In that year Mrs Anderson wrote "**I am sorry the painting of the doll is not finished**".
- This makes it one of her last paintings as from **1930 her output dwindled** perhaps because of her **failing eyesight**.
- In December 1926, distraught after the **death of an old friend** (Rilke), she met and sought religious guidance from her neighbour, the neo-Thomist (Thomas Aquinas) Catholic theologian Jacques Maritain. She also met Maritain's sister-in-law, **Vera Oumançoff** (pronounced 'oo-man-soff'), with whom she fell passionately in love although it is unlikely it had physical expression. Gwen was never attracted physically or emotionally by lesbians although they found her attractive.
- **The relationship ended in 1931 and in the last eight years of her life she lived as a recluse**. She only had her cats for company and ate so little she became weak and could hardly stand. She preferred to give her little food to her cats.
- Her last dated work is a **drawing of 20 March 1933**, and no evidence suggests that she drew or painted during the remainder of her life. In 1939 not wishing to live in another **war-torn country she travelled to Dieppe**

en route to England but she fell ill on the way and died and was buried as a pauper in an unmarked grave.



BREAK



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Self-portrait*, c. 1900, 61 x 37.8 cm, National Portrait Gallery

Augustus Edwin John (1878-1961), *Self Portrait*, 1913, National Museum Wales

- We have seen Gwen's work and I will now show you Augustus's work.
- As a reminder Gwen's work appears quiet, self-contained and Augustus intense and out-going.



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Merikli*, 1902, 76.2 × 63.7 cm, Manchester Art Gallery

- This picture was Augustus John's **first critical success**. It was voted the New English Art Club's '**picture of the year**' in 1902. The title **Merikli** is defined in *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales* as 'ornament worn round the neck, gem, bead, especially coral'. Obsessed by the gypsy way of life, Augustus has depicted his first wife, Ida Nettleship, as a gypsy. Over time, the layers of paint have dried out and cracked.
- As I said earlier, when he was seventeen he briefly attended Tenby School of Art before studying at the Slade. He became a star pupil and was regarded as the most talented draughtsman of his generation. When he was 19 he had a serious accident in the sea at Tenby but during his convalescence his artistic development progressed quickly. The following year he won first prize at the Slade for *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, which we saw.
- **He then studied independently in Paris and in 1901 married Ida Nettleship** (1877-1907) the daughter of an artist and a fellow student at the Slade. He accepted a post at the **University of Liverpool** to secure his financial position and taught there from 1901 to 1904. So this was painted during that period. You may think he hated Liverpool but he loved it. He loved the docks with its energy and mix of people from all over the world. You may also think he was a poor teacher but although the other university staff at first looked askance at his long hair and gold earrings he was excellent at working alongside the students and learning with them.

- **Ida Nettleship** (1877-1907) became a student at the Slade when she was 15 and she studied there until she was 21 under Fred Brown, Henry Tonks and Wilson Steer. She became friends with Gwen John and they shared a flat together in Paris in 1898 when they studied under James Whistler. At the end of her time at the Slade she met Augustus and they married in 1901. David was born in Liverpool in 1902 where Augustus was temporary professor. He later became a musician and postman.

NOTES

- "Half-length, three-quarter right side portrait of Ida Nettleship, first wife of the artist, as a gypsy. A young woman wearing a soft, brown dress, seated with a basket of fruit and flowers on her lap. She has a daisy at her right wrist in her lap, and holds up another daisy in her left hand. Her face is turned to the front, and is brightly lit in contrast to the dark plain background."

REFERENCES

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/merikli-205290>



Augustus John (1878-1961), *Dorelia Standing before a Fence*, c. 1903-04, 202 × 122 cm, Tate

- In 1903 he started a relationship with **Dorothy "Dorelia" McNeill** (1881-1969), a typist from Camberwell who attended the Westminster School of Art in the evening which is where she met Gwen. She was described by another artist as so beautiful you could not take your eyes off her. Her taste for dressing in 'artistic' clothes caused Augustus to fantasise that she had gypsy ancestors and he renamed her Dorelia. She is dressed here in her 'gypsy' clothes.
- From 1905 Augustus and his wife Ida lived in Paris with Dorelia. Following Ida's death John lived with Dorothy for the rest of his life and they had four children.
- Throughout his life Augustus was interested in the **Romani people** whom he called '**Gypsies**'. He sought them out across the UK and Europe and learnt to speak their language. For a time, he and his family, which included his wife Ida, mistress Dorelia, and John's children by both women, **travelled in a caravan**, in gypsy fashion. His biographer speculated that his love of the gypsy life derived from his **father, who hated gypsies, warning to him that he would be kidnapped** and brought up by gypsies. His father didn't know that Augustus longed to leave home and wished he would be kidnapped by gypsies. The represented escape and freedom for Augustus.
- We have already seen *Woman Smiling* (1908-09) which was bought by **John**

Quinn.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-dorelia-standing-before-a-fence-t11761>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *William Butler Yeats*, 1907, 76.2 × 51.2 cm, Manchester Art Gallery

- This is a portrait of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (1865-1939).
- "A post-impressionist bust-length portrait of a man seen in three-quarter view to the left. He is depicted in a dark grey, nearly black jacket, and a white shirt with a large, floppy bow tie. He has dark hair, which is parted at the brow, and much of his face is in shadow, in particular the near side and his eye sockets, creating an overall impression of someone dark and brooding. The background is green." [1]
- (CLICK) In a letter to John Quinn, dated 4 October 1907, **Yeats wrote:** '**Augustus John** has been staying at Coole. He came there to do an **etching of me** for the collected edition ... I don't know what John will make of me. He made a lot of sketches with the brush and the pencil to work the etching from when he went home. I felt rather a martyr going to him ... he exaggerates every little hill and hollow of the face **till one looks a gypsy grown old in wickedness and hardship.**' This drawing is one of those pencil studies for the portrait of Yeats now in the City Art Gallery, Manchester, to which the Tate Gallery oil portrait is related. [2]

REFERENCES

- [1] <https://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/title/?mag-object-3536>
- [2] <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-w-b-yeats-n05298>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *David and Dorelia in Normandy*, 1908, 37.2 × 45.4 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum

- Dorelia modelled for Gwen and Augustus and was his common-law wife after his first wife Ida Nettleship died in 1907. In her time she was regarded by some as the perfect example of bohemian fashion.
- From 1903 Augustus, Ida and Dorelia lived together. During this period Ida had three more children—Robin, Edwin and Henry and Dorelia had a child with John. **Ida had to give up painting to look after the children and she considered leaving John** but died of puerperal fever giving birth to Henry **before she could leave him**. In John's memoirs *Chiaroscuro* written in 1952 there is **not a single mention of Ida**, his wife and mother of five of his children.
- This painting shows Dorelia with **David, Augustus's first child with Ida**. It was a year after Ida had died and David was then six.

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<https://collection.beta.fitz.ms/id/object/3473>

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/david-and-dorelia-in-normandy-4573>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *The Blue Pool*, 1911, 30.2 × 50.5 cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *The Blue Pool*, 1911, 30.2 × 50.5 cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery

- From 1911 to 1927 Augustus, Dorelia and the children lived at Alderney Manor, a toy-castle of a house near Poole which Dorelia turned into a home of flowers and huge stews and soups and wood fires. It was not a tidy house, one guest remarked that he left his hat on the floor and returned six weeks later to find it still in the same place. It was described as '**an amazing place, a vast, secluded park of prairies, pine woods, birch woods, dells and moors**'. The **children ran free** through the woods and over the heath. In the grounds they had cows, pigeons, a monkey, donkeys, pigs, ponies, cart horses, dogs, cats and twelve hives of dangerous bees that stung everyone.
- Augustus had a studio and it was here that he painted *The Blue Pool*, one of his most famous works. The pond or pool was known for being turquoise blue whatever the weather because of suspended particles of clay in the water.
- Augustus spent his time working, often morose. The children ran wild unless he needed them as models. He was a **strict Victorian father**, not the relaxed bohemian you might imagine. For example, one of the boys would always sniff his food before eating it which annoyed Augustus and one day he pushed his son's face into the food. The boy rebelled and threw the plate out of the window so Augustus made him go outside scrape all the food off the gravel driveway and come back and eat it all.

- In 1927 they moved to Fryern Court in Fordingbridge and Alderney Manor was later demolished to make way for a housing estate.

REFERENCES

<https://poolemuseumsociety.wordpress.com/2018/05/03/in-search-of-alderney-manor/>

<https://emuseum.aberdeencity.gov.uk/objects/2562/the-blue-pool>



Augustus John (1878-1961), *Lyric Fantasy*, c.1913-14, 238 x 472 cm, Tate

- One difference between Augustus and Gwen was that he used landscapes as a setting for some of his figure compositions but Gwen hardly at all.
- **This very large painting** was one of three commissioned by Sir Hugh Lane for Lindsay House, Cheyne Walk in 1909, the other two are *The Mumpers* (Detroit Intitute of Art) and *Forzeed Amore* (later overpainted, private collection). Augustus started work on them in 1909/10 and he worked and reworked them until 1915 when **Lane died on the *Lusitania* which was sunk by a German U-boat**.
- The planning may have begun as early as 1907 when Augustus wrote, "**I am about to paint a picture which will prove conclusively that the finest decoration can be produced without any direct reference to visual 'Nature'**". In other words it is produced from his imagination but the figures are based on sketches of his friends and family. Only two models have been identified his first wife **Ida on the far right** and **Dorelia, with the guitar**. His first wife died in 1907. With the death of his patron it was left unfinished.
- No symbolic meaning has been attached to the work which is simply a group of people dancing. Augustus wrote that the artist, "**Perhaps in a dream he has caught a glimpse of the Golden Age**".
- **'I am apt to search much further back than human memory can tell of, to Pre-history and the Dawn, for clues to a clearer sense of**

personal identity.' Augustus John in his memoir, *Finishing Touches*

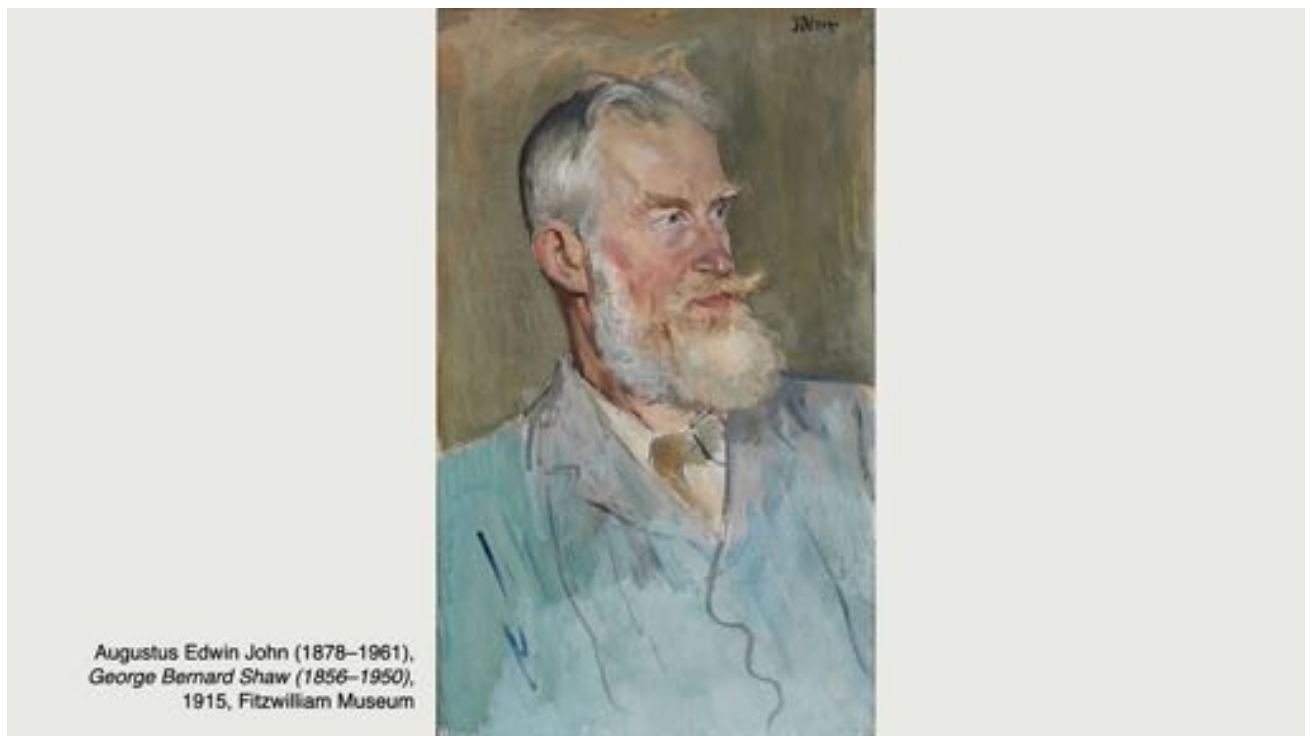
NOTES

- Until 1940 the mural had no title and Augustus decided on *Lyric Fantasy*. In 1952 he asked for the name to be changed to *The Blue Lake*.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-lyric-fantasy-t01540>

<https://www.wahg.org.uk/weba/wp-content/uploads/SeminarHandouts/S16/S16-11b-Gwen-John-Humphreys.pdf>



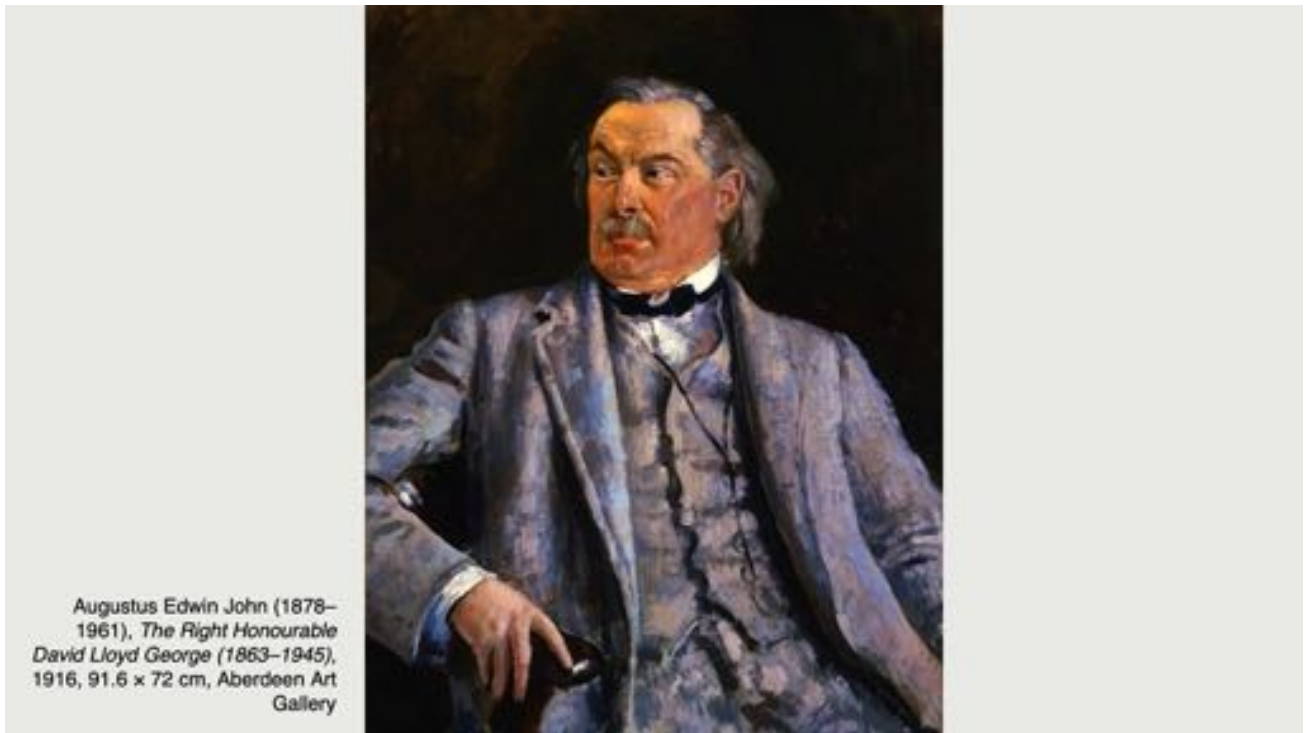
Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *George Bernard Shaw* (1856–1950), 1915, Fitzwilliam Museum

- I am now going to show you a **series of portraits** as he is best known for these and they provide a better reference point for comparison with Gwen. However, it is slightly misleading as he continued to paint outdoor scenes of Dorelia and his family. I also will show you **little from the last twenty-five years** of his life as it is not regarded as his best work.
- **Augustus completed several drawings** of the famous Irish poet and playwright, **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950) in 1915 during a short stay at **Lady Gregory's estate** at Coole Park in Galway. One of these drawing is in the National Portrait Gallery and these studies were used to produce **three finished portraits** that are now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (this one), the Royal Collection and the collection of the National Trust (Shaw's Corner, Hertfordshire).
- In John's memoirs, written over thirty years later, he describes the encounter in remarkable detail. He recalls arriving at Coole Park **in 'poor shape' and with a cough** that seemed to him 'both organic and incurable'. Shaw's chauffeur drove John to a chemist in a nearby town and ordered up a concoction of ingredients that swiftly brought John back to full health, ready to face the 'task with confidence'.
- The time away in Ireland allowed John and Shaw to become well acquainted. Their relationship was peppered with both admiration and irritation for one

another. In a letter to Dorelia John refers to Shaw as a '**ridiculous vain object in knickerbockers**'. By contrast, in his autobiography he recalled that '**What I have sketched here was more than an ordinary episode: it was a great occasion, for I had come to know in intimacy a true Prince of the Spirit, a fearless enemy of cant and humbug**, and in his queer way, a highly respectable though strictly uncanonical saint.' Similarly, despite being dismayed at 'being immortalised as an elderly caricature' and frustrated at John's method of painting over or washing out canvases, Shaw would hold on to one of the portraits from this sitting for **the rest of his life**.

REFERENCES

- The above is taken from the National Portrait Gallery website — [https://www.npg.org.uk/research/archive/archive-journeys/acquisition-histories/george-bernard-shaw-by-augustus-edwin-john,-pencil,-c.1915-\(npg-6972\)](https://www.npg.org.uk/research/archive/archive-journeys/acquisition-histories/george-bernard-shaw-by-augustus-edwin-john,-pencil,-c.1915-(npg-6972))



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *The Right Honourable David Lloyd George* (1863–1945), 1916, 91.6 x 72 cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *The Right Honourable David Lloyd George* (1863–1945), 1916, 91.6 x 72 cm, Aberdeen Art Gallery

- **By 1916 Augustus had reached the peak of his reputation among art connoisseurs.** People who followed his career felt he had not lived up to the potential he showed at the Slade. However, he went from strength to strength as a painter of the rich and famous.
- This portrait came about in an unusual way. At the beginning of 2015 the Chairman of Aberdeen Art Gallery paid 210 guineas for a blank canvas with a promise from Augustus John that he would paint a portrait of anyone he selected.
- Lloyd George had recently visited Aberdeen and dined with the Chairman. Shortly after sittings had been arranged Lloyd George was appointed Minister of Munitions. This was in the middle of the First World War and so little time was available for sittings. John described him as "**a fine subject but a bad sitter**". The painting was finished in February 1916 and the Chairman gave Lloyd George a box of cigars for, as he put it, "**the boy who had come well out of a trying ordeal**".

NOTES

- "The story of how this painting of the Welsh Wizard came to belong to Aberdeen Art Gallery is an interesting and unusual one. It goes back to the dark days of World War I, to a sale of pictures in aid of the Red Cross, early

in 1915. **A large blank canvas was knocked down to Sir James Murray**, Chairman of the Aberdeen Art Gallery, for 210 guineas. It was a high price to pay for a blank canvas but **the donor was Augustus John, flamboyant doyen of British art, and he had promised to paint a portrait on it.**

- At first Sir James could not think what to do with his canvas and to have his own portrait painted seems not to have occurred to him but - '**a few days later it dawned on me that the Chancellor's portrait was the solution**'. Lloyd George had recently visited Aberdeen on a political speech-making tour and had dined with Sir James at Glenburnie Park in Rubislaw Den North. With these pleasant memories of his reception in the city he agreed at once.
- Soon after arranging sittings with Augustus John 'from 9.45 - 10.30am' he was appointed **Minister of Munitions** and was so busy that they were given only rarely. John described him as "**a fine subject but a bad sitter**." There was relief all round when the portrait was finished in February 1916, Lloyd George confessing to Murray, -"**No-one but you could have made me do this!**" Sir James wrote later of how he promptly drew out a packet of 100 Peter Mitchell cigars and handed them to the Minister '**for his good conduct - sort of prize for the boy who had come well out of a trying ordeal**'. " [1]

REFERENCES

[1] <https://emuseum.aberdeencity.gov.uk/objects/2594/the-rt-hon-david-lloyd-george>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Colonel T. E. Lawrence*, 1919, 80 × 59.7 cm, Tate

- **Augustus was a war artist in the First World War I** working for the Canadian War Memorials Fund to record Canada's role in the war. He was billeted to the Somme and wrote he 'enjoyed being out there' but he suffered from what he called a 'paranoia' continually. He wrote, 'I cannot stand anybody' and he could see 'no good in anything'.
- After the war he found **fashionable success with his portraits of famous literary and society figures** such as Thomas Hardy, James Joyce, Lady Ottoline Morrell and T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935, aged 46), also known as '**Lawrence of Arabia**'. He had become famous as as **British Military liaison officer during the Arab Revolt** of 1916-18. He was a **driving force behind the Arabs' offensive** and defensive movements **against the Turks**; after the war he recorded his Middle Eastern experiences in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. He was killed in a motor-cycle accident in 1935.
- The Government selected Augustus John and William Orpen as the two most famous British artists to attend the Peace Conference. During the **Peace Conference in 1919 Lawrence became friendly with Augustus** and sat for this portrait. He was amused by the result and described himself as looking like the 'rebellious' or 'wrathful' one. Lawrence wanted to buy the painting but it was **too expensive**. Augustus painted two other portraits of Lawrence at this time, one Lawrence described as the 'goody-goody one' and the other Augustus described as a 'dud'.

NOTES

- He was the only officer in the British Army allowed to wear a beard except for the King. This meant that at a distance he was often met by ordinary soldiers standing and saluting.
- He was almost court-martialled for hitting a fellow officer but was saved by Lord Beaverbrook. He returned to England and did not return to the war front.
- He painted an enormous painting called *The Canadians Opposite Lens* and spent most of the rest of his life working on it but it is unfinished.
- He visited Paris and met Gwen in 1917 and they had dinner together. He found her much changed since the start of the war and with the recent death of Rodin who she still regarded as his 'true wife'. She had gone from being a gay person full of fun before the war to a recluse living with her cats and a hypochondriac. However, Gwen wrote that his visit had done her good.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-colonel-t-e-lawrence-n03566>

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961),
The Marchesa Casati, 1919, 96.5 ×
68.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *The Marchesa Casati*, 1919, 96.5 × 68.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario

- Also at the **Peace Conference in 1919** he met the arresting **Marchesa Casati** whose extravagance and narcissism were legendary. Augustus drew or painted her four times over their 35 year friendship.
- The mountains in the distance and her smile allude to Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* but the Marchesa in her silk pyjamas and heavily made-up eyes is more seductive than mysterious.
- There are some 125 known portraits of her but this is one of the most successful.

NOTES

- The portrait was originally full-length but was cut down by Augustus.

REFERENCES

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-marchesa-casati/AwHtL6mZHKOZGg?hl=en-GB>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Lady Ottoline Morrell*, 1919, 69 × 51.1 cm, National Portrait Gallery

- Lady Ottoline Morrell was a **well-known socialite and art lover**. She met Augustus in 1906 and had a **brief affair** with him in 1908. He began this portrait in 1918 and it was exhibited in 1918.
- *The Star* called it a '**grotesque travesty of aristocratic, almost imbecile hauteur**'. *The Manchester Guardian*, however, was more positive: '**... an ideal portrait in the Johnian sense in the way that it makes life more exciting and fantastic and unlikely**'. Augustus's biographer (Michael Holroyd) wrote "**Her eyes are rolled sideways in their sockets like those of a runaway horse and her mouth bared soundlessly**".
- **Lady Ottoline herself liked it and hung it over the mantelpiece** in the drawing room of her London house.

NOTES

- "Patron and society hostess. After travelling widely as a young woman, in 1902 Ottoline married Philip Morrell, a solicitor and later Liberal MP. She established herself as a literary and political hostess at their home in Bloomsbury and from 1915 at Garsington Manor, their home near Oxford. Her social gatherings provided a forum for intellectual interaction and opportunities for writers and artists to meet patrons. Visitors to Garsington included Lytton Strachey, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, Henry Lamb and

Augustus John. Lady Ottoline Morrell, the chatelaine of Garsington Manor outside Oxford, was a ferocious socialite, friend and lover of artists and writers, including Augustus John, whom she **first met in 1906 and with whom she had a brief affair in 1908.**

- He began this portrait in 1918. When it was exhibited in 1920, **most people were critical of it**, the Manchester Guardian writing that 'it is like one of the queer ancestral portraits you see in a scene on the stage, although it is done by a man of genius'. The Star called it a '**grotesque travesty of aristocratic, almost imbecile hauteur**'. The Manchester Guardian, however, recognised its merits: 'an ideal portrait in the Johnian sense in the way that it makes life more exciting and fantastic and unlikely'. **Lady Ottoline herself liked it** and hung it over the mantelpiece in the drawing room of her London house. It is well described by Michael Holroyd in his biography of Augustus John: 'Her head, under its flamboyant topsail of a hat, is held at a proud angle and she wears, like rigging, several strings of pearls (painted with the aid of tooth powder) above a bottle-green velvet dress. Her eyes are rolled sideways in their sockets like those of a runaway horse and her mouth bared soundlessly'." (Art UK, National Portrait Gallery)

REFERENCES

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp03183/lady-ottoline-morrell>

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw08219>

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Thomas Hardy* (1840–1928), 1923, 61.3 x 51.1 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Thomas Hardy* (1840–1928), 1923, 61.3 x 51.1 cm, The Fitzwilliam Museum

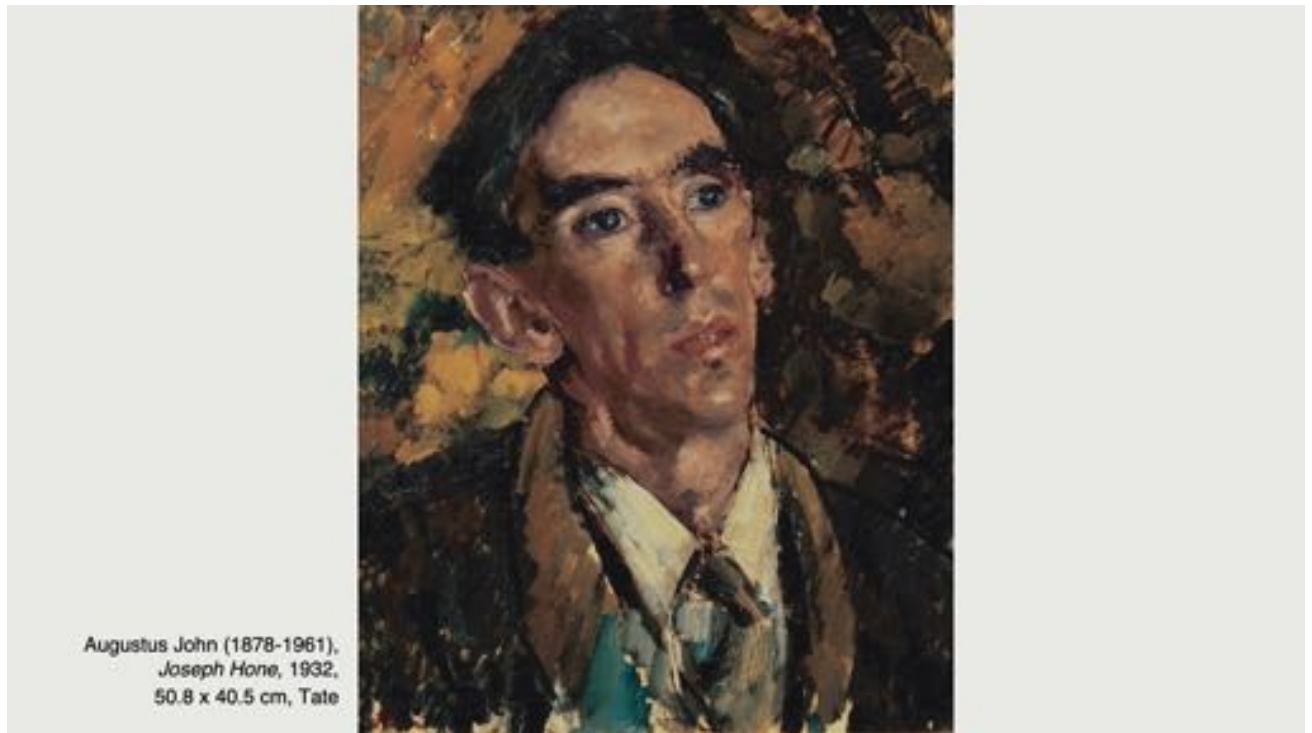
- **Augustus met Thomas Hardy through T.E. Lawrence in 1923.** In the following weeks he made several visits to **Max Gate**, the house that Hardy had designed and built for himself in Dorchester, Dorset, to work on this affectionate and admiring portrait. **The study** in which Hardy is shown is that in which he wrote many of his most celebrated works, including ***Jude the Obscure*** (1895).
- Augustus revered Hardy and wrote, "**An atmosphere of great sympathy and almost complete understanding at once established itself between us, though the veneration in which I held Hardy impeded to some extent the natural expression of my response to his quite lovable personality ...**"
- John recorded in his memoirs that 'Hardy himself was, physically, not of monumental build, though he had a fine head'. Yet in the portrait the artist has **done his best to endow the old man with a certain stature**. We are looking up in reference as he gazes out of the picture in deep thought. Half the canvas is filled with his grey suit creating a monumental block fixed in place by his large hands and thumbs, giving stability and dignity to his presence.
- **Despite many prestigious commissions Augustus began to reach the peak of his reputation as a fashionable society portrait painter by**

about 1925.

- **In 1921 he was elected Associate of the Royal Academy and in 1928 he as elected full Royal Academician.** He was made trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1933 to 1941.

REFERENCES

<https://fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/objects-and-artworks/highlights/1116>



Augustus John (1878-1961), *Joseph Hone*, 1932, 50.8 x 40.5 cm, Tate

- 'John was fifty-three in 1931, but **he seemed old, his hair was grey, his eyes bloodshot.**' Lady Mosley about Augustus John in 1931.
- By the time he was 54, when he painted this, **he was filled with self-doubt and suffered from bouts of gloom.** He isolated himself and **found solace in alcohol.** He had **long out-lived his popularity** although he had been elected a **Royal Academician in 1928.**
- One skill he never lost was the ability to **conjure up a living likeness with a few brushstrokes.** Joseph Hone was an old friend and a distinguished biographer best known for his **biography of W.B. Yeats.**
- **Augustus John and his family had moved to Fryern Court at the edge of the New Forest in 1927** and Hone came to stay when this portrait was painted. Augustus was unhappy with the portrait but it remained as he left it.
- Augustus fought for the **rights of gypsies in the New Forest** and they called him Sir Gustus and he became known as the 'King of Bohemia'.



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961),
Dylan Thomas (1914–1953), 1937-38,
45.7 × 33.7 cm, National Portrait Gallery

Augustus Edwin John
(1878–1961), *Dylan
Thomas* (1914–1953),
1937-38, 41.4 (x) 35 cm,
National Museum Wales,
National Museum Cardiff



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Dylan Thomas* (1914–1953), 1937-38,
41.4 × 35 cm, National Museum Wales, National Museum Cardiff

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Dylan Thomas* (1914–1953), 1937-38,
45.7 × 33.7 cm, National Portrait Gallery

- "The artist **met Dylan Thomas (1914–1953) at the Fitzroy Tavern** (Charlotte Street), probably in 1935, and introduced him to Caitlin Macnamara, whom he married in 1937. This is one of a **pair of portraits of the young poet** by John. Both probably date from late 1937 or early 1938 when Thomas and his wife were staying at her mother's house in Hampshire **not far from John's home at Fryern Court.**
- (CLICK) The artist recalled '**I got him to sit for me twice, the second portrait being the more successful: provided with a bottle of beer he sat very patiently.**' (Art Uk, National Museum Wales)"
- I am not sure which of the two is the second portrait but I think the one on the right is the most successful.
- One critic has claimed that "**the painterly brilliance of his early work degenerated into flashiness and bombast, and the second half of his long career added little to his achievement.**" However, from time to time his inspiration returned, as it did on a trip to Jamaica in 1937...

REFERENCES

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/dylan-thomas-19141953-116860>

The other portrait is at

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw09660/Dylan-Thomas>



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Two Jamaican Girls*, 1937, 76.2 x 63.8 cm, Walker Art Gallery

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Two Jamaican Girls*, 1937, 76.2 × 63.8 cm, Walker Art Gallery

- "John visited Jamaica in 1937 when it was still a British colony. His stay coincided with the first stirrings of serious revolts against poor wages and working conditions. When John arrived, he was mistaken for a visiting politician. John sympathised with the Jamaican people, but his opinions and attitude could be considered patronising today.
- The island was a great inspiration to him. He made many observant paintings of the women and hotel workers that he met there, including this celebrated example. Here, the young woman in front appears bored while her companion seems apprehensive in John's presence." [1]

REFERENCES

[1] <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/artifact/two-jamaican-girls>

Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961),
Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery (1887–1976), 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 1944, 77 x 62 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow



Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery (1887–1976), 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein*, 1944, 77 x 62 cm, Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow

- In 1941 he was offered a knighthood but Buckingham Palace insisted he marry Dorelia. He proposed to her properly on one knee but she refused as she considered it inappropriate after so long and for the wrong reason. Augustus was consoled by being awarded the Order of Merit (1942) which did not require him to marry.
- In 1942 Montgomery sat for Augustus John who he commissioned to paint a portrait for £500 that he intended to give his son if he did not survive the war. While it was being painted the studio was visited by George Bernard Shaw and Montgomery and Shaw "hit it off".
- However, there was instant dislike between Montgomery and Augustus John and when it was finished Montgomery told him - **"I don't like it - and I won't pay for it!"** Bernard Shaw didn't like it either and told Augustus, **"You really weren't interested in the man."**
- As it happens Augustus was not unhappy since he sold the painting to someone else for much more money.

NOTES

- "In his memoirs Montgomery relates that in February [1942] he began to sit for a portrait which he wanted for his son David in case he did not survive

the war. The well-known artist, Augustus John, was commissioned for a fee of 500 pounds. During the sittings Montgomery met the famous writer George Bernard Shaw who visited the studio. The incident is described by Nigel Hamilton in *Master of the Battlefield*. Between Montgomery and Augustus John there was an **instant dislike**, but the general and the writer now "hit it off" completely. Shaw afterwards described Montgomery as "that intensely compacted hank of steel wire" with a gaze like a "burning-glass," which "concentrates all space into a small spot." In the end Montgomery disliked the portrait - "**I don't like it - and I won't pay for it!**" Neither did Bernard Shaw who told Augustus John, "**You really weren't interested in the man.**" The artist was not unhappy since he sold the painting to someone else for much more money. A black and white copy of the oil portrait is found in Moorhead's *Montgomery*." [1]

REFERENCES

[1] Colin Baxter (Ed.) *Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, 1887-1976, A Selected Bibliography*, Greenwood press, 1999, p.67

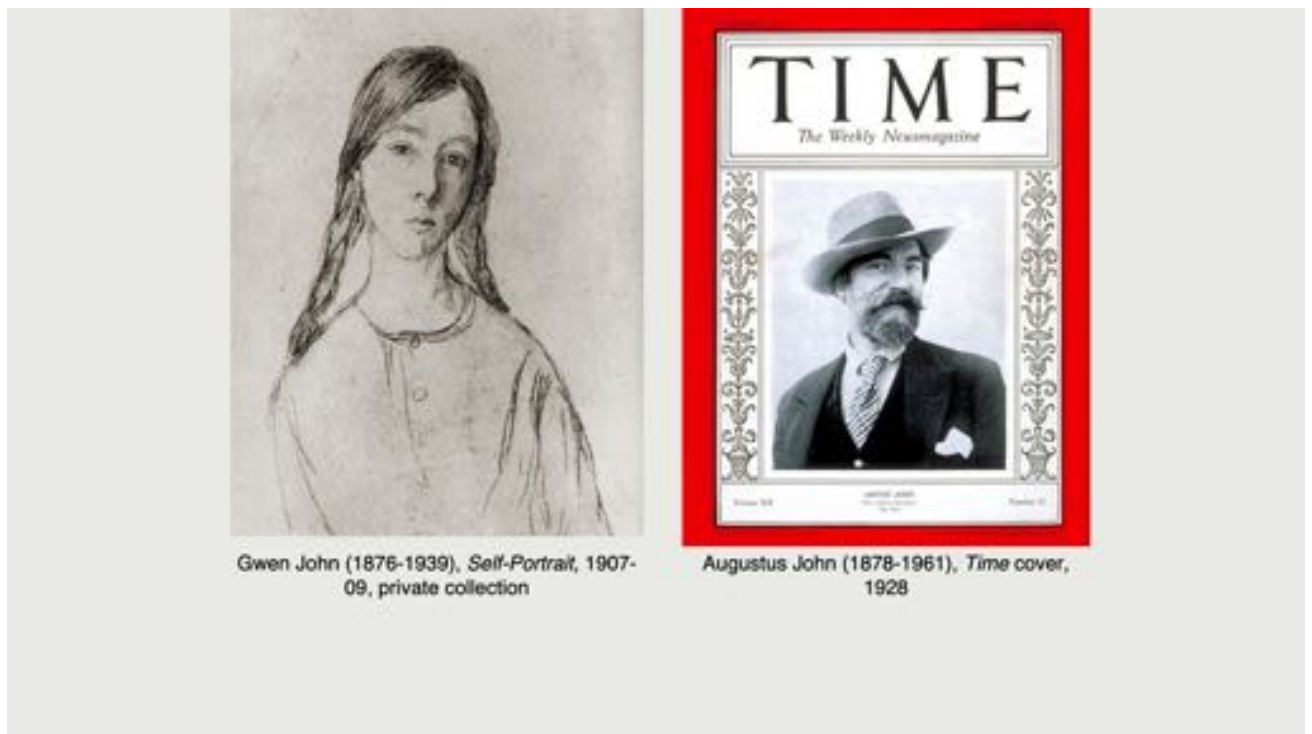


Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961), *Dorelia*, 1959

- I thought I would end with this painting of Dorelia his partner for 58 years. He died two years after this was painted and she continued to live at Fryern Court until her death eight years later.
- In old age, **John had ceased to be an important force in British art but he was still greatly revered** as shown by a huge exhibition of his work in 1954 at the Royal Academy.
- He was a pacifist and founder member of the Committee of 100 and a month before he died he attended an anti-nuclear weapons demonstration in Trafalgar Square. He died at home in **Fryern Court** aged 83. On his death the obituary in *The New York Times* said, '**He was regarded as the grand old man of British painting, and as one of the greatest in British history.**'
- **Tate Britain held a major exhibition of the work of 'Gwen John and Augustus John'** in 2004-5. According to the gallery's publicity, this exhibition revealed that although Augustus described himself and his sister as "**the same thing, really,**" their **art developed in different directions.** Augustus' work seems wildly exuberant against Gwen's more introverted approach, but both artists indicate a similar flight from the modern world into a realm of fantasy.

NOTES

- He wrote two biographies *Chiaroscuro* (1952) and *Finishing Touches* (published 1964).
- In 1921 he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy and elected a full R.A. in 1928. He was named to the Order of Merit by George VI in 1942. He was a trustee of the Tate Gallery from 1933 to 1941, and President of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters from 1948 to 1953.



Gwen John (1876-1939), *Self-Portrait*, 1907-09, 44.8 x 34.9 cm, Tate
 Augustus John (1878-1961), *Time cover*, 1928

- Brother and sister artists are unusual although not unknown. The most famous are perhaps Rosa Bonheur and her less well-known brother Auguste, an animal painter. John Brett, the Pre-Raphaelite-style artist and his sister Rosa Brett. Hilda Carline, first wife of Stanley Spencer, was an artist and had two brothers who were artists, Richard and Sydney. Marcel Duchamp had a sister Suzanne who was a Dada artist.
- I think Augustus and Gwen John and the two individually best known brother and sister artists. This leads commentators to make comparisons between their work as I have been doing here. Conventionally, Augustus was regarded as flamboyant, sociable and outgoing whereas Gwen has been seen as quiet, introverted and preferring her own company. These differences have been projected onto their work. This may be misleading Augustus wrote "**She didn't steal through life, but preserved a haughty independence which people mistook for humility.**"
- Gwen appears quiet, self-contained and Augustus intense and out-going. To understand her art she should be seen as an international artist. She and her brother were conscious of being Welsh artists as there were few in London. They felt they were outsiders coming from another world. Gwen also spent 36 years of her 63 years in France.
- By the time he was **twenty-five**, Augustus had become the **most famous**

British artist of the day. His talent as an artist was compared with that of **Michelangelo, Gauguin and Matisse** and he became **legendary** for his bohemian lifestyle and celebrity circle of friends. Since his death his reputation has declined.

- By contrast Gwen was largely ignored by the critics until about 1926. More recently she has become a **celebrated painter of international renown** to the extent that the retrospective at the Tate in 2004 felt that they had to reclaim Augustus's reputation.
- Augustus once said "**Fifty years after my death [which was 2011] I shall be remembered as Gwen John's brother.**". He was right, she is now regarded as one of the most important British artists of the 20th century and he has been largely forgotten. What Rennie Mackintosh said about his wife Margaret could have been said by Augustus, "**she has genius and I have talent**".



GWEN JOHN AND AUGUSTUS JOHN

QUESTIONS?

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- Augustus John on Gwen—**"Gwen and I were not opposites, but much the same really, but we took a different attitude. I am rarely 'exuberant'. She was always so; latterly in a tragic way. She wasn't chaste or subdued, but amorous and proud. She didn't steal through life, but preserved a haughty independence which some people mistook for humility. Her passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational. She was never 'unnoticed' by those who had access to her."**
- Augustus wrote they had a:
 - Common contempt for sentimentality
 - Augustus is not 'exuberant' she was always so, latterly in a tragic way
 - Gwen was not chaste or subdued but amorous and proud
 - She preserved a haughty independence which some thought was humility
 - Her passions for both men and women were outrageous and irrational
 - She was never 'unnoticed' by those who met her
- Both were confident in their talent and both went to the Slade
- Both followed a traditional path after the Slade based on portraiture
- Both rejected realism and believed they must take their cue from the subject
- Both followed their imagination and both looked for escape

- Both produced works of passion based on a selfish preoccupation with their own ideas
- Gwen was introvert, Augustus extrovert but both sought to find areas not occupied by others
- Look at their drawing of each other and of their closest friends
- Look at portraits of Dorelia:
 - Augustus - gypsy, exterior, distant, landscape, a before story has begun
 - Gwen - refuge, retreat, interior, closed room, story after it has been told
- Augustus shows us the beginnings, the possibilities, before the story has begun, it is all potential, like the view of a child when everything is possible..
- Gwen shows us the end of the story, calm, relaxed, the story of old age and wisdom when everything has taken place.