

- **Let's start by listening to another art historian describing a painting ...**

Notes

There are many paintings that could be used to discuss how to read a painting. Some good examples are:

NPG

1. 1395-9 *Wilton Diptych*, who was the artist? Why was it produced?
2. 1450 Piero della Francesca *The Baptism of Christ*, formal
3. 1507 Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne (Burlington House cartoon)*, Louvre painting and Freud's interpretation as a vulture
4. 1522 Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, formal, the leg
5. 1533 Holbein, *The Ambassadors*, many symbols and interpretations
6. 1601 Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, Baroque, Council of Trent
7. 1748-9 Gainsborough, *Mr & Mrs Andrews*
8. 1884 Seurat, *Bathers*, pointillist in parts (added later?)

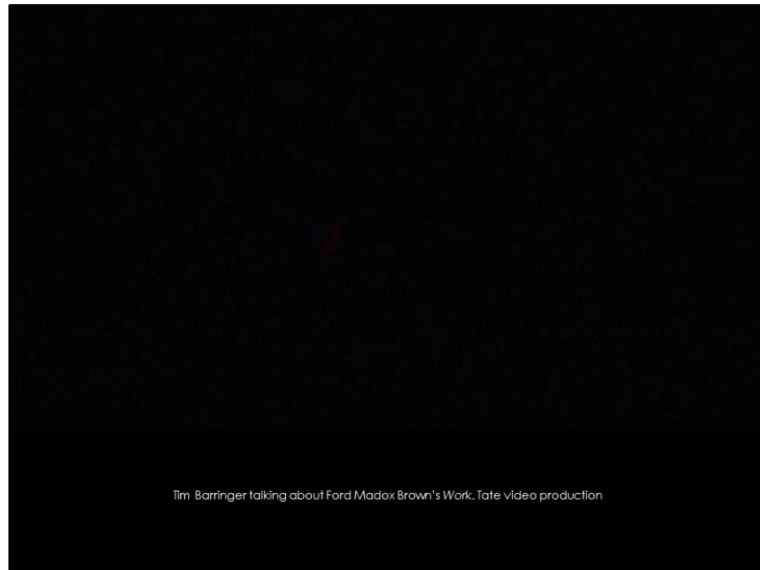
Tate Modern

1. Cubism, Picasso, *Fruit Dish Bottle and Violin*, 1914 NG
2. Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, urinal, story of NY gallery
3. Surrealism, Rene Magritte, *Time Transfixed*, 1938, train coming out of fireplace
4. Joan Miro, *Woman and Bird in the Moonlight*, 1949
5. Jackson Pollock, *Summertime: Number 9A*
6. Rothko, *Light Red over Black*, 1957

General

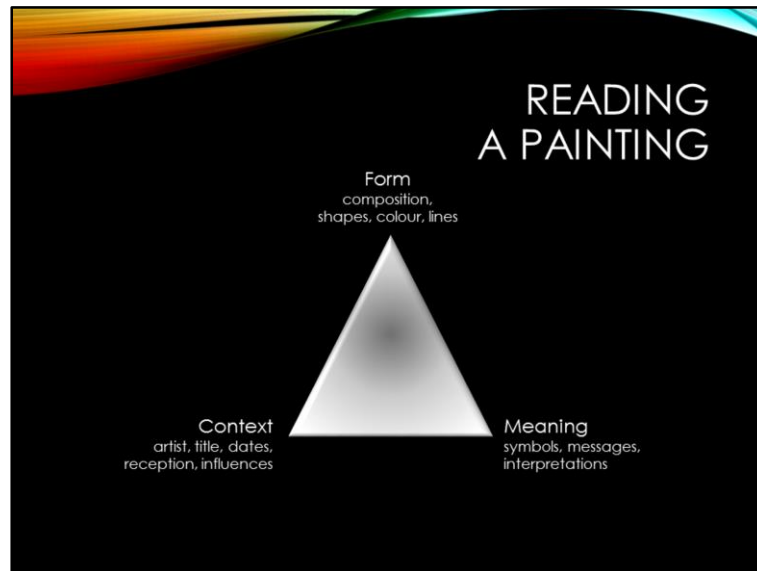
1. 1594 Marcus Gheeraerts II, *Portrait of Captain Thomas Lee*
2. 1600 Elizabeth I, *The Rainbow Portrait*

3. 1650 Peter Lely, *Barbara Villiers, Lady Castlemaine*
4. 1670 Vermeer, *Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*
5. 1743 Hogarth, *The Marriage Settlement*
6. 1750 Hogarth, *March of the Guards to Finchley*
7. 1789-90 Thomas Lawrence, *Queen Charlotte*
8. 1838-9 Turner, *Fighting Temeraire*
9. 1826 Constable, *The Cornfield*
10. 1859 Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia*
11. 1900 Sergeant, *Madame X*
12. 1967 Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, Tate
13. 1991 Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*



Tim Barringer talking about Ford Madox Brown's *Work*, Tate video production

- You are about to hear **Tim Barringer** describe a painting by **Ford Madox Brown** called **Work**.
- I would like you to take note of the **different ways** he describes or reads the painting.
- (Play video)
- Tim Barringer is the author of many books on nineteenth century art including *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (Yale, 1998), *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (Yale, 2005). He is a Professor at Yale after working at the V&A, University of London and Birmingham. **His PhD thesis was on this painting** so he is a, if not *the*, recognised expert.
- So, how did he describe or read the painting?
- He gave his personal opinion as a recognised expert, he said it is '**one of the greatest paintings of the nineteenth century**'.
- We all have **personal opinions** about works of art from **Titian to Tracy Emin's bed** but I would like to get away from personal opinions and try to find a way of looking at works of art more **objectively**.



- There are three types of description he offered:
 1. about the **form**, the formal properties of the painting such as its **size** and the composition, a **pyramid** with a central **pentagonal group**;
 2. about the **context**, the artist, the background and the influences, such as the **artists sense of humour**; it is also concerned with the background to the historical period, the provenance, i.e. the history of purchases, and its critical reception over time (reception theory), that is what critics and reviewers wrote about it at the time and since then;
 3. and about the **meaning**. He divided his analysis of the meaning into two, particular symbols, such as the **dogs**, sometimes called the **iconography** and the **overall meaning**, in this case a **political statement**, sometimes called the **iconology**. The distinction between iconography and iconology was made by Erwin Panofsky in a 1955 essay. The limits of iconography was pointed out by Ernst Gombrich in 1972 when he described the 'dictionary fallacy'. This is the idea that a symbol has a single meaning that we can just look up as if it were in a dictionary. He also rejected levels of meaning and any, like Barthes, personal or psychological intention on the part of the artists as this is in general unavailable to the viewer.

Notes

- Erwin Panofsky defined "iconography" as the study of subject matter in the visual arts and "iconology" as an attempt to analyse the significance of that subject matter within the culture that produced it.
- *The Death of the Author* is a 1967 essay by the French literary critic and theorist **Roland Barthes**. The French title was *La mort de l'auteur* an intentional pun of Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* as it had many authors over centuries. Barthes's essay argues against traditional literary criticism's practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text, and instead argues that writing and

creator are unrelated.

- This painting is unusual as Ford Madox Brown wrote a five pages catalogue describing all his intended meanings which is one reason I choose it. This means that as viewers we must , necessarily reach our own interpretation but in this case we also have the artists views to take into account. However, Barthes was writing about literary texts not about paintings so even a seemingly precise description is subject to our interpretation. The ultimate, eternal intended meaning of a work can never be reached but as Barthe wrote, every work is "eternally written here and now", with each re-reading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" and its impressions on the reader.

References

- Panofsky, Erwin. "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art." In *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. By Erwin Panofsky, 26–54. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955.
- Gombrich, E. H. "Aims and Limits of Iconology." In *Symbolic Images*. By E. H. Gombrich, 1–25. London: Phaidon, 1972.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work*, 1852-1863, exhibited 1865, Manchester Art Gallery
 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_(painting))

- So let's get started with **form**. Looking at the formal properties is always a good way to start as it requires no knowledge of the artists, its history or the context.
- **What do we mean by a paintings formal properties:**
 - **Composition** – curves, diagonals, triangles, rhythm and spacing
 - **Space** – perspective, both aerial and linear, walking through the picture, how close are we to the picture space?
 - **Form** – such as the sculptural form of bodies, form achieved by chiaroscuro, form created by line and by colour
 - **Tone** – the contrast of light and shade, chiaroscuro.
 - **Colour** – and its use to create a mood and convey an emotion
- The first and simplest formal property is its **size**, it is a **big painting** and large paintings were reserved for history paintings, the highest genre of academic art.
- However, the style and approach are revolutionary which undermines the conventions of history painting.
- We will start with **composition**.
- Brown designed the frames and often used an **arched frame** or pictorial device reminiscent of religious altarpieces.
- To see the overall form it is best to **half close your eyes** and to make this easy I have done it for you ...

Notes

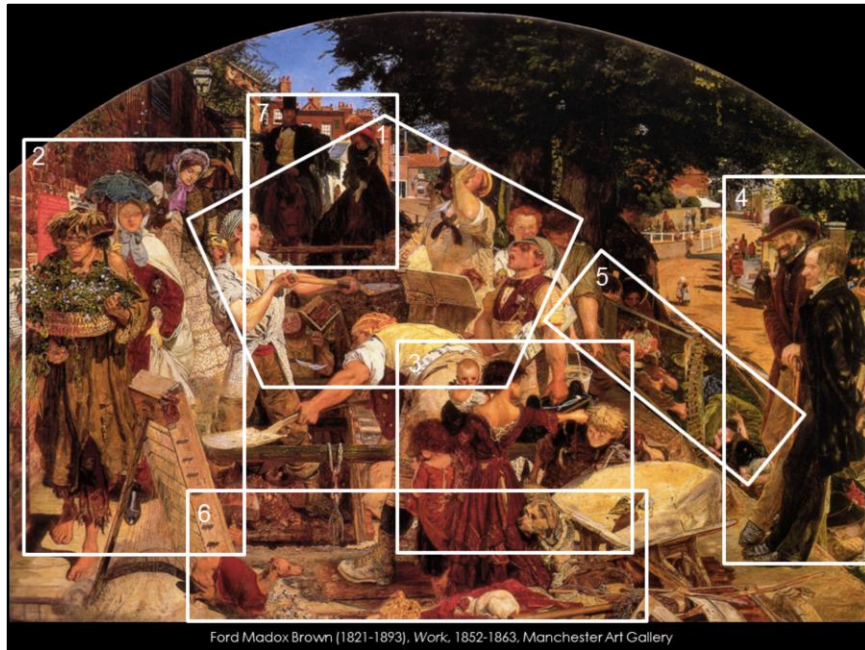
Form

- Note there is a distinction between 'form' as a shorthand for the formal properties of a painting and 'form' meaning, for example, the shape of a figure in the painting.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work* (1852-1865), Manchester Art Gallery

- This painting is a complex composition but if we reduce the painting to its strongest highlights we find a **triangular composition**, which is the basis of many paintings, and there is a group in the middle.
- The figures are compressed from the right to the left, from rural relaxation, to concentrated labour to the urban crush on the left. Although the aristocrats are at the top they are pushed back, unable to progress and they are put in the shade. The workers are brightly lit.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work* (1852-1865), 137x198cm, Manchester Art Gallery

Compositional Groups

- But within this triangle there is a central pentagonal group of the key players and many other **groups of related figures**.
- Do this with **all paintings** that include figures. Identify the **key groups** and how they interact. Pay particular attention to expressions and **sightlines**—who is looking at whom.
- At this point I will start to **stray** into **non-formal properties** as I begin to **identify the shapes as figures** and as different types of people.

1. **Manual workers**, in the centre there is a five-sided shape containing a brightly light group of seven manual workers, the central focus and theme of the painting. There is the hand of another worker deep in the trench. Also one of the figures is not digging but appears to be shouting, he is a potman who is selling beer, but more of that later.
2. **Passers-by**. On the left is a mixed group, a figure holding a tray of plants followed by two women and a little girl with a yellow hat and a man carrying a tray on his head.
3. **Children**. Below the workers are a group three children and a baby.
4. **Intellectuals**. On the far right are two standing observers who a Victorian would recognise as Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) the philosopher essayist, teacher and historian alongside F. D. Maurice (1805-1872, John Frederick Denison Maurice) theologian, and Christian Socialist.
5. **Unemployed**. To there right is a group of figures lying down on a bank with a suspicious figure standing above them.
6. **Dogs**. There are three dogs in the foreground, an upper class whippet wearing a smart

coat, a small puppy that looks like a terrier and a poor mongrel behind. There is another dog in the painting but it is hard to see. It is a hunting dog below the final group.

7. **Wealthy couple.** On horses at the top are a wealthy couple with a dog.

- We can also see other figures in the distance, a policeman and orange seller on the far right, elm trees above and a wealth of minute detail, flowers, tools and equipment but more of this later.

Space

- Space is concerned with whether the painting creates a three dimensional world we feel we can walk into. In this case it does and I will look at the location more later as we can find the exact spot from which Madox Brown painted.

FMB wrote:

- **Navvies.** 'The young navvy who occupies the place of hero in this group, and in the picture, stands on what is termed a landing-stage, a platform placed half-way down the trench; two men from beneath shovel the earth up to him, and he shovels it on to the pile outside. ... Here are presented the young navvy in the pride of manly health and beauty; the strong fully developed navvy who does his work and loves his beer...'
- **Rich Couple.** 'The couple on horseback in the middle distance, consists of a **gentleman, still young, and his daughter.** (The rich and the poor marry early, only those of moderate incomes procrastinate.) **This gentleman is evidently very rich, probably a Colonel in the army, with a seat in Parliament, and fifteen thousand a-year,** and a pack of hounds. He is not an over-dressed man of the tailor's dummy sort - he does not put his fortune on his back, he is too rich for that; moreover, he looks to me an **honest true hearted gentleman** (he was painted from one I know), and could he only be got to hear what the two sages in the corner have to say, I have no doubt he would be easily won over. But the road is blocked, and the daughter says we must go back, papa, round the other way.'
- **Children.** 'I would beg to call your attention to my group of **small, exceedingly ragged, dirty children** in the foreground of my picture, where you are about to pass. I would, if permitted, observe that, though at first they may appear just such a group of ragged dirty brats as anywhere get in the way and make a noise, yet, being considered attentively, they like insects, molluscs, miniature plants, &c., develop qualities to form a most interesting study, and occupy the mind at times when all else might fail to attract. That **they are motherless, the baby's black ribbons** and their extreme dilapidation indicate, making them all the more worthy of consideration, a mother, however destitute, would scarcely leave the eldest one in such a plight. As to the father, I have no doubt he drinks, and will be sentenced in the police-court for neglecting them. The **eldest girl, not more than ten, poor child!** is very worn-looking and thin, her frock, evidently the compassionate gift of some grown-up person, she has neither the art nor the means to adapt to her own diminutive proportions - she is fearfully untidy therefore, and her way of wrenching her brother's hair looks vixenish and against her. But than a germ or rudiment of good housewifery seems to pierce through her disordered envelope, for the younger ones are taken care of, and nestle to her as to a mother - the sunburnt baby, which looks wonderfully solemn and intellectual as all babies do, as I have no doubt your own little

cherub looks at this moment asleep in its charming basinet, is fat and well-to-do, it has even been put into poor mourning for mother. The other little one, though it sucks a carrot in lieu of a sugar-plum, and is shoeless, seems healthy and happy, watching the workmen. The care of the two little ones is an anxious charge for the elder girl, and she has become a premature scold through having to manage that boy - that boy, though a merry, good-natured-looking young Bohemian, is evidently the plague of her life, as boys always are. Even now he will not leave that workman's barrow alone, and gets his hair well-pulled, as is natural.'

- **Chickweed Seller.** 'Next in value of significance to these, is the **ragged wretch who has never been taught to work**; with his restless gleaming eyes, he doubts and despairs of everyone. But for a **certain effeminate gentleness of disposition and a love of nature, he might have been a burglar! He lives in Flower and Dean Street, where the policemen walk two and two**, and the worst cut-throats surround him, but he is harmless; and before the dawn you may see him miles out in the country, collecting his wild weeds and singular plants to awaken interest, and perhaps find a purchaser in some sprouting botanist. When exhausted he will return to his den, his creel of flowers then rests in an open court-yard, the thoroughfare for the crowded inmates of this haunt of vice, and played in by mischievous boys, yet the basket rarely gets interfered with, unless through the unconscious lurch of some drunkard. The bread-winning implements are sacred with the very poor.'
- **Brainworkers.** 'To the right of the painting 'are **two influential Victorian figures who are the brain workers**, who seeming to be idle, work, and are the cause of well-ordained work and happiness, in others. They are portraits of the **writer, Thomas Carlyle** and the **Christian Socialist, the Rev. F. D. Maurice who founded the Working Man's College where Brown himself taught art.**'
- **Potman.** 'The **man with the beer-tray, calling "beer ho!"** so lustily, is a specimen of town pluck and energy contrasted with country thews and sinews. He is humpbacked dwarfish, and in all matters of taste, vulgar as Birmingham can make him look in the 19th century. As a **child he was probably starved, stunted with gin**, and suffered to get run over. **But energy** has brought through to be a **prosperous beer-man, and "very much respected,"** and in his way he also is **a sort of hero**; that black eye was got probably doing the police of his master's establishment, in an encounter with some huge ruffian whom he has conquered in fight, and hurled through the swing-doors of the palace of gin prone on the pavement.'



Michelangelo, *The Libyan Sibyl*, 1509, fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican

- I need to switch away from Ford Madox Brown's *Work* to make a more general point about form. Since the Renaissance there has been an important distinction between line and colour, the two represent two approaches to art—the intellectual and the emotional. Which is more important? Reason or feeling? **Sense or sensibility?**

Form

- Michelangelo's *Libyan Sibyl* can be seen on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1508-12). With her regal pose and Hellenic features, she was known for her prophecy of the coming of a king born of a virgin. This figure is one of the finest on the ceiling. This sibyl is suspended in a dramatically twisted pose, or contrapposto.
- **(Click)** The red chalk drawing, done from a male model, shows a study of the face in the lower left-hand corner, in which the artist transformed the rough **male features** of his model into the Hellenic ideal of **female beauty** found in the final painting.
- A **fundamental distinction** from the time of the Renaissance is the distinction between those artists that used line to create form and those that used colour. The two masters of the two approaches are Michelangelo for line and Titian for colour.
- Line means that the artist often **uses an underdrawing**, that **outline is important** and that the **edges and contours are carefully delineated**.
- In the nineteenth century the **Pre-Raphaelites were the masters of line** and the **Impressionists the masters of colour**.

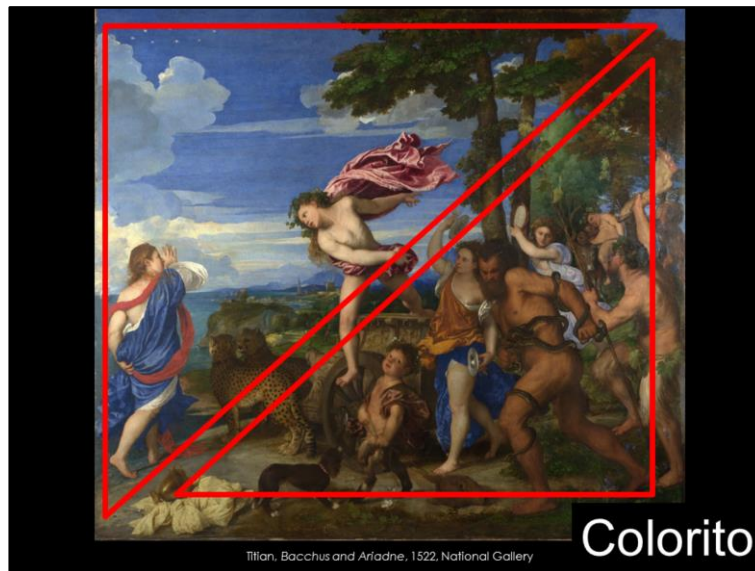
Notes

- There are 12 prophetic figures on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, seven Israeli prophets and five female Sibyls of the Classical world.
- They are:- Jonah, Jeremiah, Persian Sibyl, Ezekiel, Erythraean Sibyl, Joel, Zechariah, Delphic Sibyl, Isaiah, Cumaean Sibyl, Daniel, Libyan Sibyl.

- It is reputed that Socrates visited the Oracle and one of his students asked if any man was wiser than Socrates and the Oracle answered 'None'. Socrates spent his life trying to understand this answer as he knew he was ignorant. He searched out wise men and interviewed them but was always unimpressed. In the end he decided that only the gods have wisdom and the wisest of men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is worthless.

Michelangelo Buonarroti

- He was born in Caprese (Tuscany) in the 1470s and trained first as a painter with Ghirlandaio, and then as a sculptor under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici. In 1496, already known as sculptor, he went to Rome, where he carved the 'Pietà' for St Peter's.
- Back in Florence in 1501 he began work on many sculptural and painterly projects most of which were left unfinished in 1505, when he was summoned to Rome to begin work on a sculpted tomb for Pope Julius II, a project that dogged him until 1545. From 1508 to 1512 he painted the vault of the Sistine Chapel with scenes from the Old Testament, from the Creation to the Story of Noah. Immediately celebrated, the Sistine Chapel ceiling, with its innumerable figures in complex, twisting poses and its exuberant use of colour, is the chief source of the Mannerist style.



Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1522-3, National Gallery

- Here is an example of what we call colour or **colorito**. In Renaissance Italy line was called '**disegno**' and colour '**colorito**' and the distinction was political.
- Titian did not do any underdrawing he painted directly onto the blank canvas.
- This distinction may sound minor but it goes to the heart of two ways of thinking about painting and it was still part of early nineteenth century analysis of the Old Masters.
- The **Florentine** style was disegno, careful drawing came first and the approach was regarded as intellectual and made painting an intellectual activity.
- In **Venice** colour was the most important aspect and colour is associated with emotion. The verb colorito means the application of colour and Venetian artists would sketch on the canvas with charcoal and build up the forms using pigment directly applied and reworked.
- **Venetians** believed that their approach came closest to nature as we do not find lines and outlines in nature only colours creating shapes. They believed colour is the source of animation and the pulse of life. Venetians were empirical, they worked out the result they wanted as they went along. Florentines were scientific and planned all aspects of the painting first.

Notes

National Gallery, London

- "Bacchus, god of wine, emerges with his followers from the landscape to the right. Falling in love with Ariadne on sight, he leaps from his chariot, drawn by two cheetahs, towards her. **Ariadne** had been **abandoned** on the Greek island of **Naxos by Theseus**, whose ship is shown in the distance. The picture shows her initial fear of Bacchus, but he set her **diadem (crown)** in the heavens as the **constellation Corona** shown above her (the national Gallery website says Ariadne

- is turned into the constellation).
- The programme for the series was probably devised by a humanist scholar in the service of Alfonso d'Este. The subject of Bacchus and Ariadne is derived from the classical authors Ovid and Catullus.
- The painting is one of a famous series by Bellini, Titian and the Ferrarese artist Dosso Dossi, commissioned for the Camerino d'Alabastro, (Alabaster Room) in the **Ducal Palace, Ferrara**, by **Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara**, who in around 1510 tried to include Michelangelo and Raphael among the contributors. Titian's painting was in fact a **substitute** for one with a similar subject which the Duke had **commissioned from Raphael** (1483-1520). Bellini's 'Feast of the Gods' for this room is dated 1514, and the three works by Titian were painted 1518-25."
- The composition is divided **diagonally into two triangles**, one of blue sky and still but for the two lovers caught in movement, the other a mass of movement and mostly green and brown. The follower of Bacchus who struggles with a snake was influenced by the antique sculpture of Laocoön which had recently been discovered in Rome. The **King Charles spaniel** that barks at the boy satyr is a **common motif** in Titian's work and was probably a **court pet**. The **gold urn** inscribed with the artist's signature (TICIANVS) may also have been familiar to the Duke as **one of the antiquities** in his collection.

Titian (Tiziano Vecellio)

- Titian was born in Pieve di Cadore, a small town at the foot of the Dolomites on the Venetian side of the Alps in about 1490.
- He trained briefly with Gentile Bellini and his brother Giovanni Bellini, which was the most important workshop in Venice. His early style was influenced by Giorgione and following his death in 1510 and Sebastiano del Piombo's departure he became the leading painter in Venice.
- He became famous as a portraitist and in 1518 for the 'Assunta' (Assumption of the Virgin Mary) in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice.
- In 1516 he was employed by Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara who also employed Raphael, Fra Bartolomeo and Dosso Dossi. Following the deaths of Raphael and Fra Bartolomeo he was commissioned to paint two Bacchanals, one in the Prado, Madrid, and the other *Bacchus and Ariadne*.
- Titian also worked for the court of Mantua. In 1523 he began painting for the future Duke of Mantua, Federico II Gonzaga the son of Isabella d'Este (who was the sister of Titian's earlier patron Alfonso I). Titian mainly painted portraits for the Mantuan court.
- In 1525 he married Cecilia (who tragically died in 1530). Titian and Cecilia had three children.
- Titian painted a full-length portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in Bologna in 1530. He became the principal painter to the imperial court, which gave him immense privileges, honours and even titles. From this moment he was the painter most in demand at courts across Europe. Titian also became the official painter of Charles V's son, Philip II of Spain.
- From the 1550s Titian radically revised his style and painting technique and had a much freer use of the brush and a less descriptive representation of reality.



Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, National Gallery

- Another aspect of the formal properties of a painting is the use of light and shade to create form. This, in Italian is called *chiaroscuro*, literally 'light' and 'dark' and the master of using *chiaroscuro* for dramatic effect was Caravaggio.
- He painted with a new realism that was very different from the Classical idealism of Michelangelo.
- Caravaggio was born in Milan and trained under Titian and he used the Venetian practise of painting directly on the canvas using oil paints.
- His closely observed realism with all the flaws and defects of life appealed to young artists and many other artists followed his style.
- Caravaggio was notorious for his emotion and wild behaviour and this energy is found in his paintings.
- The strong side light he often employed and the low key lighting accentuates the emotional impact.
- As one art historian said, **he put the 'scurio' in chiaroscuro, that is the dark into light-dark.**
- The extended arms and the bowl of fruit almost falling at our feet extend the picture space out into our space.
- **He never did underdrawings** but would sketch the main shapes using his brush handle in the first layer of paint.
- He was harshly criticized in his lifetime but influenced Rubens, Velazquez and Rembrandt.

Notes

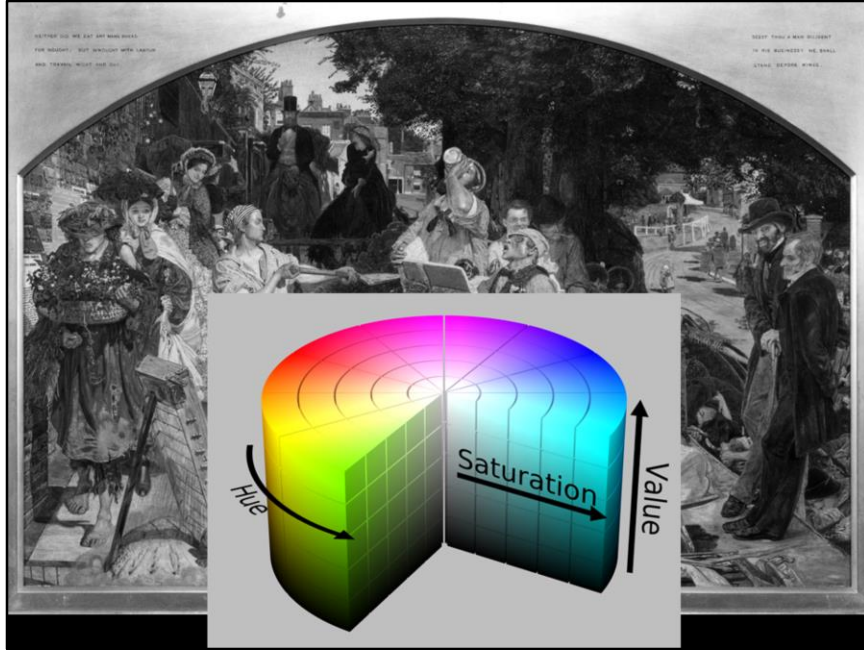
- An incognito Jesus, reveals himself to two of his **disciples** (presumed to be **Luke and Cleopas**) in the town of Emmaus. The event was three days after the crucifixion, that is on

the day of resurrection. Some claim Cleopas was the brother of Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary. Luke is one of the four evangelists and is represented by an ox or bull sometimes with wings. He is said to be the first icon painter.

- Caravaggio painted another *Supper at Emmaus* in 1606 which is now in Milan and I more restrained. There is a third version with a bearded Christ hat is privately owned.
- Christ may be beardless as mark's Gospel says he appeared 'in another form'.
- **Like the world** these apostles knew, the basket of food **teeters perilously over the edge**.
- Council of Trent 1545-1563 in Trento (Trent) and Bologna. Prompted by the protestant Reformation it was the Catholic churches most important ecumenical council. It defined the Counter-Reformation. Protestantism removed public art from religion but the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church encouraged religious art that was strictly religious. Veronese was called before the Inquisition to explain the 'buffoons, drunken Germans and dwarfs' in his last supper so he changed the title to *The Feast in the House of Levi*.
- 'chiaro' means clear, light or pale, 'scuro' means dark and 'oscuro' means obscure or murky.
- The **scallop shell** is the traditional **emblem of James**, son of Zebedee, and is **popular with pilgrims** on the Way of St James to the apostle's shrine at **Santiago de Compostela** in Galicia (Spain). Medieval Christians making the pilgrimage to his shrine often **wore a scallop shell** symbol on their hat or clothes. The pilgrim also **carried a scallop shell** with him, and would present himself at churches, castles, abbeys etc., where he could expect to be given as much sustenance as he could pick up with one scoop. Probably he would be given oats, barley, and perhaps beer or wine. Thus even the poorest household could give charity without being overburdened. The association of **Saint James with the scallop** can most likely be traced to the legend that the **apostle once rescued a knight covered in scallops**. An alternative version of the legend holds that while St. James' remains were being transported to Galicia (Spain) from Jerusalem, the horse of a knight fell into the water, and emerged covered in the shells. In French the animal (as well as a popular preparation of it in cream sauce) is called **coquille St. Jacques**. In **German**, they are **Jakobsmuscheln** — literally "James mussels".

Caravaggio

- First known painting 1592, he painted small genre scenes and was completely destitute.
- From 1595 he was taken into the court of Cardinal del Monte and then worked for Rome's wealthiest patrons. He painted effeminate young men and religious scenes.
- In 1599 he received his first major commission for the Contarelli Chapel, scenes from the life of St. Matthew.
- From 1600 commissions came pouring in, mostly large religious scenes.
- In 1606 he had to flee Rome with a price on his head after committing murder. Until 1610 he was on the run, from Naples to Malta to Sicily. He painted dark, religious subjects, grim, sober and unsettling.
- The Council of Trent wanted artists to be more natural than those that followed the Mannerist style but Caravaggio went too far, from dirty fingernails to dirty feet.
- A Cardinals secretary said, 'In this painting there are but vulgarity, sacrilege, impiousness and disgust'.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work*, 1852-1863, exhibited 1865, 137x198cm, Manchester Art Gallery

See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work_(painting))

Colour

- Returning to our painting of *Work* we can see that it is in the designo school. The Pre-Raphaelites were influenced by the Spirito Sancto fresco through engravings and their work carefully delineates the precise forms of the natural world.
- Brown adjusted his palette to make it brighter after seeing the work of the Pre-Raphaelites at the 1851 Royal Academy exhibition where *Chaucer* was on view.
- A few more observations on colour. It is a very technical subject as colour involves combination of objective scientific measurement and the subjective response to colour.
- Technically colour consists of **three dimensions**,
 - **hue**, for example, red, blue, green,
 - **saturation** (or chroma) is how pure it looks, low saturation colours are greyish
 - and **value** or **brightness** (also called value or luminosity).
- The **brightness** of each colour is sometimes called its **tone**. Light colours are sometimes called **tints** and dark colours **shades**.
- (Click) If we remove all the hues (i.e. colours) we are left with a black and white version that shows the tones and the tonal range.
- All **high saturation** colours (i.e. bright colours) have a medium brightness as tints are obtained by adding white and shades by adding black.
- **Low key** pictures are predominantly dark and **high key** predominantly light.

- **Chiaroscuro** (Italian for light-dark) is the use of strong contrasts used to improve three-dimensional modelling or add a sense of drama.
- Colours can also be warm (yellow, orange and red) or cool (blue, green and light purple). Warm colours come closer and remind us of sunshine and cool colours of water and the sky and they appear to recede.



Georges Seurat (1859-1891), *Bathers at Asnières*, 1884, National Gallery

Formal Properties

- We have come to the end but I should add that some art historians (see as Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg) argue that **the only important analysis is the formal analysis, sometimes called formalism.**
- This is partly because
 - As we move into **abstract art** the **formal properties often dominate** over the symbols and meaning.
 - Artists and art historians felt that each discipline should **do what it does best** as that is more **honest and productive**. Writing is better at telling a story or making a point than images so an honest artist will not try to attempt these things. Instead the artist will regard their task as applying materials, often coloured pigments, to a flat surface, no more.
 - In nineteenth-century England the Aesthetic Movement did this to create works of beauty **without meaning or purpose**. In the early twentieth century the word beauty was not used as it was regarded as reactionary and political suspect.
- **Roger Fry** (1866-1934) in *Vision and Design* (1909) was an early Modernist critic to apply formalist analysis to contemporary art. Fry writes,
 - 'A work of art had the peculiar property of conveying the aesthetic emotion, and it did this in virtue of having "significant form"'.
- This Seurat is one the paintings described in Roger Fry's book.

Notes

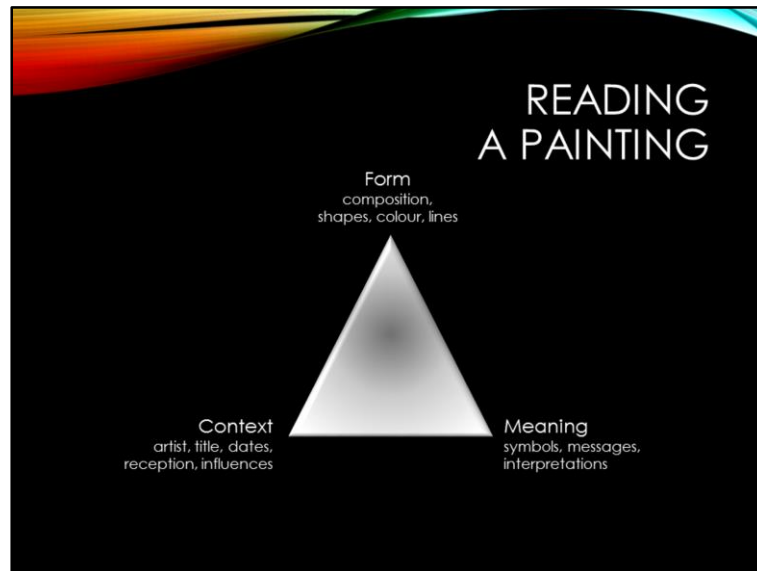
- Asnières is pronounced 'an-yair'
- The formalist approach goes back to Roger de Piles (1635-1709) and his *Principles of Painting* and more recent art historians are Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945).
- Roger Fry married and had two children but shortly after his wife became seriously

mentally ill and was committed to a mental institution for the rest of her life. Fry met Vanessa Bell (sister of Virginia Woolf) and her husband Clive Bell and joined the Bloomsbury Group. Fry had an affair with Vanessa Bell and was heart-broken when she fell in love with Duncan Grant and decided to live with him permanently.

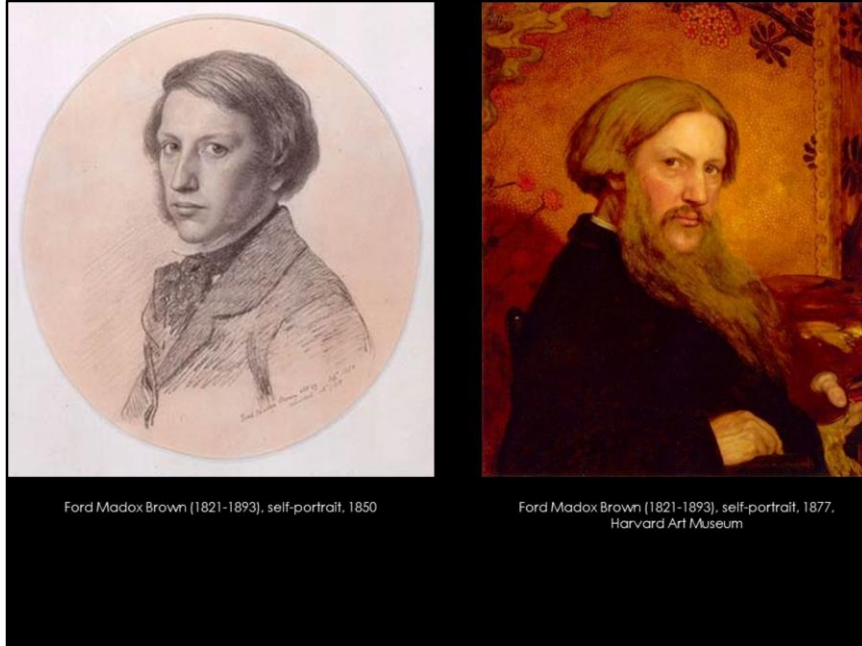
- Fry's *Vision and Design* contains chapters on Art and Socialism, Art and Science, Negro Sculpture, Ancient American Art, Mayan Art, Mohammedan Art, Giotto, the Art of Florence, Durer, El Greco, William Blake, Claude, Aubrey Beardsley, the French Post-Impressionists, Cezanne and Renoir.

Seurat

- Seurat is considered **one of the most important Post-Impressionist painters**. He moved away from the apparent spontaneity and rapidity of Impressionism and **developed a structured, more monumental art** to depict modern urban life.
- 'Bathers at Asnières' is an important transitional work. It shows him developing the application of his **novel pointillist technique** to a large work on the scale of History painting.
- At the start of his career, Seurat followed a traditional path: taught to paint by a **pupil of Ingres**, Henri Lehman, at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris; studying the works of early Italian and 17th-century French artists in the Louvre; and then exhibiting at the official Salon. His drawings in Conté crayon allowed for very subtle tonal gradation; they shimmer in a manner akin to the effect created by Seurat's pointillist painting technique.
- Seurat combined a traditional approach, based on his academic training, with a study of modern techniques, such as Impressionism. He also applied ideas from contemporary **optical theories of colour** relationships. Seurat's disciplined work, which contrasts with that of many of his Impressionist contemporaries, was very influential.



- I have completed the formal analysis and so let's look at the three aspects of reading a painting mentioned earlier.
- When I look at a work of art there are three areas of questions,
 - First, we can examine what are called the **formal properties**, the composition, shapes, colours, perspective, techniques used and so on.
 - Second, there are the **factual questions**, who is the artist, what is the title, when was it painted and exhibited, who was the patron and so on. This is a big area as it brings in the history of the period and influences on the artist.
 - Finally, and perhaps the biggest area is the **meaning**. Many people find this the most interesting and we can approach it in different ways. We can look for symbols and meanings, the social function of the work, how it was received at the time and over the years since and we can also examine it from the point of view of a paradigm such as feminism or modernism or psychology.
- We will try out the triangle of analysis as we go along.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), self-portrait, 1850, aged 29

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), self-portrait, 1877, aged 56, Harvard Art Museum

Context

The Artist

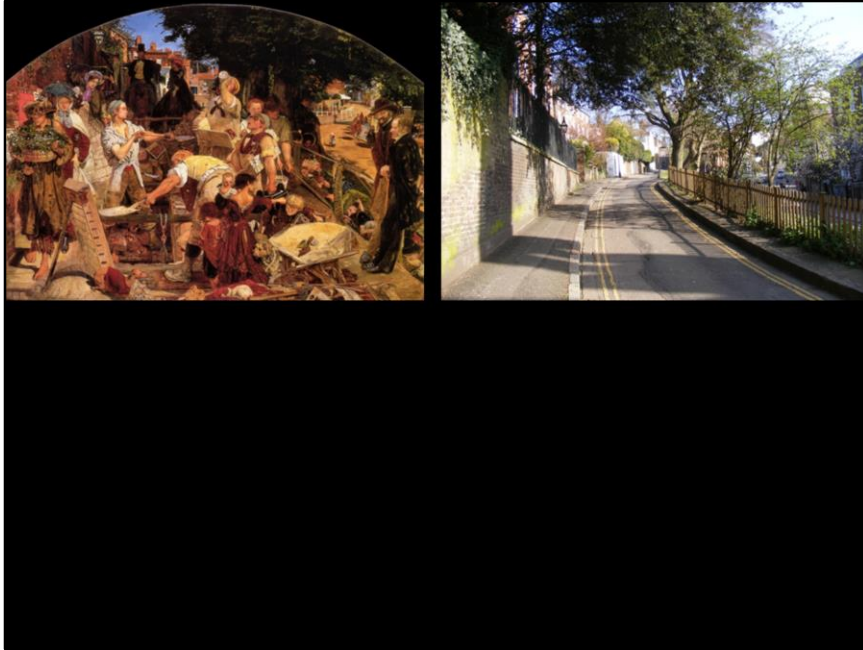
- We can now move on to the **context of the painting**, not the meaning within it but everything outside the painting. This requires research and reading.
- To begin with the artist:
- **Ford Madox Brown** was born in **Calais** on 16th April, 1821, the son of a ship's purser (a crew member in charge of the ship's finances). His mother maiden name was Caroline Madox from whom he received his middle name. His parents were poor but his grandfather was a well-known medical theorist.
- He trained in **Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp** between 1837 and 1839 and later moved to Paris. His best known paintings are *Work*, *The Last of England*, and *English Autumn Afternoon*. He was a **perfectionist** and his paintings took years to finish, which meant that he spent much of his life poor and suffering genuine hardship. He died in 1893. Ford Madox Brown parents were Ford Brown and Caroline Madox and they moved to Calais for cheaper lodgings, where he was born. The family travelled to Bruges (1835), Ghent (1836) and then Antwerp (1837) so he could study art. His mother died in 1839 when he was 18, his sister in 1840 and his father in 1842.
- He **first exhibited in 1840 at the Royal Academy** (aged 19). Brown struggled in the 1850s and considered emigrating to India.
- One of his most famous pictures is *The Last of England* which he sold for 325 guineas. By the late 1850s he had **lost patience with the Royal Academy** and **refused to exhibit** his

paintings there. He founded the Hogarth Club in 1858 with William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and former pupil Rossetti but he resigned in 1860 and it collapsed in 1861. From the 1860s he designed furniture and stained glass.

- He was **married twice**, first to **Elizabeth Bromley** his first cousin in 1841. The first child died as an infant, the second Emma Lucy was born in 1843. His wife died of pulmonary tuberculosis in Paris in 1846 aged 27. His second wife was his **model Emma Hill** and they lived together as social conventions prevented him from marrying the illiterate daughter of a bricklayer. Their daughter Catherine Emily was born in 1850 and they married in 1853. Their son Oliver Madox brown (1855-1874, known as Nolly) was a promising artist and poet but he died of blood poisoning aged 19. It was a crushing blow for Brown and he kept his room as a shrine. Another son Arthur was born in 1856 but died aged 10 months. He was the model for the baby in *Work*.
- Lucy and Catherine were competent artists and Lucy married William Michael Rossetti in 1874. Catherine married Francis Hueffer and through them Brown became the **grandfather of Ford Madox brown the novelist** and great-grandfather of the Labour Home Secretary, Frank Soskice.
- Brown had a **secular funeral** and is buried in East Finchley.

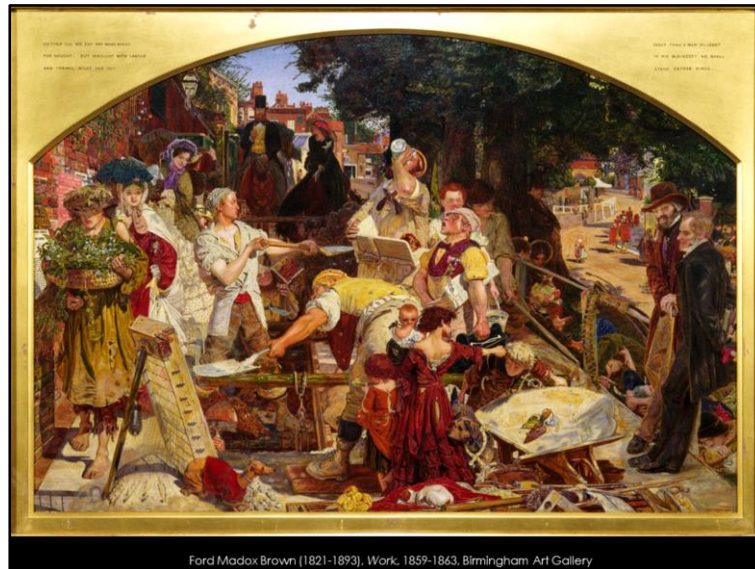
Thomas Plint

- The other important person for any painting is **the patron who commissioned it**. *Work* was commissioned by **Thomas Plint** (1823-1861), a Leeds's stockbroker after seeing a preliminary sketch in 1856. He was an important collector of Pre-Raphaelite art and a religious evangelist and lay preacher. Plint specified a holy-looking lady with tracts to distribute and the inclusion of Carlyle and Kingsley.
- He also bought Millais's *The Black Brunswicker* and *Christ in the House of His Parents* and nine works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.
- His fortune grew during the early Victorian period but plummeted during the recession at the end of the 1850s.
- His picture collection alone he paid £25,000 for but he was in severe financial difficulty when he died in 1861 aged 38. His wife died two months later in childbirth leaving 11 children. His collection was sold for £18,265 to care for his children.
- Other collectors were James Leathart, the Newcastle lead merchant and Thomas Combe, the Oxford publisher.



Context: the Location

- We can walk through the space, it is presented as an accurate landscape in front of us.
- This is **The Mount in Hampstead** where Brown lived. He took his easel to this site every day to paint the scene.
- I can show how accurately he represented the space before him by fading a photograph taken recently.
- You can see it has changed little in 150 years.
- This tells us that Ford Madox Brown wanted to represent what he saw precisely, accuracy of representation was important to him.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work* (1852-1865), 137 x 198 cm, Manchester Art Gallery

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work* (1859-1863), 68.4 x 99.9 cm, Birmingham Art Gallery

Context

- When seriously looking at a painting one should always start by checking the **number of versions**, who owns them and their provenance.
- If fact, there are **two versions** of this painting, one in **Manchester Art Gallery** and the other in **Birmingham Art Gallery**.
- The **Manchester** version is the one that **Brown exhibited**, it is the larger version and it was commissioned by **Thomas Plint** based on an early sketch he was shown by Brown.
- This is the **Manchester version** shown without its frame.
- The other version is smaller and was commissioned by **James Leathart** for **£315** in 1859. It is now in the **Birmingham Art Gallery**. It was completed the same year as the original. Brown replaced the portrait of his wife Emma with one of Leathart's wife, Maria.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work* (1852-1865), Birmingham Art Gallery
 Ford Madox Brown, *The Last of England*, 1855, Birmingham Art Gallery (the Fitzwilliam version has a red open weave shawl)

- This shows the **Birmingham version and the Manchester version**. The Manchester version is the larger original version he painted for Thomas Plint who died before it was completed. The Birmingham version is a smaller copy painted by Brown for **James Leathart in 1859** and completed in 1863.
- **(Click)** The model for the 'lady of leisure' in the original Manchester version was **Brown's wife Emma**. She had a regular oval face, wide set, heavy lidded eyes and a rosebud mouth. She also modelled for *Last of England*. The model for the small Birmingham version was Maria Leathart, the wife of the person who commissioned the painting.
- Brown, like the other pre-Raphaelites often used **friends and relations as models**.
- Note the unusual circular format for *Last of England*, possibly to remind us of a **porthole**.

Notes

- Brown intended to make the modern British workman a fit subject for fine art.
- He spent 11 years working on the painting from 1852 to 1863 and he exhibited it in a **one-man exhibition at the Gallery, 191 Piccadilly** (opposite Sackville Street) in **1865**.
- Brown wrote a **five-page catalogue entry** to describe what was happening in *Work* and the symbolism used.
- Every tiny detail was subject to deep study and is pregnant with meaning. Brown wished to combine social realism with social idealism, that is to show things as they really are but to suggest how they should be.

- The workers are laying a **new water main** which was approved by Parliament in **1852**. The reservoir is behind the buildings on the left.
- The scene is **The Mount in Hampstead** and Brown was living nearby in conditions of 'extreme poverty'.
- Brown wrote regarding *Last of England*, 'Absolutely without regard to the art of any period or country, **I have tried to render this scene as it would appear.**' The same applies to *Work*.
- *Last of England* was voted Britain's eighth favourite picture in a BBC Radio 4 poll.

References

Iconographic Analysis based on an article by Gerard Curtis



Hogarth, *Beer Street*

- Brown's principal artistic model was the work of **William Hogarth**, in particular his paintings *Humours of an Election* and his prints *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*. While working on the painting Brown set up the Hogarth Club for artists that admired Hogarth's work.

Influences

This illustration by Hogarth has been described as an important influence on Brown although the two have different agendas. Hogarth is extolling the virtues of English beer as opposed to the evils of gin.

The poem reads,

Beer, happy Produce of our Isle
Can sinewy Strength impart,
And wearied with Fatigue and Toil
Can cheer each manly Heart.

Labour and Art upheld by Thee
Successfully advance,
We quaff Thy balmy Juice with Glee
And Water leave to France.

Genius of Health, thy grateful Taste
Rivals the Cup of Jove,
And warms each English generous Breast
With Liberty and Love!



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Sempstress*, 1846

Paintings about Work

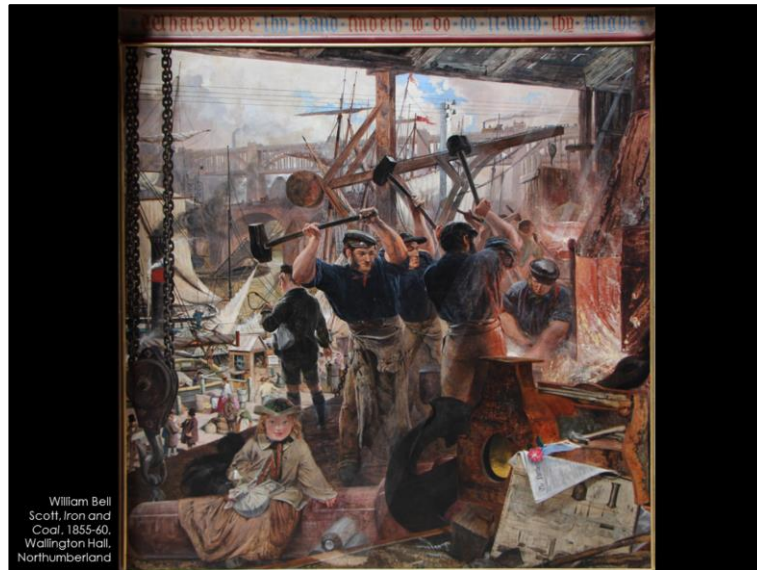
The Sempstress

- This painting is **the fountain head** of a whole tradition of **social realist painting in Victorian England**.
- This painting is based on a poem of the same name and the two had a **profound effect**.
- You can see it is **2:30 in the morning** and the sky is streaked with moonlight. The lit windows opposite indicate that the same thing is happening all over London. The **seamstress's eyes are swollen** and inflamed as she must do close work by the light of a candle. The morsel of food on the plate indicates she has to **eat while she is working** and on the mantelpiece you can see **medicine bottles**. One has a label saying 'The Mixture' and it is supplied by **Middlesex Hospital** so she is unwell.
- This is one of the first paintings in which art is used to campaign for the poor. Richard Redgrave did not come from a wealthy family and his sister had been forced to leave home and find a job as a governess. She became ill when in service and had to be nursed by his family until she died. It was painted in 1843, the year that Punch appeared and in the Christmas issues there was a poem that struck a nerve. By Thomas Hood and called *The Song of the Shirt*. It began:

*With fingers weary and worn
With eyelids heavy and red
A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags*

*Plying her needle and thread –
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the “Song of the Shirt”*

- The verse that inspired Redgrave. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 (this is the 1846 version). The poem continues that she is sewing a shirt but also her own shroud.
- Redgrave was an Academician, art director of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), received the cross of the Legion of Honour and was surveyor of crown pictures for 24 years and produced a 34 volume catalogue. He declined a knighthood in 1869.
- It is impossible today to **understand the impact** it had. Thackeray described it as ‘**the most startling lyric in our language**’. It was set to music, the subject of a play and of many sermons. Sempstresses often went blind and if a single stitch was wrong their wages were docked. Articles appeared saying British citizens were being subjected to a **form of slavery** and a German living in England called **Friedrich Engels** showed a study he had written of the **horrors** of the situation to a **friend** living in **Paris called Karl Marx**.
- Redgrave had created a **new category of painting** but it is not based on visiting the poor but the interior is borrowed from a 17th-century Dutch work and the **swollen eyes** looking **heavenward** is typical of many Baroque images of **swooning saints**. Redgrave realised that unless he made the subject **respectable** it would not be accepted. He **succeeded** brilliantly.



Other paintings of work

William Bell Scott, *Iron and Coal*, 1855-60, Wallington Hall, Northumberland

- The other famous image of working men in Wallington Hall, Northumberland.
- It was painted after Brown had started.
- **William Bell Scott** and Ford Madox Brown were both **good friends** of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and they both helped him following his severe breakdown and attempted suicide in 1872.
- Ford Madox Brown's **12 murals in Manchester Town Hall** repeat the basic structure of William Bell Scott's **murals on the history of Northumbria in Wallington Hall**.
- The geologist and theologian **William Buckland** thought that the proximity of iron and coal in the UK was **divine providence**.
- In the painting was have a Stephenson steam engine drawing, a **locomotive wheel being forged**, an **Armstrong gun barrel**, barges carrying coal, a train crossing Robert Stephenson's **High-Level Bridge** in Newcastle and opened by **Queen Victoria** in **1849**.

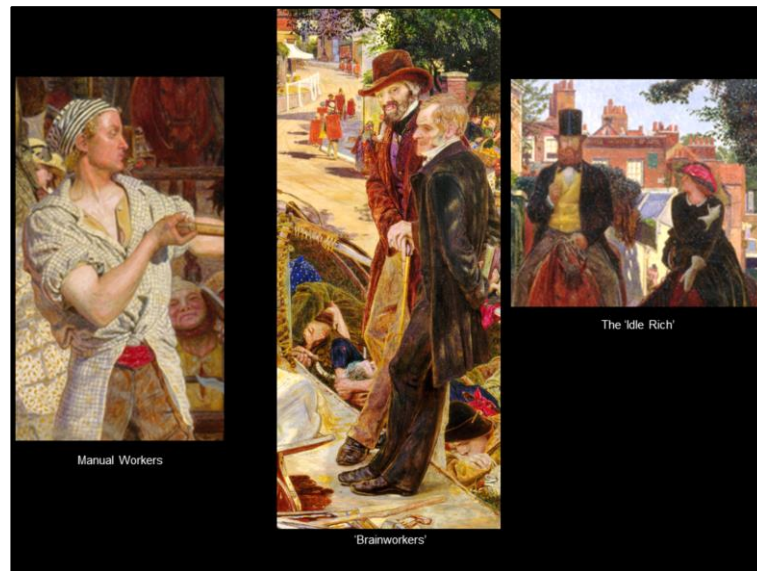


Édouard Manet (1832-1883), *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, Courtauld Gallery, London

- This painting has been the subject of numerous interpretations of its meaning.
- There is a book called **12 Views of Manet's Bar** that has a chapter for each interpretation.
- I will mention just four so you can see the range:
 1. **Marxist interpretation.** Many interpretations revolve around the meaning of the reflection in the mirror being incorrect. We know from **X-ray analysis** that Manet's **moved the reflection of the barmaid to make it less and less correct**. Many barmaids at the Folies-Bergère were **prostitutes**. As her reflection is not '**correct**' it has been suggested it **represents a memory**. If she is then she is offering herself to a client she is turning herself into a **commodity** and so like all commodities she aims to produce desire through representation. It is a study of the effects of **capitalism and consumerism**.
 2. **Feminist interpretation** is that women were limited into the jobs they could take on and so many were forced into prostitution. Manet to our attention the exploitation of women, both in Olympia and in this painting.
 3. **Psychological interpretation.** B. R. Collins interprets the **barmaid's look** as "**day dreaming**", "**coldly detached**", "tired and glum", "absent, weary, dispirited" and Clark categorizes the look as "not quite focused on anything" all of which Collins believes creates an **elusiveness and inaccessibility** reinforced by the hard textures that dominate the work resulting in a "**drama of invitation and denial**". This, he suggests, highlights the theme of the painting "**the psychological gap between the sexes**", not a result, as Baudelaire claims, of women's stupidity but **because of their Otherness**.
 4. **Political interpretation.** The presence of **English Bass Pale Ale** rather than **German beer** has been taken as signifying that this is an anti-German painting a decade after the Franco-Prussian War.

Notes

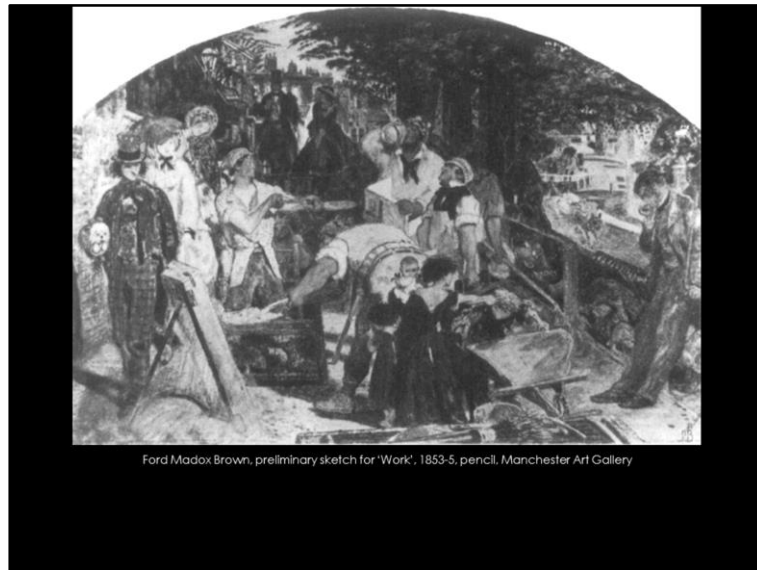
- **Art historical interpretation.** As most of the painting is a reflection in a mirror and a **mirror is a flat surface** presenting an illusion of the world so the painting is about the illusory nature of painting. It is Manet's final work and he could be making a comment on his life's work. Plato criticized artists for taking us further away from the true reality of things by creating an illusion.
- T. J. Clark thinks that an artist uses new techniques, novel perspectives and subjects to **put established belief under pressure** and this creates public hostility and inflamed reactions. He argues that in those **things not mentioned** but left unsaid **in reviews** we can learn something about **what really matters to a society. Prostitution was not mentioned** in the press reviews as it cuts across normal class boundaries as it exposes the self to someone seen as inferior, it is not something that is talked about.
- S. Levine speculates on the possible links between the barmaid, whose name is Suzon as an un-biblical Susannah "longing for sexual knowledge" and as a woman "who awakened his memory of his mother's happy smile of sensual rapture."



Socio-Political – Work and Cleanliness

- Overall, the painting is usually described as being about the **nobility of work** and the **social importance of clean water**.
- We have all heard about the Victorian work ethic and ‘**cleanliness is next to Godliness**’ and this painting is based on those ideas and so to understand the painting as it was understood at the time we need to understand these Victorian values.
- The main theme and the title is the ennobling nature of **work** which is expanded upon in **Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present***. One of Carlyle extended metaphors likens work to digging an ever widening river that drains a pestilent swamp of ignorance.
- The workers divide into groups as we saw earlier including the idle rich and the ‘brain workers’, Thomas Carlyle on the left and F. D. Maurice, holding a bible on the right.
- **F. D. Maurice** the Christian reformer created Working Men’s Colleges at which Ford Madox Brown lectured. **Maurice gave lectures** on the ‘**Great Unwashed**’ and the relationship between cleanliness and godliness.
- Thomas Carlyle wrote in ***Past and Present***,
 - **Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work!** Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like helldogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man.
- In the same book Carlyle creates the character of **Bobus Higgins, a corrupt sausage maker** who uses horsemeat in his product to undercut competitors. In the painting the billboards being carried down the road read ‘Vote for Bobus’. Bobus is being portrayed as a corrupt politician.
- The other influence was Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (3 volumes in 1851, a fourth by 1861) and his 1849 article in the *Morning Chronicle* in which he wrote,

'I shall consider the whole of the metropolitan poor under three separate phases, according as they will work, they can't work and they won't work'.



Ford Madox Brown, preliminary sketch for 'Work', 1853-5, pencil, Manchester Art Gallery

- We can also examine *Work* from **different perspectives**.
- One is suggested by this sketch in which F.D. Maurice and Thomas Carlyle are replaced by an artist who looks like Brown.
- This is the **pencil sketch** by Madox Brown that resulted in the **commission** for the painting from **Thomas Plint** (1823-1861).
- **Plint was a religious evangelical** and asked Brown to **include a woman dispensing tracts** in his painting. It is also possible that the influence of Plint resulted in the figures of F.D. Maurice and Thomas Carlyle.
- One interpretation is suggested by the changes between the sketch and the final version:
 - The **sketch** can be seen as a comment on the **artist as observer** and a manual worker.
 - The sketch for *Work* **does not show Carlyle or Maurice** but an artist who looks like Brown.
 - **The inclusion of F. D. Maurice was a Christian Socialist** who believed in improving worker's minds and bodies within the existing social system.
 - In 1855 F. D. Maurice founded the Working Men's College and persuaded Rossetti, Ruskin and Madox Brown to teach there.
 - **A group of navvies would be regarded as dangerous** as they were **independent, had no families, earned a lot and lived a riotous life**.
 - The celebration of the worker is overseen not by the artist observer but by two intellectuals who are imposing a **particular social order**.
 - By 1860 **Carlyle** had become much more **reactionary** and **wrote in favour of slavery** and **criticised the unemployed** for being ignorant.
 - With the figures of **Maurice and Carlyle** it can be seen as supporting a **particular Christian Socialist agenda** for controlling the worker.

Notes

- Plint is the collector who bought Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents*, the 1850 painting that received such terrible reviews because it was thought to be blasphemous.
- Plint died the year before it was completed.
- The 1789 French Revolution lay behind British middle-class concerns until 1848.
- Carlyle wrote *Past and Present* in 1843 in which he promoted the nobility of labour but within a hierarchical class system that demanded a new type of humane industrialist to lead society.
- The Chartist rally in Kennington Park in 1848 did not result in a revolution allaying middle-class concerns.



- Why was cleanliness important?
- In one recent cholera outbreak in London 11,000 people died.
- The 'ragged dirty brats' in the painting are **orphans** from the cholera epidemic. Their orphan status is indicated by the black band on the baby. The father, Brown wrote, has forsaken them for alcohol. The **Hampstead Water Company** was notorious for supplying **dirty water** unlike the New Water Company that was digging this hole to lay new pipes. Brown was very **worried** about his family **catching cholera** and, unusually, had a bath every day.



Faraday Giving His Card to Father Thames, *Punch*, 21 July 1855)

- When Brown was designing this work in **1853-4 11,000 people died** in London alone in a **major cholera outbreak**. Dr John Snow was advocating a germ theory where the prevention was clean water but the miasmatic theory also suggested prevention based on cleanliness.
- In **1858 was the Great Stink** when the smell from the Thames was so great parliament could not sit.
- Sanitation and water reform was the central reform issue at this time and it was a dominant theme of Dickens's *Bleak House* which was published in 1852-3. The noted scientist Michael Faraday wrote a letter to *The Times* calling for water reform and for the Thames to be cleaned. The '**Great Stink**' which closed the Houses of Parliament was not until summer **1858**.

Notes

- Michael Faraday (1781-1867), one of Britain's great scientists and one of the most influential scientists in history even though he received little formal education. Faraday was born in Newington Butts a few hundred yards from my mother and father.
- Faraday was also active in what would now be called environmental science, or engineering. He investigated industrial pollution at Swansea and was consulted on air pollution at the Royal Mint. On 7 July 1855, Faraday sent a letter to *The Times* which was printed on 9th. It concerned the foul condition of the River Thames, he wrote, 'surely the river which flows for so many miles through London ought not to be allowed to become a fermenting sewer.'



Satirical cartoon by William Heath, showing a woman observing monsters in a drop of London water (at the time of the Commission on the London Water Supply report, 1828)

- The link between **dirty water and cholera went back further**. **Microscopes** showed that dirty water was **full of organisms** and it was assumed by many that these could bring disease.
- Although many thought that **disease was carried by miasma**, foul smelling air, it was known that dirty water contained minute organisms. It was the work of **Dr. John Snow** (1813-1858) in studying the causes of cholera in Soho in 1854 that led eventually to a better understanding.

Notes

- He first publicised his theory in an 1849 essay, *On the Mode of Communication of Cholera*, followed by a more detailed treatise in 1855 incorporating the results of his investigation of the role of the water supply in the Soho epidemic of 1854. He removed the handle of the pump in Broad Street (now Broadwick Street). It is the street in which William Blake was born (at No. 28, now demolished).
- He died from a stroke aged 45.



George Cruikshank, *Salus Populi Suprema Lex*, 1832

- We see from the balloon '**We shall all have the Cholera**' that even in 1832, the links between drinking water, sewage, and the disease was suspected.
- The Southwark Water Company was one of the oldest water purveyors in London, having been formed in 1760. When the company merged in 1845 with the **Vauxhall Water Company**, it brought a poor reputation for the quality of its water. Perhaps the most famous comment about the old Southwark Water Company was made in 1832 in a cartoon published by **George Cruikshank**. His picture in a dramatic manner condemned the water drawn by the company from the River Thames near the London Bridge, shown downriver in the background. It presents John Edwards, owner of the Southwark Water Company, posing as **Neptune** ("Sovereign of the Scented Streams"). He is seen crowned with a **chamber-pot**, seated on a stool on top of a cesspool which doubles as the water-intake for the Southwark Water Company customers in south London.
- Comments of people on the banks of the Thames included, "It makes me sick! What torrents of filth come from that ... sewer! What do they drink? That! Give us clean water! Give us pure water! We shall all have the cholera."
- By 1832, the association of **water and cholera** had already appeared in the public mind, as captured by Cruikshank. **Cholera had first come** to the United Kingdom in the **autumn of 1831**, and reached **London in February 1832**. During those years there was much discussion amongst government officials on ways to stop cholera, including ways to improve sanitary conditions, but no water-improvement laws were passed. Cruikshank's cartoon was either reflecting or stirring the public sentiment -- or likely both.
- In **1855**, new waterworks were established at **Hampton**, as was required by the **1852 Metropolitan Water Act of Parliament**. Parliament in this act declared that no water

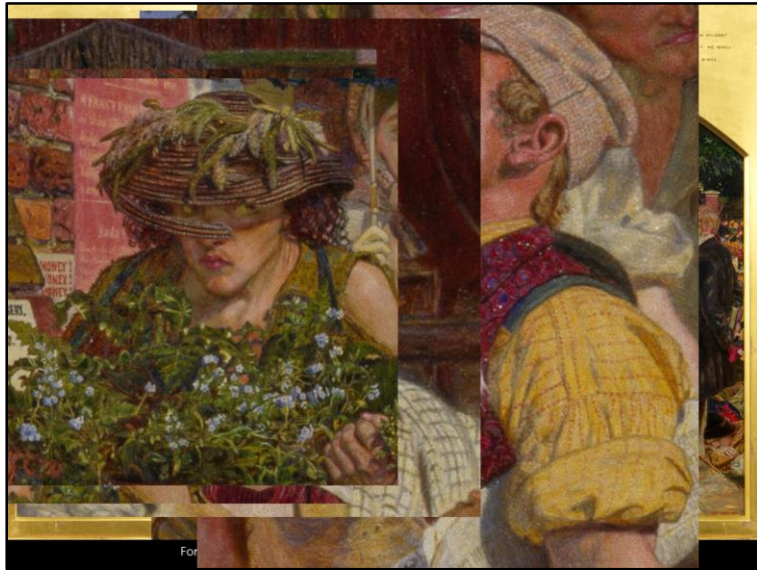
company after August 31, 1855 (with one exception, Chelsea Waterworks) should take its water from the River Thames below Teddington Lock.

Notes

- George Cruikshank (1792-1878), caricaturist and illustrator praised as the modern Hogarth in his lifetime. Draw illustrations for his friend Charles Dickens. His father was also a caricaturist. He married twice but after his death it was found he also had had 11 illegitimate children by his mistress Adelaide Attree. Later in life he became obsessed with temperance and anti-smoking. In his obituary Punch wrote 'There never was a purer, simpler, more straightforward or altogether more blameless man. His nature had something childlike in its transparency' Apparently they did not know of his illegitimate children.
- *Salus Populi Suprema Lex. Salus populi suprema lex esto* (Latin "The health of the people should be the supreme law," "Let the good of the people be the supreme law" or "The welfare of the people shall be the supreme law") is found in Cicero's *De Legibus* (book III, part III, sub. VIII). Motto of City of Salford, London Borough of Lewisham, Harrow and many other boroughs and states. **John Locke** uses it as the epigraph in his *Second Treatise on Government* and refers to it as a **fundamental rule for government**. It was the inscription on the coronet of Roundhead and Leveller William Rainsborough during the English Civil War. This motto was also endorsed by Hobbes at the beginning of Chapter 30 of *Leviathan* and by Spinoza in Chapter 19 of his *Theological-Political Treatise*. The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service has adopted the phrase as its motto.

References

George Cruikshank, *Salus Populi Suprema Lex*, 1832



Meaning

Floral symbolism

- The Victorians and in particular the Pre-Raphaelites were consumed by floral mania and the meaning of flowers. Brown, a keen gardener painted with botanical accuracy. However, because of the number of floral dictionaries published there were often conflicting meanings. Along the bottom of the frame is a quotation from Genesis (3:19), 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread'. This refers to Adam and Eve's labour as punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In the centre of the painting a young red-headed labourer carries a pail of water and in his right hand is an apple held up to be seen. This is the symbol of temptation and is a reminder that labour leads from Original Sin to redemption and so the apple represents the dignity of labour.
 - Many Victorians and Victorian artists were **obsessed** with the '**language of flowers**', including Thackeray, Edward Lear, John Ruskin and Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Particularly the Pre-Raphaelites including Ford Madox Brown.
 - It linked contemporary polite social with scientific observation.
 - Brown was a **keen gardener** and always painted with botanical accuracy.
 - Decoding flowers must be used with care as there were many **contradictory** floral dictionaries in the Victorian period. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Nicholas said to his mother, with a certain pre-Freudian naivety, he knew of no '**language of vegetables which converts a cucumber into a formal declaration of attachment**'.
1. A young labourer carrying a pail full of water **holds out an apple**, this symbol of Temptation and original sin reminds the Victorian that work is part of God's punishment and it leads to redemption from original Sin. The apple emphasises the dignity of labour.
 2. Next to him a boy with **red hair holds a carrot**, long associated with red hair. Red hair was a fetish of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti. Red hair was also associated with the Irish and a large proportion of the navvies in England were Irish. The Great Irish Famine of 1845-8 resulted in millions over Irish families emigrating. On the bank to the

right Brown shows an unemployed 'young shoeless Irishman' and his wife. As they were so poor the Irish were often the first to contract cholera and fever. In fact many thought the Irish were responsible for generating and communicating diseases. Two of the peasants on the bank Brown tells us are reduced in strength by fever.

3. The young orphaned child modelled by Brown's son Arthur (who died in infancy prior to the completion of the painting) **carries daisies**, the flowers of childhood and innocence.
4. The **elm trees** in the background are symbols of **dignity** and frame the dignity of work.
5. The **potman** wears a small boutonniere of **fuschias and sweet peas**, emblems of **taste and departure**. This supports Browns comment that he has 'vulgar tastes' and his wares (beer) are transitory compared with the infinite nature of water.
6. The labourer on the left shovelling **chews the stem of a china or species rose**, symbolising beauty and emphasising the beauty of his labours.
7. The **tract distributor** wears a spray of **Hepatica flowers** in her bonnet a symbol of **confidence** used to establish her haughty character.
8. The woman in front modelled on **James Leathart's wife Maria** (on Brown's wife Emma in the Manchester painting) holds a leaf-shaped parasol and **feminine beauty** as Brown notes is a '**flower that feeds upon the sun**'. But it is a symbol of **Vanitas**, Brown warns '**health may fail, beauty fade, pleasures through repetition pall—I will not hint at the greater calamities to which flesh is heir.**'
9. **On the left is a chickweed seller** or what was colloquially called a 'Botany Ben'. Brown tells us he lived in 'Flower Street' and sold wild flowers and herbs for culinary, medicinal and decorative purposes. In his hat is a spray of wild grain, straw and plantain and he carries **chickweed, symbol of ingenious simplicity** to match his 'effeminate gentleness'. The **straw** was often used, for example, by Hogarth in his painting of Bedlam Hospital, to **signifiy madness** and Henry Mayhew in London Labour and the London Poor tells us that beggars and those on the bottom rung of society often feigned madness to gain sympathy and greater sales.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Venus Verticordia*, 1864-8, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth

- Many other paintings used the symbolism of flowers.
- The rose means love and the honeysuckle happiness but this symbolism must be balanced against the overall effect. Ruskin was disturbed by the flowers and wrote, *They were wonderful to me in their realism, awful – I can use no other word – in their coarseness: showing enormous power, showing certain conditions of non-sentiment which underlie all you are doing now’.*
- This painting is sometimes mentioned as marking a **turning point** in Rossetti’s use of **sumptuous Venetian colours** and an increase in decorative accessories. These changes in his style were **unacceptable to Ruskin** and disagreements about this painting **led to them breaking up**.

Notes

- It was repainted with Alexa Wilding’s face in 1868.
- The model for this painting was Alexa Wilding (born Alice, c. 1845-8 to 1884). She sat for more of Rossetti finished works than Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris and Fanny Cornforth. She came from a working class family and was born in Surrey and when Rossetti met her she was a dressmaker and wanted to become an actress. Wilding never married and on the 1881 census is listed with two children but they are thought to be those of his uncle and aunt who died at the same time. By this time she was a landlady and property holder, a considerable achievement.
- The title means ‘**turner of hearts**’ but even this is ambiguous. Does it mean turn to chastity?
- **Robert Buchanan** criticized his poetry as he had not seen his paintings but by implication his criticism applies to the paintings. Buchanan wrote an article called ‘The Fleshly School

of Poetry' (*The Contemporary Review*, October 1871) in which he criticized Rossetti, William Morris and Charles Swinburne for being too sensual and praising the body rather than the soul. The article was expanded into a pamphlet in 1872, but he subsequently withdrew from the criticisms it contained, and it is chiefly remembered by the replies it evoked from Rossetti in a letter to the *Athenaeum* (December 16, 1871), entitled *The Stealthy School of Criticism*, and from Swinburne in *Under the Microscope* (1872).

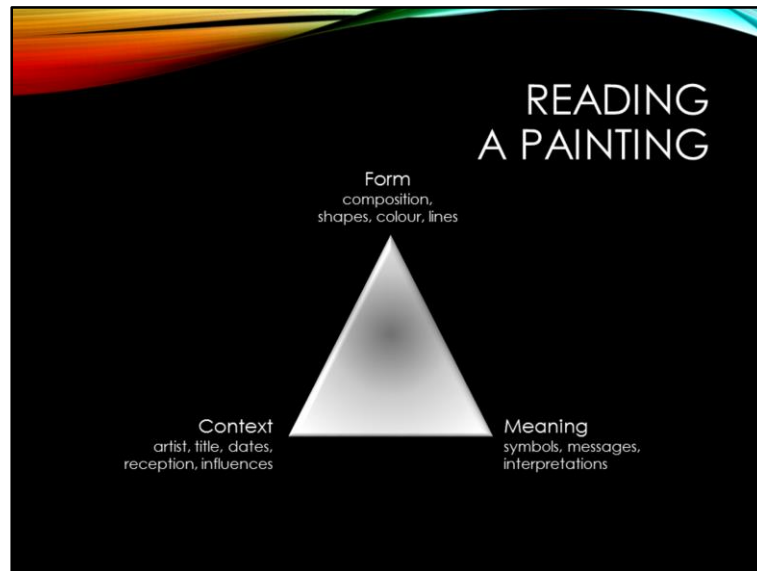


- There is a crime mystery hidden in the painting, a robbery 'of great violence'.
- The poster on the wall provides **three clues**, it mentions a '**bull terrier**' and the thief dressed in a '**billy-cock**' and '**Fustian**'. Brown later explained that it is a 'bull terrier pup'. The owner of the puppy is likely to be nearby and 'Fustian' is the colour of working men's corduroy, an olive green to burnt umber. A Billy-cock was a type of hat worn by the lower classes also called a wide-awake hat or Quaker-style hat. The person that satisfies all the requirements is not the obvious candidate leaning against the tree on the right but the chickweed seller by the poster.
- Why is he **hiding his face**? There are **two police officers**, one of the road stopping the orange seller and the other on horseback coming down the lane next to the elm trees.
- Brown suggested later that the chickweed seller has just **sold the valuable bull terrier pup** to the labourer. In the original design for work the chickweed seller was a dog seller. Brown also wrote that if it were not for the chickweed seller's 'gentle disposition ... he might have been a burglar'. This could be a clue and phrased to put us off the scent.
- The bull terrier was bred to have a different head during the 1860s but this is the earlier head shape that **Bill Sykes dog 'Bull's Eye'** has in early illustrated versions of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838). There is another clue on the poster '**...ot one eye**'. This may mean the dog has a mark on one eye and this suggests Bill Sykes's dog and Bill

Sykes also had a billy-cock hat and fustian coat.

References

Gerard Curtis, 'Ford Madox Brown's Work: An Iconographic Analysis', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 74, No. 4. (Dec., 1992), pp. 623-636.



- As a reminder I have showed how we should start reading a painting by carrying out a formal analysis then looking into the context, the artist and the background information.
- We will then be in a position to start considering possible interpretations, starting with the symbols and moving up to its overall message.
- Form provides the aesthetic pleasure.
- Context provides the pleasure of finding out facts.
- Meaning provides the pleasure of a detective story, speculating on possible interpretations.
- So have fun reading paintings.
- Thank you.