From Omega to Charleston

From Omega to Charleston

The Art of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant 1910-1934

·CHARLESTON·
THE BLOOMSBURY HOME OF ART & IDEAS

PIANO NOBILE

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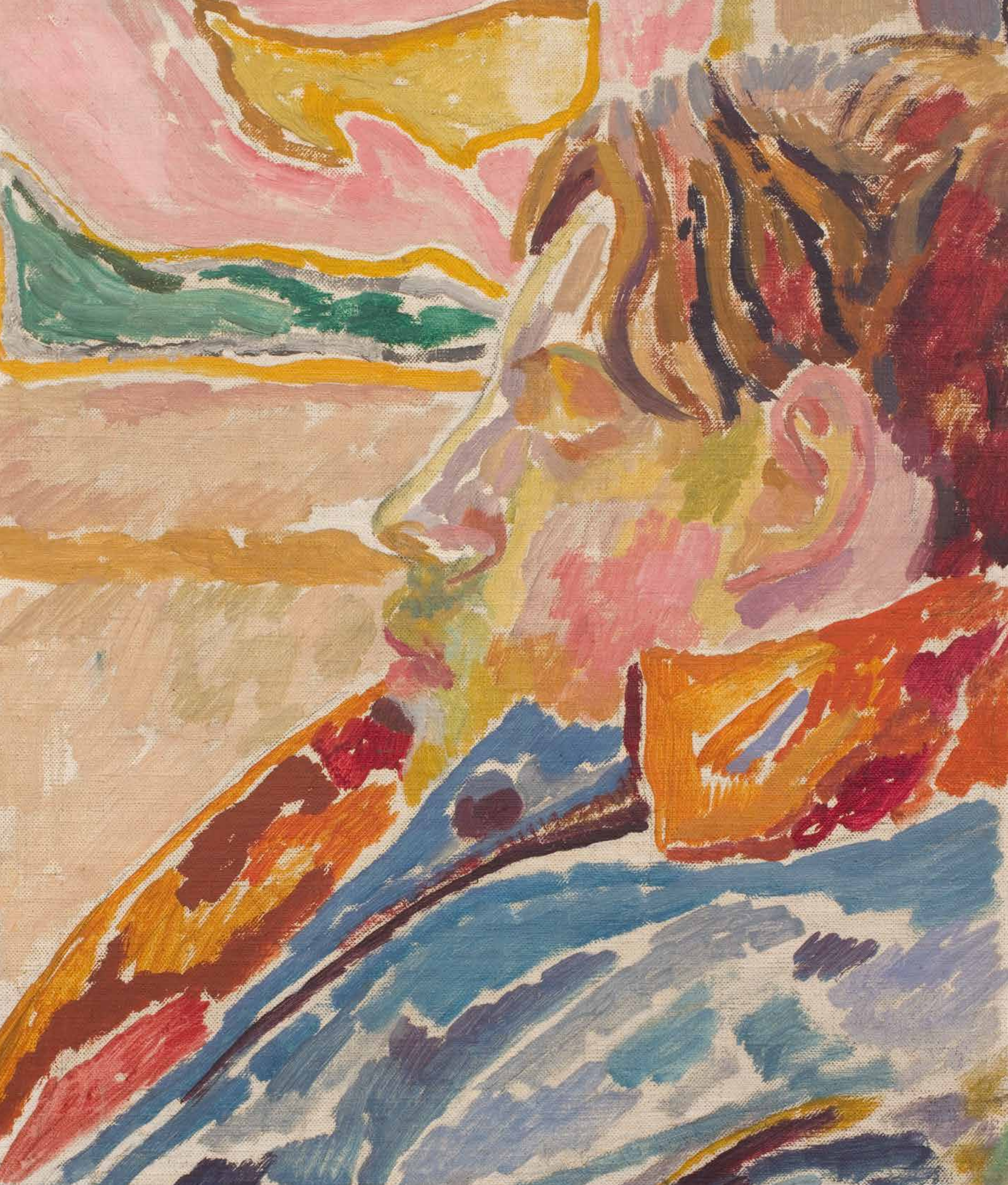


Cat.11 (detail)

FOREWORD

Matthew Travers

PIANO NOBILE is proud to present the first exhibition exclusively dedicated to the work of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant for over twenty years. Bell and Grant were two artists whose embodiment of an aesthetic marked them as pioneers. They were radicals – artistically, socially, politically, sexually. As such, their work and their Sussex home of Charleston has become an inspiration for many innovators and arbiters of taste, forming the basis of a style now emulated across contemporary culture – from painters to musicians, actors to fashion designers.

A century has passed since Bell and Grant commenced working, but the creative and domestic legacy of this artistic duo becomes ever more relevant. The new film on the *Famous Women Dinner Service* currently under production by *British Art Studies*, with Hana Leaper, Judy Chicago and the Feminist Art Collective, is testament to the re-evaluation Bell and Grant deserve and signals a new era of research and attention from academics and museums internationally.

Huge thanks must be given to Richard Shone for so generously sharing his unique relationship with Duncan Grant, archival material and general knowledge of all things Bloomsbury. The enthusiasm and support of The Charleston Trust, particularly Darren Clarke, has been instrumental in facilitating several major loans and it has been a pleasure to work with the Paul Mellon Centre and Hana Leaper. We are delighted to be publishing their research in the second part of this volume, kindly introduced by Frances Spalding.

With these works – carefully chosen, rarely or never before seen in public, and in some cases brought to the open market for the first time – we hope this exhibition will contribute to an enlivened appreciation of these two remarkable artists.

Fig. 1
Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell
at La Bergère, Cassis, 1928

THE CHARLESTON ARTISTS

A Memoir

Richard Shone

Fig.2 Charleston in Spring, 1970

WHEN I first came to know Duncan Grant and went to Charleston in 1965, his reputation was showing the first shoots of a revival. After his period of celebrity between the two world wars, he had become yesterday's man. His Tate Gallery retrospective in 1959 had a subdued reception, partly because it had not been carefully selected, and partly through its timing: nothing could have been less in fashion at that moment. Five years later came a more impressively chosen show at Wildenstein's in Bond Street to mark Grant's eightieth birthday. It had extensive reviews and many works sold. It was through reviews of this show that I contacted Grant in late 1964. I was fifteen and far away at school in Shropshire. We corresponded, and Grant's delightful, simply written letters were a highlight of my O-level days.

In the late summer of 1965 I paid my first visit to Charleston (fig. 2). We were both a little nervous, not helped for me when, at dinner on my first evening, I was faced with an artichoke, something I had never encountered before. But all went well. From the start the house cast its spell on me, a place utterly different from any I had known. Duncan lived there alone, yet not exactly so,

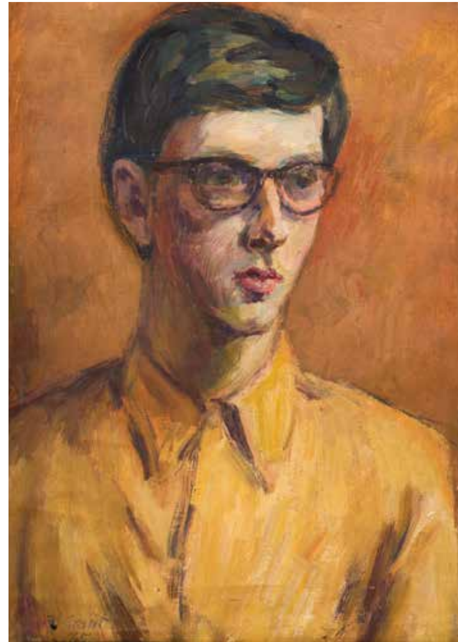


Fig.3 Duncan Grant, *Portrait of Richard Shone*, 1965, Private Collection, UK

for the incomparable housekeeper Grace Higgens and her husband Walter lived in quarters at the back of the house. But the two people with whom Grant had shared Charleston had recently died – Vanessa Bell in 1961 and Clive Bell in 1964.

On this first visit I was given Vanessa Bell's downstairs bedroom to sleep in, with a screened bath to one side, French windows overlooking the garden and portraits by Duncan on the walls of Vanessa's children Julian, Quentin and Angelica. It was not until some years later that I learnt I had slept in the bed in which Vanessa had died.

Duncan showed me around the house, which must have been rather an effort for him as I knew little or nothing of many of the figures he mentioned in relation to the pictures which crowded the walls. Certainly I recognised the names of Delacroix, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso and Matisse, but artist friends such as Othon Friesz and Segonzac, Matthew Smith and Edward Wolfe had to be explained.

In the morning, after excellent coffee and porridge (cooked overnight, and slightly salted "in the Scottish way"), Duncan asked if I would sit to him in the studio – "a good way of getting to know someone". Over the next two days he painted a small head-and-shoulders of me. He worked at a slender easel, moving backwards and forwards in his chair, mixing colours and dipping his brush into the linseed oil pot and adding a dash of turps. Every so often there would be a break; I would stretch my legs from my perch on a highish stool, he would sit back, light a cigarette and take stock. For most of the time I was simply an object; at other times there were reassuring looks, sometimes questions, comments and gentle laughter. The result was modest (fig.3), but for me the picture overflows with memories of that moment when my life took such an unexpected direction.

Thereafter my visits were limited to the spring or summer holidays from school. If brief, they were always beguiling and I began to take a place in Duncan's life, meeting his family and friends. There was much I did not yet know, however. For some years I was under the impression, as were many, that Angelica's father was Clive Bell, rather than Duncan. He never dropped a hint. She was simply Vanessa's beautiful daughter who warmed the house with her presence on frequent visits. Nor did I realise that the poet Paul Roche was at the centre of Duncan's emotional life. I became very fond of him and his wife Clarissa and their children. But the highlights of my early visits were meeting two of Duncan's oldest friends – Lydia Keynes and Leonard Woolf.

Lydia, famous as the Russian dancer Lydia Lopokova who had married John Maynard Keynes, lived at Tilton House, across the fields from Charleston. In her

rather untidy and unlovely rooms, she was surrounded by works by Seurat (a big study for *La Grande Jatte)*, Cézanne, Degas and Renoir, Picasso and Derain; as well as by British artists – Sickert (a wonderful pair of tarts in a pub), Hitchens, Moore and, of course, by Duncan himself. Long widowed and reclusive though she was, Lydia enjoyed short visits and was never more lively than when reminiscing about the Ballets Russes, bringing alive Diaghilev, Karsavina and Massine with inimitable gestures, all in her heavily accented English and indomitable vocabulary which left us helpless with laughter.

Very different was tea with Leonard Woolf, a few miles away at Monk's House, Rodmell. Already enamoured of Virginia Woolf's writings, I felt this visit was like touching a fragment of the True Cross - which, indeed, was partly Duncan's intention in taking me there. Leonard was austere but not unfriendly, spare and upright with a beautiful clear voice, white hair *en brosse* and trembling hands. At Lydia's we had drunk a bottle of Sauternes; at Leonard's it was strong Indian tea and yesterday's rock cakes, after a walk around his overflowing summer garden. Inside, he showed me pictures, such as Vanessa's *Apples* (1918-19; Monk's House) and a very good early Roger Fry. There were also Vanessa's portraits of Virginia, particularly the well-known one of her seated in a deckchair, her face without features: "It's more like Virginia in its way than anything else of her", he said (see exh. cat. Dulwich 2017, p.70; Private Collection). I came to see this as an important moment in my education – that painting did not need detail to be expressive and 'like'. Moments such as this came thick and fast at Charleston. I was being educated in the holidays from school with new ways of looking at the world, as well as drinking Sauternes and eating artichokes.

Work was at the unwavering centre of Charleston life. Duncan was, in the words of his old friend the theatre director Jacques Copeau, "un homme véritablement épris de son travail". He was dedicated, professional and immensely prolific. Even a small commission – a book jacket or some cups and saucers to paint – would often entail many ideas to be elaborated and refined towards the final design. I remember his being asked by the Folio Society to provide illustrations to an edition of Wu Ch'êng-ên's marvellous novel *Monkey*. Masses of drawings were produced and books consulted – picturebooks on China from Lewes Library and a telephone call to his neighbour Cyril Connolly to find out exactly what kind of monkey was Monkey (Connolly, mad about 'wild creatures', came up with the goods – it was a gibbon).

At the easel Duncan was quite a slow painter, very focused and deliberate, carefully calibrating what he saw into marks on the canvas. I was always fascinated by how he would give a true impression of local colour through a mixture of other colours. He rarely used pure white, for example, and he avoided purple from the tube. He would usually begin a canvas with indications in charcoal of the structure of the subject; this would then be 'fixed', to be

followed by passages of local colour, thinly applied with plenty of turps, to form the basis of the 'real work' of painting. Sometimes, alas, the spontaneous start disappeared in a welter of effortful marks towards a fuller realisation. Some grimly unfinished corpses hung about the studio. But luckily, in about 1969, something of a change occurred when he started a series of still lifes taken from his immediate surroundings, notably the studio's high mantelshelf with its raft of accumulated objects (fig.4). The paintings included photographs and reproductions of other works of art in an exhilarating shuffle between past and present. His touch was lighter and more tentative, the viewpoint more random, the objects rarely re-arranged. It was a rich, ruminative finale to seventy years' work.

If the studio was at the heart of the house, the way of life into which I had slipped was of paramount importance. When I read – far too still – that Bloomsbury was pretentious, snobbish and self-congratulatory, I hold fast to my experience of what remained of that society. Certainly life at Charleston was civilised but by no account was it pretentious or in any way snobbish or exclusive. The same is true, perhaps even more so, of Leonard Woolf's modest life at Monk's House. On a material level, Charleston was comfortable but not full of comforts. Meals were always good but simple, even sometimes a little frugal. Bathrooms were wintry; the pipes had no reservations about freezing themselves at the drop of the thermometer. If paint peeled or leaks stained the walls, there was no destroying the complex visual eloquence of the rooms. Nothing was over-refined or placed to impress; good furniture sat cheek-by-jowl with very ordinary pieces, resurrected by seductive decoration. Centuries, cultures and styles met together in conversational harmony.

Duncan was the most deeply pacific person. While he maintained long-held beliefs and opinions – never received, always his own – he was not dogmatic, would avoid arguments and was not judgmental. "How perfectly monstrous", he might say in reaction to some item on the TV news, but he was not bellicose. In order to work he had to be in a state of tranquility, his mind cleared of personal distractions. In earlier years he was emotionally volatile; aware of this, he employed considerable self-discipline to reduce its tumultuous effects. I think that his decision to spend his life with Vanessa was an act of self-knowledge that brought huge rewards to both of them. They needed each other – for a variety of reasons – and even if that need had its disadvantages, it was the foundation of their long, profound relationship.

Duncan enjoyed talking about the people he had known and events in his spectacular past. He was always particular in his memories and frequently visual, so that a person came alive with snapshot immediacy – Matisse's besuited correctness of demeanour, the sweat pouring from Massine after a performance, Lady Ottoline Morrell's blurry make up, as though "she'd been

Fig.4 Duncan Grant,
Corner of the Mantelpiece, Charleston, 1972,
Private Collection

caught in the rain", the ambiguous half-smile that played about the lips of George Mallory, Nina Hamnett in a battered cloche hat, holding out her hand, "yet *not* holding it out", for half-a-crown for a drink in the Fitzroy Tavern. Going further back, his memory of Cosima Wagner, widow of the composer, walking her dog in the Cascine in Florence in 1904 was like a drawing by Charles Keene.

But one person who did not come into focus for me at that time was Vanessa. Duncan often mentioned her, but I think that having been so close to her he was unable to separate particularities from so large a canvas of memories. And, in a way, she was still alive to him, in his mind at least. Her spirit hovered over the proceedings of the house. She was evident throughout – her brimming sewing-box in the sitting-room, neat bundles of letters in her bedroom desk. And of course there were her paintings hanging on the walls. These included the *Still Life on the Corner of a Mantelpiece* (1914; Tate) and *Still Life, Wild Flowers* (cat.12). They were a revelation, for at that time I had seen only a few, much later works by her in which any signs of that early modernism were scarcely detectable. It took me some time to reconcile the picture that had evolved in my mind of this retiring woman, her tranquil flowerpieces and soft-focus depictions of her grandchildren, with the remarkable boldness of her life and work in earlier years.

But the treasure trove of Vanessa's paintings was at the very top of the house, either in her studio or stored in less than ideal conditions in an adjoining room. The studio, with its sloping ceiling and wide window high above the Sussex fields, still contained much of her painting paraphernalia, pots of brushes, rolls of designs on paper neatly stacked on shelves under the window, objects she used in her still lifes – vases, glasses, a plaster-cast head – and a small bookcase, chiefly memorable for a long run of the *Rose Annual*, books by Virginia for which she had designed the jackets, and Victorian children's classics from which she used to read to her granddaughters. The studio was by no means a shrine but it had a certain forlorn dustiness quite distinct from the rest of the house. It was here, looking through canvas after canvas, that I began to see what a formidable artist she had been.

By 1913-14 Vanessa had been at the heart of radical art in Britain. While colour had remained relatively muted in her painting in 1911-12, the revelations of the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* in London at the end of 1912 (in which she herself was represented) had an immediate impact on her work. This could be seen both in her easel paintings and her designs made in preparation for the opening of the Omega Workshops in July 1913. She was in full command of a brilliant, unprevaricating palette of chrome yellows, viridians and postbox reds, brought to order by rich, judicious blacks. The Omega encouraged her use of clear, unmixed colour, decisive contours, non-referential form and, when needed, large scale. Her abstract carpets and textiles remain exceptional in

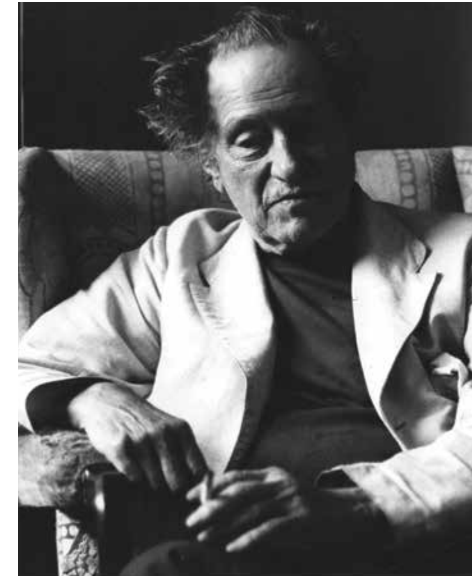


Fig.5 Duncan Grant in his studio, publicity still for Christopher Mason's film *Duncan Grant at Charleston*, 1970

modernist European design. They predate the Russian experiment of the early 1920s and Sonia Delaunay's textiles of the post-war period.

For a few years, the radical character of Vanessa's work (leading to her abstract paintings of 1914-15, see cat.5) was completely in step with her personal life. She cut through the social conventions with an almost insolent disregard and devised a way of life that suited her, her family and close friends – one that paid little heed to the expected niceties of society. "Nessa", wrote Virginia, "seems to have slipped civilization off her back, and splashes about entirely nude, without shame, and enormous spirit". She was outspoken, decisive, and could even be alarming to those who did not know her, struck by her physical beauty and uncompromising directness of speech. With her own friends she was often ribald, amusing and adventurous. She wrote to her husband Clive and to one or two friends what must surely be the most uninhibitedly bawdy letters by any woman of that era. She was someone to be reckoned with.

The later years of the First World War and afterwards saw some stalling of her momentum as a painter. She began to share, with many artists of her generation, a similar sober return to order. This readjustment brought about a long series of finely tuned and readily available works, particularly still lifes and interiors, as well as some of her most alluring textiles, ceramics and book jackets. She was a well-known modern painter but she could no longer be considered a leader. Then came the catastrophe of the death in 1937 of her son Julian in the Spanish Civil War, a loss from which she never fully recovered.

And so, gradually and surely, Vanessa withdrew. Of course she 'saw people', continued to welcome her family and grandchildren and a few old friends. But the top studio was where she was most deeply herself, registering the light on a pot of roses, the shadow of a book, the pattern on a fold of cloth. Her late self-portraits are an affecting testimony to that withdrawal. Resigned, yet resilient, her remoteness is tempered by her permitting us to see it so directly.

Duncan was slow to recover from Vanessa's death, but – with the help of his family and friends–he hitched himself back into life. His social world broadened. Where Vanessa, in later years, had hardly dipped her toe into unaccustomed waters, Duncan now found himself in agreeable new company with no one to answer to. Even so, one could catch him mentally referring to Vanessa's probable opinion – and drawing her features, from habit, on the back of an envelope.

Duncan's last decade saw both social liberation and a revived reputation but he was also a long-lived witness to a past that was becoming a part of history. A film was made about him by Christopher Mason (fig.5) and he made a memorable appearance in Julian Jebb's film about Virginia Woolf. He was punctilious in

answering letters begging for information and he saw scholars and writers. His memory for dates was wobbly to say the least; he was surprised to be told he had been a member of the Camden Town Group (he was). He groaned at the mention of Bloomsbury. But he did take seriously the young Michael Holroyd researching Lytton Strachey's life and, not without some trepidation, allowed him to reveal his early 'erotic adventures' with Strachey and Keynes, in his great post-Wolfenden biography.

In spite of this raking of the past – and I became one of the rakers when I was commissioned in 1972 to write *Bloomsbury Portraits* – he lived in the present. He had always been a great visitor to the West End galleries. Often alerted by his friend and supporter Richard Morphet, a young curator at the Tate, he kept up with new shows and appreciated Richard Hamilton and Howard Hodgkin; enjoyed a big Richard Long in the Hayward's *New Art* exhibition; and through his dealer Anthony d'Offay, he painted a double-portrait of Gilbert & George, placing them against his Omega screen (1913; The Charleston Trust). On his first visit to New York in 1966 he was taken to the famous Minimalism show *Primary Structures* and was very impressed. In spite of the horrors of airports, he adored new places such as Cyprus, Morocco and Portugal (fig.6), bringing back sketches and studies from which he would work in the winters at Charleston.

Since his death in 1978, Duncan's reputation has fluctuated. His work has never been short of enthusiastic private collectors in Britain and North America but public collections have stopped actively acquiring it. The Tate owns no painting by him from his last thirty or more years. His work finds few apologists among the critics although younger scholars are far less hidebound by prejudice. Vanessa Bell emerged as the favourite in *The Art of Bloomsbury* at the Tate in 1999, a change in her fortunes that climaxed last year with the comprehensive retrospective at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. But it is absurd to denigrate one at the expense of the other. Yes, the two painters have much in common, but their personalities are distinct: "Mr Grant taps", Virginia Woolf wrote, "Mrs Bell [is as] mute as mackerel". The climate of opinion changes, the paintings remain.

I am perhaps the last person to be writing objectively about these artists. They immeasurably enhanced my life, they are under my skin. My feelings for their works also fluctuate, sometimes preferring this or that phase. But their desire to harmonise rather than to leave chaotic, to explore rather than to impose, the simple purity of their works' content and the affections that directed its meaning – all this I hold to increasingly as time passes.

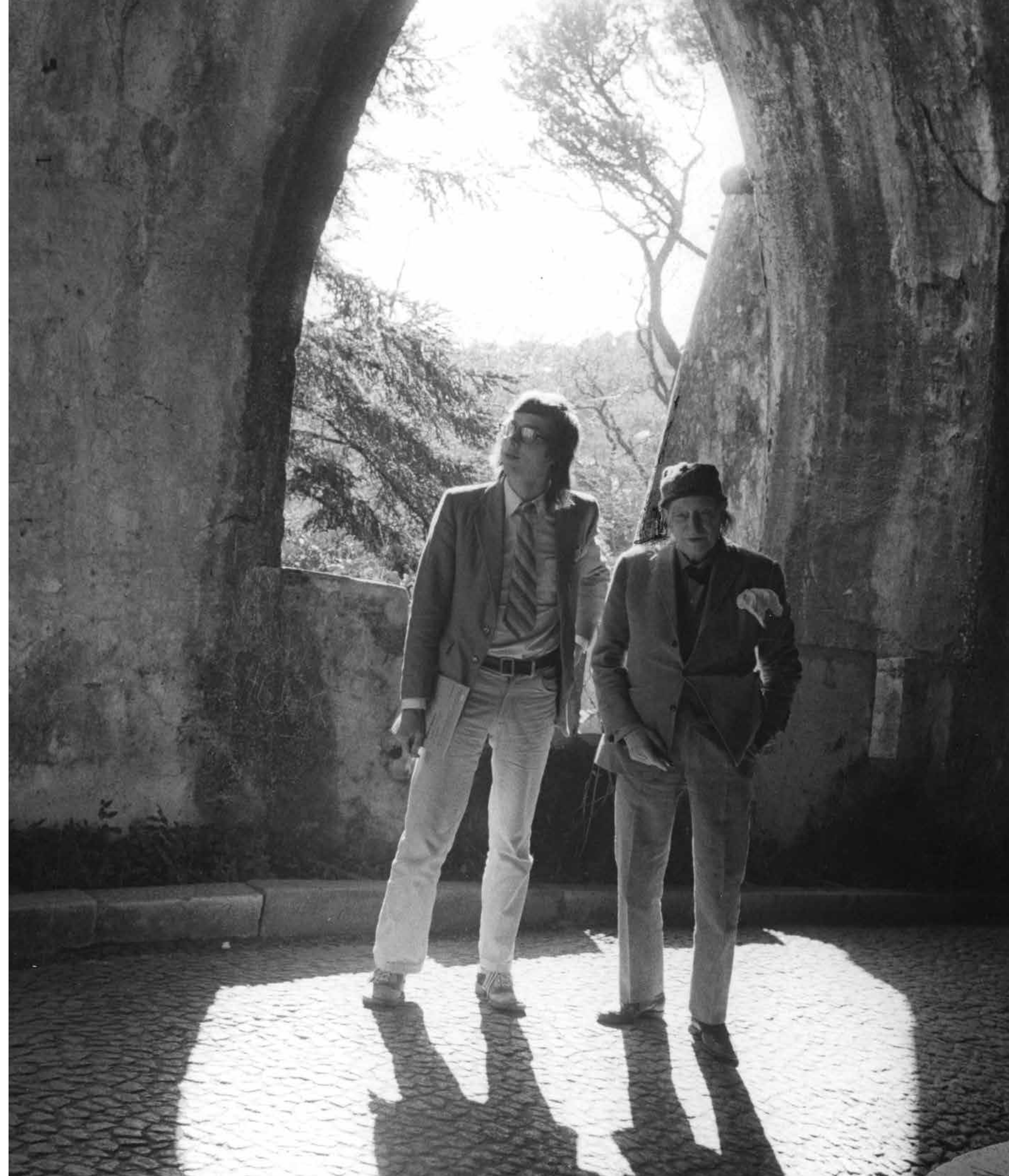


Fig.6 Lindy Guinness, *Richard Shone and Duncan Grant in Sintra*, Portugal, 1972

Fig.7 The Dining Room, Charleston

A NOTE FROM CHARLESTON

Darren Clarke

The Rausing Head of Collections,
Research and Exhibitions, The Charleston Trust

IN or about the winter of 1916 the Bloomsbury artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant made their first marks on Charleston. Over the freshly painted panels under the window of the front room (now known as Clive Bell's Study) Vanessa Bell made delicate line drawings in paint of single stem flowers magically suspended in drinking glasses. On the back of the door Grant filled the upper panel with bright, rich colours, capturing a dynamic assemblage of objects. The artists were doing what they did best: taking the everyday scene and turning it into something magical. This they did with Charleston, the house in East Sussex that was their home and studio for over sixty years.

Like the suspended stems in Bell's first decorations, life at Charleston was a balancing act, both domestically and emotionally. War and political belief had brought this household together. Duncan Grant and his lover David Garnett were both conscientious objectors who needed agricultural employment or faced going to prison. Sussex provided work and a home. Sexual jealousies and the constraints and restrictions of wartime, the domestic challenges of no electricity, no mains water, no telephone and unreliable staff created an uneasy but resilient atmosphere at Charleston, enhanced by the geometric patterns and fluid, floral designs that began to cover fireplaces, doors and shutters.

The rooms at Charleston, previously a guest house, were smothered in wallpapers that Virginia Woolf had described as "awful" and Bell "rather horrid." These were hidden under thick layers of creamy wash, designed by Bell and Grant who mixed Indian red and cobalt blue into the white support to create a soft and harmonious ground for their new designs.

After the war and the birth of Bell and Grant's daughter, Angelica, the house became a summer residence, a place to enjoy the English countryside in its prime, to work out of doors, eyes shaded from the sun by large brimmed hats, accompanied by the energetic humming of bees and chirruping of children. The decorations continued inside; the building of a new Studio was an

opportunity for Grant's seductive designs, as was the Garden Room chimney breast. Also Bell's decorations in the Spare Bedroom of marbled columns and arches with salmon pink walls continued to turn Charleston into a jewel box, its solid vernacular exterior belying the warm and vibrant colours within.

With the threat of another world war, Charleston provided refuge, being elevated once again to a full-time home for the artists, and their circle. New rooms were created and old ones repurposed to accommodate this new life. The house, now filled with paintings and furniture evacuated from London, was a canvas for a new tranche of decorations – the distinctive black and geometric designed walls of the Dining Room and the playful grey paisley of the Garden Room.

Old age did not stop the artists' creativity, both working until their deaths (Bell in 1961 and Grant in 1978), but Charleston grew old too; the roof leaked, the walls became damp, the swirls of paint threatened by decay. The Charleston Trust was formed to rescue and restore the ailing house and its contents. Now these private spaces are public ones, still humming with life, still inspiring and enchanting all who visit.

Fig.8 The door to Clive Bell's study, Charleston, painted by Duncan Grant

WORKS

Richard Shone

I

DUNCAN GRANT

Self-Portrait in Hat, c.1909

Pencil on paper
19.7 × 17.8 cm / 7¾ × 7 in

Grant drew and painted himself throughout his life, not from any sense of vanity (he was the least vain of men), but often from the want of a model (particularly in his early years) or from a need to change pace in between other works. The present self-portrait belongs to a considerable group drawn between about 1908 and 1911 and is the most attractive of them. Hats appear in many of his self-portraits (and a turban in two early paintings), often worn indoors to reduce any distracting top light. In later years, a wide-brimmed straw hat became an almost essential ingredient of his day-to-day wear.

This work was formerly in the collection of Sir Geoffrey Keynes, the surgeon and literary scholar who was the younger brother of Maynard Keynes.

Cat.1 *Self-Portrait in Hat*, c.1909

(detail)

2

VANESSA BELL

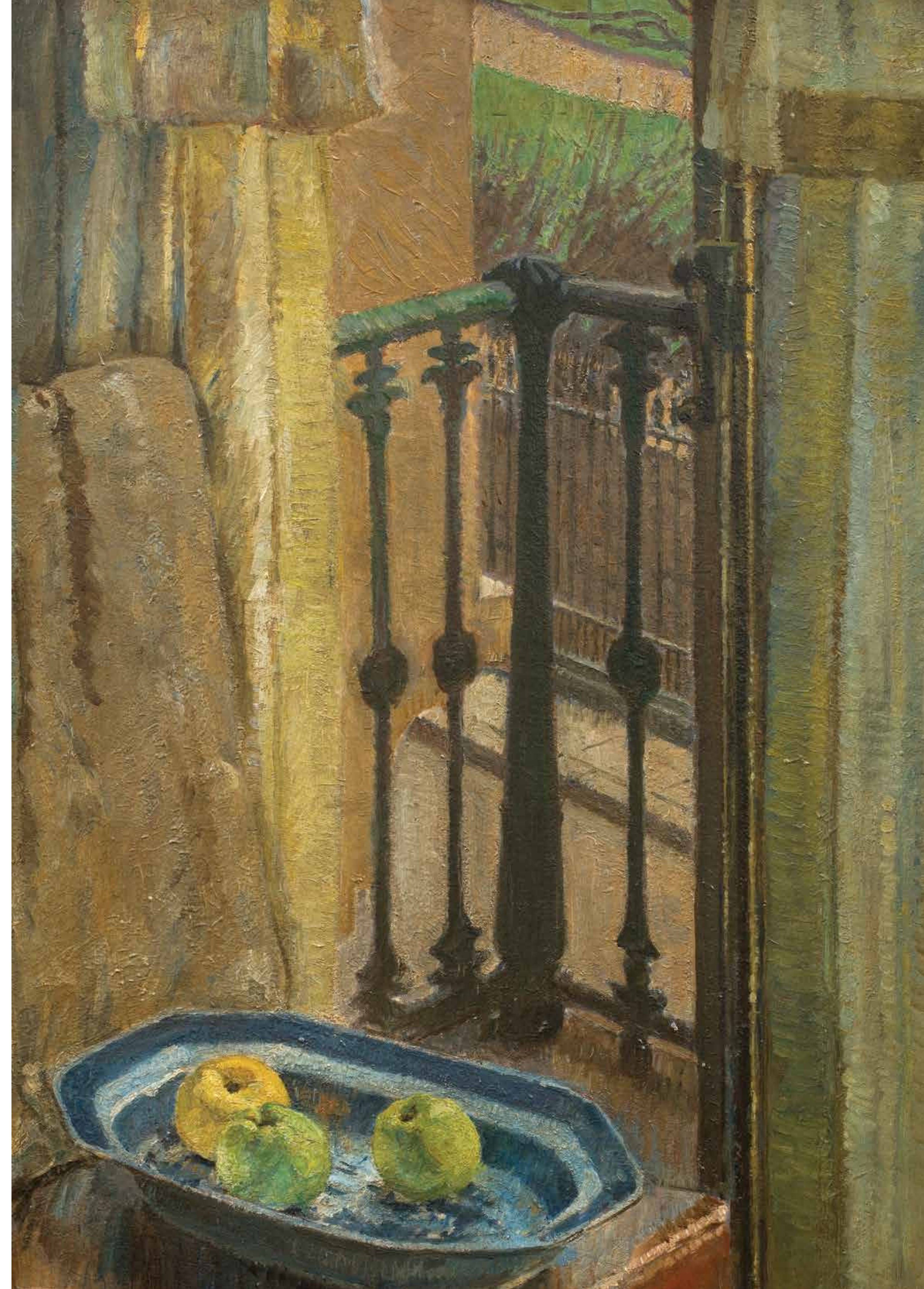
Apples: 46 Gordon Square, c.1909-10

Oil on canvas
71 × 50.8 cm / 28 × 20 in

The railed garden of Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, is seen through the balconied first-floor window of the Bells' house at number 46. This was the drawing-room for some years until it became Vanessa Bell's studio and, in 1916, Maynard Keynes's sitting room/library until his death in 1946.

Bell has placed a Nankeen dish holding three apples on a low table or box with heavy curtains either side of the window, one of the three that reached to the floor of the room. The view outside suggests winter or very early spring and its divisions of street, pavement, grass and path should be compared to similar arrangements shown here (cats.14 and 17). Although Bell's work was to change radically over the following two years, the subject-matter is already highly characteristic with its emphatic verticals and view from one space to another. The careful drawing and impasted paint surface momentarily align her work with the Fitzroy Street circle of artists gathered around Walter Sickert, especially with Spencer Gore and Harold Gilman. Her treatment of apples bears comparison with Grant's later work (cat.8) and her independent development in still life is displayed here, with another awkwardly framed arrangement from 1933 (cat.29).

This is one of the handful of early paintings by Bell that have survived and as such is exemplary in its slow, meditative intimacy which is her most personal mode of self-revelation.



3

DUNCAN GRANT

Tents, 1913

Signed 'D Grant'
Oil on hardboard
61 × 76 cm / 24½ × 29⅝ in

In August 1913, a large summer camp took place at Brandon, near Thetford, on the Norfolk-Suffolk border. Familiar figures from Bloomsbury and other friends gathered there over a period of ten days. Grant and Bell were both present, armed with painting equipment. Bell produced an oil-sketch of the camp which she later used as the basis of her outstanding Omega Workshop screen *Bathers in a Landscape* (fig.9). Grant painted a similar view of three tents pitched against a background of trees but, unlike Bell, includes only a minor suggestion of figures. In the following months he made a second, more improvised version (as was often his habit at this time) which is more stylised and lighter in colour (Private Collection, London). In the present example he has kept to a relatively naturalistic colour scheme. Although the example of Cézanne's brushwork is particularly evident in the treatment of the trees, Grant's own idiosyncratic approach comes through in the gentle oddity of the composition.

Fig.9 Vanessa Bell, *Painted Omega Screen (Bathers in a Landscape)*, 1913, Victoria and Albert Museum

4

DUNCAN GRANT

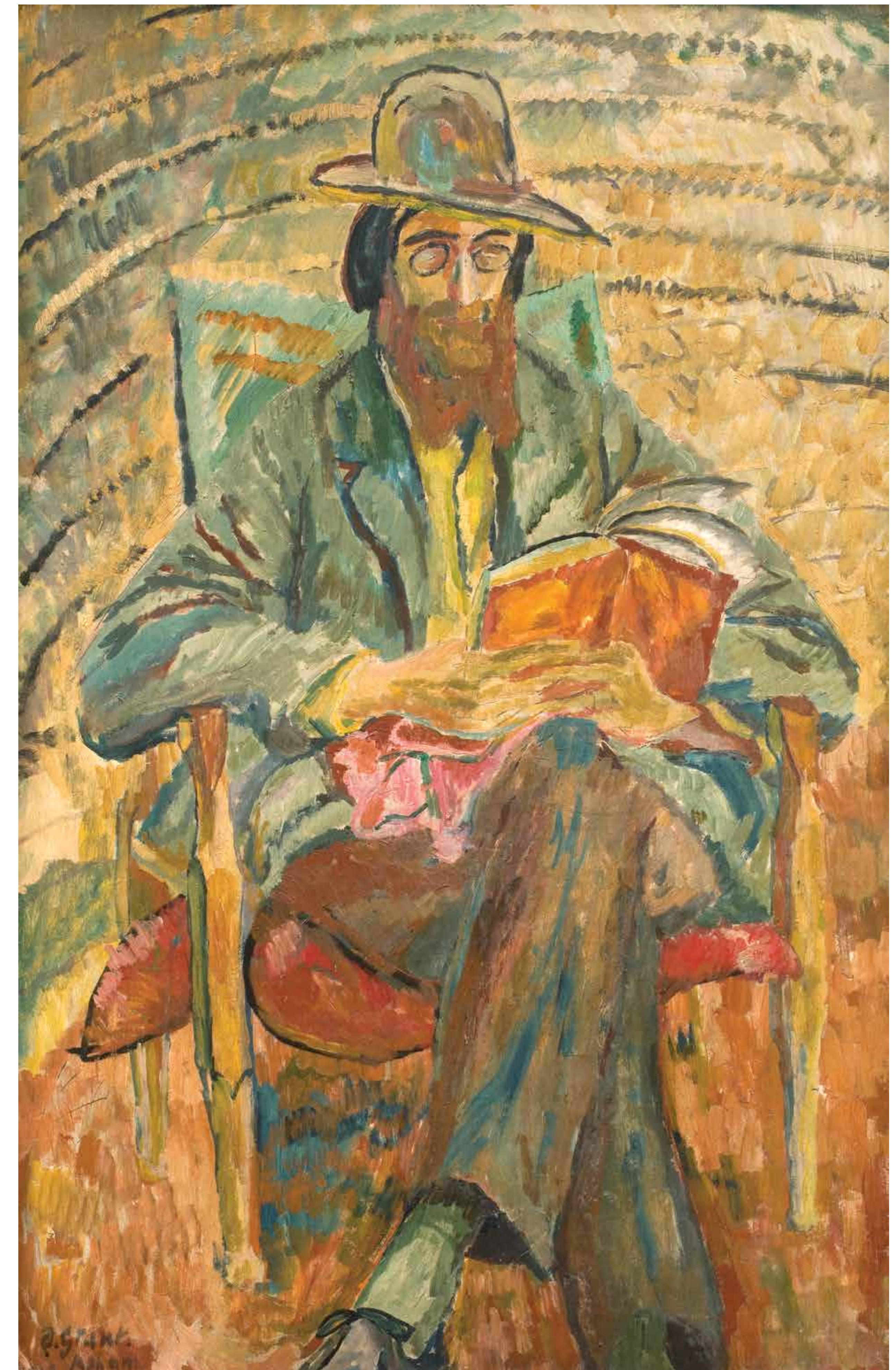
Lytton Strachey, 1913

Signed 'D Grant Asham [sic]' lower left
Oil on board
91.5 × 59.1 cm / 36⅛ × 23¼ in

The future biographer Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) is shown reading, seated on the terrace at Asheham House with a high, curved flint wall behind him. Strachey visited Asheham in the second week of September 1913 where a party of guests was already gathered, including three resident painters – Grant, Bell and Fry, all of whom painted him. Bell's is one of her most exhilarating portraits from this period (see exh. cat. Dulwich 2017, p. 60), Fry's is a wooden failure. Grant's portrait includes the whole figure, allowing him a free rein in the rhythmic correspondences and orchestration of colour seen throughout. His fine earlier portrait of Strachey (c.1909; Tate), painted in a careful New English Art Club style, shows the writer at a particularly gloomy moment in his life (see exh. cat. Tate 1999, no. 7A); three years later we find him, still reading, in the company of congenial friends on a summer weekend, by then his first book, *Landmarks in French Literature* (1912), under his jaunty hat.

Grant was photographed painting this work (fig.87) and the sitting was recorded in a number of other photographs (fig.10). Strachey seems quite aloof from the confusion of children, stools, easels and painters that confronted him although one can be sure there were some amusing exchanges between him and Clive Bell who was seated just to his left. It was Clive who brought the painting to Charleston in 1939, and who bequeathed it to Barbara Bagenal. Before returning it to Charleston upon her death in 1984, she told the present writer she would often talk aloud to the picture of Strachey during solitary days in her home in Rye.

Fig.10 Lytton Strachey at Asheham, with Julian and Clive Bell to the right, 1913



5

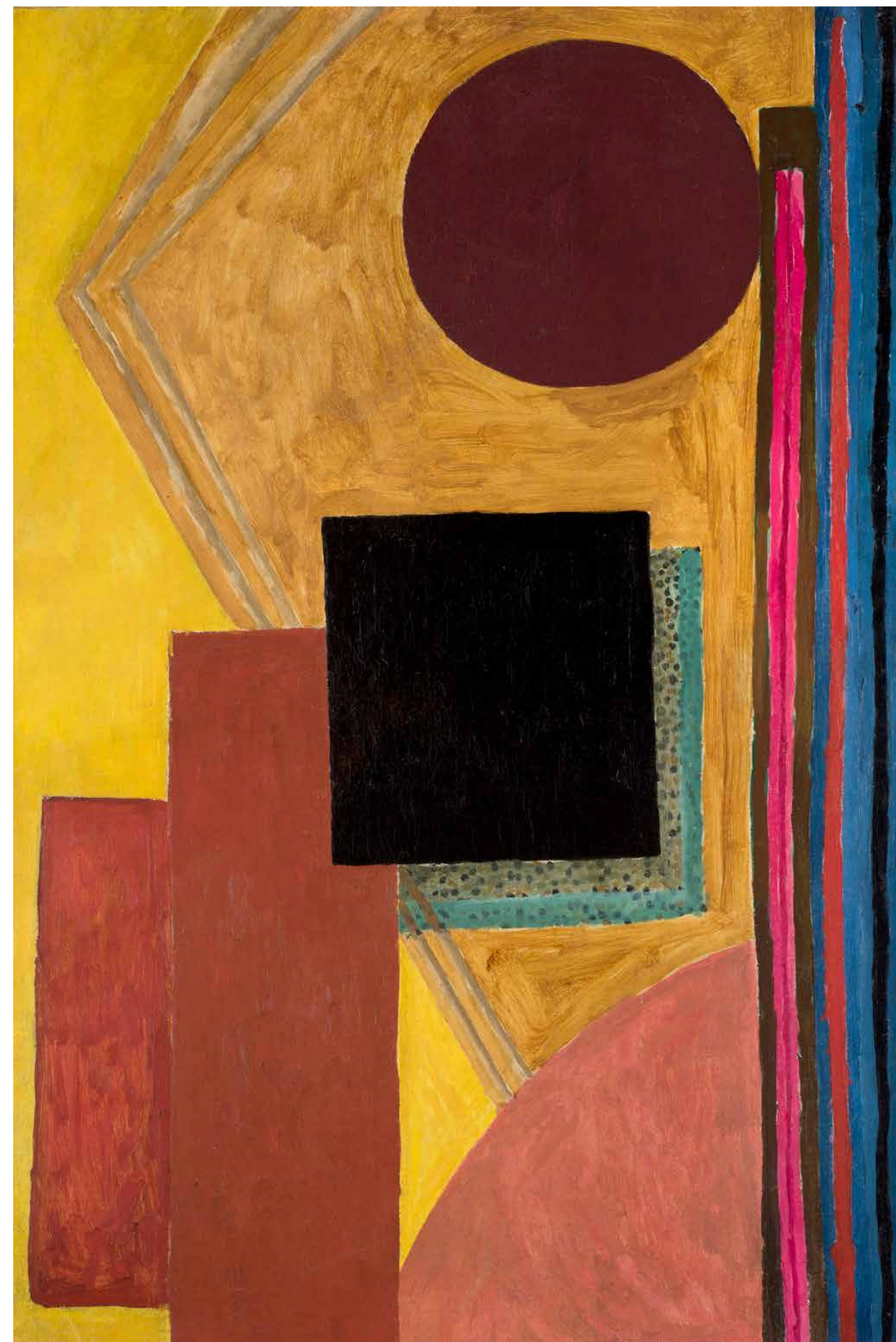
VANESSA BELL

Abstract Composition, 1914

Oil on canvas
92.8 × 62.3 cm / 36½ × 24½ in

Bell's non-figurative paintings were few in number, although certainly more than the two oil paintings that remain – the present work and one in the Tate – and two on paper (including the collage in the Museum of Modern Art, New York). All are testimony to the radical point she achieved in 1914-15. Whereas Grant's more plentiful abstracts from the same period invariably suggest some, if slight, figurative allusion, Bell's are uncompromising in their use of simple forms on the surface of the support with little or no indication of depth. Emphatic verticals meet the edge of the support, as they do in earlier figurative works such as *Apples: 46 Gordon Square* (cat.2). There has been some quite sensible commentary on the possible influence on her and Grant's work of abstract paintings by František Kupka, particularly his *Vertical Planes III* of c.1912-13 which Bell and Grant might – or might not – have seen on show in Paris in 1913. The likenesses are superficial and we should credit Bell and Grant with a natural, personal progression from figuration to abstraction at a time when it was almost inevitable, given their abstract design contribution to the Omega Workshops.

The present work remained unexhibited until the show devoted to the Omega Workshops held at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, in 1984.



6

DUNCAN GRANT

Standing Nude with Bird, 1914

Oil on wood
183 × 62.5 cm / 72⅛ × 24⅝ in

This astonishing painting – astonishing not only in contemporary British art but also in a wider European context – belongs to a group of four works carried out on long wooden panels that Grant acquired some time around 1914. Two others were used horizontally for a reclining nude woman playing a flute; the fourth, a standing nude, remaining unfinished. The present image was based on a photograph of Molly MacCarthy taken by Vanessa Bell in her studio at 46 Gordon Square (fig.11) in late 1914. Informal photographs of naked friends, as well as of themselves, were Grant's and Bell's speciality in the period 1913-15, contributing to Bloomsbury's uninhibited style of life at that time.

Here the figure, silhouetted against an enormous leaf, seems to be standing in prayer or some exotic trance, emphasised by her staring eyes. Richard Morphet has written of Grant's and Bell's preoccupation with gesture and their figures' "glances or gaze", particularly in their early works which "combine the meaningful stare with the Delphic gesture". The present painting is exemplary in this respect, even to the still, blue bird with its commanding eye.

Fig.11 Vanessa Bell, *Molly MacCarthy posing in 46 Gordon Square*, 1914

7

DUNCAN GRANT

Decorated Vase (Tunis), 1914

Painted and glazed earthenware
Height: 34.3 cm / 13½ in

In January 1914 Grant visited Tunis, going by sea from the South of France. While there he came across a local pottery and painted this vase with figures on each side. Although in the spirit of Omega designs, it was not available at the Workshops and Grant kept it all his life. He did, however, decorate a number of ceramic wares for the Omega (examples are in the Courtauld Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum). These ceramics were informed by Grant's interest in African sculpture, shared with Picasso and others, dating from his pre-war visits to Paris. *The Tub* (c.1913; Tate) stands out as a successful assimilation of these ideas and features the same circular breasts and patterned, decorative hatching seen here.

In the early 1930s, the potter Phyllis Keyes made casts of this Tunis vase; one of which, decorated by Grant, is exhibited here (cat.31).

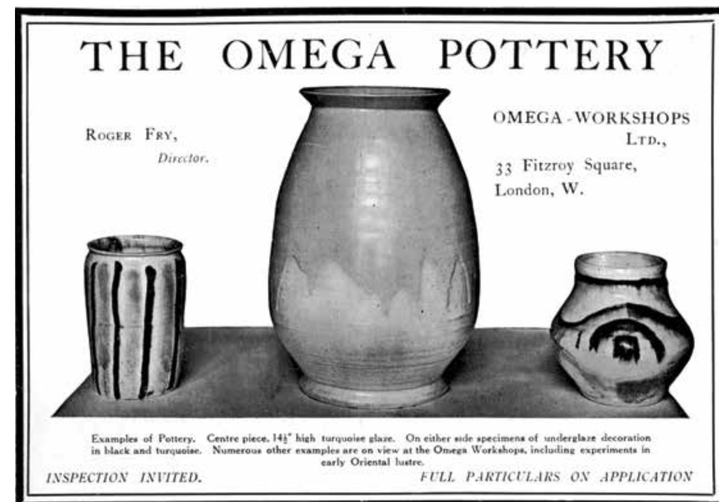


Fig.12 Advertisement for Omega Pottery, *The Burlington Magazine*, March 1915

8

DUNCAN GRANT

Still Life with Fruit and Coffee Pot, 1914

Signed and dated '1914 D. Grant.' lower right
Pencil, oil and collage on panel
47.6 × 64.2 cm / 18¾ × 25¼ in

Fig.13 Duncan Grant, *The Modelling Stand*, c.1914, Private Collection

8

This buoyantly coloured still life was signed and dated quite soon after it was painted (unusual for Grant at this time) and it may well have been one of the three works he showed as an invited exhibitor in the Vorticist exhibition held in June 1915 – two still lifes and one collaged abstract.

It is difficult to say where the work was painted, but most likely it was in Grant's accommodation at 38 Brunswick Square and suggests an improvised lunch for one in his studio, further indicated by the decoration or painting in the background. Grant began to use collage in his easel paintings and in designs for the Omega Workshops in early 1914. Sometimes he used found papers and sometimes painted paper himself, all cut to the necessary shapes; he also used pieces of fabric, wood, labels and silver cigarette paper. His most extensive collage is his *Abstract Kinetic Collage with Sound* of late 1914 (Tate). At first glance the use of collage in this work is hardly apparent, but it is in fact quite extensive, particularly in the lustre coffee pot which dominates the composition and takes the place of the central white form found in other collaged still lifes, such as *The Modelling Stand* (fig.13).

Both Bell and Grant show a remarkably early adoption of European avant-garde methods in 1914. Bell's *Still Life (Triple Alliance)* of that year is equally pioneering in its use of collage but assumes a more political outlook (University of Leeds Art Collection, see exh. cat. Dulwich 2017, p.97). Here, Grant paints over his newspaper cuttings, giving priority to colour and vivacious composition.

Cat.8 (detail)

9

VANESSA BELL

Portrait of Molly MacCarthy, 1914-15

Gouache, oil, and collage on board
92 × 75 cm / 36¼ × 29½ in

Fig.14 Vanessa Bell, *Portrait of Molly MacCarthy Sewing*, c.1913, whereabouts unknown

9

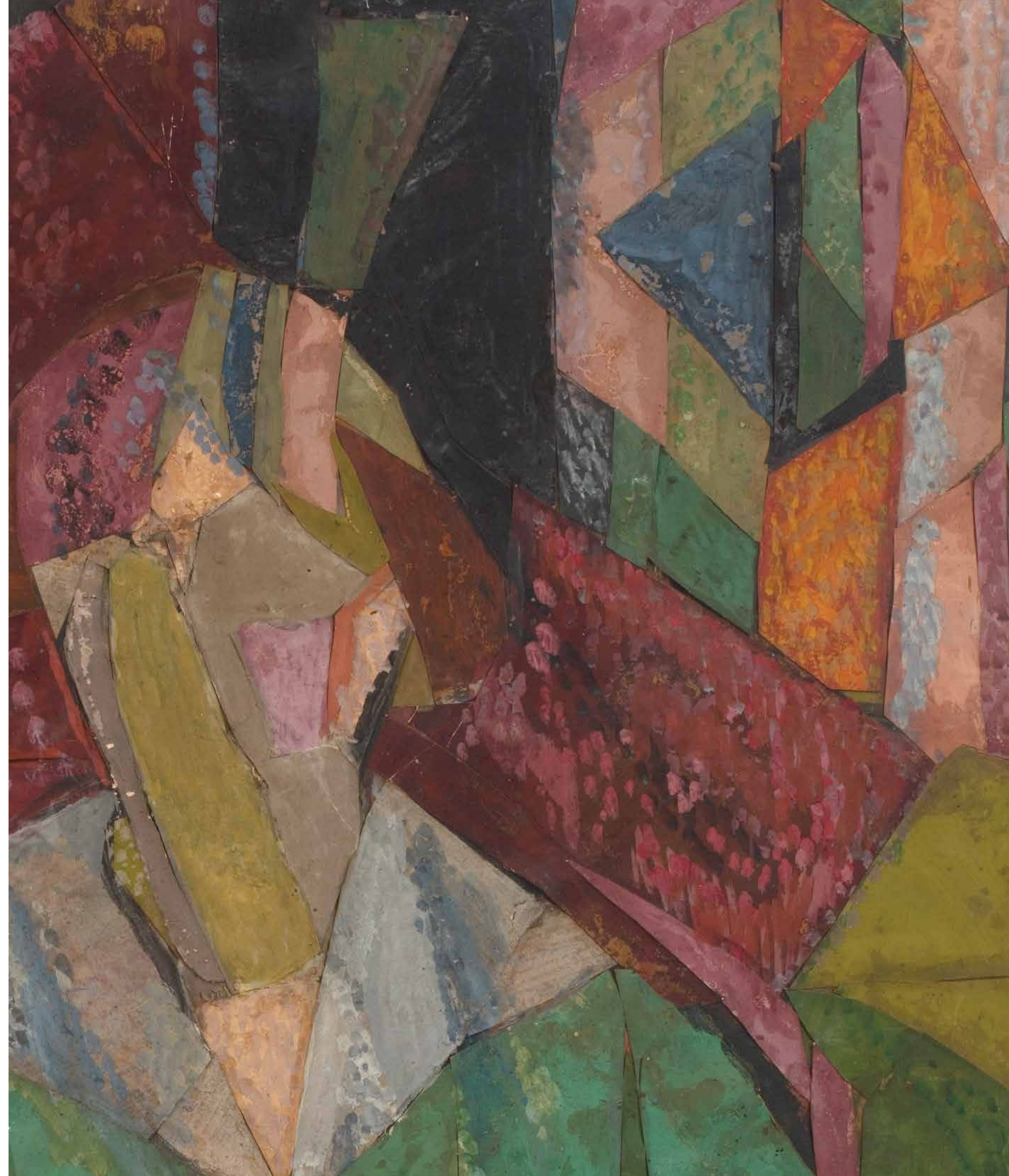
Molly MacCarthy (1882-1953), née Mary Warre-Cornish, was a daughter of the Vice-Provost of Eton, and married the critic and writer Desmond MacCarthy (1877-1952) with whom she had three children. Although they lived in Chelsea, the MacCarthys were on intimate terms with Bloomsbury. It was Molly who instigated the Memoir Club in 1920, at which its members, after dining together, read short autobiographical papers, some of which are invaluable records of aspects of early Bloomsbury, particularly those by Maynard Keynes and Virginia Woolf. Molly MacCarthy herself published several books, the best known of which is *A Nineteenth Century Childhood* (1924).

Molly was cursed with increasing deafness which inhibited the sustained conversation at which, like her husband – she excelled. Accounts of her highlight her humour and brilliant, sometimes fantastic talk. She had a short, unsatisfactory affair with Clive Bell. In 1914 she accompanied the Bells to Paris, but whether she went with them to see Picasso is unclear. It was on this visit that Vanessa Bell was astonished by the artist's constructions and collages which were undoubtedly a spur for this work.

Vanessa Bell and Molly MacCarthy were lifelong friends. Bell painted her at least twice in 1912 at Asheham House (fig.14), and photographed her naked in 1914 at 46 Gordon Square.

This collage owes something to the two earlier paintings, but the sitter's dress and setting are different. It is entirely composed of painted and cut papers and is almost certainly the first such complete collage in modern British art. Bell did not go on to develop this strand in her work, perhaps finding it a laborious practice in contrast to the sensuous directness of paint. The work was long in the collection of David Garnett and was acquired from his estate sale by Stephen Keynes.

Cat.9 (detail)



IO

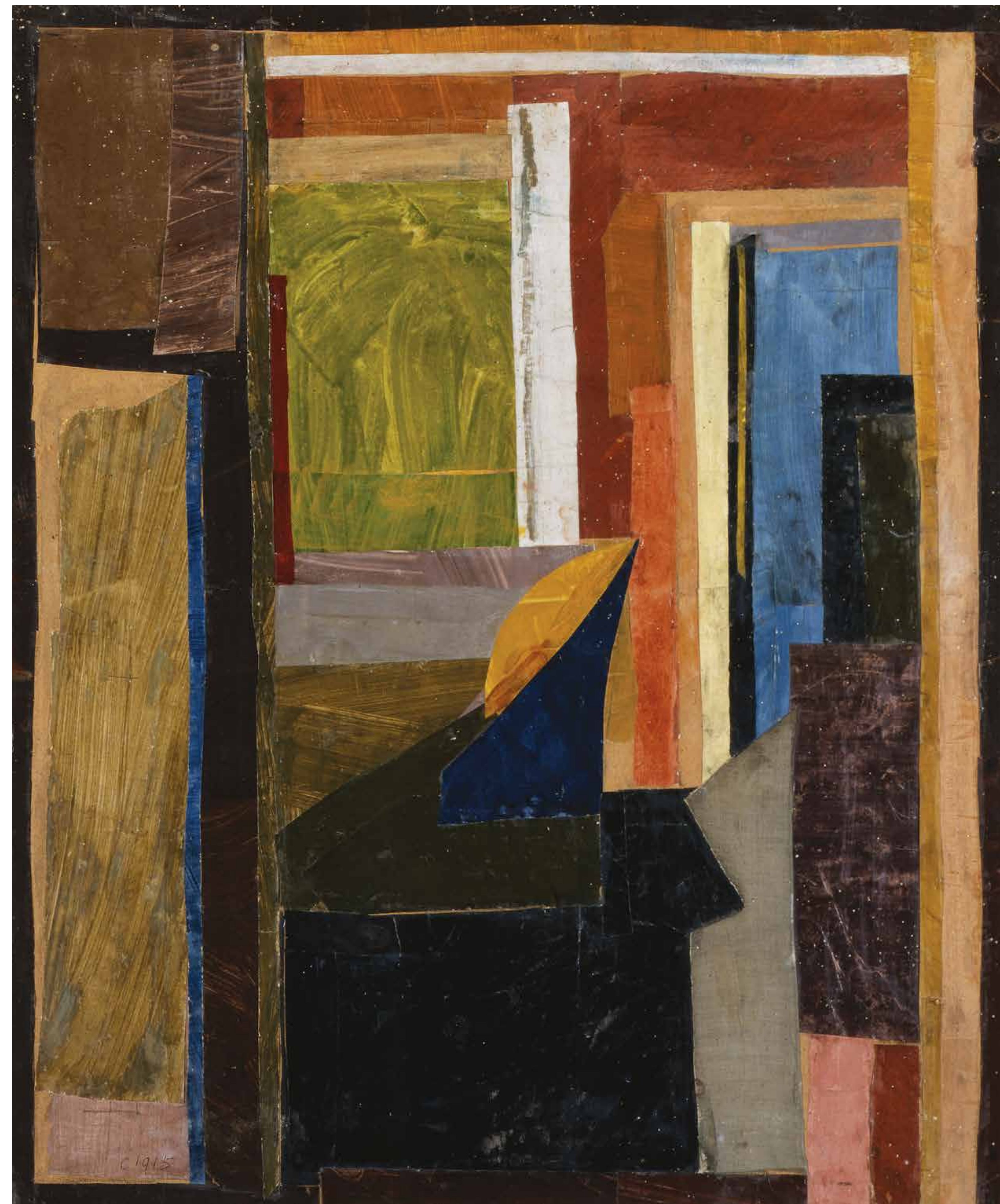
DUNCAN GRANT

Interior at Gordon Square, c.1914-15

Dated 'c.1915' lower left
Painted collage on board
76.4 × 64.2 cm / 30⅛ × 25¼ in

A small painting by Grant called *Interior. 46 Gordon Square* (1914; Tate) formed the basis of the present work. Grant frequently made two versions of a painting at this time; here, he has greatly enlarged and schematised his initial work and produced one of his most arresting collages. The subject is one that occurs throughout his career: the view of one room from another. Here he shows the first floor of the Bells' house, 46 Gordon Square, indicating one of the open double-doors that divided its two principal rooms. We can discern a sofa seen from the side (the pale central ellipse), rugs and canvases (for this was Vanessa Bell's studio). Although Grant almost certainly worked with the earlier painting to hand, the collage is in no sense a 'copy' and he has felt free to alter or simplify its components; for example, lowering in height, one of the two curtained windows at the back and omitting the legs of the chair in the foreground. All this emphasises the architectonic concept of the work.

It is hardly irrelevant to note that this room saw so many early Bloomsbury gatherings and conversations on aesthetics, 'significant form' and abstract philosophical questions.



II

DUNCAN GRANT

David Garnett in Profile, 1915

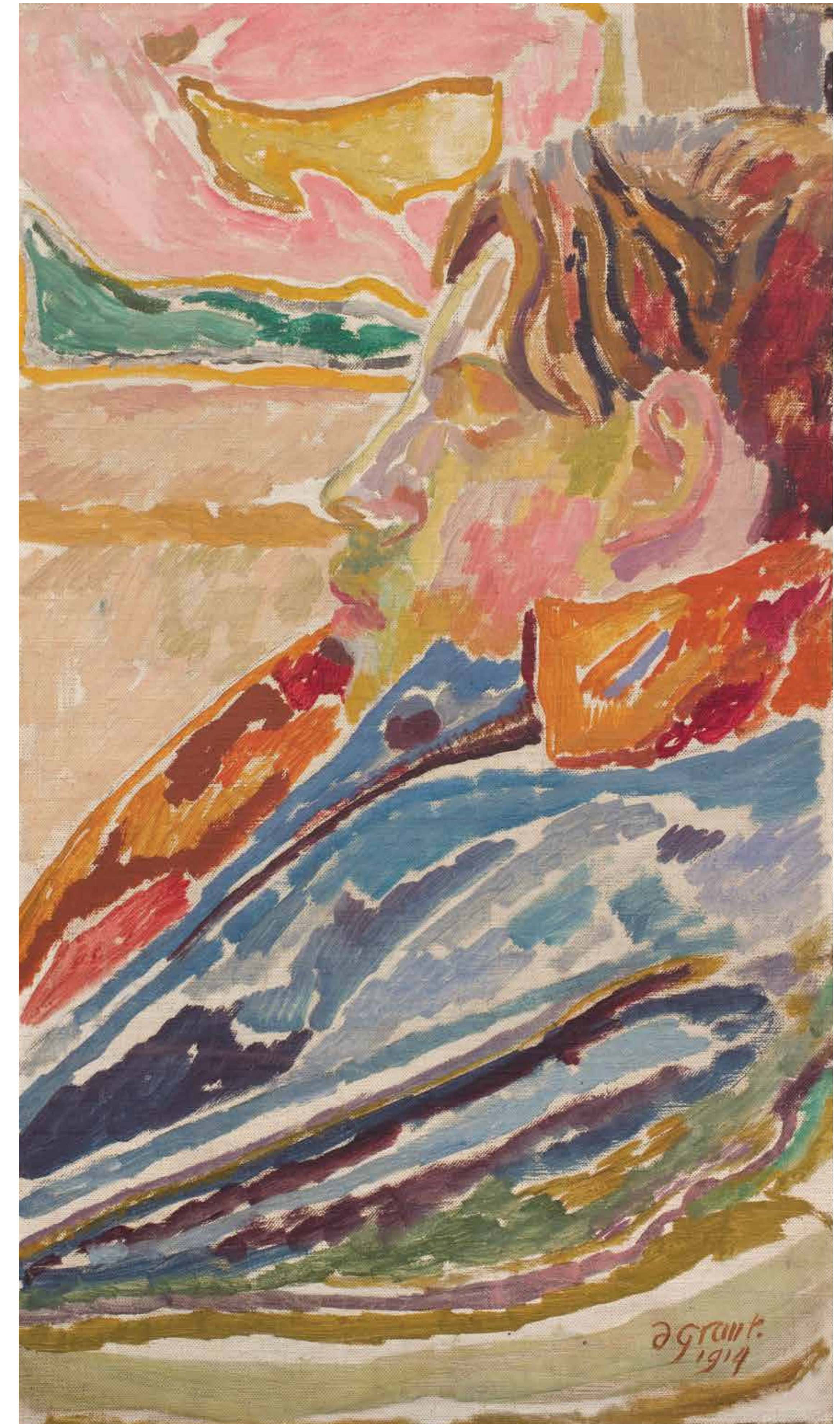
Signed and dated 'D Grant 1914' lower right
Oil on canvas
67 x 38.8 cm / 26⅜ x 15¼ in

This portrait was painted in 1915 at Eleanor (now known as Ellanore) House, West Wittering, Sussex, in the boathouse-studio in which Grant and Garnett spent several weeks, joined by Vanessa Bell in the day (cats.12 and 14). Garnett (1892-1981) was the only child of the celebrated publisher's reader and critic, Edward Garnett, and his wife Constance, the pioneering translator of the great nineteenth-century Russian writers. David himself became a novelist, editor and autobiographer (fig.15). In 1942 he married his second wife, Grant and Bell's daughter Angelica, born in 1918. Garnett's romance with Grant lasted about four years but the frank female nude seen beyond Garnett here surely alludes to his predominant heterosexuality.

Their lives at this period were bound together through their shared conscientious objection to compulsory military service. Garnett owned several outstanding early works by Grant and Bell, including the latter's collage of Molly MacCarthy (cat.9).

Grant's mistaken dating of the work to 1914 is a much later inscription.

Fig.15 David Garnett at his home in France, c.1980



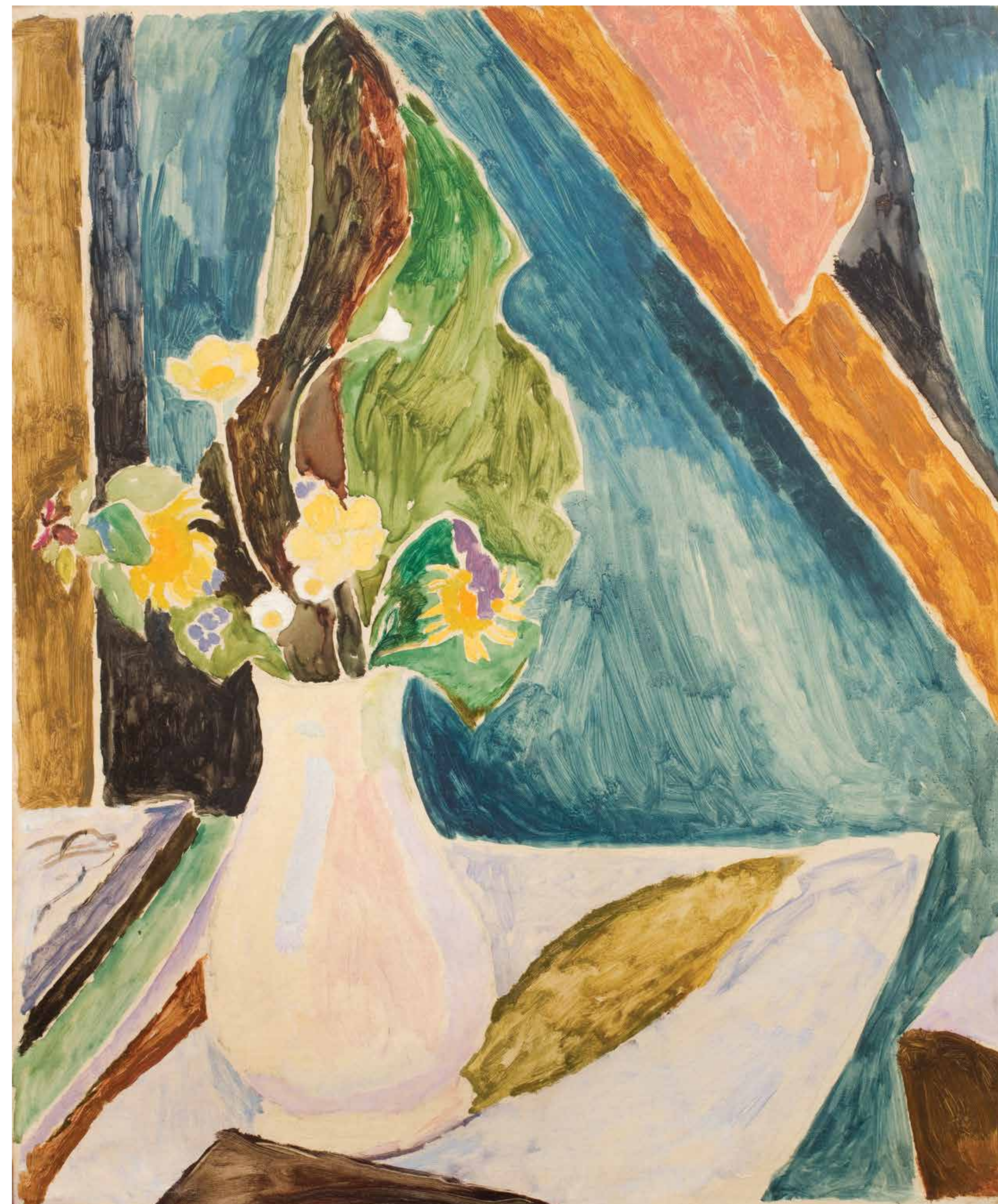
12

VANESSA BELL

Still Life: Wild Flowers, 1915

Oil on canvas
76.8 × 63.5 cm / 30¼ × 25 in

This still life was almost certainly painted at Eleanor House in late spring 1915 (as were cats. 11 and 14). The large leaf and wild flowers – buttercups, a bluebell and a dandelion among them – are roughly arranged in a white pot on a table with what appear to be books or magazines to the left. The background is not easy to read but the diagonal shape starting at the right suggests an easel and the colours are predominant in other paintings by Bell and Grant from this prolific month at Eleanor House. Bell gave the painting to Grant soon after completion, and for many years it hung by his bed at Charleston. It first came to wide notice when it was included in Bell's memorial retrospective, toured by the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1964. In the show's catalogue, Ronald Pickvance wrote that this still life, along with a handful of other paintings, were cardinal works in the history of English Post-Impressionism.



13

DUNCAN GRANT

Portrait of Mary Hutchinson, 1915

Oil on board
61.4 × 44.8 cm / 24⅛ × 17⅝ in

Fig.16 Vanessa Bell, *Mary Hutchinson at Charleston*, 1917

13

Mary Hutchinson (née Barnes; 1889-1977) was a cousin of Duncan Grant and the Strachey children. She married the barrister St John Hutchinson and together they entertained artists and writers of an older generation such as Henry Tonks and George Moore. Between 1915 and the late 1920s, she was the mistress of Clive Bell who introduced her to more contemporary art and literature. She patronised the Omega Workshops and commissioned decorative schemes from Grant and Bell for her home, in Hammersmith and subsequently in Albert Gate, Regent's Park. She was an intimate friend of Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot and, later, Samuel Beckett. Her relations with Bloomsbury in general were not always easy; she lived in a much more upholstered and socially luxurious world; and unlike, say, Vanessa Bell, she was fashionably dressed and perfectly poised in any social situation.

Four known portraits of Mary Hutchinson were begun by Grant, only one of which – the present work – was completed and signed and dated many years later. Grant and Bell first painted her at 46 Gordon Square when she posed against a rectilinear abstract work or wall painting. Bell records in a letter that Grant had to begin again, dissatisfied with his first canvas. There was a further attempt, followed by this painting. She sat again for the painters at Charleston in 1917, and Grant may have continued with this present version, more fluently painted than his earlier attempts and somewhat kinder in its portrayal. It contrasts strongly with Bell's 1915 painting, a vivid but unflattering image that is one of her outstanding early works (fig.17).

Grant's portrait was last publicly exhibited in 1973 when it was acquired by Lady Pauline Rumbold (née Tennant).

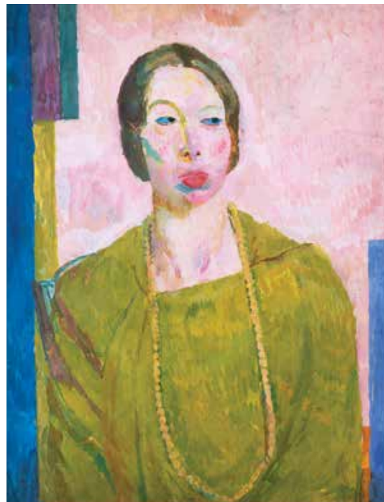


Fig.17 Vanessa Bell, *Mrs St John Hutchinson*, 1915, Tate

Cat.13 (detail)

14

VANESSA BELL

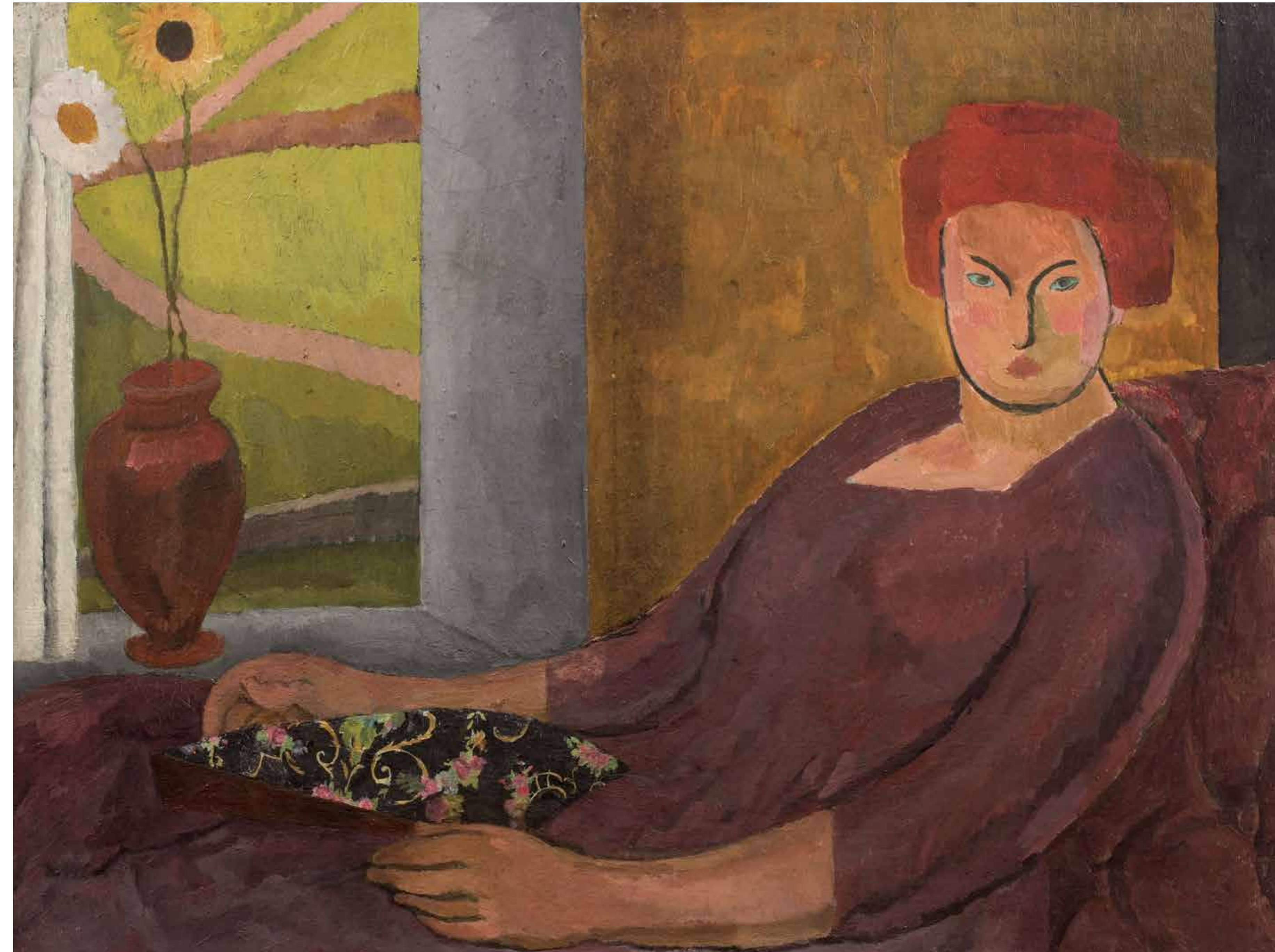
Woman in a Red Hat, **1915**

Verso: Duncan Grant, *Two Men on a Beach*, 1920s
Oil on canvas
76.8 × 102 cm / 30 × 40⅛ in

Little is known about this painting, here exhibited for the first time. It was discarded by Bell and the reverse of the canvas was used by Grant in the late 1920s for a painting of two men on a beach. Although Bell may at first have had a posed model as her starting point, she continued the work without her. We know this from an unfinished painting by Grant which shows Bell (seen from behind) working on the canvas (fig.18, whereabouts unknown, previously with Anthony d'Offay). This was painted in spring 1915 when both artists were working in a large studio, lent to Grant, by Professor Henry Tonks of the Slade School. This was situated close to the Chichester Estuary where they were staying at Eleanor (now Ellanore) House, the country home of St John and Mary Hutchinson who were friends of Tonks.

The window, with its view of horizontally banded grass, paths and a wall, and the flowers in a vase on the sill, are extremely characteristic of Bell's work. This combination of interior and exterior is first seen in *Apples: 46 Gordon Square* (cat.2) and continued throughout her career. The strikingly simplified head of the model and her helmet-like red hat contrasts with the minutely rendered pattern of the material on the figure's lap. This may well be a partially open fan, strongly suggested in Grant's painting of Bell at work on this canvas.

Fig.18 Duncan Grant, *Vanessa Bell Painting*, 1915, whereabouts unknown



15

16

DUNCAN GRANT

Study for Embroidered Fire Screen, c.1914-16

Signed and dated 'D Grant c.16' lower left
Collage and gouache on board
74 × 62 cm / 29⅛ × 24⅜ in

Fig.19 Duncan Grant, *Lily-pond table*, c.1913-14, The Charleston Trust

15

16

DUNCAN GRANT

***Embroidered Fire Screen**, c.*1919
Polychrome wools stitched on linen canvas by Marie Moralt
75 × 61 cm / 29½ × 24⅛ in

Swimmers, stylised waves, fountains, pools and fish occur throughout Grant's contributions to the Omega Workshops, all suggestive of freedom and movement. They range from a swimmer on a wooden pencil box to the spectacular lily-pond table tops and screens of swirling colour poured onto a dark, flat surface, the goldfish moving around the lily-pads (fig.19). A single goldfish occupies the centre of this embroidered fire screen and its accompanying design. The screen seems to have been commissioned by Maynard Keynes and was, until recently, in the collection of his nephew, the late Stephen Keynes. Although the design is dated 1916 (late inscription), it probably belongs to a year or two earlier and a piece of collaged newspaper shows the date of '[Marc]h 10 1914'. It was not immediately transferred to canvas but was carried out in wool by Dr Marie Moralt who came to know Grant and Bell in early 1919 when she cured their ailing baby daughter, Angelica. Dr Moralt, whose portrait was painted by both artists, also worked a cross-stitch chair back and seat, by Grant, for Keynes's rooms in King's College, Cambridge.

During the Omega period, Grant, Bell and Fry relied on a variety of friends and acquaintances to stitch their designs in wool and silk. In later years, Grant's mother Ethel Grant became the most prolific and sensitive interpreter of her son's designs (cats. 25 and 26).

Cat.16 Duncan Grant, *Embroidered Fire Screen*, c.1919, installation view with original frame

17

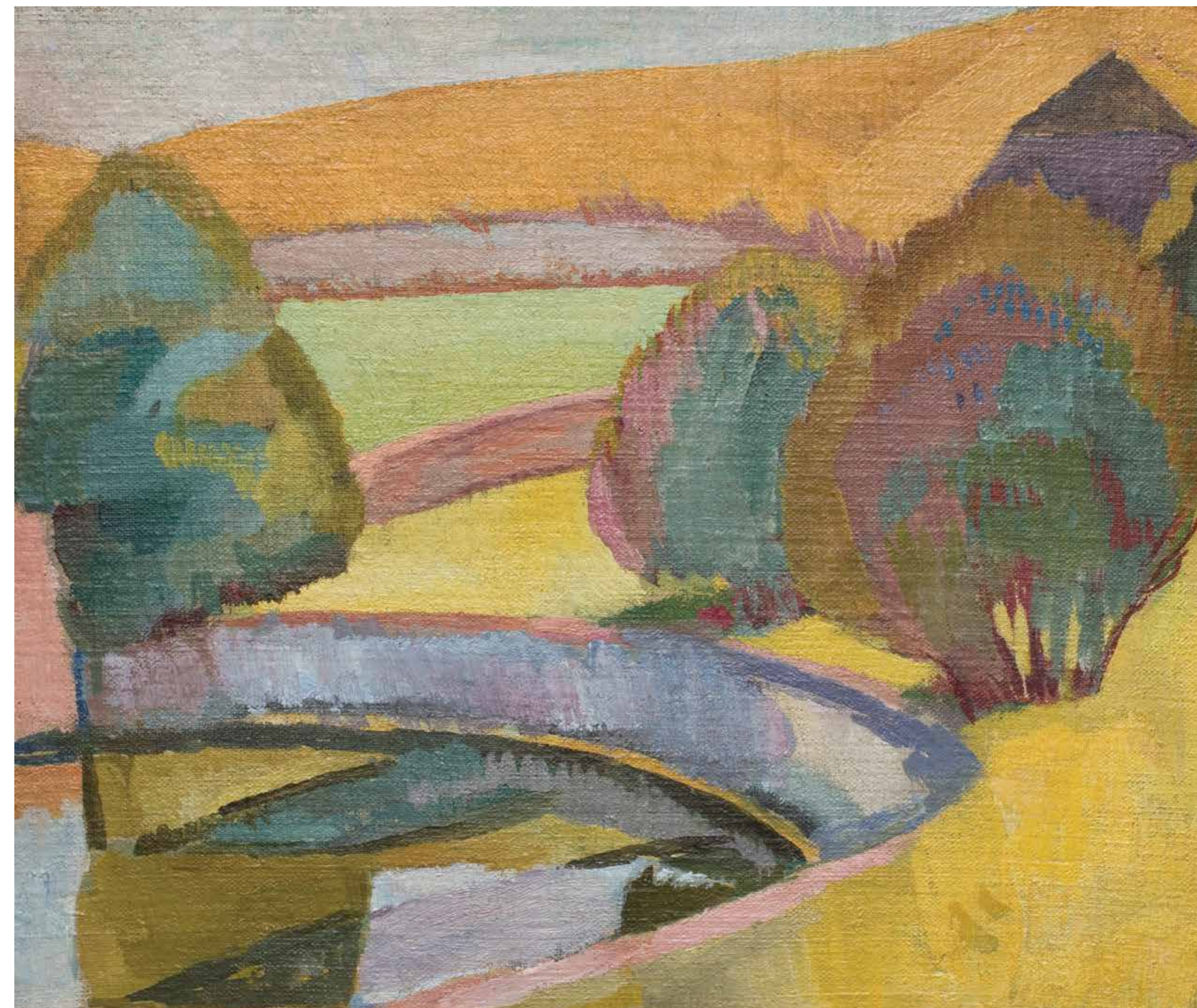
VANESSA BELL

The Pond, Charleston, 1916

Oil on canvas
30.5 × 35.5 cm / 12⅛ × 14 in

According to Grant, this was the first painting made by Bell after she moved to Charleston in September 1916. She was immediately captivated by its downland setting and secluded position at the foot of Firle Beacon. Charleston was a working farm on the Gage family estate but the house itself was no longer tenanted by the farmer, had briefly been a summer boarding-house, and was free to rent when Bell found it (directed there by Leonard and Virginia Woolf). It had almost no up-to-date amenities – no electricity or gas, water from an outside pump – but plentiful rooms, a walled garden and a sizable farm pond within yards of the front door. Charleston's seclusion was greatly valued by Bell all her life but particularly during the First World War when she established her alarmingly unconventional household there with her two sons, Julian and Quentin (not at school), and two young conscientious objectors who were having an affair and with one of whom – Duncan Grant – she was in love. Her husband, Clive Bell, visited when he could and sometimes brought with him his mistress Mary Hutchinson (cat.13). Maynard Keynes, a regular visitor, contributed to the expenses.

Bell soon set up a studio in a bedroom on the first floor, although for the present painting she was in a room at the front of the house, an upstairs viewpoint she often favoured, that included the flint-walled pond, a dark granary at right and the slow curve of Firle Beacon beyond. She wrote to Grant: "The colour is too amazing now, all very warm, most lovely browns and warm greys and reds with the chalk everywhere giving that odd kind of softness" (Bell to Grant, 18th September 1916). Bell particularly liked water in a landscape, taking pleasure in the repeated but changing images it afforded, setting one kind of reality against another. Her reactions to this new landscape are perfectly realised in this deceptively modest canvas, the dark bushes giving a monolithic note to the lines and curves animating the space up to the sky.



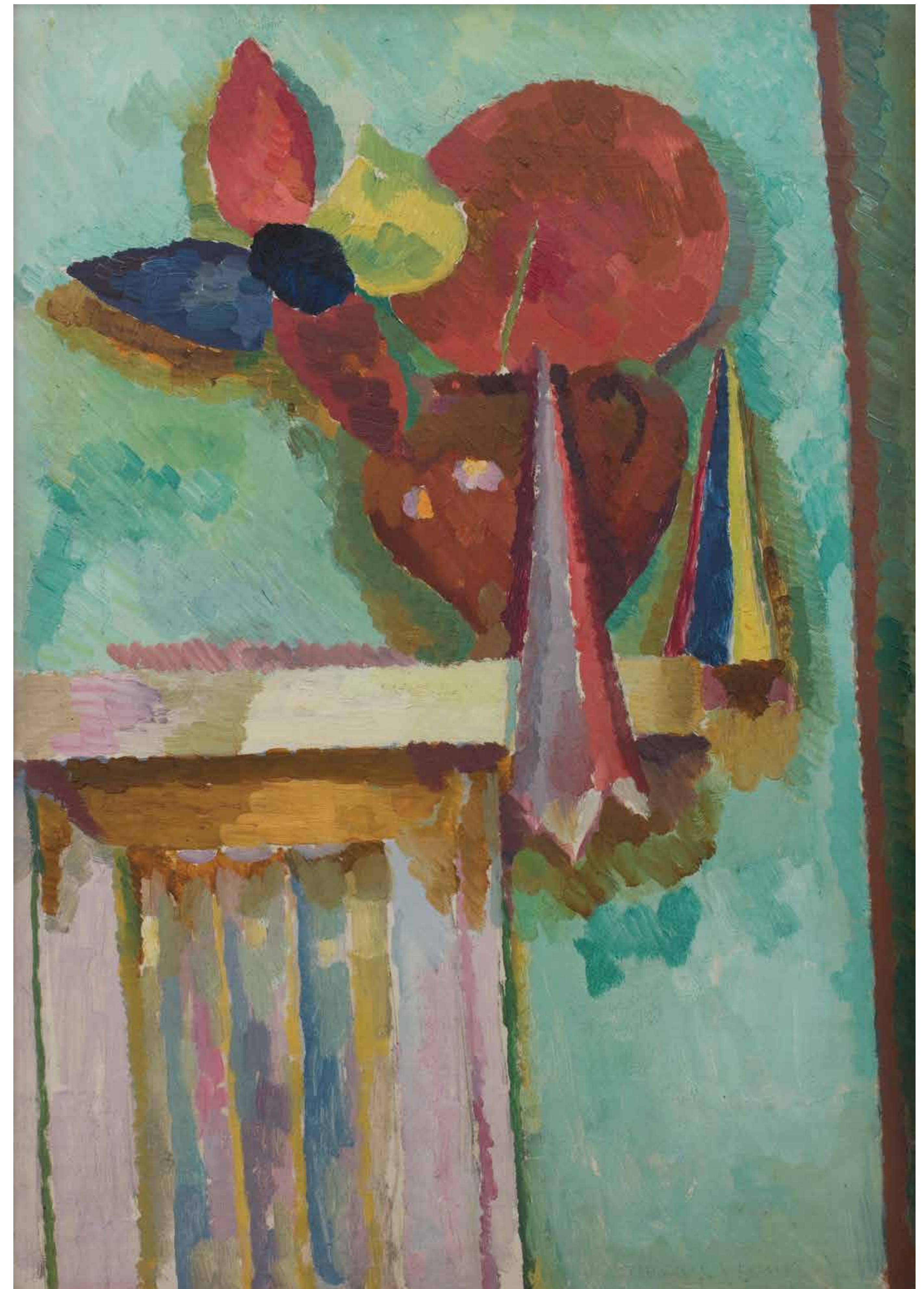
18

DUNCAN GRANT

Paper Flowers, 1917

Oil on canvas
72.8 × 51.2 cm / 28⅝ × 20⅛ in

Paper flowers, often brilliantly coloured and botanically improbable, were sold at the Omega Workshops, becoming a popular item. They appear in Grant's and Bell's still lifes by 1914. Three such blooms, along with what seems to be a small red fan, are seen here in a glazed terracotta pot on the sitting-room mantelpiece at Charleston. The distinctive green walls of this room are familiar from other paintings, especially Grant's 1917 portrait of Bell lying on a sofa with the fireplace at right (National Portrait Gallery). The off-vertical angle of the shelf and chimney-breast are typical of Grant's still lifes (the example of Cézanne ran deep), counterpointing the rectangular canvas support. Here, he characteristically contrasts the coloured fantasy of the flowers with their geometric setting, enhanced by the long, dark vertical at right.



19

DUNCAN GRANT

Flowers in a Glass Vase, c.1917-18

Oil on board
58.4 × 54 cm / 23 × 21¼ in

The fusion of abstraction and figuration in Grant's work around the time of this painting was an attempt to reconcile his spontaneous lyrical gift (as seen in his Omega designs) with a more austere sense of discrete form. Here, a shallow spatial recession is established by the geometric abstraction at left cutting in front of the elliptical glass vase of stylised flowers. The écriture behind the vase was used frequently by Grant at this moment – flat yet painterly – and occurs most fully in his and Bell's wall panels for Maynard Keynes's rooms in Cambridge (cat.21) from two or three years later. Geometric flowers (appearing here as luminous discs contained within their abstract borders) recur in Grant's decorative designs throughout his oeuvre.

20

DUNCAN GRANT

Juggler and Tightrope Walker, c.1918-19

Oil on canvas
103.5 × 72.4 cm / 40¾ × 28½ in

This outstanding painting was one of the stars of Grant's first one-person exhibition held at the Carfax Gallery, London, in February 1920. It was mentioned in most of the reviews of the exhibition and was bought by Lytton Strachey. Its evolution is unclear and it may well have been started before Grant visited a circus at Dartford, Kent, in early autumn 1919 – which he had greatly enjoyed: "It was enchantingly traditional with clowns and exquisite horses and jugglers", he wrote to Vanessa Bell shortly afterwards. In October, he listed 'Acrobat and Juggler' as one of the paintings he had to finish for his Carfax show.

As was established in two known preliminary drawings (fig.20), the picture is divided into two, Grant having no intention of recreating a realistic spatial setting. The girl on the tightrope is shown indoors, whereas the juggler – standing on a platform – seems to be outside, with the suggestion of an early Italian Renaissance landscape way beyond his legs. A central column is decorated with colours used elsewhere in the work. Grant's lyrical and sometimes fantastic conceptions were often tethered to reality by pictorial devices such as the curtains seen here and in his *Venus and Adonis* (c.1919; Tate).

It is worth remembering that in November 1919, when Grant was finishing the painting, he had attended the London première of the Russian Ballet's *Parade* with its characters drawn from the music hall and the circus, including a male and female acrobat in tight, spangled costumes.

Fig.20 Duncan Grant, *Study for Juggler and Tightrope* Walker, 1918

21

VANESSA BELL & DUNCAN GRANT

Studies for The Muses of Arts and Sciences, 1920

Oil on canvas
83.8 × 35.5 cm / 33 × 14 in (each)

21

In 1910, Grant painted a mural in John Maynard Keynes's study in Webb's Court, King's College, Cambridge. It occupied part of a wall to the right of the room's door and depicted nude and semi-nude male and female figures celebrating the grape harvest. It combined modernist figuration with references to Piero della Francesca's frescos in Arezzo and was a surprising addition to the rooms of a young lecturer in economics.

Ten years later, Keynes – by then a Fellow of King's – commissioned Grant and Bell to decorate the same study, with related panels on either side of the door and bookcase, as well as curtains and furnishings. The artists, working in an outdoor studio at Charleston, planned eight figures – four male (Grant) and four female (Bell) – representing the Muses of the Arts and Sciences, although as they worked, they were not absolutely clear which Muse represented what and constantly changed their attributes.

While Bell and Grant worked on the decorations, Keynes was living at Charleston writing *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, (1919), which was to make him an internationally famous and controversial figure a few months later.

The colour scheme, marbled backgrounds and painted framing of each panel were worked out through drawings and the eight swiftly painted studies shown here. The ensemble was influenced by memories of works that the two painters had seen in Italy earlier in the year (such as Andrea del Castagno's series of *Illustrious People* in the Villa Carducci) as well as a reproduction of two figures by Bona da Ferrara that had appeared in a recent issue of *The Burlington Magazine*, a copy of which was at Charleston.

A year later Bell was still working on the panels, but the room was finished by 1922 with the addition of huge appliqué curtains. The colourful vitality of the oil-sketches was somewhat lost in the final figures which are more solidly realised and emphatically painted, striking some visitors as "somewhat austere and melancholy". But the room certainly impressed a young Canadian, A.F.W. Plumtree, who was being supervised by Keynes in October 1928: "He is a very interesting person, with most amazing rooms – white and orange ceilings, extraordinary drapings, modernistic sort of frescoes, semi-futuristic pictures and so forth". (in M. Keynes, ed. *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 247).

Cat.21 (detail)

22

DUNCAN GRANT

Study after 'The Lemon Gatherers', c.1920

Oil on canvas
121.9 × 86.4 cm / 48 × 34 in

One of Grant's most notable early paintings is *The Lemon Gatherers* (fig.21), inspired by memories of a troupe of Italian actors known as the Sicilian Players that had appeared in London in 1908, as well as by certain standing figures in Piero della Francesca's frescos in Arezzo. It was shown at the Friday Club in 1910 and purchased by the Bells. It is thought that Grant reprised the composition in c.1913, painting a second version. If this is correct, he returned once more to this canvas, obliterating his second version and producing a full-scale interpretation in c.1919 (see Watney 1990, pl.5; whereabouts unknown), as well as the present canvas, showing only the left-hand side of the composition. Although the 1910 painting is still recognisable as his source, Grant has simplified the figures, monumentalised them and exaggerated their 'plasticity', particularly in the arms and hands.

This work and others contemporary with it, such as *Venus and Adonis* (c.1919; Tate), *Juggler and Tightrope Walker* (cat.20) and the final figures for Keynes's room in Cambridge (cat.21) show Grant's move to a more fully realised three-dimensional style without loss of the inventive colour that distinguished his earlier Post-Impressionist work. It has sometimes been assumed that Grant was influenced in this phase by the example of Picasso's swelling Neo-Classical figures and nudes, but Grant's paintings pre-date his exposure to these works, which he first saw in Picasso's studio in 1920.

Fig.21 Duncan Grant, *The Lemon Gatherers*, 1910, Tate

23

DUNCAN GRANT

***Self-Portrait*, 1923**

Inscribed 'Paris 1923' lower left
Pencil on paper
30 × 15 cm / 11¾ × 5⅞ in

Grant drew and painted in Paris on many occasions, starting in 1906-07 when studying at La Palette under Jacques-Emile Blanche. In the early 1920s he paid several extended visits, even renting a studio for a month or so and furthering his friendships with writers and painters, including Picasso, Cocteau and Derain. In June 1923, after a tour of Spain with Bell and Fry, he returned to England via Paris where he spent a week, partly to attend the première of Stravinsky's new ballet *Les Noces*, with sets by his (Grant's) friend, Natalia Goncharova.

This is one of two tousled-headed self-portraits from this visit, almost certainly drawn in his room in the Hotel de Londres in rue Bonaparte. (The other portrait was shown in *Duncan Grant: Works on Paper*, Anthony d'Offay, London, 1981, no.31.)

24

VANESSA BELL

Decorated Lamp Stand, c.1931-32

Signed 'VB' on base
Painted and glazed earthenware
Height: 23.5 cm / 9¼in

From 1931, the potter Phyllis Keyes – with a workshop in Warren Street and later in Clipstone Street – supplied Bell and Grant with innumerable pots, jugs and vases, either thrown by her or cast from pieces they supplied (cats. 30 and 31). Ceramic lamp bases were a popular line, always including a hole near the bottom edge, through which the electric wire was threaded; a cork fitting held the bulb at the top. This example, never previously exhibited, is one of Bell's earliest collaborations with Keyes, showing a seated female nude from the front and the back in one of Bell's most calligraphically free decorations.

Cat.24 Vanessa Bell, *Decorated Lamp Stand*, c.1931-32, right and rear view.

25
26

VANESSA BELL

***Chair Seat*, c.1924**

Polychrome wools cross-stitched by Ethel Grant
41 × 51 cm / 16⅛ × 20⅛ in

Needlework objects in wool or silk were familiar at the Omega Workshops from its opening in 1913, particularly fire screens, chair seats and cushions. After the Omega closed down in 1919, Bell and Grant continued to design such objects and a number of friends and professional embroiderers carried out the work. By far the most prolific and successful was Ethel Grant (1860-1948), Duncan's mother. In 1925, she contributed several pieces designed by her son to an exhibition of *Modern Designs in Needlework* at the Independent Gallery in London (where designs by Bell, Grant, Fry and Wyndham Tryon were shown; the exhibition was praised by Paul Nash in a review in *Artwork* (Jan. – Mar. 1926).

The work here by Bell was intended either as a chair seat or, more likely, a rectangular stool cover. It is similar to a number of chair seats at Charleston and at Monk's House, Rodmell. Invariably her designs show a vase of flowers or some fruit, framed by abstract elements (as also seen in many of her book jackets for the Hogarth Press). Grant's vocabulary is similar but tends to greater elaboration. The oval stool here was acquired by Maynard Keynes in the 1920s, adding to his considerable number of needlework furnishings such as the fire screen shown here (cat.16).

Bell and Grant were not alone among their European contemporaries in designing for furnishings, especially textiles. Grant was very impressed by Raoul Dufy's printed textiles, seeing them in Paris in 1923. And, in the context of this design, it should be noted that Juan Gris designed some chair seats to be carried out in needlework by his dealer's wife, Mme Kahnweiler, in early 1924. Indeed, several of Gris's still lifes of this period are very similar in their objects – vases, fruit, musical instruments, classical busts – and flat, overlapping areas of colour, to the decorative work by Bell and Grant in the 1920s.

25

26

DUNCAN GRANT

Fruit Bowl Stool, c.1925-8

Polychrome wools cross-stitched by Ethel Grant, on wooden stool
27 × 56 × 42 cm / 10⅝ × 22⅛ × 16½ in

Cat.26 *Fruit Bowl Stool*, c.1925-8

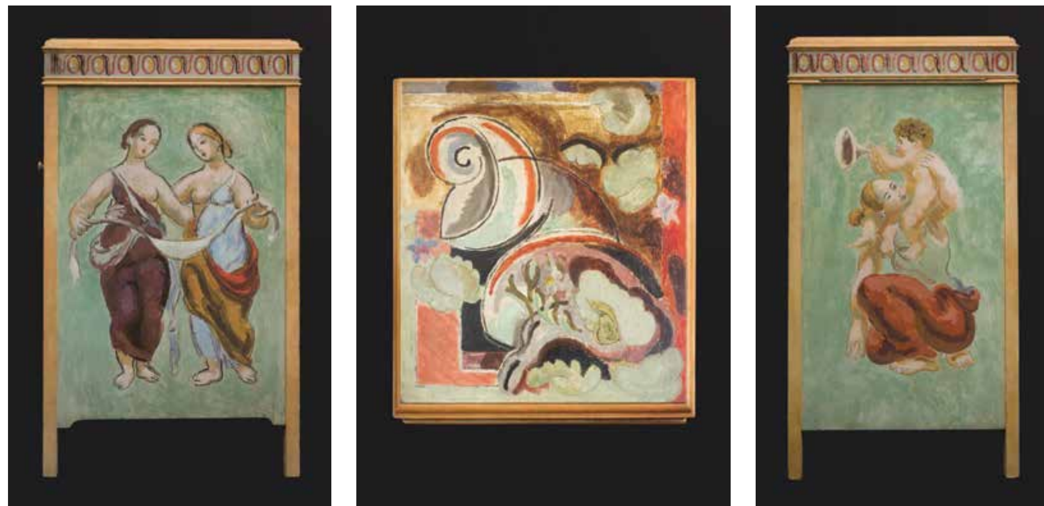
Cat.26 (top view)

27

DUNCAN GRANT

Painted Gramophone Cabinet, c.1926

Oil on oak veneer (HMV Model 162)
93 × 47 × 52 cm / 36⅝ × 18½ × 20½ in



Cat.27 Duncan Grant, *Painted Gramophone Cabinet*, c.1926, right, top, and rear view

27

In the 1920s, gramophones as free-standing pieces of furniture became immensely popular. The turntable was at the top, under a lid, and records could be stored underneath. Several of these entered Bloomsbury households and Grant and Bell were in demand to decorate the cabinets (two are at Charleston, another at the Woolfs' home, Monk's House, Rodmell). Grant decorated the present work for Maynard and Lydia Keynes and it was at their Sussex home, Tilton, for many years. Keynes's nephew, Richard, remembered Easter holidays at Tilton when they listened to "Mozart and Paul Robeson singing Negro spirituals".

Maynard Keynes was one of Bell and Grant's closest friends during this period, and a regular visitor to Charleston from its initial occupation by Bell in 1916, contributing to its rent and domestic expenses. He was a welcome guest, bringing news of the 'outside world' during the war, as well as books, journals, food and drink. However, his relations with them deteriorated after his unexpected marriage to Lydia Lopokova in 1925. Bell was never reconciled to this but Grant remained close, as this commission shows, advising Keynes on his picture collection and, later, on the visual arts activities of CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) which, under Keynes's chairmanship, became the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946.

Grant made studies of the two singing women and the two male figures, the former reproduced by Raymond Mortimer, who owned the study, in his *Penguin Modern Painters* volume on Grant (1944, pl. 31).

There was a record player with an enormous horn at Charleston in 1917 when Grant painted Bell listening to music (Private Collection, California). And one of Grant's last decorative commissions (1969) was to paint two large loudspeakers for which he made brilliantly coloured abstract designs.

Cat.27 (right view)

28

DUNCAN GRANT

Toilet of Venus, c.1929

Signed 'D. Grant' lower left
Oil on canvas
78.5 × 63.5 cm / 30⅞ × 25 in

In 1928, the poet Lady Dorothy Wellesley (later the Duchess of Wellington) commissioned Grant and Bell to decorate the dining room of her home, Penns-in-the-Rocks, near Withyham, Sussex. At first only painted panels affixed to the walls were envisaged; in the following year, curtains, furniture and lights were added, and the room was finished in late 1930, inaugurated with champagne and dinner for several guests including Vita Sackville-West and the novelist Hugh Walpole (fig.22). It was undoubtedly Bell and Grant's most elaborate and expensive interior and involved an extraordinary amount of work. It was warmly praised in the press, especially in an illustrated article in *The Studio* (August 1930).

Of the six painted panels, Grant's *Toilet of Venus* went through several stages, from preliminary drawings through compositional studies in oil and in tempera. He finished a full-scale work but thought it was too detailed and 'solid' and rapidly painted the final more calligraphic version. The present work is one of three small-scale painted studies.

In the post-war years, when Penns-in-the-Rocks changed hands, the dining room was not to the taste of the new owners and the panels and furnishings were sold for derisory prices. Fortunately, Southampton City Art Gallery was able to acquire five of the six paintings although they are sadly depleted in effect when seen out of their original context – "The best thing we did really", Grant later commented, "– wonderful at night with the lights and pictures reflected in the looking-glasses".

Fig.22 Dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks from an article in *The Studio*, August 1930

29

VANESSA BELL

Basket of Flowers, 1933

Signed and dated 'V Bell 1933' lower left
Oil on canvas
76 × 45 cm / 29⅞ × 17¾ in

A characteristic of Bell's still–life paintings, from the earliest ones we know (cat.2) to ones from her last years, is the subtle variety of viewpoints she adopts. She liked to look down on her motif or up at it, placing objects on a high mantelshelf or raised table. In several flowerpieces she may face her subject directly at eye level but include a mirror behind it in which the reflection is slightly raised. The present painting probably depicts a bookshelf against a wall at Charleston, affording strong, close shadows. The roses in the basket are accompanied by what appears to be a faded hydrangea flower, suggesting a date of autumn 1933. It was then that Bell was completing a group of oil paintings in readiness for her exhibition in March the following year where this work was first shown.

30

VANESSA BELL

Music Room Vase, 1932

Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 22 cm / 8⅝ in

In early 1932, the Lefevre Gallery commissioned Bell and Grant to design and decorate a Music Room to be installed in the first floor of their premises at 1a King Street, St James's (fig. 26). The room, on view in December that year, contained a piano, duet stool, gramophone, chairs, rugs and six painted wall panels inspired by various composers. Among smaller items were lamps and the two vases shown here, all supplied by Phyllis Keyes (see cats. 7 and 25).

The room was Grant and Bell's last collaborative domestic interior. Although it received considerable press coverage and toured to Preston and Bradford, it was not financially successful. Tastes were changing and the strong colours and insistent patterning of the ensemble were already running counter to prevailing fashions.

31

DUNCAN GRANT

Music Room Vase, 1932

Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 32 cm / 12⅝ in

32

VANESSA BELL & DUNCAN GRANT

The Famous Women Dinner Service, 1932-34

50 hand-painted Wedgwood blank ceramic plates
26 Plates: Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in
24 Plates: Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Fig.23 Howard Grey, *The Famous Women Dinner Service* at Saltwood Castle, c.1981

Cat.32
'Vanessa Bell' and verso

Mary Queen of Scots
George Eliot
Virginia Woolf

Cat.32 'Fanny Kemble' (detail)

THE FOLDING OF TIME

Frances Spalding

Biographer of Vanessa Bell
and Duncan Grant

TIME is a necessary ingredient in the making of art. And as it moves through time and history a work of art can reveal further meanings, raise new questions or seem to alter and change according to the interests and intellectual climate of the day. It is a curious phenomenon and over the years it has made every new exhibition of Bloomsbury art in some way surprising. At last year's Vanessa Bell exhibition, held at Dulwich Picture Gallery, her *Street Corner Conversation* (c.1913; Private Collection) reappeared after many years. With its restricted palette and abrupt treatment of form it could almost have been mistaken for an early Vorticist painting, by David Bomberg or William Roberts. And even Baudelaire, with his desire for the painter of modern life, would surely have been astonished that such a mundane, anonymous subject could occasion a painting of such visual drama and force.

Recently, on a visit to Southampton City Gallery, I re-encountered Duncan Grant's *Parrot Tulips*, which has a fragile beauty and seems to hover between Edwardian naturalism and the onset of Post-Impressionism. It was the painting which made his debut with the Camden Town Group in 1911. It appalled the painter Neville Lytton who thought it "incompetent beyond measure" when it was acquired by his friend the civil servant and collector Sir Edward Marsh who went on to become a leading patron of modern British art. Marsh later recalled: "The change of heart which led me from ancient to modern [pictures] must have come to pass in 1911, when I bought Duncan Grant's *Tulips* painted in that year and still one of my best treasures."

And still today, Bloomsbury continues to garner bouquets and brickbats, to offer unexpected insights and to change our perceptions of what art can do or be. And time plays its part in all this. The cultural critic Michel de Certeau has argued that historical time is not linear, but that past and present can be

wrapped and folded together. Nowhere is this more evident in this exhibition than in the dinner plates, painted by Bell and Grant, as part of a one-hundred-and-forty-piece dinner service for Kenneth Clark. The inclusion of the beauty queen 'Miss 1933' reminds us of the moment in time when the project was devised. But the subject chosen for these plates, of forty-eight famous women, from royalty to courtesans, offers a fascinating record. It looks back at the past in order to preserve for the future an array of figures, many of whom can be associated with Bloomsbury interests, such as the historical figures whose lives fascinated Clive Bell and Lytton Strachey, or the authors whom Virginia Woolf wrote about in her novels and essays.

Here is an index to many of the strands within the formation of Bloomsbury sensibility, here is the gaiety that animated their conversations and the rhythmic patterning that enlivens so many of their decorative ventures. All this is laid out lightly and with brio on plate after plate, while memories and associations reverberate. Rarely has decorative art been so playful yet also achieved such depth.

Cat.32
(verso detail) Wedgwood maker's mark

Cat.32, 'Miss 1933' (detail)

TALK OF THE TABLE:

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's Famous Women Dinner Service

Hana Leaper

"...it turned out differently to what we had expected"[1]

IN 1932, Kenneth and Jane Clark ordered "36 large plates, 12 smaller plates, 36 side plates, 12 soup cups & saucers, 1 salad bowl & stand, 2 junket dishes, 6 oval dishes at different sizes, 2 sauce boats & stands, 4 pepper pots, 4 salt pots, 4 mustard pots, 2 sauce tureens & stands & handles, and 3 Liverpool jugs" from the artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant (fig.24). The set that the Clarks received two years later challenged their expectations, and taste, in numerous ways.[2] Clark, an influential art historian, museum director, and patron, recorded:

> As usual with commissions it turned out differently to what we had expected. Instead of a gay cascade of decorative art like the best Savona, Duncan and Vanessa conscientiously produced forty-eight plates each of which contained the portrait of a famous woman (Bloomsbury asserting its status as a matriarchy). These are in effect forty-eight unique paintings by Duncan and Vanessa, for which they made innumerable studies, and which will give posterity a good idea of their style in the '30s.[3]

Expecting luxurious fine dining ware, they instead received the *Famous Women* set of fifty portrait plates, a provocative and humorous work of art that challenged both the standard orientation of history and the way in which it is recorded, as well as consolidating a call for social change, beginning in the domestic realm. Despite making a claim for the lasting art historical importance of the set, in terms of representing the artists' work of this period, Clark seemed disconcerted by these results.

The set is one of the foremost works of a then nascent feminist field of art that contests the visual history of 'Civilisation' presented by Clark throughout his career. Often working in craft media, its practitioners continue to draw attention to hidden histories of inequality, including the lack of representations of women and minority groups. Recent examples include Lubaina Himid's 2007 work *Swallow Hard: The Lancaster Dinner Service*, which uses dinner

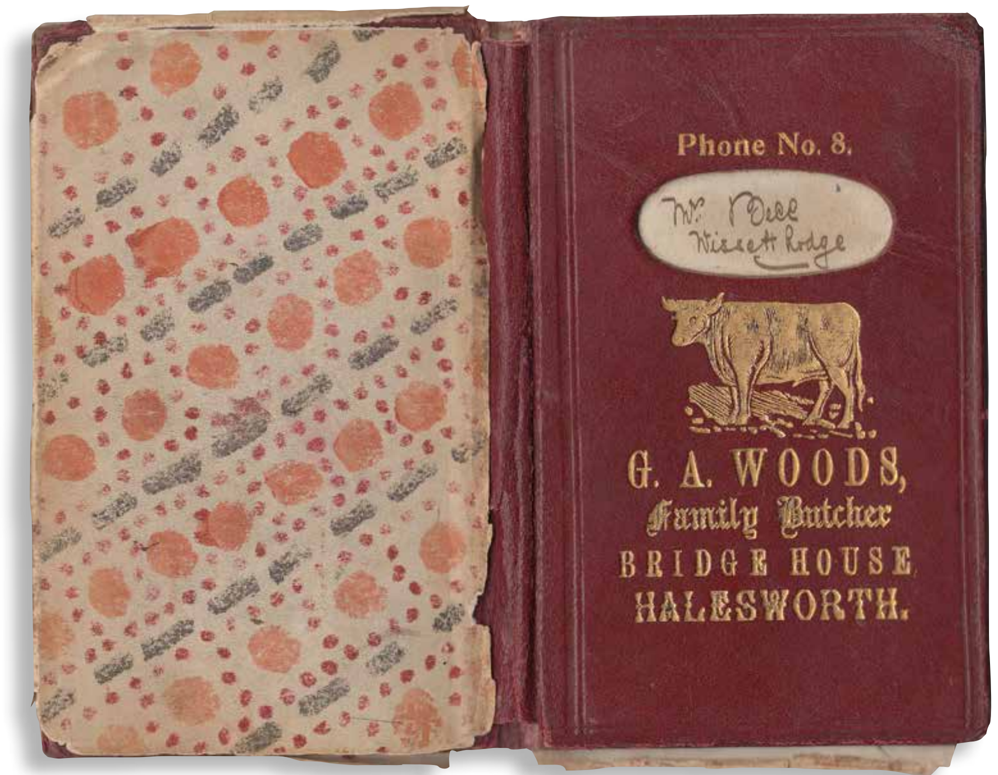
ware to examine Lancastrian involvement in the slave trade, and Jessica Lynn Whitbread's performances of *Tea Time: Mapping Informal Networks of Women Living with HIV* (2011–ongoing), which uses a teacup to represent each of the women living with HIV who have participated in the project.

Like many of these works, Bell and Grant's plates invite empathetic dialogues between subjects. In the case of the *Famous Women*, this has resulted in unexpected and joyful associations. In his autobiography, *Another Part of the Wood* (1974), Clark recounted that his initial inspiration for the service came from dining with the dealer and collector Joseph Duveen in New York in ostentatious splendour "on a blue and gold Sèvres service made for the Empress Catherine of Russia".[5] 'The Catherine the Great' plate thus provides a fascinating point of connection between two paradigms: the artists' ambitious and dissident work to challenge both the gendering of history – with its boundaries between craft and fine art – and the prevalent culture of formal hospitality, and Clark's more conventional standpoint, both in terms of his inspiration for owning an artist-designed dinner service and the art historical models he popularised. Including the original owner of Duveen's Sèvres service in *Famous Women* recognizes her role as a patron of the arts and a powerful female ruler – two legacies which inspired the set.

Further, in a curiously feminist twist, despite Clark's ambivalence towards the end product, letters between Bell and Jane Clark prove that Jane at least knew a great deal of information about the set during its creation, and seems to have taken charge of managing the project with Bell. A large group of letters between Bell and Jane survive – many more than between the artists and Mr Clark. They indicate a growing closeness between the two women. On 30 January, Bell wrote: "but don't you think we might use Christian names? It's so much less business like!";[6] and over the coming months they discussed their personal tribulations ("One's children never leave one long in peace, do they?"),[7] as well as making many appointments to meet, usually over lunch, tea, or dinner (fig.27).

Bell described the ideas for the plates in detail to Jane, and in return, seems to have been encouraged in them. In February, early on in the process, Bell wrote:

> We have considered the whole question of treatment a great deal & I want to ask your opinion about our present plans. We think there might be some sort of [?indecipherable] idea running through the service to give it character & unity while allowing a good deal of variety also and our idea is to make it an illustration of women in different capacities—famous queens, actresses & so on—this would give me a great deal of choice. We could have classical figures or modern or anything. At the same time there'd be [me/more] general idea & interest to connect all. But please say if you or Mr Clark don't like the idea.[8]



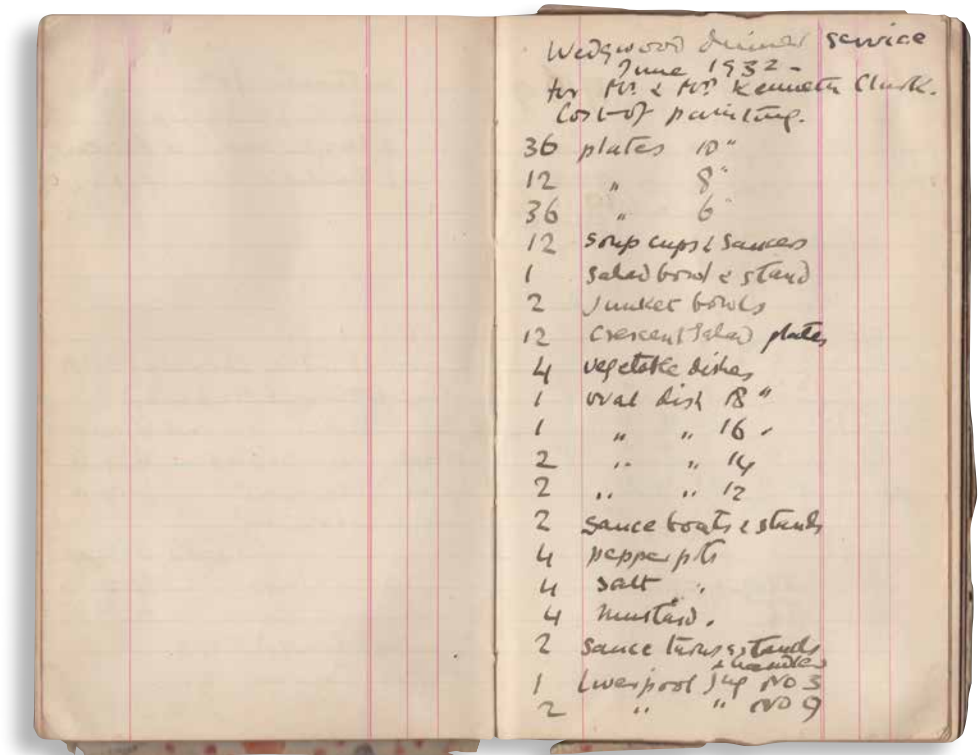

Wedgwood dinner service
June 1932 –
for Mr & Mrs Kenneth Clark.
Cost of painting.
36 plates 10"
12 " 8"
36 " 6"
12 soup cups & saucers
1 salad bowl & stand
2 junket bowls
12 crescent salad plates
4 vegetable dishes
1 oval dish 18"
1 " " 16"
2 " " 14
2 " " 12
2 sauce boats & stands
4 pepper pots
4 salt "
4 mustard.
2 sauce tureens, stands & handles
1 Liverpool jug No 3
2 " " No 9

Fig.24 Vanessa Bell's order-book detailing the Clarks' commission, Private Collection

This prompts a new reading of the set. Marginalised in accounts of Kenneth Clark's life and his avid collecting, we might claim a place here for Jane as a sensitive and discerning art lover, for whom the unusual concept of a celebration of victorious women in a format that subverts artistic and historical conventions held great appeal.

Radical Hospitality

In the same year as Bell and Grant received the Clarks' commission, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a contemporary of the Bloomsbury Group and leader of the Futurists, also aimed to revolutionise Italian culture through reinventing the relationship between art and domesticity. *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) was a manifesto that reimagined dining as an artistic experience. Marinetti introduced the book, which contains recipes that combine ingredients based on aesthetic concerns rather than those of taste, as having the aim of:

> changing radically the eating habits of our race, strengthening it, dynamizing it and spiritualizing it with brand-new food combinations in which experiment, intelligence and imagination will economically take the place of quantity, banality, repetition and expense.[9]

Fig.25 Duncan Grant eating from the *Mme le Marquis de Caux* test plate in the dining room at Charleston, 1964

In England, the artists and writers associated with the Bloomsbury Group also utilised the dining table as an arena of radical hospitality and their shared mealtimes were a gateway to the political, social, and spiritual reform of a nation. Like Marinetti, their forays into domestic redesign were riven with humour and artistry; unlike Marinetti's, they were not intended to reduce calories or conversation to a functional minimum. Domesticity and home life – the culture of the table – were at the heart of the entwined lifestyle and artistic practice that this unconventional family pioneered. Their common passion for dining and conversation, collecting, and home-making transformed the strict Victorian homes and tables they had grown up with into creative, intellectual spaces full of colour and humour, where social norms were daily deconstructed.

In *Another Part of the Wood*, Clark called his dinner service commission "an attempt to revive his [Grant's] interest in decorative art".[10] Yet, as Richard Shone has observed, both artists were already in great demand "when they squeezed in this commission to oblige new friends".[11] The many decorative schemes they were individually and jointly involved in during the 1920s and 1930s shared both motifs and underlying values with the *Famous Women* set, underscoring their commitment to socially engaged domestic practice. Their 'Music Room', an "eccentric vision of the English landscape" exhibited at the Lefevre Gallery in 1932, did not prove commercially successful, but became the setting for a lauded cocktail party hosted by Bell and Woolf (fig.26).[12] In equal parts

Fig.26 Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Lefevre Gallery *Music Room interior design with Grapes fabric*, 1932

whimsical, sophisticated and unconventional, it showcased the Bloomsbury model of an engaging and comfortable social space that encouraged enquiry. The themes of the room celebrated arts and culture, and prompted conversation: the six floral still life panels each represent a different composer and share motifs with the piano, stool, and gramophone. According to Reed, the artists' liberal use of "cheerful pastiche and quotation" (for example, their images of swags and positioning of mirrors) expressed an "Amusing disdain for the rigors of high modernism".[13] The emphasis on pleasure over formalism clearly positions the artists as advocates of witty heterogeneity rather than overarching narratives, and undermines contemporary standards of taste.

Images of musical instruments, reading and writing materials, cuisine and cultural figures from throughout history and from around the world, together with *trompe l'œil* motifs delivered with a fluid jocularity also occur throughout the privately commissioned rooms the artists designed for friends. Particular examples are those created for John Maynard Keynes at 46 Gordon Square (1918) and King's College Cambridge (1920–22; cat.21); and Leonard and Virginia Woolf at 52 Tavistock Square (1924). They were amenable spaces for hosting meetings that often intertwined professional interests with friendships (key concerns for figures then at the height of their social, political, and intellectual influence) and were designed to reflect their occupants' creative and intellectual values.

Rather than the heroic austerity of high modernism or luxury of Art Nouveau, their rooms pronounced the aspiration, shared by both the artists and their clients, to shape a lifestyle that married pleasurable aesthetics with what Christopher Reed has termed "humanism with deep historical roots".[14] The rural home that the artists created together in Charleston, Sussex, from 1916 onwards exemplifies this ethos. Unexpected juxtapositions, such as kitchen cupboards decorated in 1950 by Bell with still lifes that look to seventeenth-century Dutch precedents, reveal a privileging of visual delight over functional or hierarchical propriety. Their seemingly irreverent, yet carefully curated juxtapositions of valuable antiques and avant-garde paintings with folk art and pottery from many places and periods show that 'good taste', and etiquette were not valued as a reflection of creative capacity or moral propensity. Their respect for the domestic world of everyday pleasures and human relationships meant they invested huge amounts of energy in this realm, seen by few outsiders, and with no commercial value in the art market. The fabric of the home and the approach to hospitality inside it became an enduring artwork, eroding boundaries between high and low art forms, and allowing members of the household to live freely, supplanting gendered roles.

A more public contribution to this reimaging of the domestic order as a space of emancipated humanism and relaxed relationships was made by

Fig.28 top: Omega Workshops, Omega ware dinner plate, c.1914-16, Private Collection

bottom: Omega Workshops, Omega ware dessert plate, c.1914-16, Private Collection

the mass-produced ranges that the pair designed for the 1934 government-sponsored *Modern Art for the Table*, an exhibition held at Harrods store in London to promote good design in the home. They contributed bone china wares for E Brain & Co (Foley China), alongside Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, Albert Rutherston, Ernest Procter, and Angelica Bell; and earthenware for A J Wilkinson Ltd. Known as the 'Bizarre' range, this became synonymous with the name of Wilkinson's artistic director and design leader, Clarice Cliff. Unlike the unique and exclusive high-end commission for Clark, the Clarice Cliff and Foley labels were emblematic of middle-class tastes and budgets, and belonged firmly to the territory of mass-produced collectibles.

By contrast, manufacturing the *Famous Women* service necessitated an involved process that took more than a year to organise and complete. It was facilitated by Billy Winkworth, a ceramics collector and connoisseur, who was a mutual friend of the Clarks and the Charleston artists and made introductions to Wedgwood. The artists travelled to Stoke-on-Trent as the guests of Josiah Wedgwood V, where they toured the Etruria factory, and spent a day "looking at all the different shapes, glazes & colours in the Wedgwood pottery".[15] They selected a blank shape called the "concave pattern, that is a plain round plate with a slightly concave edge" for its "very practical" qualities, and a "grey body, which when it has a transparent glaze on it is a lovely cool white very like Delft"[16] (fig.27). Their choices of a fairly chunky shape, similar to those used for Omega ware (fig.28), with an iconic finish suggests a self-conscious recourse to the history of fine dining combined with an ever-present spirit of subversion – a marriage of tradition and modernism, craft and high art.

Promoting their dissident design sensibility as appropriate for both ends of the market demonstrated the artists' enduring vision of radically transformed and transformational domesticity. From 1913–19, they had been co-directors at the Omega Workshops, a prototype social enterprise artists' collective, where work went unsigned. Director Roger Fry's prospectus for the Omega Workshops explained to potential customers and creatives their endeavour to "discover a possible utility for real artistic invention in the things of daily life", and to use a new aesthetic language conducive to the freedoms and equalities these practitioners were exploring and advocating for in domestic life.[17] Although the idealism ingrained in the foundations of the Omega Workshops was diminished by the war – and Bell later wrote how difficult it was in retrospect to believe they had been so optimistic about the political agency of home decoration on the eve of global, mechanised war – their playful, provocative, reimagining of home life became an enduring tenet of their shared practice and is evident in the *Famous Women*.[18]

Fig.27 clockwise from top left:
Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 13 December [1931];
Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 21 September [1932];
Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 3 June [1932]
Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 30 January [1933];
Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund

"If you could say what you like about art, sex, or religion, you could also talk freely and very dully about the ordinary doings of daily life."[19]

There are many stories of meal times at Charleston, from the frugal to the fantastical. Food is mentioned frequently in letters, diaries, and memoirs, but the real feast the friends assembled for was primarily of ideas and friendships, and the tastes explored were aesthetic.[20] Every stage in the developing relationships between this extraordinary group of individuals was marked with such gatherings. Their exploratory Thursday evenings in the social laboratory of Gordon Square formed the basis for lifelong friendships and overturned the conventions of polite hospitality and conversation. In contravention of the prescriptive rules under which they had been raised, where menus were elaborate, rituals entrenched, and men disappeared after dinner, Bell recalled:

I believe there was generally some whiskey to be had, but most of us were content with cocoa and biscuits. In fact, as everyone had had something to eat and perhaps drink at about eight o'clock, it did not seem to occur to them to want any more at nine or at any time between then and midnight. Then, perhaps, exhausted by conversation, serious or frivolous, they welcomed some nourishment.[21]

When Thursday evenings resumed after Thoby Stephen's death (1906) and Bell's marriage to Clive Bell (1907), they were hosted by Virginia Woolf, now a professional writer growing in confidence. New figures were brought into the fold – including Grant, who had already had sexual relationships with Lytton Strachey and Maynard Keynes, and talk ricocheted between figures from "a fluid and indeterminate matrix of individuals, associations and ideas", including artists, writers, classicists, philosophers, and intellectuals.[22] Bell recorded the energy and freedom, the intellectual exploration, and conversely the silliness, awkwardness, and ordinariness of these evenings:

I wonder what those who imagine a rarefied atmosphere of wit, intelligence, criticism, self-conscious brilliance and never any tolerance of ordinary dullness would have thought of the rather stiff young ladies to whom it did not occur not to talk about the weather; or of Adrian's dog, Hans, who insisted on entertaining the company by blowing out matches; of a great many rather childish doings and discussions. When it is said that we did not hesitate to talk of anything, it must be understood that this was literally true. If you could say what you like about art, sex, or religion, you could also talk freely and very dully about the ordinary doings of daily life. There was very little self-consciousness, I think, in those early gatherings, but life was exciting, terrible and amusing and we had to explore it, thankful that one could so freely.[23]

This combination of the brilliant and the banal continued throughout many manifestations of this social circle: the Friday Club, the 1917 Club, the Memoir Club, and the less official visits, dinners, parties, and evenings in shared houses. When, as established professionals, they welcomed T. S. Eliot into their company on his first visit to Charleston with a dinner, Quentin Bell fondly remembered the occasion as "the night of the Great Covey" (a covey is a small flock of partridges) and "perhaps our finest hour". Bell miscalculated the portions and over-ordered the food with the result that:

Eleven birds were brought in, resting on various dishes and platters. There was a good deal of astonishment when this covey made its appearance and some laughter; our guest of honour the poet was delighted. Eliot was funny, charming and still somehow impressive. It was a wonderful evening.[24]

The friends' frequent sharing of hospitality led to the genesis of extraordinary ideas and manifested in repeated attention to dining utensils and food in their work. Bell's *Apples: 46 Gordon Square* (cat.2), *Apples* (1916), and *Tea Things* (1920); Grant's *Still Life with Fruit and Coffee Pot* (cat.8) and *Still Life with Jug, Knife and Onion* (1920) are all relatively early examples of themes that found purchase throughout each artist's oeuvre. Together with Roger Fry's many depictions of similar subjects; for example, *Still Life with Chocolate Cake* (1912) and *Biscuit Tin and Pots* (1918); and Woolf's many rich and evocative descriptions of food and dining – Madame de Staël is alluded to as confirmation of the rich intellectual discussion taking place during the boeuf en daube dinner in *To the Lighthouse* – this demonstrates the enduring importance of domesticity and everyday life as an artistic inspiration, and indeed, tool. The few objects that Bell retained from her childhood home were intensely evocative of the connection between family, memory, and mealtimes. They included "blue-and-white willow pattern serving dishes", which now hang over the kitchen ranges, and the "Dutch walnut glass-fronted cabinet which was one of a pair that once belonged to the novelist W.M. Thackeray", which was placed in the studio and filled with "an eclectic range of ceramics" (it is now at Charleston and displays the four *Famous Women* test plates that remained there).[25]

The artists' recognition of the importance of get-togethers with their network of friends and the support, inspiration, conviviality, and joy they afforded, let them imagine a network of famous women – overlooked by history – dining together, sharing the experiences of their remarkable lives. Their ideas for populating the plates can be traced from a lively variety of sources. It is important to acknowledge that neither artist claimed to be a scholar and neither was a historian with vast stores of esoteric knowledge about historical women'. Their inspiration came from the personal interests they had cultivated over time and discussions amongst friends, women and men, several of whom promoted the work of women through their own businesses or practice.

The Famous Women and Feminist Fancies of the Bloomsbury "Matriarchy"

Why did Bell and Grant invite this particular set of historical women to dine, so to speak, with Bloomsbury, and with the Clarks? A kindred zest for life and disregard for convention link many of the famous women to one another, and to the artists and their friends. Many were pioneers, either in a particular professional field or leadership role; but many had lived inspirational lives, carving out opportunities for themselves where precedents were rare.

Hints in Bell's numerous letters to the Clarks on the subject of the plates indicate that a cross-section of well-wishers had known of the *Famous Women*'s genesis, and perhaps had helped them to identify suitable figures; also that, at times, it was a struggle to do so. On 9 June (probably in 1933, though the letter does not record the year), Bell wrote to her now good friend, Jane Clark: "We wanted to ask if you'd mind if we had a tea-party to show them [the plates] to a few people before you have them, as so many people have been curious to see them".[26]

The proposed tea party had the additional purpose of "attracting more orders too!".[27] Bell was adept at organising events that combined friendship and patronage with celebration and discussion, as at the Music Room cocktail party.

An undated and unsigned fragment from the same collection of unpublished letters outlines some of the difficulties the artists faced with manufacturing the plates and deciding on women to include:

> There are still 7 plates to be done. Two (Virginia Woolf and Ellen Terry) were failures & will be done again. Three actresses are wanted to make up the dozen & we propose to do Mrs Jordans, Pavlova & Greta Garbo. Two beauties are wanted & we propose Lady Hamilton and 1933. Would any others be preferred?[28]

The forty-eight portraits eventually create an impressive depth and breadth of field – geographically and historically. Diana Wilkins, who worked with preparatory sketches in the Angelica Garnett Gift archive at Charleston and has contributed to this catalogue, has analysed that while forty per cent of the women are British, just over another forty per cent of the women are of European origin. As far as we can tell, two are African, one Japanese, two North American, one from Asia Minor, and two from the Arabian Peninsula. This transhistorical sorority encompasses women from the realms of ancient history to the present moment – contemporary women like Miss 1933 (Marian Bergeron, the winner of the Miss America beauty pageant of 1933), Virginia Woolf, and Greta Garbo, to several from Before the Common Era, like Helen of Troy and Sappho.

Fig.29 Duncan Grant, *The Queen of Sheba*, 1912, Tate

This range demonstrates an extraordinary scope of reference, indicating the magnitude of the research that lay behind the service. Each portrait appears to have had an existing basis. Some are well-known and have numerous manifestations; others are more mysterious, and we were unable to find a source for Murasaki. Several show striking similarities to famous portraits from Western art, and were, in all likelihood, consciously based on these works; for example, Piero di Cosimo's *Simonetta Vespucci* (c.1480), Peter Lely's *Nell Gwynn* (c.1675), and Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun's *Marie Antoinette dite "à la Rose"* (1783; figs.69, 59, 49). The artists also looked to a wide range of media, such as the mosaic of Empress Theodora from the Basilica San Vitale, Ravenna; the sculpture of Sappho by Pierre-Nicolas Beauvallet (1813); and the engraving of Pocahontas by Simon van de Passe (c.1616; fig.63).

Whilst there are a number of surprising omissions from the artists' immediate circle, such as Annie Thackeray Ritchie, Julia Margaret Cameron, Vita Sackville-West, and Elinor Ewbank (Grant's distant relation, childhood companion, and the first woman to gain a First in Chemistry at Oxford), a number with precedents in Bell and Grant's previous work demonstrate an abiding fascination with certain figures. The Queen of Sheba and Empress Theodora appear in Grant's 1912 pointillist painting *The Queen of Sheba* (shown in the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* of 1912; fig.29) and Bell's 1912 *Byzantine Lady* (fig.53). Test plates featuring La Princesse Mathilde and Bell's ancestor Mme la Marquise de Caux (Adelina Patti), show that the artists' research extended further than the women who made the final cut (fig.25).

The set belongs to the broader context of the quest which Bell shared with her younger sister, Virginia Woolf, to fashion appropriate ways to commemorate women's histories. Many of the authors commemorated in the set were women about whom Woolf had written essays, including Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dorothy Osborne, Sappho, Madame de Staël, Sarah Churchill, Ellen Terry, and Christina Rossetti. Whilst Woolf wrote famous polemics about the absence of women from history and literature, and produced commercially and critically experimental biographies of family, friends, and women she identified as creative forebears in the form of *Orlando*, *Flush*, *Freshwater*, and *Famous Men and Fair Women*, Bell's practice weaves together multiple generations of the women of her own family with canonical and religious imagery.

Bell also wrote several short pieces about their female relatives. In recounting the little she knew of her French great-grandmother, she mourned that it "isn't enough", and railed: "Why didn't some of her innumerable descendants scribble something, silly and illiterate perhaps as this, but first-hand and real?" Far from a passing flight of fancy, her longing for intergenerational connection fundamentally affected her creative processes: "My wish to know more about

her drives me on".[29] Echoing this keenly felt sense of injustice at being robbed of her female ancestry, in her enquiry 'Women and Fiction' of 1929 Woolf noted:

very little is known about women. The history of England is the history of the male line, not the female. Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, what remains?[30]

Yet the sisters were encouraged in their artistic pursuits by their particular – and it must be noted, exceptional – family history. Their great aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron, is now recognised as one of the most important practitioners in photographic history, and their elder half-sister, Stella Duckworth, had been a keen and encouraging photographer. Cameron's practice provided, both literally and figuratively, a 'lens' through which her great nieces were able to view their family, past and present. It also informed their own work, providing them with inspiration, a touchstone to affirm their identities as female artists, and a model for experimental and creative means of recording likenesses. Although Cameron does not have a dedicated plate in the set, her artistic influence is visible through the Ellen Terry portrait which was based on her 1864 photograph of the actress – an appropriate homage to her role in shaping visual culture from behind, not in front of the camera (fig.30/83).

The artists' emphasis on uncovering forgotten women and finding new modes for women's and non-heteronormative histories can be located as a forerunner of feminist art projects of the 1960s: yet it is equally important to acknowledge its roots in the networks of practitioners that the artists belonged to.

"the lives of the obscure – in those almost unlit corridors of history where the figures of generations of women are so dimly, so fitfully perceived"

The artists subdivided the set into four sections: Beauties, Dancers and Actresses, Queens, and Women of Letters. The title 'Beauties' is a clue to the historical antecedents of this section. Peter Lely's series of portraits known as the 'Windsor Beauties', and Sir Godfrey Kneller's 'Hampton Court Beauties' depict aristocratic young women of the Stuart Court of "'the merry monarch' Charles II".[31] Information from the Royal Collection notes that whilst some held official court positions, others held less official posts as "noted courtesans".[32] The first series of eleven works were "apparently commissioned or at least assembled by Anne Hyde, Duchess of York, probably around 1662–5"; the second were painted for Queen Mary II and "described by Defoe . . . as 'principal Ladies attending upon her Majesty, or . . . [ladies] frequently in her Retinue'".[33]

Fig.30/83 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Ellen Terry*, negative 1864, c.1875, J. Paul Getty Museum (detail)

It is indicative of the subversive tenor of Bell and Grant's selection that none of these official Court Beauties, whose portraits were crafted for the pleasure of the indulgent courts of the late seventeenth century, appear in the *Famous Women* set. Instead, they included figures like low-born actress and royal mistress Nell Gwynn. Charles II lasciviously kept his private portrait of Gwynn "displayed behind a painting of a landscape. He enjoyed swinging back the panel to reveal her to his friends, so that they could all enjoy looking together".[34] Yet despite receiving no titles and far less money than her aristocratic rivals, Gwynn's name is better known to history than the more refined, discreet, and clothed women of the official Court Beauties. In these seventeenth-century portraits, beauty signalled virtue, chastity and obedience, and – conversely – sexual desirability. Bell and Grant's portraits subvert these qualifications of feminine appeal, venerating ambition, achievement, and autonomy – sexual as well as intellectual. Their 'Beauties' do not form a passive category, but an inspirational history of women who gained celebrity status from their involvement in intellectual, political, artistic, and social elites – often from outsider positions. Some, like artist Elizabeth Siddal, had talents that went sadly unrecognised in the twentieth century. Others like Helen of Troy and Pocahontas are romanticised as the heroines of love stories that omit the bloody and brutal racial and colonial conflicts that characterised their lives. Many protested, or overcame sexist constraints by challenging expected behaviours.

Their women have been selected for their talent, power, and occasionally sheer bloody-mindedness, whilst the gentle grace or connections to royalty that were Mary II's criteria for commissioning the 'Hampton Court Beauties' have little role to play. Gwynn, like numerous of her fellow famous women, straddles sections, defying simple categorisation. As a result, any cataloguing or display of these women entails curatorial comment. Although their decorative borders form a rough guide, Mrs Langtry, like Gwynn, could be moved between 'Beauties' and 'Actresses and Dancers', and Fanny Kemble between 'Actresses and Dancers' and 'Women of Letters'. Most had complex personal lives as interesting to feminist art history as the public roles that brought them fame. Many vigorously crafted identities and statuses at odds with the mores of their historical epochs. Some were professionals; lots were lesbian, bisexual, or had unconventional sexual relationships; not a few had numerous titles, or used pseudonyms. With few exceptions, the lives of a majority of these women reflect the new sexual politics at the heart of the Bloomsbury understanding of humanism.

By making household utensils into a provocative medium of discussion and debate, and invoking the traditionally feminine space of the dining table to – paraphrasing Clark – assert Bloomsbury's status as a matriarchy, Bell and Grant created an artistic and discursive platform for sexual politics and women's histories. They created this feat in a work commissioned by an extremely

influential, and well-connected collector, curator, and critic, in the knowledge that it would be documented within the annals of twentieth-century history and biography, and possibly publicly displayed. They devised an innovative and outré project that, despite its idiosyncrasy in terms of form and subject, is no mere novelty item.

The service is a systematic and sustained gambit that contributed to an early movement towards recording women's achievements alongside other projects the artists would have known about. As previously mentioned, these include Virginia Woolf's writings, from which they selected many of the 'Women of Letters'. It encompassed Francis Birrell's editorship of the 'Representative Women' series, for which Vita Sackville-West wrote *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea* in 1927. The 'Representative Women' series contained several figures that overlapped with Grant and Bells set, suggesting that it was used as a source, including *Sarah Churchill: Duchess of Marlborough* (Bonamy Dobree, 1927), *Elizabeth B Browning* (Irene Cooper Willis), *Rachel* (James Agate, 1928).

Another source for the plates may have been the 'Pears Palace of Beauty' at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924. Actresses were hired to personify ten famous historical women in a series of rooms designed to reflect the appropriate epoch, and souvenir postcards were created to commemorate the pageant. Seven of the Pear's Beauties also received *Famous Women* plates. These were Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Beatrice, Mary Queen of Scots, Nell Gwynn, Mrs Siddons, and Miss America 1924 (updated to Miss America 1933 for the plates).

Edith Sitwell's *English Women* (1942), a collection of mini-biographies accompanied by images, was published a decade later with numerous overlapping figures including Ellen Terry, Queen Elizabeth I, Virginia Woolf, and Christina Rossetti. Published during the Second World War, this series seems to augur the growing acknowledgement of and appetite for women's histories.

The dearth of painters in the *Famous Women* set is slightly disappointing given the profession of its makers. However, the fortunes of the dictionary of women artists that art historian Daphne Haldin began to compile in the 1960s gives us a sense of how difficult it was to find published materials relating to women painters. The archive of her research was deposited with the Paul Mellon Centre library in the 1970s, and contains a whole file of material detailing rejections of the proposed dictionary by publishers. Centre archivist Frankie Drummond Charig has recorded that: "Apart from a memorable visit to the Centre by Germaine Greer, who viewed the material whilst researching her book *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work*, the collection has only been consulted by a couple of researchers".[35]

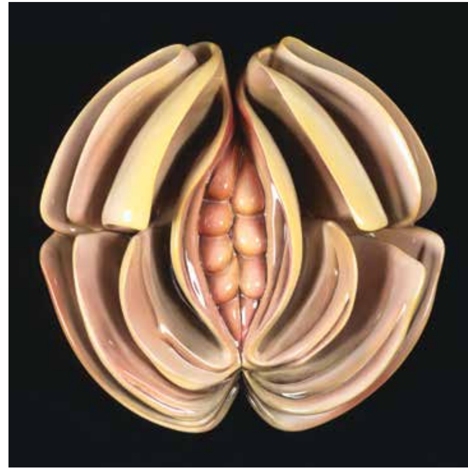


Fig.31 Judy Chicago, Virginia Woolf Plate, from *The Dinner Party*, 1979, Brooklyn Museum, New York

The recovery of the *Famous Women* set makes clear its principal place in a feminist artistic tradition that continues to accrue in the twenty-first century – a community of pioneering women artists and feminist collaborators that echoes the lineage between the famous women on the plates. Working together in collaboration without signing the plates, Bell and Grant rejected the usual claims to authorship and instead embraced the creative dynamic of a partnership of equals. Collective work, frequently engaging domestic imagery and 'low art' materials and techniques, became a cornerstone of much feminist practice.

Though the *Famous Women* remained largely hidden from view in Clark's collection, tantalising hints of its existence emerged from time to time: an article in *The Sketch* in 1934, four test plates at Charleston, two preparatory sketches at the Ashmolean and one collected by the V&A, as well as the portrait roundels that occasionally appear for sale. It is impossible to ascertain, and ultimately unproductive to speculate, whether other artists, critics, and writers knew of their earlier efforts. However, comparative analysis of Bell and Grant's set with the numerous projects that also combine collaboration and conversation to celebrate radical hospitality and women's histories promises to offer rewarding outcomes and lead to new avenues for research. To start this process, Judy Chicago, creator of *The Dinner Party*, a pioneering feminist artwork which shares the ceramic medium and certain women from Bell and Grant's set (Theodora, Virginia Woolf, and Sappho), and members of the Feminist Art Collective, whose recent work *China Vagina* responds to Chicago's work, will begin a conversation with the author about *Famous Women* and their own projects, to be published by *British Art Studies* in 2018 (figs. 31 and 32).

We hope that the *Famous Women* set will go on to ignite many more conversations about the characters emblazoned on the plates, and the role of this set and its creators in altering the paradigms of art history, from unquestionably accepting traditional narratives to honouring "the familiar, the friendly even the facetious".[36]

Fig.32 Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, installation view, 1979, Brooklyn Museum, New York

FAMOUS WOMEN

Hana Leaper

Vanessa Jones

Sean Ketteringham

Dorian Knight

Alice Purkiss

Jenni Sofia Kristina Råback

Anne Stutchbury

Claudia Tobin

Diana Wilkins

Samantha Wilson

VANESSA BELL
1879–1961

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Vanessa Bell spent her adult life determined to achieve an alternative way of living, after having grown up in the crowded Stephen family home at Hyde Park Gate in the late Victorian era.[1] It was at 46 Gordon Square, where Bell and her siblings moved to in 1904, that the Bloomsbury Group was formed. This band of friends and family made original contributions to painting, literature and economics as well as creating a new kind of domestic life.[2] Bell, inspired by French Impressionism, became a radical innovator in abstraction, colour and form, working across portraiture, still life and landscape. She exhibited in London as well as in Paris, Zurich and Venice. In addition, together with Duncan Grant and Roger Fry, she was co-director of the Omega Workshop, an artists' co-operative for the decorative arts. Her most enduring creative partnerships were with her sister Virginia Woolf, and fellow Bloomsbury Group member Duncan Grant, with whom she also had a sexual relationship and a daughter, Angelica Garnett. Together, she and Grant worked on multiple interior decoration collaborations and commissions.[3] The artists' inclusion of one another's portraits in the *Famous Woman Dinner Service* indicates an enduring mutual interest in portraiture, decoration and each other – and stakes a claim to their seminal role in feminist art history.

D.K. & H.L.

DUNCAN GRANT
1885–1978

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Born in Scotland, Grant spent much of his youth in India. Upon returning to Britain in 1893, he took up painting at the Westminster School of Art. He also travelled in Continental Europe, where he studied with Jacques-Émile Blanche, met Matisse and visited Picasso's studio. Back in London, Grant became a central figure in the Bloomsbury Group.[4] He was a prolific artist, experimenting in textiles, interior decoration, ceramics, murals, illustration and theatre design. Taking inspiration from the Old Masters as well as the modern art he encountered during his travels in Europe, he enjoyed great success. He represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1926 and 1932, and his paintings have been collected by museums across the world.[5] He inspired great affection in those whom he met, as a compassionate, charming, gentle and humorous man.[6] Although he was actively homosexual, his longest union was with Vanessa Bell, with whom he lived, loved and worked for nearly half a century, both in London and in Charleston, their country home in Sussex.

D.K. & H.L.

WOMEN OF LETTERS

JANE AUSTEN
1775–1817

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Jane Austen was the author of six novels: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. She enjoyed a steadily rising reputation in her lifetime and earned a large following of readers known as 'Janeites'.[7] Her novels centre on eighteenth-century gentry society, and bring wit and cool observation to the predominant themes of female friendship and the pursuit of a suitable marriage.

Throughout her life, Vanessa Bell found great satisfaction in reading Austen. Her husband, Clive Bell, shared her high opinion of the author, as did Duncan Grant.[8] After reading Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), Bell weighed the work of her sister in comparison to that of Austen as being, "of course to Virginia's advantage, or at any rate equality".[9]

Woolf gave her own assessment of the novelist: "What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial." While "gossip says of Jane Austen that she was perpendicular, precise, and taciturn", Woolf nevertheless concludes by describing her as "the most perfect artist among women, the writer whose books are immortal".[10]

C.T.

Fig.33 James Andrews, *Jane Austen*, 1869

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND FLUSH
1806–1861

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The Victorian poet signed her early letters and poems with the initials 'EBB' and retained the moniker after she married the poet Robert Browning in 1856. The publication of her two-volume *Poems* (1844) prompted her future husband to write to her and intimacy ensued, despite the strong disapproval of her father. The pair married privately in London and then fled to Italy, later settling in Florence. The collection *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) tells the story of their courtship, while poems such as 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' express Barrett Browning's social conscience and support for the abolition of slavery. Her novel-poem *Aurora Leigh* (1857) addresses women's rights and artistic aspiration.[11]

The design for this plate acknowledges the companionship between Barrett Browning and her dog, Flush. In 1933, Vanessa Bell made four illustrations for the first British edition of *Flush*, Virginia Woolf's unconventional biography of Barrett Browning's spaniel (fig.34). Barrett Browning's pose in these portraits seems to have served as a model for the depiction of her on this plate. Woolf's narrative draws attention to the similarities between Barrett Browning's appearance and the face of her spaniel:

> Heavy curls hung down on either side of Miss Barrett's face; large bright eyes shone out; a large mouth smiled. Heavy ears hung down on either side of Flush's face; his eyes too, were large and bright: his mouth was wide. There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I – and then each felt: But how different! Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from the air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other?[12]

C.T.

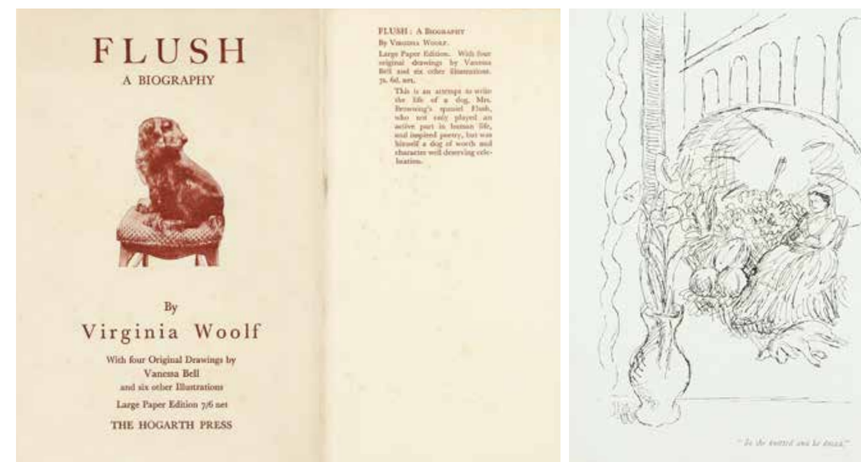


Fig.34 Above: Vanessa Bell, *Flush: A Biography,* dustjacket, 1933. Virginia Woolf, *Flush: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), above right: Vanessa Bell, *'So she knitted and he dozed'*, 1933. Virginia Woolf, *Flush: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933)

CHARLOTTE BRONTE

1816–1855

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The eldest of the Brontë sisters, Charlotte was a poet and novelist. Best known as the author of *Jane Eyre* (1847), her passionate and rebellious heroines challenged the conventions of Victorian morality and were regarded by some contemporary readers as 'unfeminine'.[13] She published her first works under the pseudonym Currer Bell, while her two novelist sisters, Emily and Anne, published as Ellis and Acton Bell. Charlotte initially rejected a marriage proposal from the local curate, Arthur Bell Nicholls, but eventually married him in 1854. She died the following year.

In an essay on *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* (1916), Virginia Woolf noted that despite Brontë's early death, she was "the centre now of so much legend, devotion, and literature". She speculated that readers were attracted to the author "not for exquisite observation of character – her characters are vigorous and elementary; not for comedy – hers is grim and crude; not for a philosophic view of life – hers is that of a country parson's daughter; but for her poetry".[14]

Grant and Bell may have seen the portrait of Brontë by George Richmond at the National Portrait Gallery. Her father perceived in it "strong indications of the genius of the author".[15]

C.T.

Fig.35 Vanessa Bell, *Charlotte Brontë*, plate design, c.1933, The Brontë Society

GEORGE ELIOT
1819–1880

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The English author Mary Anne Evans wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot. She published poetry, translation, journalism and seven novels including *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72). From 1851, she was editor of left-wing journal *The Westminster Review*. Her work is noted for its psychological realism and for plots with strong female characters.

Of Eliot's heroines, Virginia Woolf wrote:

> The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something – they scarcely know what – for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence.[16]

The portrait of Eliot on this plate is rather more complimentary than the verbal portraits offered by her contemporaries, of which Woolf observed, "one cannot escape the conviction that the long, heavy face with its expression of serious and sullen and almost equine power has stamped itself depressingly upon the minds of people who remember George Eliot".[17] Vanessa Bell recalled listening to her sister reading Eliot's work aloud in their youth: "We read most of the Victorian novelists in this way, and I can still hear much of Eliot and Thackeray in her voice".[18]

C.T.

Fig.36 Duncan Grant, *George Eliot*, plate design, c.1933

MURASAKI
c.978–1026

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Lady Murasaki Shikibu was a Japanese novelist and poet who served as a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Shoshi at the Imperial court, during the Heian period. Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, c.1005) is widely recognised as a classic of Japanese literature. Among the pictorial works inspired by the novel are twelfth-century handscroll illustrations, which represent "the type of small-scale pictures created to amuse Heian aristocrats, particularly women".[19]

Duncan Grant's early art education involved copying Japanese prints, and in 1925, he read the first volume of Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji*.[20] In that same year, Virginia Woolf published a review of Waley's translation, describing it as a "story of the enchanting boy – the Prince who danced 'The Waves of the Blue Sea' so beautifully that all the princes and great gentlemen wept aloud".'[21] Woolf paints a romantic picture of the novelist sitting down to write "in her silk dress and trousers with pictures before her and the sound of poetry in her ears", in stark contrast to her contemporaries of the same period in the Western world, who were "fighting or squatting in their huts while she gazed from her lattice window at flowers".[22] In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf mentions Murasaki alongside Emily Brontë and the Greek poet Sappho as a "great figure of the past".[23]

C.T.

DOROTHY OSBORNE
1627–1695

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Dorothy Osborne was an English gentlewoman famed for the letters she wrote to her husband, the diplomat William Temple, before their marriage (fig.38). Her family, particularly her brother, opposed the match.[24] The letters comment on a range of political, cultural and religious events and are remarkable for their discerning style, ironic wit and resolute judgement of character. In this correspondence (now held at the British Library), Osborne often described wanting to find 'the most apposite word' for her subject; she treated the letters as a site for both testing her own convictions and conversing with a man who related to her seriously.[25] The letters were newly edited by G. C. Moore Smith in 1928, and Virginia Woolf was among those charmed by Osborne's sharp and observant personality. Osborne, Woolf wrote, "gave a record of life, gravely yet playfully, formally yet with intimacy, to a public of one, but to a fastidious public, as the novelist can never give, or the historian either.".[26]

J.S.K.R.

Fig.37 Vanessa Bell, *Dorothy Osborne*, plate design, c.1932

Fig.38 Frontispiece, *Letters from Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple (1652–54)*, ed. Edward Abbot Parry, 3rd ed. (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1888)

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI
1830–1894

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The English poet Christina Rossetti was the youngest of the four artistically gifted Rossetti children: her siblings were the scholar and Anglican nun Maria Francesca Rossetti (1827–1876), the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) and the civil servant and art critic William Michael Rossetti (1829–1919). Their father was a Neopolitan exile and professor of Italian at King's College, London, and their mother was an educated woman who trained her daughters to become governesses.[27]

Christina Rossetti, who also wrote under the pseudonym Ellen Alleyne, published her most famous works in the 1860s, with *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in 1862 and *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* in 1866. Both had a frontispiece and decorations by Dante Gabriel.[28] She is cited as having been involved, 'emotionally at least' in the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and contributed seven poems to the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ*.[29]

Virginia Woolf's essay 'I am Christina Rossetti' outlines "the awkward ardour of my admiration" for a fellow writer. Although dissimilar in many respects, Rossetti and Woolf shared numerous similarities: namely, both belonged to select companies of young artists and intellectuals, and both satirised pomposity. In a description, that also applied to herself and her sister, Woolf wrote that Rossetti

> liked her brother's friends and little gatherings of young artists and poets who were to reform the world, rather to her amusement, for although so sedate, she was also whimsical and freakish, and liked making fun of people who took themselves with egotistic solemnity.[30]

H.L.

Fig.39 Vanessa Bell, *Christina Rossetti*, plate design, 1932-3

GEORGE SAND
1804–1876

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

George Sand was a prolific French author and is remembered for her rustic novels and unconventional lifestyle. She had many passionate love affairs – love in defiance of social norms is a recurrent theme in her works – and she sometimes dressed as a man to bypass the social inhibitions placed on women.[31] The plate is inspired by Delacroix's portrait of Sand, and both draw attention to the androgyny of her radically short hair and ambiguous dress (fig.40); Elizabeth Barrett Browning praised Sand as a "large-brained woman and large-hearted man".[32] *Les Maîtres sonneurs* (1853) was Leslie Stephen's favourite novel, and he passed on his admiration of *Histoire de ma vie* (1855) to Virginia Woolf.[33] Anny Thackeray, the sister of Stephen's first wife, had known Sand as a girl, and the Stephen children enjoyed 'Aunt' Anny's stories of Sand and others: Woolf recalled her sense "that we have been in the same room with the people she describes".[34]

J.S.K.R.

Fig.40 Eugène Delacroix, *George Sand*, 1834, Musée Delacroix, Paris

SAPPHO
c.610–c.570

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Sappho was a Greek lyric poet renowned for the beauty of her writing style, which has impressed generations of readers with its lively sense of personality.[35] She spent the majority of her life living on the island of Lesbos and writing among her 'thiasos', the female community that she led. Its purpose was to educate young women and the thiasos was in fact the main subject described throughout her writing. Aphrodite was its divinity and inspiration, while Sappho was the servant of the goddess, and homoeroticism (as in other ancient Greek same-sex communities) formed part of the context for explorations of poetry, religious passion and love, often in preparation for marriage. Sappho's works were collected and published in the third and fourth centuries.[36]

Aware of Sappho's work, Virginia Woolf described her as being "a great figure of the past" in *A Room of One's Own*.[37] In a letter to Dorothy Tyler, Woolf wrote that "Sappho was not a unique writer but supported many other poetesses. That I think until the late eighteenth century was never the case for England".[38] The supportive nature of Sappho's thiasos was reflected by the collective nature of the Bloomsbury Group.

V.J.

Fig.41 Duncan Grant, *Sappho*, plate design, The Charleston Trust

MADAME DE STAËL
1766–1817

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, Baronne de Staël-Holstein was a prominent French-Swiss woman of letters, political propagandist and conversationalist, who was a leading critical commentator on the European culture of her time. She convened a salon for intellectuals and her writings include novels, plays, moral and political essays, literary criticism, history, autobiographical memoirs and poems. Her 1796 work *A Treatise on the Influence of the Passions upon the Happiness of Individuals and of Nations* is an important work in the European history of ideas, with particular relevance for Romanticism.[39]

Her marriage to the Swedish ambassador in Paris, Baron Erik de Staël-Holstein, was ended by formal separation in 1797, and she had several liaisons with political figures. Her role in a liberal resistance group was perceived as a threat by Napoleon, who exiled her from Paris. Madame de Staël is mentioned during the beouf en daube dinner table scene in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), alongside Voltaire and Napoleon as part of the "admirable fabric of masculine intelligence" that Mrs Ramsay admires:

What did it all mean? To this day she had no notion. A square root? What was that? Her sons knew. She leant on them; on cubes and square roots; that was what they were talking about now; on Voltaire and Madame de Staël; on the character of Napoleon; on the French system of land tenure; on Lord Rosebery; on Creevey's Memoirs: she let it uphold her and sustain her, this admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence, which ran up and down, crossed this way and that, like iron girders spanning the swaying fabric, upholding the world, so that she could trust herself to it utterly, even shut her eyes, or flicker them for a moment, as a child staring up from its pillow winks at the myriad layers of the leaves of a tree.[40]

H.L.

Fig.42 Vanessa Bell, *Mme de Staël*, plate design, c.1932

VIRGINIA WOOLF

1882–1941

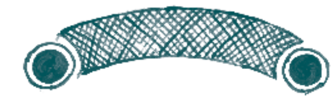
Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Virginia Woolf was an English writer and member of the Bloomsbury Group literary and artistic circle. She is renowned for her experimental modernist novels, including *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928), as well as for her essays, reviews and feminist polemic, *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Its central dictum is well-known, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".[41]

Woolf was ambivalent about sitting for portraits, but her sister Vanessa Bell painted several images of her at different moments in her life. "Do you think we have the same pair of eyes, only different spectacles?"[42] Woolf wrote to Bell in 1937. She used Bell as a basis for characters in her novels including Katharine Hilbery in *Night and Day* (1919) and the painter Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. The serene and delicate depiction on this plate has affinities with Charles Beresford's photograph of the young writer in profile (fig.43), and Bell's recently recovered 1934 portrait of her sister at 52 Tavistock Square (The Charleston Trust).

C.T.

Fig.43 Charles Beresford, *Studio Portrait of Virginia Woolf*, 1902, National Portrait Gallery



QUEENS

CATHERINE THE GREAT

1729–1796

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Born Princess Sophie Friederike Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst, Catherine changed her name in 1745, when she became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church and married the heir to the throne of Russia.[43] In 1762, Catherine's husband became Tsar Peter III; later in that same year, she usurped him and was declared Empress. Catherine advocated for culture, education and modernisation, as well as military conquest: she extended Russian territory into Crimea and Poland.[44] Alongside her ambition and power, she is famed for her series of lovers, some of whom she helped promote to high office; for example, Stanisław Poniatowski, who became King of Poland, and Grigory Potemkin who became Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and Prince of Taurida.[45]

Catherine the Great was a patron of the arts and her collection formed the basis for The State Hermitage Museum.[46] Kenneth Clark claimed that his inspiration for commissioning the *Famous Women* set came when he dined "on a blue and gold Sèvres service made for the Empress Catherine of Russia" belonging to Baron Joseph Duveen.[47] During the Second World War, German soldiers discovered erotic furniture in her apartments and documented them with photographs, although the actual objects were soon lost. In February 2017, Sotheby's sold a replica based on a table depicted in them, in homage to Catherine the Great's "supposed secret erotic cabinet".[48]

H.L.

Fig.44 Vigilius Erichsen (Ericksen), *Portrait of Catherine II in front of a Mirror*, 1762-4, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

CHRISTINA OF SWEDEN
1626–1689

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Queen Christina ruled Sweden for more than twenty years between 1632 and 1654. Highly educated, Christina was a collector and patron of the arts, who longed to make Stockholm 'The Athens of the North'. Like Elizabeth Tudor, Christina was repeatedly pressured to marry but refused to do so. Unconventionally, Christina often behaved in what was perceived as a masculine manner – she occasionally dressed in men's clothes, and was said to have female lovers.[49] Towards the end of her reign, Christina planned to convert from Protestantism to Catholicism but faced strong opposition from her court. Eventually she abdicated, changed her name and moved to Rome, where she received a warm welcome from the Pope. However, Christina was not content to live quietly. She plotted to achieve power and had her lover Gian Rinaldo Monaldeschi killed for betraying her intrigues.[50] Christina, along with Lola Montez, is mentioned in Flaubert's novel *Sentimental Education* and it is possible that Virginia Woolf suggested her inclusion, as she was an admirer of Flaubert's writing. Vanessa Bell's interest may also have been sparked by the film *Queen Christina* (1933) starring Greta Garbo.

D.W.

Fig.45 Vanessa Bell, *Christina of Sweden*, plate design, 1932–33, Victoria and Albert Museum

CLEOPATRA
70/69–30BCE

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Queen of Egypt and last of its native rulers, Cleopatra's conflicted reign is famous through both historical and dramatic sources. She became queen after the death of her father, Ptolemy XII, in 51BCE and ruled successively with her two brothers, Ptolemy XIII (51–47BCE) and Ptolemy XIV (47–44BCE), and her son Ptolemy XV Caesar (44–30BCE).[51] Cleopatra first allied with the Roman General Julius Caesar to regain her throne from her brother Ptolemy XIII. They became lovers in 48BCE, though she was married to two of her brothers at different times during her reign. She began her legendary relationship with Mark Antony in 41BCE. After marrying and having three children together, they committed suicide in 30BCE.

In 1909, Virginia Woolf went 'unsuitably attired' as Cleopatra to attend an artists ball;[52] and a photograph from the late 1930s shows Eve Younger as Charmian, one of Cleopatra's handmaids, and Angelica Bell as Cleopatra from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (fig.47). Photographs of Grant's 1924 costume designs for *The Birds* also show a figure that appears to be based on Cleopatra.

H.L.

Fig.46 Eve Younger as Charmian and Angelica Bell as Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, late 1930

ELIZABETH TUDOR
1533–1603

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Elizabeth was the only child of King Henry VIII (1491–1547) and his second wife, Anne Boleyn (c.1500–1536). After her mother was executed, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate, but she became Queen of England and Ireland after the death of her half-brother Edward VI in 1553, the execution of Lady Jane Grey in 1554 and the death of her half-sister Mary I in 1558.[53] Her rule lasted forty-five years, during which time a moderate and stable protestant Church of England was established, overseas exploration expanded significantly and the arts flourished.[54] She was comprehensively educated, spoke several languages and played the spinet and lute, as well as composing music. She is sometimes referred to as the 'Virgin Queen' as, despite many offers and great pressure, she refused to marry.[55]

Elizabeth is described as an authoritative leader in Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando*:

It was in this very room, she remembered, that Queen Elizabeth had stood astride the fireplace with a flagon of beer in her hand, which she suddenly dashed on the table when Lord Burghley tactlessly used the imperative instead of the subjunctive. "Little man, little man" – Orlando could hear her say – "is 'must' a word to be addressed to princes?" And down came the flagon on the table: there was the mark of it still.[56]

H.L.

Fig. 47 Duncan Grant, *Elizabeth Tudor, plate design*, Private Collection

EUGENIE
1826–1920

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Eugénia María de Montijo de Guzmán, later Comtesse de Teba, was born into a Spanish noble family that had fought for Napoleon I in the Peninsular War (1808–14). She married Napoleon's nephew Charles-Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-1873) in 1853, and was thus Empress of France between 1853 and 1870.[57] She took an active role in political life and acted as regent in 1859, 1865 and 1870.

She was also an arbiter of taste and worked closely with the couturier Charles Worth and the luggage maker Louis Vuitton to establish luxury fashions worldwide, including popularising a colour known as 'Empress Blue'.[58]

H.L.

Fig.48 Workshop of Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Empress Eugenie*, 1857, Hillwood Museum, Washington, DC

JEZEBEL
Died c.843BCE

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Jezebel was a Phoenician princess, the daughter of the priest-king Ethbaal, ruler of the coastal Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon (modern aydā, Lebanon). She married King Ahab who ruled from about 874BCE to about 853BCE, and became Queen of the Kingdom of Israel.[59] She persuaded Ahab to introduce the worship of the Tyrian god Baal-Melkart, and demanded the execution of prophets who were preaching of Jahweh, the national god of Iron Age Israel and Judah.

Her name has become synonymous with the archetype of the wicked woman. There are several biblical references to her immodesty: "Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face" (2 Kings 9:30, King James Version [KJV]); committing adultery, and refusing to repent her actions:

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.
(Revelation 2:21, King James Version [KJV])

H.L.

MARIE ANTOINETTE

1755–1793

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

As the last Queen of France before the French Revolution, Marie Antoinette's life was beset with scandal and intrigue. After marrying Louis XVI in 1770, she soon cultivated a circle of court favourites. Her extravagance and failure to produce an heir provoked her rivals to spread stories of alleged affairs. Her stance against the popular movement to abolish feudalism made the Queen personally unpopular with activists. In 1789, she returned with the King from the palace at Versailles to Paris, where they became hostages of the Revolutionary movement. Although she attempted to restore the position of the crown with a series of secret negotiations, she was unsuccessful and the monarchy was overthrown in 1792. Convicted by the Revolutionary Tribunal for high treason, Marie Antoinette was executed by guillotine on 16 October 1793.[60]

This Bloomsbury plate is indebted to Vigée Le Brun's portrait *Marie Antoinette à la Rose* of 1783, depicting the Queen as the epitome of courtly decorum and propriety (fig.49). The story behind the painting illustrates Antoinette's role as a progressive and sexually emancipated woman. The Queen's attire in an earlier version, *Marie Antoinette in a Chemise Dress* (1783), had caused uproar and was deemed highly unsuitable for public display.[61]

Marie Antoinette's life held a special place in the Bloomsbury imagination. Vanessa Bell often reminded her daughter Angelica that she had French blood in her veins, as her great-great-grandmother had been married to the Chevalier de l'Etang, a member of Marie Antoinette's household.[62] Quentin Bell claimed that de l'Etang was "attached to the household of Marie Antoinette – too much attached it is said", and was banished from France to India.[63]

A.S.

Fig.49 Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, *'Marie Antoinette à la Rose'*, 1783, Palace of Versailles

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS
1542–1587

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Mary was only six days old when her father James V died and she became Queen of Scotland. Raised as a Catholic, she spent her formative years in France, while her mother, Mary of Guise, ruled as regent. Mary's marriage in 1558 to King François II was short-lived, and in 1561, she returned to Scotland as a widow. Her reign was characterised by a series of disastrous romantic relationships. She married her cousin, Lord Darnley, in 1565, shortly before he was murdered in 1567. Immediately afterwards, she married James Earl of Bothwell, who was suspected of being involved in Darnley's murder. Rebellion followed, forcing Mary to abdicate in favour of her one-year-old son, James VI. She sought refuge in England with her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I. Over the next nineteen years, Mary became the focus of numerous Catholic plots to assassinate Elizabeth. Eventually, Mary was tried for treason and condemned to death in October 1586. She is buried in Westminster Abbey.[64]

The likeness which seems to have inspired the image of Mary for this plate is a portrait by François Clouet of 1559–60 (fig.50). It depicts her, aged nineteen, in white mourning dress, signifying the loss of two members of her close family: Henry II in 1559, and her mother in 1560. The whiteness of Mary's skin was praised by her contemporaries as a mark of beauty, a feature clearly emphasised in the *Famous Women* version.[65]

Although this sombre portrait celebrates her beauty, Mary was also famous for her "charisma, intelligence and determination to maintain her status", which may have been reasons that Bell and Grant were drawn to her.[66]

A.S.

Fig.50 François Clouet, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, c.1560–61, Royal Collection

QUEEN MARY
1867–1953

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Although Princess Mary of Teck was engaged to Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, he died suddenly in 1892 before they could marry. Encouraged by the royal family, she married Prince George, Duke of York in 1892, Albert's younger brother and next in line to the throne. When Edward VII died in 1910 and George V ascended to the throne, Mary became queen consort. Despite being criticised by some as dull and reserved, Mary was widely praised for her charitable work and active role in implementing royal social policy.[67]

During the First World War, she coordinated the efforts of national charitable organisations and mobilised the Needlework Guild to participate in the donations of gifts to deserving causes. In 1914, she formed the Queen's Work for Women Fund, a branch of the National Relief Fund. According to Mary's official biographer, she had "an earnest desire to relieve stress and concern about social conditions", and continued her patronage of many charitable causes after the end of the war.[68] Besides her public duties, Mary had a passion for collecting and spent time developing the royal art collection.

Mary's image on this plate resembles the photograph taken by Bertram Park in 1927. Her reserved nature and gentility are emphasised by the way she grasps her pearls, and her straight-backed pose. This dinner plate portrait brought Grant and Bell the friendship of Lady Patricia Ramsay, the artist and granddaughter of Queen Victoria "for whom they gave a party at 8 Fitzroy Square".[69] Patricia had been a bridesmaid to Queen Mary at her wedding in 1893.[70]

A.S.

Fig.51 Attributed to Vanessa Bell, *Queen Mary*, plate design, Ashmoleon Museum

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA
Died c.955BCE

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Widely perceived as an exotic and mysterious woman of power, the persona of the Queen of Sheba has captured many European imaginations. Historically, she appears in many of the world's great religious works, among them the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. According to Jewish and Islamic traditions, the Queen of Sheba was ruler of the Kingdom of Saba [Sheba] in south-western Arabia, about 1000 BCE. Her story, told in the biblical account of the reign of King Solomon, describes her leading a camel caravan bearing gold, jewels and spices, to visit his court in Jerusalem. There to test Solomon's wisdom, she proceeds "to prove him with hard questions", which he answers to her satisfaction.[71] They exchange gifts and she returns to her kingdom.

The Queen of Sheba's association with the exotic East clearly inspired Grant. His 1912 representation *Queen of Sheba* was painted for another extraordinary Bloomsbury associate, the classical scholar and linguist Jane Harrison, "for a scheme of decoration in part of the cloister at Newnham College, Cambridge".[72] This venture did not come to fruition, but Christopher Reed has argued that this work, modelled by Grant's cousins – Newnham student Pernel Strachey, and Lytton Strachey – challenges the conventional version of the tale, questioning the Queen of Sheba's submission to King Solomon by portraying them meeting as equals (fig.29).[73]

Depicting a black-skinned, muscular and warrior-like nude Queen of Sheba, Grant and Bell's dinner plate image also challenges familiar perceptions of her race, power, physique and sexuality, disrupting popular contemporary representations, such as Betty Blythe's risqué portrayal in the 1921 Fox film.

A.S.

Fig.52 Duncan Grant, *The Queen of Sheba*, plate design

THEODORA
c.500–c.548

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Empress Theodora reigned with her husband Justinian from his succession in 527 until her death in 548. Much of what is known about the life of the ancient Empress has come from the inconsistent accounts of one contemporary observer, the historian Procopius of Caesarea. His speaks of her "wanton childhood" and subsequent career as an actress and a prostitute in his work *Secret History*, and in *On Buildings*, testifies to her many charitable works. According to Charles Pazdernik, Theodora's life is a striking rags-to-riches story, a tale of palace intrigue and heartless manoeuvres, and a testament to her own convictions and contributions to the work of government.[74]

After visiting the sixth-century mosaics at the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, in which Theodora is a central figure, Bell and Grant each painted a portrait of her in 1912, titled *Byzantine Lady* (fig.53) and *The Countess*, respectively. The section of the mosaic showing the Empress Theodora was reproduced in Clive Bell's book *Art* in 1914.

Bell's *Self-Portrait at the Easel* was also painted in 1912. The stylised profile, palette and textures combine "the strength of ancient Byzantine mosaics and the domestic associations of woolwork".[75] The *Famous Women* plates show that Bell has remained interested in portraying historical women in a tailored idiom that synthesises their monumental status with everyday experience.

A.S. & H.L.

Fig.53 Vanessa Bell, *Byzantine Lady*, 1912, Government Art Collection

VICTORIA
1819–1901

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Queen Victoria was just eighteen when she succeeded to the throne after the death of her uncle King William IV, in 1837. She fell in love and married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg in 1840 and soon became pregnant with the first of nine children. They were great art patrons, a passion memorialised in the name of London's Victoria and Albert Museum. When Albert died unexpectedly in 1861, Victoria was devastated and plunged into a deep mourning that continued for the rest of her life.[76]

Queen Victoria died in 1901 at Osborne House, after ruling for sixty-three years. In his biography *Queen Victoria* of 1921, Bloomsbury protagonist Lytton Strachey recalled the sadness felt by the country when the Queen was on her deathbed:

> The vast majority of her subjects had never known a time when Queen Victoria had not been reigning over them. She had become an indissoluble part of their whole scheme of things, and that they were about to lose her appeared a scarcely possible thought.[77]

The widespread image of Queen Victoria as a stern, sombrely-dressed, unsmiling matriarch became an enduring image evident in many public statues and official photographs, such as Downey's 1933 cabinet card (fig.54). This likeness clearly provided Bell and Grant with a widely recognised model for their dinner plate portrait.

A.S.

Fig.54 W. & D. Downey, *Queen Victoria*, albumen cabinet card, National Portrait Gallery

BEAUTIES

BEATRICE
1266–1290

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Beatrice 'Bice' Portinari, a Florentine gentlewoman and wife of a banker, was the principal inspiration for several of the poetic works by Dante Alighieri in the thirteenth century. Dante first met Beatrice in 1274, when he was just a boy. He went on to chronicle his love for her in *La Vita Nuova* and later immortalised her in the *Divine Comedy* as Beatrice, who takes over from Virgil as a spiritual guide through Paradise and leads the protagonist to the beatific vision.[78]

Following her untimely death at the age of twenty-four, Beatrice became a muse once again in the nineteenth century, when Pre-Raphaelite painters including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Henry Holliday represented her in their works.

Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, in which Beatrice first appears, was included in Rossetti's 1861 translation of Italian poetry into English, *The Early Italian Poets*.[79] He also made a number of paintings which feature Beatrice. The most famous is *Beata Beatrix*, a large oil painting made between 1864 and 1870. In this work, Rossetti draws a parallel between Dante's despair at the death of Beatrice and his own grief at the death of his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, who died in 1862 after overdosing on laudanum.[80]

A.P.

Fig.55 Duncan Grant, *Beatrice*, plate design, The Charleston Trust

MISS 1933
1918–2002

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Marian Bergeron became the youngest Miss America on record, in 1933, at the age of fifteen. After the competition, she returned to high school and reigned as Miss America for two years. During that time, she became a model with a New York agency, though her youth meant that she was allegedly not offered the studio screen tests that should have been part of the prize. Already an established singer, she became a featured vocalist with the bands of Ozzie Nelson, Rudy Vallée, Frankie Carle and Don Bestro.[81] She became a wife, mother and Girl Scout Leader, as well as a representative of the Miss America Pageant.[82]

S.W. & H.L.

Fig. 56 *Miss America 1933, Marian Bergeron*

SARAH CHURCHILL
1660–1744

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Sarah Churchill became one of the most influential women of her time, as the result of her close friendship with Queen Anne.[83] She was a devoted advocate of the Whig party and was able to exert significant political influence over the Queen while in favour.[84] Her political dedication ultimately led to her downfall, however, and in 1711, she and her husband were dismissed from court.[85]

The decision to include Sarah Churchill in the plate series may have been spurred by the Bloomsbury Group's relationship with Bonamy Dobrée, who was a literary scholar and a close friend of Woolf's husband, Leonard.[86] In 1927, Dobrée published a book titled *Sarah Churchill: Duchess of Marlborough*, as part of the 'Representative Women' series edited by Francis Birrell – another Bloomsbury associate. The series consisted of fourteen books by various authors, including fellow Bloomsbury Group member Vita Sackville-West, detailing the lives of notable female figures such as Letizia Bonaparte and Christina of Sweden.[87]

S.W.

Fig.57 Duncan *Grant*, *Sarah Churchill*, plate design, Private Collection

Fig.58 Michael Dahl, *Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough*, c.1700, National Portrait Gallery

NELL GWYNN
1650–1687

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Regarded by most of her biographers as having been 'low born', Nell Gwynn was the long-time mistress of King Charles II. Renowned for her beauty, she became the most famous actress of the Restoration era and figures as a major forerunner of our modern celebrity culture.[88] Gwynn achieved great success in her acting career during an era when public discourse readily equated actresses with prostitutes. Virginia Woolf had discussed the idea that women are "all but absent from history" in part because societies consistently find that "publicity in women is detestable."[89] The publicity that Gwynn received during her career would have gone against established notions of femininity.

Gwynn was the subject of multiple films through the twenties and thirties and, in 1926, a novel about her life was published by Elizabeth Bowen. Woolf had written essays about other works by Bowen, specifically in her 1908 novel The Sword Decides.[90]

S.W.

Fig.59 Peter Lely, *Unknown Woman formerly known as Nell Gwynn*, c.1675, National Portrait Gallery

MRS LANGTRY
1853–1929

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Lillie Langtry, 'the Jersey Lily', was famous for her beauty through her successful career as an actress and producer. Born Emilie Charlotte Le Breton, the daughter of the Dean of Jersey, her second husband became a baronet in 1907, making her a Lady. She was a well-connected socialite and a prominent figure in society; she was a close friend of luminaries such as the writer Oscar Wilde, the politician William Gladstone and King Edward VII, with whom she allegedly conducted an affair while he was Prince of Wales.[91] John Everett Millais' 1878 portrait *A Jersey Lily* was exhibited at The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, where a policeman was assigned to guard what became one of the most celebrated portraits of its day.[92] Photographs and sketches of Langtry were produced for sale and she became one of the most popular 'Professional Beauties' of the era.[93] She is mentioned in Virginia Woolf's diary on Thursday 14 May 1925, where Woolf describes seeing Langtry, "coming down the playhouse steps . . . loveliness that struck me in the breast."[94]

Her acting roles reflected society women and often received severe censure for their risqué nature. In her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf wrote, "Chastity . . . has, even now, a religious importance in a woman's life . . . to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest".[95] It would appear that Langtry possessed this courage, asserting that: "Every woman is entitled to her independence".[96]

S.W.

Fig.60 Lafayette, *Mrs Langtry as Pauline*, c.1885, National Portrait Gallery, London

MADAME LA PRINCESSE DE METTERNICH
1836–1921

Diameter 25.5 cm / 10 in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Princess Pauline Clémentine Marie Walburga von Metternich, née Countess Sándor de Szlavnicza, was a Viennese socialite, who was famous for her patronage of contemporary music, art and fashion. She was given the nickname 'The Metternich' due to her strong leadership in court and social affairs in *fin de siècle* Vienna.[97]

In 1856, she married her uncle, Prince Richard von Metternich, who became the Austrian Ambassador to France from 1859–1871. Her patronage of the House of Worth during this time helped cement the success of the fashion house established by the London-born designer, Charles Frederick Worth, in 1858.[98]

Metternich was also notorious for participating in an "emancipated duel" with Countess Anastasia Kielmannsegg in 1892, reportedly over a disagreement regarding arrangements for the Vienna Musical and Theatrical Exhibition of which Metternich was Honorary President. The two women fought with rapiers until they drew blood, upon which they were advised to, "embrace, kiss and make friends".[99]

A.P.

Fig.61 Franz Xavier Winterhalter, *Pauline Sandor Princess Metternich*, 1860, Private Collection

LOLA MONTEZ

1821–1861

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Born Elizabeth Rosanna Gilbert in Ireland, Lola Montez was a performer famed for her Spanish dances, scandalous behaviour and her controversial relationship with King Ludwig I of Bavaria. Following an early marriage and swift divorce to an army officer with whom she had eloped, Gilbert set her sights on a stage career and travelled to Cádiz where she learned the basics of Spanish dance and language. In 1843, she returned to England as Lola Montez, a noble Spanish dancer. Critical responses to her performances were sharply divided; however, her unorthodox behaviour became legendary and she performed across the world.

In the late 1840s, Montez began a notorious liaison with King Ludwig I of Bavaria, who promised to grant her citizenship and make her a countess, much to the dismay of his cabinet. Their affair ultimately led to the cabinet's resignation in 1847, bringing an end to nearly ten years of conservative Catholic government.[100] Her subsequent notoriety persisted in part through references in popular culture, in particular via films depicting her life made in 1922 and 1955.[101]

Montez may have been suggested as a subject for the dinner service by Virginia Woolf. Woolf was deeply interested in the writings of Gustave Flaubert,[102] in whose 1869 novel, *Sentimental Education*, Montez is referenced.[103]

A.P.

Fig.62 Joseph Karl Stieler, *Lola Montez*, 1847, Nymphenburg Palace 'Gallery of Beauties', Munich

POCAHONTAS
1596–1617

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Pocahontas was a Native American woman, the daughter of Powhatan, the paramount chief of a network of tribal nations.[104] She is remembered for her association with the colonial settlement of Jamestown and is said to have saved the life of Englishman John Smith in 1607.[105] She was later captured and held ransom by the English, and during her captivity converted to Christianity, taking the name Rebecca. Bell and Grant's decision to include her in the plate series may have been influenced by David Garnett's 1933 novel *Pocahontas, or the Nonparell of Virginia*, a work that has been described as "the most successful, subtle, and deeply moving of all the fiction" based on Pocahontas's life.[106] The image of Pocahontas in the dinner service shows striking similarities to the only known portrait of her drawn from life, an engraving by Simon van de Passe, in which she is depicted in Elizabethan dress, with a ruff and velvet hat (fig.63).[107]

S.W.

Fig.63 Simon van de Passe, *Pocahontas*, c.1616, engraving, National Library of Congress, Washington DC

MADAME RÉCAMIER
1777–1849

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Juliette Récamier was born in Lyon and married Jacques-Rose Récamier in Paris in 1793. The marriage was platonic, and historians speculate that Jacques-Rose was her biological father.[108] Récamier became a renowned socialite and salonnière in the Parisian salons of the era, guiding discussions among leading literary and political figures.[109]

In 1905, Vanessa Bell founded the Friday Club, hoping to recreate the cultural milieu she had observed in Parisian cafés.[110] Like Récamier, who prided herself on her ability to maintain friendships with people of all political allegiances, Bell united disparate artists and kept a healthily argumentative society under control.[111] Quentin Bell reproduced François Gérard's 1804 portrait of Madame Récamier in his 1947 history of fashion, *On Human Finery*, to illustrate "her simple chiton, her bare feet, her Roman hair style" (fig.64).[112] This appears to be the portrait that the Récamier plate is based on.

S.W.

Fig.64 François Gérard, *Juliette Récamier*, 1805, Musée Carnavalet

ELIZABETH SIDDAL
1829–1862

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal was a painter, poet and artists' model, who sat extensively for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. She was introduced to the circle by Walter Howell Deverell, who had seen her working in a milliner's shop and was struck by her fine and unusual appearance.

After sitting for Deverell, Siddal was painted by William Holman Hunt, then John Everett Millais for his famous *Ophelia* of 1852, then exclusively for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom she later married in 1860. Siddal herself began painting and drawing in 1852, and much like the Brotherhood, focused upon medieval and literary themes. She also illustrated a number of poems by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, including *St Agnes' Eve* and the *Lady of Shalott*.

Siddal's works were well received by her contemporaries, and in addition to support from Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown, she gained the patronage of leading Victorian art critic, John Ruskin. It was with Ruskin's encouragement that she studied for a brief period at the Sheffield School of Art.

Despite increasing ill health and her worsening addiction to laudanum, Siddal continued to draw, paint and compose poetry until her death from an overdose in 1862. Distraught, Rossetti buried most of his poems, in manuscript form, alongside Siddal's body in Highgate Cemetery.[113]

A.P.

Fig.65 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Elizabeth Siddal*, 1855, Ashmolean Museum

AGNÈS SOREL

1422–1450

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Agnès Sorel is renowned as the first officially recognised royal mistress in history. Nicknamed the 'Dame de Beauté' with her blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin, slender figure and high, round breasts, she was selected as mistress by the French King, Charles VII (1403–1461) in 1444. A public celebrity in her time, Sorel modelled for a number of contemporary paintings, including most famously Jean Fouquet's 1450 *Melun Diptych* in which she appears as the Virgin Mary (fig.66).[114]

Charles was said to be besotted with Sorel, as Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) remarked: "He fell so much in love that he could not even spend an hour without her. Whether at table, in bed, at council, she was always by his side".[115] Sorel bore three of Charles' children, all of whom he recognised.

Attributed with inspiring political and military success, her role has come to represent both a romantic affair and an effective political engagement within the court, which marked a turning point in women's visibility in official spaces.[116] In presenting Sorel to his court, and more importantly in giving her a quasi-official position within it, the King defined a new role for women and a new practice for French kings.[117]

Sorel died from dysentery aged twenty-eight; however, rumours of poisoning were rife. In 2005, tests on her hair and skin found that she had indeed died from mercury poisoning, although whether or not this was murder remains unknown.[118]

A.P.

Fig.66 Jean Fouquet, *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels*, right wing of the *Melun Diptych*, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp

Fig.67 Vanessa Bell, *Agnès Sorel*, plate design

HELEN OF TROY
c. fifth century BCE

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

In Greek legend, Helen of Troy was the most beautiful woman of Greece and the indirect cause of the Trojan War. Daughter of the god Zeus by either Leda or Nemesis, as a young girl Helen was carried off by the hero Theseus but later rescued by her brothers.[119] Her suitors came from across Greece, among whom she chose Menelaus, Agamemnon's younger brother.

In Menelaus' absence, Helen fled to Troy with Paris, son of the Trojan king Priam. After Paris was slain, Helen married his brother, Deiphobus, whom she betrayed to Menelaus when Troy was subsequently captured. She returned to Sparta with Menelaus, where the couple lived until their deaths.

Famously referred to by poet Christopher Marlowe as the "face that launch'd a thousand ships", Helen has represented the personification of ideal beauty for artists throughout history, and it is therefore unsurprising that she was selected by Bell and Grant as a beauty for their dinner service commission.[120] Duncan Grant had a particular interest in ancient civilizations and frequently depicted mythological subject matter in his unique style, once complimented by Roger Fry for its "Doric delicacy".[121]

A.P.

Fig.68 Antonio Canova, *Bust of Helen of Troy*, after 1812, Victoria and Albert Museum

SIMONETTA VESPUCCI

1453–1476

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Simonetta Vespucci was an Italian noblewoman, who became regarded as the face of modern Florence under the Medici family and the greatest beauty of her age.[122] Known as 'la bella Simonetta', Vespucci is believed to have modelled for paintings by leading artists of the Renaissance, such as Sandro Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio, and to have inspired many writers of the age, including Angelo Poliziano, Sforza Bettini and Lorenzo de' Medici.[123]

So powerful was the myth surrounding Vespucci's beauty, that images and writing supposedly inspired by her continued to be produced long after her death at the age of twenty-two. The art historian Charles Dempsey argues that Vespucci was the living prototype for Lorenzo de' Medici's Florentine conceptions of ideal femininity.[124]

While some critics, including John Ruskin, assert that Venus in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (finished ten years after Vespucci's death) closely resembles Vespucci, the art historian Ernst Gombrich has dismissed this idea as a "romantic myth".[125] Both Grant and Bell depicted Venus during their careers. In 1919, Grant painted *Venus and Adonis*, and in 1929, the two collaborated on the *Toilet of Venus* for Lady Dorothy Wellesley's Sussex home, Penns-in-the-Rocks (cat.28).

S.W.

Fig.69 Piero di Cosimo, *Simonetta Vespucci*, c.1480, Musée Condé, Chantilly

DANCERS AND ACTRESSES

SARAH BERNHARDT
1844–1923

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Sarah Bernhardt was an actor, whose successful career spanned over sixty years. Her mother's lover, the Duke of Morny, was determined to establish Bernhardt as a stage sensation, and at the age of sixteen, she was accepted into the prolific Comédie-Française. By 1866, her reputation as an actor was at its height. Throughout her career, Bernhardt played contemporary and Shakespearean characters as both male and female leads. The French dramatist Victorien Sardou wrote roles specifically for Bernhardt and reviews described her as "golden-voiced, brilliant and ever interesting".[126] Her continued support for the military lead to her receiving the Legion of Honour in 1914.[127] When her husband died, Bernhardt had a stream of affairs with men, including the future King Edward.

Bernhardt was well-known for her unconventional lifestyle, on and off the stage. Duncan Grant was perhaps familiar with this aspect of her persona, and was inspired by her voice, having listened to her recordings on a gramophone in Parisian cafés in 1906.[128] Leonard Woolf also spoke of her performance in 1901 as being "simply one superb whirl of sensation".[129]

V.J.

Fig.70 Photograph of Sarah Bernhardt from the show, *Hernani*, playing Doña Sol,1877, photograph, Private Collection

Fig.71 Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, *Sarah Bernhardt*, plate design, The Charleston Trust

LA CAMARGO

1710–1770

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Marie-Anna de Cupis de Camargo trained as a ballerina in Paris under the choreographer Françoise Prévost. La Camargo's artistic style of small jumping steps made her a star pupil. She danced in Brussels and Rouen before making her Paris debut in *Les Caractères de la Danse* in 1726. Audiences were astonished that a woman could execute so perfectly the *entrechat* and *cabriole*, leaps normally performed by men. She rejected conventional dress on stage and instead opted to wear a shorter skirt with close-fitting drawers, also removing the heels from her slippers.[130] La Camargo danced in seventy-eight ballets during her twenty-five-year career; she retired in 1751.[131]

The Bloomsbury Group likely knew about La Camargo's rejection of conventional gender roles due to their support of the eponymous Camargo ballet company, whose performances were frequently attended by Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Virginia Woolf.[132] They were members of the Camargo Ballet Society and Bell designed theatre sets for Camargo productions including *Fête Galante* in 1934 and *High Yellow* in 1932.[133]

V.J.

Fig.72 Attributed to Duncan Grant, *La Camargo*, plate design

MRS CAMPBELL
1865–1940

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Taking the name of her first husband, Mrs 'Pat' Campbell made her stage debut in 1888 at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool. She is best remembered for her performance as Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* (1895–1898) and her leading role in *Hedda Gabler* (1907). Her friend George Bernard Shaw claimed, "her Fedora threw Sardou out of the window", and she "play[ed] Pinero off the stage".[134] She played the roles of several of the other famous women from the set including Mrs Jordan and George Sand, and was well acquainted with Sarah Bernhardt.[135] In 1900, Campbell became her own manager and director, performing in New York with great success. Her first performance on screen was at the age of sixty-eight in *Riptide*.[136]

Vanessa Bell saw Mrs Campbell's performance of *Hedda Gabler* in 1922. Bell wrote to Roger Fry describing her as "really magnificent. She's amazing to look at, too. Only of course she was rather too good for the thing as a whole".[137]

V.J.

Fig.73 *Mrs Patrick Campbell as Magdalene in 'Magda'*, 1896, National Portrait Gallery

Fig.74 Attributed to Duncan Grant, *Mrs Campbell*, plate design, The Charleston Trust

ELEONORA DUSE
1858–1924

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The Italian actress Eleonora Duse was born into a family of actors. She took to the stage at the age of four and was playing Shakespearean parts by the time she was fourteen. Inspired by Sarah Bernhardt's success in modern plays, Duse took on serious roles in plays by Dumas, Zola and Ibsen and was known for her "fluent and expressive" style.[138] Duse was, for a time, the lover of the radical Italian poet and playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio, who wrote a number of plays for her and a book exposing their erotic life.[139] Duse also had an intense relationship with the Italian feminist Lina Poletti.[140] Duse set up her own theatrical company but ill health forced her to retire in 1909. Twelve years later, financial problems compelled her to return to touring.[141] This is how Vanessa Bell came to see Duse perform in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* in 1923.[142] In the same year, Duse became the first woman to feature on the cover of *Time* magazine.[143] Despite Duse's triumphant return to acting, continued physical ailments led to her death on tour in the following year.[144]

D.W.

Fig.75 *Eleonora Duse*, Historical and Public Figures Collection, New York Public Library Archives

GRETA GARBO

1905–1990

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Brought up in poverty, Greta Gustafsson was born in Sweden and trained there as an actress. She played her first major role in a silent movie in 1924 and at the director's suggestion changed her surname to Garbo. She moved to the USA, and by 1930, she was a movie star in the talkies. She played romantic roles alongside John Gilbert and their real-life involvement added to Garbo's fame. She cemented her enigmatic appeal by uttering the famous line "I want to be alone" in *Grand Hotel* (1932). In the following year, Garbo starred in a fictional account of the life of Queen Christina (1933) – another Famous Woman in this set.[145] Garbo, who was herself attracted to both sexes, convincingly portrayed Christina's bisexuality.[146] The Second World War meant the loss of the European market for Garbo's films and she retired from the public eye. Her interest turned to art and she amassed a valuable collection that included work by Pierre Bonnard and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.[147] In 1930, Bloomsbury associate Boris Anrep immortalised Garbo as the Muse of Tragedy in a mosaic in the entrance hall of the National Gallery, London (fig.76).[148] Virginia Woolf is represented in the same mosaic as the Muse of History.[149]

D.W.

Fig.76 Boris Anrep, Greta Garbo as Malpomene (Tragedy), detail from *The Awakening of the Muses*, 1928–33, National Gallery, London

MRS JORDANS
1762–1816

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Dorothea Bland was born in Ireland to a theatrical family and began acting at an early age.[150] She excelled in comedy and in popular 'breeches' parts, where actresses dressed in men's clothes. While pregnant and unmarried, Dorothea adopted the stage name of 'Mrs Jordan' – the surname being both a suitable cover for her condition and a reference to her crossing a figurative 'River Jordan' between Ireland and England. Mrs Jordan went on to have four more children before beginning a twenty-year relationship with the Duke of Clarence, who later became William IV.[151] She bore him ten children and her many pregnancies led to frequent absences from the stage and to protests from her audience. Nevertheless, she had a long and successful career at the Drury Lane Theatre, London, where Sarah Siddons also performed. The two great actresses are said to feature in Sir Joshua Reynolds's painting *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1762), with Siddons as Tragedy (right) and Jordan as Comedy (left).[152]

D.W.

Fig.77 John Hoppner, *Dorothy Jordan*, exhibited 1791, National Portrait Gallery, on loan from Tate Gallery since 1979

FANNY KEMBLE
1809–1893

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

The British stage actress and author Fanny Kemble was the daughter of actors Charles Kemble and Maria Theresa De Camp, and the niece of the tragedienne Sarah Siddons. In her 1829 debut with her father's company at Covent Garden, she played the role of William Shakespeare's Juliet. She disliked performing and wrote:

I do not think it is the acting itself that is so disagreeable to me, but the public personal exhibition, the violence done . . . to womanly dignity and decorum in thus becoming the gaze of every eye and theme of every tongue.[153]

Her critical success meant that Kemble had the luxury of only performing when necessary. She married an American in 1834, but the relationship ended following her visit to his family's plantations in Georgia, where she faced disturbing truths about the slave labour that underpinned their wealth. She returned from America to Great Britain in 1846 to write a record of her experiences, indicting slavery in *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839*; she filed for divorce in 1847.[154] She wrote many other works including two autobiographies, several plays and poems, and a novel. Bell's step-aunt, the author Anne (Annie) Thackeray Ritchie, included a verbal portrait of Fanny Kemble in her autobiography *Chapters From Some Unwritten Memoirs* (1895). In a diary entry dated from January 1915, Virginia Woolf notes that she was reading the autobiography of "Fanny Kemble's Life".[155]

V.J.

Fig.78 After Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Frances Anne (Fanny) Kemble*, 19th century

PAVLOVA
1881–1931

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Anna Pavlova began her career with the Imperial Russian Ballet and toured Europe as a star of the Ballet Russes before founding her own company. Several of the Bloomsbury Group were present when the Ballet Russes caused a sensation on its London tour in 1911. Leonard Woolf observed that the ballet was part of a fever of "exhilaration" and change, which was also reflected in Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist exhibition that same year.[156] Duncan Grant met many of the key figures from the Ballet Russes – Nijinsky, Massine and Diaghilev – and the expressive movements of the ballet were an influence, along with Matisse, on Grant's many depictions of dancers.[157] Pavlova also inspired a younger generation of dancers, including Lydia Lopokova (1892–1981). In 1918, Lopokova was principal ballerina with the Ballet Russes and later married John Maynard Keynes, a central member of the Bloomsbury Group.[158] Keynes is best known as an economist, but he was also passionately interested in ballet and the arts and helped set up the Arts Council of Great Britain.[159]

D.W.

Fig.79 Anonymous, Anna Pavlova in *The Dying Swan*, c.1910, Private Collection

RACHEL
1821-1858

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Eliza Rachel Félix was born on a roadside near Mumpf in Switzerland to a Jewish family of travelling peddlers. In 1831 they settled in Paris where Rachel received instruction in singing and acting, eventually moving to the prestigious Conservatoire. June 1838 brought her debut at the Comedie Française where she established a reputation as an outstanding tragedienne in the work of Racine, Voltaire, and Corneille.[160] "To reclaim tragedy for the female performer," theatre historian John Stokes argues, "Rachel Félix had first to occupy a theatrical space identified with the male presence." She inverted conventional approaches to tragic female characters, dominating the French stage by delivering vehemence and independence in roles usually defined by pathos.[161] These unusual performances emphasised her racial and economic background and proved popular with foreign audiences on extensive international tours.

Rachel's fame was not limited to her professional career. She was also involved in numerous love affairs with some of the most influential men of her age and was well-known for her burning eyes, memorably captured in a portrait by William Etty. Her biography, *Rachel: Her stage life and her real life* by Francis Gribble, was published in 1911 and includes the photogravure source image for Bell and Grant's plate design (fig.80). Alongside Francis Birrell's 'Representative Women' series including James Agate's *Rachel* (1928), Gribble's writing seems a likely source of inspiration for the Famous Women set with a number of overlapping figures, Madame de Staël, Christina of Sweden, George Sand and Catherine the Great amongst them.

S.K.

Fig.80 Mayer and Pierson Studio, *Rachel as Racine's Phaedra*, 1855

SARAH SIDDONS

1755–1831

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Sarah Siddons was part of the famous Kemble family of actors, which included her niece, Fanny Kemble.[162] Tall and inspiring, Siddons was well-known for playing Shakespearean roles, particularly Lady Macbeth, a part for which Ellen Terry was also famous. She may have been one of the first actresses to use portraiture to propel her to celebrity status, commissioning Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence to paint her likeness. Her manipulation of her public image as a tragic muse may have set a precedent for other actresses, including Sarah Bernhardt and Greta Garbo.[163] Siddons was an icon of the Georgian age, a period which Bloomsbury Group members such as Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey admired for its elegance and simplicity, as well as its element of fantasy. There was a notable revival of interest in Georgian architecture and aesthetics in Britain by the 1930s, and women from the Georgian period are well represented in the dinner service.[164] Bell's continued interest in these figures can be seen from her fuller portraits of Siddons and Bernhardt from 1942.

D.W.

Fig.81 Maurice Beck and Helen Macgregor, *Miss Dido Carter as 'Mrs Siddons'*, Pears Palace of Beauty commemorative postcard, 1924, Private Collection

TAGLIONI
1804–1884

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Trained by the renowned instructor Jean-François Coulon at the Opéra de Paris, Marie Taglioni was an Italian ballerina, who became one of the most important dancers in European history.[165] In the year preceding her debut at the Hoftheater in 1822, she received intensive training under the guidance of her choreographer father, Filippo Taglioni.[166] She was one of the first women to meaningfully incorporate dancing on extreme pointes into ballet, thus establishing herself as the first Romantic Ballerina.[167] Having fallen in love with a devoted fan, Taglioni left her husband to start a relationship with Eugène Desmares. Although they never married, they had a child in 1836.

Taglioni would have been known to several of the Bloomsbury Group members by virtue of their interest in ballet as an art form, and her enduring legacy in the world of dance. In 1916, 'Bloomsbury Ballerina' Lydia Lopokova performed in an adaptation of *Les Sylphides*, which was known to be the ballet that cemented Taglioni's success, after she performed in its theatre debut in 1832.[168]

V.J.

Fig.82 *Portrait of Marie Taglioni*, lithograph, c.1830, Austrian National Library, Vienna

ELLEN TERRY
1847–1928

Diameter 23.5 cm / 9¼ in / Depth 2 cm / ¾ in

Alice Ellen Terry performed her stage debut in 1856 as Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale* at the age of nine. She became one of the most popular actors in Britain and North America and worked closely with Sir Henry Irving.[169]

In a bid to 'save' Terry from the stage – acting was seen as a precarious and morally dubious occupation for a woman – the artist George Frederic Watts invited her to New Little Holland House, where she became his muse.[170] Watts had initially intended to adopt Terry, but decided to marry her instead.[171] They were wed in 1864 – with the help of Bell's great aunt, the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron – although the sixteen-year-old actress and forty-seven-year-old painter separated within a year (fig.83).[172]

Terry maintained a prolific correspondence with the playwright and theatre critic George Bernard Shaw and published an autobiography titled *The Story of my Life* in 1908. The four lectures she gave on Shakespeare and *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* were published posthumously in 1932. She became the second actress to be made a Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire in 1925.[173]

Woolf's 1928 burlesque play *Freshwater* was based on the social circle of artists and writers to which Watts, Cameron and Terry belonged. In 1935, *Freshwater* was performed at Bell's London studio at 8 Fitzroy Square with Bell as Cameron, Grant as Watts and their daughter Angelica Garnett, who was an aspiring actress, in the role of Terry.[174] Duncan Grant painted a pastel portrait of Angelica in costume for Bell with the inscription 'To VB from DG 1935'.

V.J.

Fig.83 Julia Margaret Cameron, *Ellen Terry*, negative 1864, print c.1875, The J. Paul Getty Museum

Fig.84 Duncan Grant, *Ellen Terry*, plate design, The Charleston Trust

ENDNOTES

TALK OF THE TABLE - HANA LEAPER

1. Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood: A Self-Portrait* (London: Book Club Associates, 1974), 248.
2. Vanessa Bell, *Order Book*, manuscript, unpublished. PDF copy courtesy of Piano Nobile Gallery.
3. Kenneth Clark, *Another Part of the Wood*, 248.
4. It is telling about Clark's relationship to feminist art history, or rather feminist art history's evaluation of Clark's mode of scholarship, that Griselda Pollock records: "the arch-enemy, or rather the first object of critical analysis in the Women's Art History Collective . . . was a book by Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art*". Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21.
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7. Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 26 July [1933], sent on paper headed 'Charleton, Firle, Lewes', collection of Yale Center for British Art.
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14. Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms*, 230.
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19. Vanessa Bell, "Notes on Bloomsbury", in *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 105.
20. See Jans Ondaatje Rolls, *The Bloomsbury Cookbook: Recipes for Life, Love and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014) for 384 pages of recipes, anecdotes, images, and quotes connected to the centrality of dining within this friendship group.
21. Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 100.
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23. Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 104–105.
24. Quentin Bell, 'The Dining Room', in *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 1997), 40.
25. Quentin Bell, *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden*, 42 and 77.
26. Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 9 June [1933], sent on paper headed '8 Fitzroy Square', collection of Yale Center for British Art.
27. Vanessa Bell to Jane Clark, 9 June [1933], sent on paper headed '8 Fitzroy Square', collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund.
28. Undated and unsigned fragment pertaining to the *Famous Women* dinner service. Vanessa Bell or Duncan Grant to the Clarks, sent on paper headed '8 Fitzroy Square', collection of Yale Center for British Art.
29. Vanessa Bell, *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, 49.
30. Virginia Woolf, 'Women and Fiction' first published in *The Forum*, 1929 and reprinted in the collection *Granite and Rainbow*, 1958, in *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing*, ed. Michele Barrett (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 44.
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LIST OF WORKS

1

Duncan Grant
Self-Portrait in Hat, c.1909
Pencil on paper
19.7× 17.8 cm / 7¾ × 7 in

Provenance
Geoffrey Keynes
By descent to Stephen Keynes
The Executors of Stephen Keynes

Exhibitions
1984, London, Crafts Council Gallery, *The Omega Workshops 1913-19: Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury*, no.P17, ill.

Literature
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2

Vanessa Bell
Apples: 46 Gordon Square, c.1909-10
Oil on canvas
71 × 50.8 cm / 28 × 20 in

Provenance
The artist to D. Grant
A.V. Garnett, 1978
Nerissa Garnett
Private Collection, UK, 2004
On loan to The Charleston Trust

Exhibitions
[?] 1910, London, Friday Club, (as 'Still Life')
[?] 1911, London, Friday Club, no.138 (as 'Apples')
1961, London, Adams Gallery, *Vanessa Bell (1897-1961): Memorial Exhibition*, no.3
1964, London (& tour), Arts Council, *Vanessa Bell: Memorial Retrospective*, no.5
1966, Bristol, Royal West of England Academy, *Paintings by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell*, no. 70
1979, Sheffield, Sheffield City Galleries and Portsmouth Art Gallery, *Vanessa Bell 1879-1961* (centenary exhibition), no.4
1980, New York, David & Long, *Vanessa Bell: Retrospective Exhibition*, no.3
1983, Canterbury, Royal Museum, *Vanessa Bell: Paintings* 1910-1920, no.2
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Literature
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3

Duncan Grant
Tents, 1913
Signed 'D Grant'
Oil on hardboard
61 × 76 cm / 24½ × 29⅝ in

Provenance
Clifton Pugh, Melbourne
Bryan Ferry Collection, 1992

Exhibitions
1997, London, Barbican Art Gallery, *Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914*, no.107 (as 'The artist's camp')

Literature
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, (London: Phaidon, 1993), pl.63

4

Duncan Grant
Lytton Strachey, 1913
Signed 'D Grant Asham [sic]' lower left
Oil on board
91.5 × 59.1 cm / 36⅛ × 23¼ in

Provenance
Clive Bell
Barbara Bagenal, 1964
The Charleston Trust, 1984

Exhibitions
1940, London, Wallace Collection, Consignment of paintings by Duncan Grant for the Venice Biennale, no.129
1959, London and tour, Tate, *Duncan Grant: A Retrospective Exhibition*, no.30
1964, London, Wildenstein & Co, *Duncan Grant and His World*, no.27
1967, Rye, East Sussex, Rye Art Gallery, *Artists of Bloomsbury*
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Literature
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5

Vanessa Bell
Abstract Composition, 1914
Oil on canvas
92.8 × 62.3 cm / 36½ × 24½ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V.Garnett, 1961
Anthony d'Offay by 1983
Private Collection
Collection of Ivor Braka

Exhibitions
1984, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920*, no.12
2017, London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, *Vanessa Bell*, p. 91

Literature
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6

Duncan Grant
Standing Nude with Bird, 1914
Oil on wood
183 × 62.5 cm / 72⅛ × 24⅝ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett, 1978
Private Collection, USA
Private Collection, UK, 2013

Exhibitions
1984, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920*, no.57, ill.

Literature
Richard Shone (ed.), *The Art of Bloomsbury*, exh. cat. Tate (London: 1999), p. 157, fig. 104

7

Duncan Grant
Decorated Vase (Tunis), 1914
Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 34.3 cm / 13½ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett, 1978
The Charleston Trust, 1984

Exhibitions
1980, Liverpool, Bluecoat Gallery, *Duncan Grant: Designer*, no.12
1984, London, Crafts Council Gallery, *The Omega Workshops 1913-19: Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury*, no.C15
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.99

Literature
Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, (London: John Murray, 1990), pl.6
Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity*, (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pl.36

8

Duncan Grant
Still Life with Fruit and Coffee Pot, 1914
Signed and dated '1914 D. Grant.' lower right
Pencil, oil and collage on panel
47.6 × 64.2 cm / 18¾ × 25¼ in

Provenance
Lord and Lady Rennell of Rodd
Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 1985
Private Collection, USA
Private Collection, UK, 2012

Exhibitions
[?] 1915, London, Doré Gallery, *Vorticist Exhibition*
1984 London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920*, no.61

Literature
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1993), pl.99

9

Vanessa Bell
Portrait of Molly MacCarthy, 1914-15
Gouache, oil, and collage on board
92 × 75 cm / 36¼ × 29½ in

Provenance
David Garnett
Bought by Stephen Keynes, 1981
The Executors of Stephen Keynes

Exhibitions
1984, London, Crafts Council Gallery, *The Omega Workshops 1913-19: Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury*, no.P27, ill.
2017, London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, *Vanessa Bell*, p.129

Literature
R. Tranter, *Vanessa Bell: A Life of Painting*, (London: Cecil Woolf, 1998), pl.6

10

Duncan Grant
Interior at Gordon Square, c.1914-15
Dated 'c.1915' lower left
Painted collage on board
76.4 × 64.2 cm / 30⅛ × 25¼ in

Provenance
Private Collection, UK
(Acquired directly from the artist, 1968)

Exhibitions
1975, Edinburgh and Oxford, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Museum of Modert Art, *Duncan Grant: 90th Birthday Exhibition of Paintings*, no.21
1997, London, Barbican, *Modern Art in Britain, 1910-14*, no.112
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.75
2012, London, Tate Britain, *Picasso and Modern British Art*, no.14

Literature
Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity*, (London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 157, pl. 118

11

Duncan Grant
David Garnett in Profile, 1915
Signed and dated 'D Grant 1914' lower right
Oil on canvas
67 × 38.8 cm / 26⅜ × 15¼ in

Provenance
Private Collection, UK
(Gift from the artist to the present owner, 1964)

Exhibitions
1972, London, Agnews, *Twentieth Century British Art*, no.12 1992, Sussex, Charleston, seasonal loan
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.38

Literature
Quentin Bell and Virginia Nicholson, *Charleston: a Bloomsbury House and Garden*, (London: Frances Lincoln, 1997), p.102-3, ill. detail.

12

Vanessa Bell
Still Life: Wild Flowers, 1915
Oil on canvas
76.8 × 63.5 cm / 30¼ × 25 in

Provenance
Gift from the artist to D. Grant
Anthony d'Offay
Sandy and Harold Price, 1986
Private Collection, UK
On loan to The Charleston Trust

Exhibitions
[?] 1916, London, Omega Workshops, *Paintings by Vanessa Bell*
1943, Lewes, Miller's, *An Exhibition of English and French Paintings*, no.23
1961, London, Adams Gallery, *Vanessa Bell (1897-1961): Memorial Exhibition*, no.7
1964, London (& tour), Arts Council, *Vanessa Bell: Memorial Retrospective*, no.31, ill.
1964, London, Wildenstein & Co., *Duncan Grant and His World*, no.9
1966, Bristol, Royal West of England Academy, *Paintings by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell*, no.109
1980, New York, David & Long, *Vanessa Bell: Retrospective Exhibition*, no.16, ill.
1984, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920*, no.15, ill.
1986, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, exhibition to mark the public opening of Charleston
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no. 54
2017, London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, *Vanessa Bell*, p.96

13

Duncan Grant
Portrait of Mary Hutchinson, 1915
Oil on board
61.4 × 44.8 cm / 24⅛ × 17⅝ in

Provenance
Gallery Edward Harvane
Lady Pauline Rumbold, 1973
Private Collection UK, 2008
Collection of Ivor Braka, 2017

Exhibitions
1969, Cambridge & tour, Arts Council, *Portraits by Duncan Grant*, no.23
1971, London, Gallery Edward Harvane, *Ottoline*, no. 40, ill.

Literature
R. Shone, Review of Harvane 1973, *Arts Review*, 10th March 1973, p. 130, ill.
R. Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), p. 176, pl. 106.

14

Vanessa Bell
Woman in a Red Hat, 1915
Verso: Duncan Grant, *Two Men on a Beach*, 1920s
Oil on canvas
76 × 102 cm 29⅞ × 40⅛ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
Paul Roche, 1978
Private Collection, UK, 1981

15

Duncan Grant
Study for Embroidered Fire Screen, c.1914-6
Signed and dated 'D Grant c.16' lower left
Gouache and collage on board
74 × 62 cm / 29⅛ × 24⅜ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett, 1978
The Charleston Trust, 1984

Exhibitions
1984, London, Crafts Council Gallery, *The Omega Workshops 1913-19: Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury*, no.D33

16

Duncan Grant
Embroidered Fire Screen, c.1919
Polychrome wools stitched on linen canvas
by Marie Moralt
75 × 61 cm / 29½ × 24⅛ in

Provenance
J.M. Keynes by c.1920
By descent to Stephen Keynes, 1981
Piano Nobile, 2017
Private Collection, UK

Exhibitions
1984, London, Crafts Council Gallery, *The Omega Workshops 1913-19: Decorative Arts of Bloomsbury*, no.S12

Literature
'Modern Embroidery: Some Interesting Examples of the Work of a Group of Artists and Artist-Craftsmen' in *Vogue UK*, October 1923, pp. 66-67, p. 76, b/w ill.

17

Vanessa Bell
The Pond, Charleston, 1916
Oil on canvas
30.5 × 35.5 cm / 12⅛ × 14 in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett
The Charleston Trust, 1984

Exhibitions
1976, London, Fine Art Society, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, no.23 (as 'Landscape')
1980, New York, David & Long, *Vanessa Bell: Retrospective Exhibition*, no.31
1983, Canterbury, Royal Museum, *Vanessa Bell: Paintings 1910-1920*, no.35
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.109
2017, London, Dulwich Picture Gallery, *Vanessa Bell*, p. 144

Literature
Gillian Naylor (ed.), *Bloomsbury: The Artists, Authors and Designers by Themselves* (London: Octopus, 1990) p.247, ill.
Hugh Lee, (ed.), *A Cézanne in the Hedge and other Memories of Charleston and Bloomsbury* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), ill. front cover, paperback edition.

18

Duncan Grant
Paper Flowers, 1917
Oil on canvas
72.8 × 51.2 cm / 28⅝ × 20⅛ in

Provenance
Private Collection, UK
(Acquired directly from the artist)

Exhibitions
1984-85, Dallas, Texas and London, Meadows Museum, *The Charleston Artists*, no.40, London only
1999-2000, London, Tate Gallery, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.58
2009, Charleston, seasonal loan

Literature
Richard Shone (ed.), *The Art of Bloomsbury*, exh. cat. Tate (London: 1999), p.131-2

19

Duncan Grant
Flowers in a Glass Vase, c.1917-18
Oil on board
58.4 × 54 cm / 23 × 21¼ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
Anthony d'Offay
Private Collection, UK, 1987

Exhibitions
1984, London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1911-1920*, no.76
1986 London, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, exhibtion to mark the public opening of Charleston, no.30
1987, New York, Hirschl and Adler, *British Modernist Art, 1905-1930*, no. 131
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.81
2005, Bangor N.I, Ava Gallery, *Duncan Grant*, no.9, ill. with verso

Literature
Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, (London: John Murray, 1990), pl. 26
Gillian Naylor (ed.), *Bloomsbury: The Artists, Authors and Designers by Themselves* (London: Octopus, 1990), p. 182, ill. cropped

20

Duncan Grant
Juggler and Tightrope Walker, c.1918-19
Oil on canvas
103.5 × 72.4 cm / 40¾ × 28½ in

Provenance
Bought from Carfax Gallery by Lytton Strachey, 1920 (60 gns.)
Dora Carrington Partridge, 1932
By descent, Private Collection, 2004
On loan to The Charleston Trust

Exhibitions
1920 London, Carfax Gallery, *Paintings by Duncan Grant*, no.21
1939 New York, *Exhibition of Contemporary Art*, at New York World's Fair, no.35
1959 London, Tate, *Duncan Grant: A Retrospective Exhibition*, no.42
1976, Fine Art Society, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, no.44
1999, London, Tate, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, no.119

Literature
Roger Fry, 'Mr Grant's Pictures at Patterson's [sic] Gallery', *New Statesman*, 21 Feb. 1920, pp.586-7
The Dial, Volume 73, November 1922, p.532 ill. (as 'Acrobats')
Roger Fry, *Duncan Grant* (London: Hogarth Press, 1923) pl.11, left-hand figure only
James Laver, *Portraits in Oil and Vinegar* (London: John Castle,1925), pp. 145-6
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1976), pl.122, pp.202, 205
Simon Watney, *English Post-Impressionism* (London: StudioVista, 1980), p.48
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1993), pl.137
Charleston Magazine, 12, Autumn/Winter 1995, p.17, ill.
Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant: A Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp.224-5

21

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant
Studies for The Muses of Arts and Sciences, 1920
Oil on canvas
83.8 × 35.5 / cm 33 × 14 in (each)

Provenance
Commissioned from the artists by John Maynard Keynes in 1920
One study separated to Private Collection, 1981
Gallery Edward Harvane
All eight with Anthony d'Offay by 1984
Private Collection, USA
Collection of Catherine and Philip Mould, 2012

Exhibitions
1975, London, Edward Harvane Gallery, *A Homage to Duncan Grant*, no. 7 (one panel)
1980, Liverpool, Bluecoat Gallery, *Duncan Grant: Designer*, no.45, (2 panels)
1984, London, Anthony D'Offay Gallery, *The Omega Workshops: Alliance and Enmity in English Art 1 911-1920*, no.78
1987, New York, Hirschl and Adler, *British Modernist Art, 1905-1930*, no.136

Literature
Dorothy Todd and Raymond Mortimer, *The New Interior Decoration* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1929), pls. 24 and 25
Richard Shone with Duncan Grant, 'The Picture Collector', in *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Milo Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 286
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), pp. 234-5
Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant* (London: John Murray, 1990), pl. 35 (four studies)
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1993), pp. 222-23, pl. 157 (four studies)
Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.220-23

22

Duncan Grant
Study after 'The Lemon Gatherers', c.1920
Oil on canvas
121.9 × 86.4 cm / 48 × 34 in

Provenance
Grosvenor Gallery, 1921
Henry Harris (1870-1950)
Private Collection
Jonathan Clark Gallery
Private Collection, USA, 1995

Exhibitions
1921, London, Grosvenor Gallery, no.21

Literature
Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury*, exh. cat. Tate (London: 1999), fig.11, p.18

23

Duncan Grant
Self-Portrait, 1923
Inscribed 'Paris 1923' lower left
Pencil on paper
30 × 15 cm / 11¾ × 5⅞ in

Provenance
Private Collection, UK
(Acquired directly from the artist, 1974)

Literature
Frontispiece to *Duncan Grant: Designer*, exh. cat. Bluecoat Gallery (Liverpool: 1980)
Richard Shone (ed.), *The Art of Bloomsbury*, exh. cat. Tate (London: 1999), fig. 160, p.284

24

Vanessa Bell
Decorated Lamp Stand, c.1931-32
Signed 'VB' on base
Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 23.5 cm / 9 ¼ in

Provenance
John Lehmann by c.1932
Private Collection
Roy Miles Gallery, London
Private Collection, UK, c.1987

25

Vanessa Bell
Chair Seat, c.1924
Polychrome wools cross-stitched by Ethel Grant
41 × 51 cm / 16⅛ × 20⅛ in

Provenance
Artist's estate
Anthony d'Offay by 1980
Corporate collection, UK
Private Collection, UK

Literature
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, (London: Phaidon, 1993), fig. 165, p.231, (where incorrectly captioned as owned by The Charleston Trust)

26

Duncan Grant
Fruit Bowl Stool, c.1925-28
Polychrome wools cross-stitched by Ethel Grant, on wooden stool
27 × 56 × 42 cm / 10⅝ × 22⅛ × 16½ in

Provenance
John Maynard Keynes
By descent to Stephen Keynes
The Executors of Stephen Keynes

27

Duncan Grant
Painted Gramophone Cabinet, c.1926
Oil on oak veneer (HMV Model 162)
93 × 47 × 52 cm / 36⅝ × 18½ × 20½ in

Provenance
Maynard and Lydia Keynes
By descent to Stephen Keynes
The Executors of Stephen Keynes

Exhibitions
1980, Liverpool, Bluecoat Gallery, *Duncan Grant: Designer*, no.33

Literature
Simon Watney, *The Art of Duncan Grant*, (London: John Murray, 1990), pl.42

28

Duncan Grant
Toilet of Venus, c.1929
Signed 'D Grant' lower left
Oil on canvas
78.5 × 63.5 cm /30⅞ × 25 in

Provenance
The artist's estate
Richard Shone, 1978
Private Collection, UK, 1985

Exhibitions
1980, Liverpool, Bluecoat Gallery, *Duncan Grant: Designer*, no.48

Literature
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), pp.244-4
Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp.312-13
Christopher Reed, *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture and Domesticity* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.256-257

29

Vanessa Bell
Basket of Flowers, 1933
Signed and dated 'V Bell 1933' lower left
Oil on canvas
76 x 45 cm / 29⅞ x 17¾ in

Provenance
Reid & Lefevre Ltd, London, 1934,
Ralph and Frances Partridge
By descent, Private Collection, UK

Exhibitions
1934, London, Alex. Reid & Lefevre Ltd, *Recent Paintings by Vanessa Bell*, no.14

30

Vanessa Bell
Music Room Vase, 1932
Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 22 cm / 8⅝ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett
The Charleston Trust, 1984

31

Duncan Grant
Music Room Vase, 1932
Painted and glazed earthenware
Height 32 cm / 12⅝ in

Provenance
The artist's estate
A.V. Garnett
The Charleston Trust, 1984

32

Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant
The Famous Women Dinner Service, 1932-34
50 hand-painted Wedgwood blank ceramic plates
26 Plates: Diameter 25.5cm, Depth 2cm
24 Plates: Diameter 23.5cm, Depth 2cm

Provenance
Commissioned by Kenneth and Jane Clark
By descent to Nolwen de Janzé Rice
By descent to Angélique Gaussend
Private Collection, UK.

Literature
Isabelle Anscombe, *Omega and after: Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), b/w pl. 49
Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 258
Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976), p.274
Frances Spalding, *Duncan Grant* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp. 321-322
John-Paul Stonard, '"Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilization", Tate Britain', *Financial Times*, 22 November 2013
The Times, 7 June 2017, ill.
Colin Gleadell, 'Desirable Art on a Plate', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 2017, p.36, ill.

CHRONOLOGIES

VANESSA BELL (1879–1961)

Fig.85 Bell painting Lady Robert Cecil, 1905

Fig.86 Vanessa Bell with her sons Julian and Quentin at Charleston, 1917-18

1879 Vanessa Stephen born in London, 30th May, daughter of Leslie Stephen and his wife, Julia.

1882 Birth of her sister, Virginia.

1882-94 Stephen family take annual summer holidays in St Ives, Cornwall. Educated at home in London.

1896-1900 Studies under Sir Arthur Cope RA in South Kensington.

1901 September: accepted by Royal Academy Schools and is instructed by John Singer Sargent.

1904 Following death of her father, she moves with Virginia and brothers Thoby and Adrian to 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury.
Leaves Royal Academy and briefly attends Slade School of Fine Art.

1905 The Stephens entertain Thoby's Cambridge friends including Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey and others; beginnings of Bloomsbury.
Shows portrait of Lady Robert Cecil at New Gallery.
Summer: organises the Friday Club for exhibitions and lectures; first Club exhibition in November; contributes works until 1912.

1906 First meeting with Duncan Grant at Friday Club.

1907 7th February: marries Clive Bell (1881-1964); two sons Julian (b.1908) and Quentin (b.1910).
Honeymoon in Paris where she renews acquaintance with Grant.

1908-10 Exhibits with New English Art Club and Friday Club; encouragement from Walter Sickert.
Visits to Italy in 1908 and 1909.

1910 The Bells meet Roger Fry (1866-1934).
Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in London, organised by Fry.

1911 Visits Turkey; affair with Fry (to early 1913).

1912 Four paintings included in *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London.
Working at Asheham House, Sussex.

1913 Closely involved in preparations for opening of the Omega Workshops at 33 Fitzroy Square from 8th July.

1914 Works frequently alongside Grant with whom she is in love.
Visits Picasso in his Paris studio.

1915 Paints outstanding portraits of Mary Hutchinson (fig. 17), David Garnett and Iris Tree.

1916 First solo exhibition at Omega Workshops.
March-September: lives with Grant and David Garnett in Suffolk.
Moves to Charleston, Firle, Sussex, in autumn.

1918 Works in show of recent British art, Zürich.
25th December: birth of her and Grant's daughter Angelica at Charleston.

1919 Spring: in Rome and Florence with Grant and J.M.Keynes; they visit the Berensons at I Tatti.
Lends London flat to André Derain.

1920 Spring: shows work along with Grant and Fry at Galerie Vildrac, Paris. Visits Picasso (and further meetings 1921 to 1924).
Decorations with Grant for Keynes's rooms at King's College, Cambridge (cat.21).

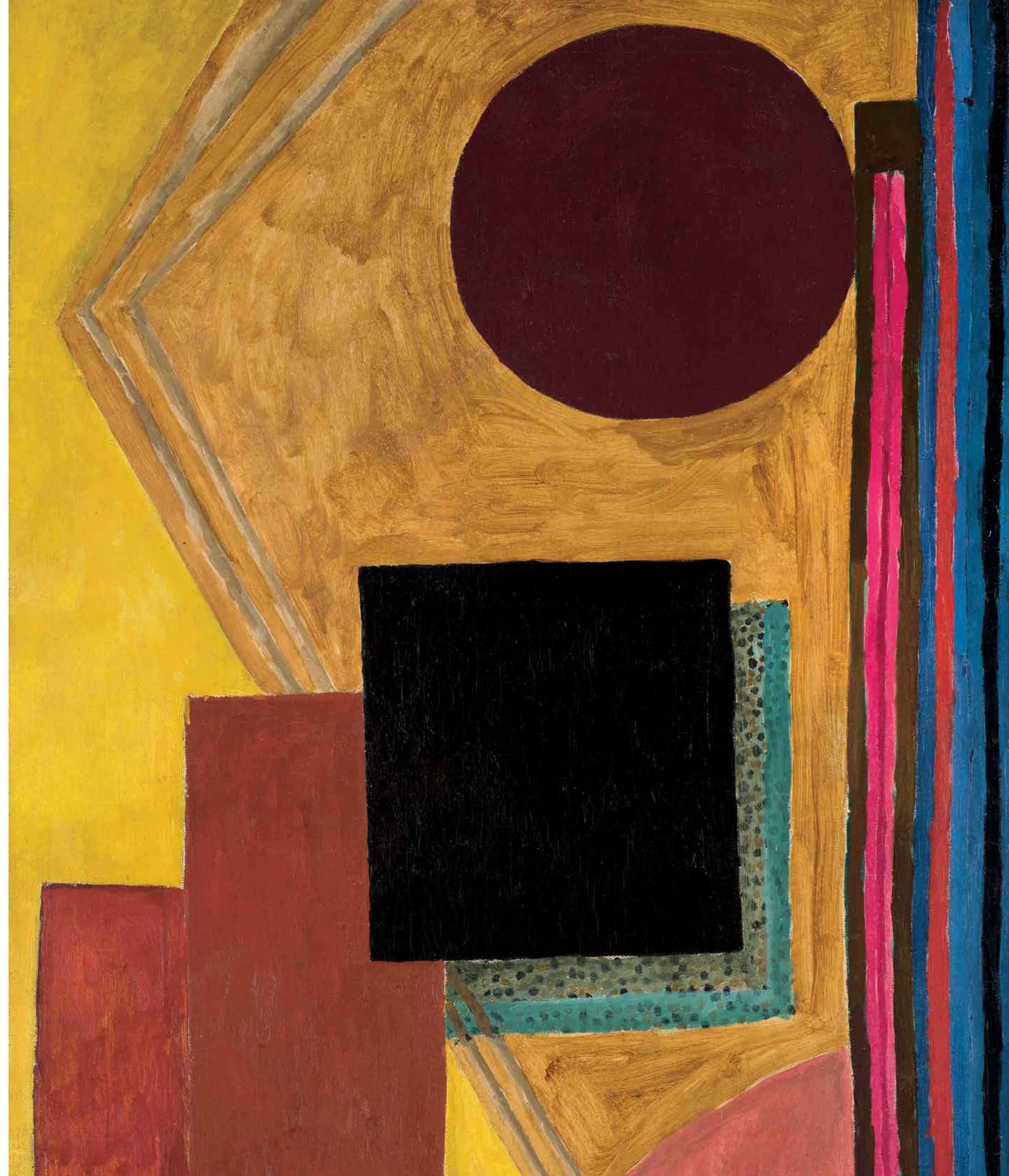
1921 October to January 1922: in St Tropez with Grant, Fry, and her children.

1922 Solo exhibition at Independent Gallery.

1923 In Spain with Grant and Fry.
Decorations with Grant in the Tavistock Square flat of Leonard and Virginia Woolf; many such interior schemes carried out in the following years.

1924	May-June in Paris: several meetings with Picasso, Derain, Segonzac and other artists.
1926	Included in first group exhibition of the London Artists' Association and shows with LAA in Berlin and New York; many works acquired by private collectors from now onwards; also purchases by Contemporary Art Society.
	May-June in Venice where she and Grant are represented in the Biennale.
1928	First of several prolonged visits to La Bergère, a rented house at Cassis; last visit in 1938.
1929	Decorates with Grant the dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks, Sussex, home of Lady Dorothy Wellesley (finished 1931; cat.28).
	Takes studio adjoining Grant's at 8 Fitzroy Street.
1930	Solo exhibition of paintings at Cooling Galleries (through LAA).
1931	Resigns from LAA and shows with Agnew's and the Lefevre Gallery in the following years.
	Designs textiles for Allan Walton Ltd.
1932	December: decorates with Grant a Music Room at the Lefevre Gallery (fig.26).
1933	Exhibits in Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (and annually 1936-39).
	With Grant paints large dinner service for Kenneth and Jane Clark (cat.32).
1934	Solo exhibition at Lefevre Gallery; designs dinner service for Wilkinson's.
	Death of Roger Fry.
1935	In Rome working on large panel for RMS Queen Mary, commissioned by Cunard.
1937	Recent paintings at Lefevre Gallery.
	Profoundly affected by death of son Julian in Spanish Civil War in July.
1938	Visiting teacher at Euston Road School.
	Last visit to Cassis.
1939-45	During the war, living at Charleston with Grant, Clive Bell and son Quentin.
1940	With Grant and Quentin undertakes extensive murals at Berwick Church, Sussex (finished 1943).
	Studio destroyed in the Blitz with heavy loss of works.
1941	Death of Virginia Woolf; continues designing jackets for her posthumous books.
	June-July: solo exhibition at Leicester Galleries.
1942	Marriage of daughter Angelica to David Garnett.
1943-44	Works on decorations, with Grant, on theme of Cinderella for Devonshire Hill School, Tottenham.
1946	Paints in Dieppe; almost annual painting stays in France and Italy until her death.
1951	Contributes large work to Festival of Britain exhibition *Fifty Paintings for '51*.
1956	Solo exhibition at Adams Gallery.
1961	7th April: dies at Charleston.
	Memorial exhibition in October at Adams Gallery.

Cat.5 (detail)



DUNCAN GRANT (1885–1978)

Fig.87 Duncan Grant painting Lytton Strachey at Asheham House, 1913

Fig.88 Duncan Grant in a costume he designed for Jacques Copeau's production of 'Pelléas et Mélisand', Charleston 1917

1885 21st January: born at The Doune, Rothiemurchus, Inverness, son of Major Bartle Grant and his wife Ethel (née McNeil). Father's sister Jane is married to Richard Strachey and their children, including Lytton, Pippa, Marjorie and James, are his first cousins.
Early years in India and Burma.

1894-99 Hillbrow Preparatory School, Rugby.

1899-1902 Attends St Paul's School, West Kensington, and lives with Strachey family.

1902-05 Studies at Westminster School of Art.

1904-05 Winter: in Florence; copies Masaccio and Piero della Francesca.

1906 Meets Vanessa Stephen at Friday Club.
February: attends La Palette, the school in Paris run by Jacques-Emile Blanche, staying until summer.
Autumn: unprofitable term at Slade School.

1907 Returns to La Palette. In Paris meets Augustus John, Henry Lamb, Gwen John and Wyndham Lewis.
Leaves La Palette and spends part of summer in Florence; then in Rothiemurchus.

1908 Living and painting in London.
Summer: affair with John Maynard Keynes and they travel to the Orkneys where he paints Keynes's portrait (King's College, Cambridge).

1909 Exhibits with the New English Art Club.
Takes rooms at 22 Fitzroy Square with Keynes; his neighbours are Virginia and Adrian Stephen; attends early Bloomsbury gatherings and meets Roger Fry.

1910 Spring: in Greece and Turkey with Keynes.
Exhibits with the Friday Club.
Frequent visits to *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*; paints mural in Keynes's rooms at King's College, Cambridge, showing influence of recent French art.

1911 Spring: in Sicily and Tunis with Keynes. On return stops in Paris and visits Matisse.
Works on two large panels for the Borough Polytechnic, London.
Attends performances of Russian Ballet which influence his work; meets Nijinsky several times at Lady Ottoline Morrell's.
November: moves to 38 Brunswick Square, a communal house shared with Keynes, Virginia and Adrian Stephen and others. December: shows one work as a member of the Camden Town Group at its Carfax Gallery exhibition.

1912 Six works in Galerie Barbazanges show in Paris of recent British art (July).
November: six works in *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*.

1913 Working on designs and furniture for the Omega Workshops, opening in July.
Spring in Italy with the Bells and Fry; greatly influenced by the mosaics in Ravenna.
Commissioned to design Jacques Copeau's production in Paris of *Twelfth Night* (first performance in May 1914).

1914 In Paris from February to May working with Copeau. Meetings with Picasso, introduced by Gertrude Stein.
First collage and abstract paintings.

1915 Spring with Vanessa Bell and David Garnett at Eleanor House, West Wittering, and later in summer at nearby Bosham.
Shows three works as invited artist at the Vorticist exhibition (June).

1916 As conscientious objector to compulsory military service, carries out agricultural work in Suffolk with Garnett, living there with Bell and family.
Autumn: works on the land as condition of exemption from military service and lives at Charleston, Firle, with Bell and Garnett.

1917 Painting much restricted; exhibits in group exhibitions at the Omega and elsewhere. Designs costumes for Copeau's production of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* given in Paris and later in 1918 in New York.

1918 Works in show of recent British art, Zürich.
November: released from agricultural labour.
25th December: birth of his and Bell's daughter Angelica at Charleston.

1919 Spring: In Rome and Florence with Bell and Keynes.

1920 Takes studio at 8 Fitzroy Street (formerly Sickert's) which remains his London studio to 1939.
First solo exhibition at Carfax Gallery (February).
Spring: shows work along with Bell and Fry at Galerie Vildrac, Paris.
Decorations with Bell for Keynes's rooms at King's College, Cambridge (cat.21).

1921 October to January 1922 in St Tropez with Bell and her children and Fry.

1922 Visits Picasso on return journey in Paris and meetings with Derain and Braque.

1923 Sets and costumes for ballet *Togo, or the Noble Savage* with Massine and Lopokova, first of several stage designs in the following years.
May-June: in Spain with Bell and later, Fry. In Paris. Meetings with Picasso, Derain, Segonzac and others.
June: *Recent Paintings and Drawings* at Independent Gallery.

1924 May-June in Paris with Bell; continues alone to Germany.

1925 Costumes and set for ballet *The Postman* with Lopokova and Idzikowski at London Coliseum; and for Lytton Strachey's play *The Son of Heaven*, Scala Theatre, London.
Witness at marriage of Keynes and Lopokova.
Summer: large studio built at Charleston.

1926 Works included in first exhibition of the London Artists' Association. Visits Venice (May-June) where he is represented at the Biennale.

1927 May-June, solo exhibition of recent work with LAA.
Three paintings at Carnegie International, Pittsburgh.

1928 First of several prolonged visits to La Bergère, a rented house at Cassis; last visit in 1938.

1929 With Bell in Germany, Vienna and Prague. February-March: retrospective exhibition with Paul Guillaume, Brandon Davis, London.
Decorates with Bell the dining room at Penns-in-the-Rocks, Sussex, home of Lady Dorothy Wellesley (finished 1931).

1931 In Rome for spring. May-June: recent paintings with LAA at Cooling Galleries. Resigns from LAA and shows with Agnew's and the Lefevre Gallery in the following years.
Designs textiles for Allan Walton Ltd.

1932 Designs two ballets for the Camargo Society.
December: decorates with Bell a Music Room at the Lefevre Gallery (fig.26).

1933 June: *Drawings by Duncan Grant* at Agnew's.
Exhibits in Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (and annually 1936-39).
With Bell paints large dinner service for Kenneth and Jane Clark (cat.32).

1934 May: *Recent Paintings by Duncan Grant*, Lefevre Gallery.

1935 May to June: in Rome working on three large panels for RMS Queen Mary, commissioned by Cunard; rejected the following year.

1936 In Spain alone, painting in Seville and Granada.

1937 In Paris with Bell and visits Picasso at work on *Guernica*.
November to December: recent paintings, including the rejected panels for the Queen Mary, shown at Agnew's.

1938 Visiting teacher at Euston Road School.
Last visit to Cassis.

1939 Gives up London studio (destroyed in the Blitz 1940) and moves to Charleston during the war, living with Bell, Clive Bell and son Quentin Bell; fire-watching for Home Guard.

1940 With Bell and Quentin Bell undertakes extensive murals at Berwick Church, Sussex (finished 1943).
Large group of paintings intended for Venice Biennale shown instead at the Wallace Collection.
Works in Plymouth for War Artists, Advisory Committee (and in 1941-42).

1944 Decorations with Bell on the theme of Cinderella for Devonshire Hill School, Tottenham.
Publication of *Duncan Grant* by Raymond Mortimer (Penguin Modern Painters Series).

1946 Paints in Dieppe; almost annual painting, stays in France and Italy until Bell's death in 1961.

1951 Contributes large work to Festival of Britain exhibition *Fifty Paintings for '51*.

1956 Designs sets and costumes for Blow's opera *Venus and Adonis* at Aldeburgh Festival and later in London.

1957 Solo exhibition of recent paintings at Leicester Galleries.

1958-59 Murals for Russell Chantry Chapel, Lincoln Cathedral.

1959 May to June: Tate Gallery Retrospective.

1960 Spring at Menton with Bell.

1961 Greatly affected by death of Bell at Charleston 7th April; paints little until the autumn. Winter (to February 1962): in Spain with Edward le Bas and visits Morocco (and again in 1964 at Marbella).

1964 Large retrospective at Wildenstein; heralds reviving reputation and has many sales.

1965 May to June: in Morocco.

1966 April to May: shares with Bell large show of paintings at Royal West of England Academy, Bristol.
October: only visit to United States.

1967 To Greece with Paul Roche.

1968 To Tangier and Fez in summer.

1970 Filmed at Charleston for documentary on his life and the house by Christopher Mason.

1971 Spring in Portugal. Watercolours and drawings shown by Anthony d'Offay.

1973 Autumn: visits Turkey with Paul Roche.

1975 Several ninetieth birthday exhibitions including old and new paintings at Anthony d'Offay, a Tate display and a retrospective in Edinburgh and Oxford.

1978 9th May: dies at Aldermaston, Berkshire, in home of Paul and Clarissa Roche. Memorial service at St Paul's Cathedral (27th June) with address by Kenneth Clark.

Fig.89 From left to right: Duncan Grant, J.M. Keynes, and Clive Bell at Charleston, 1919

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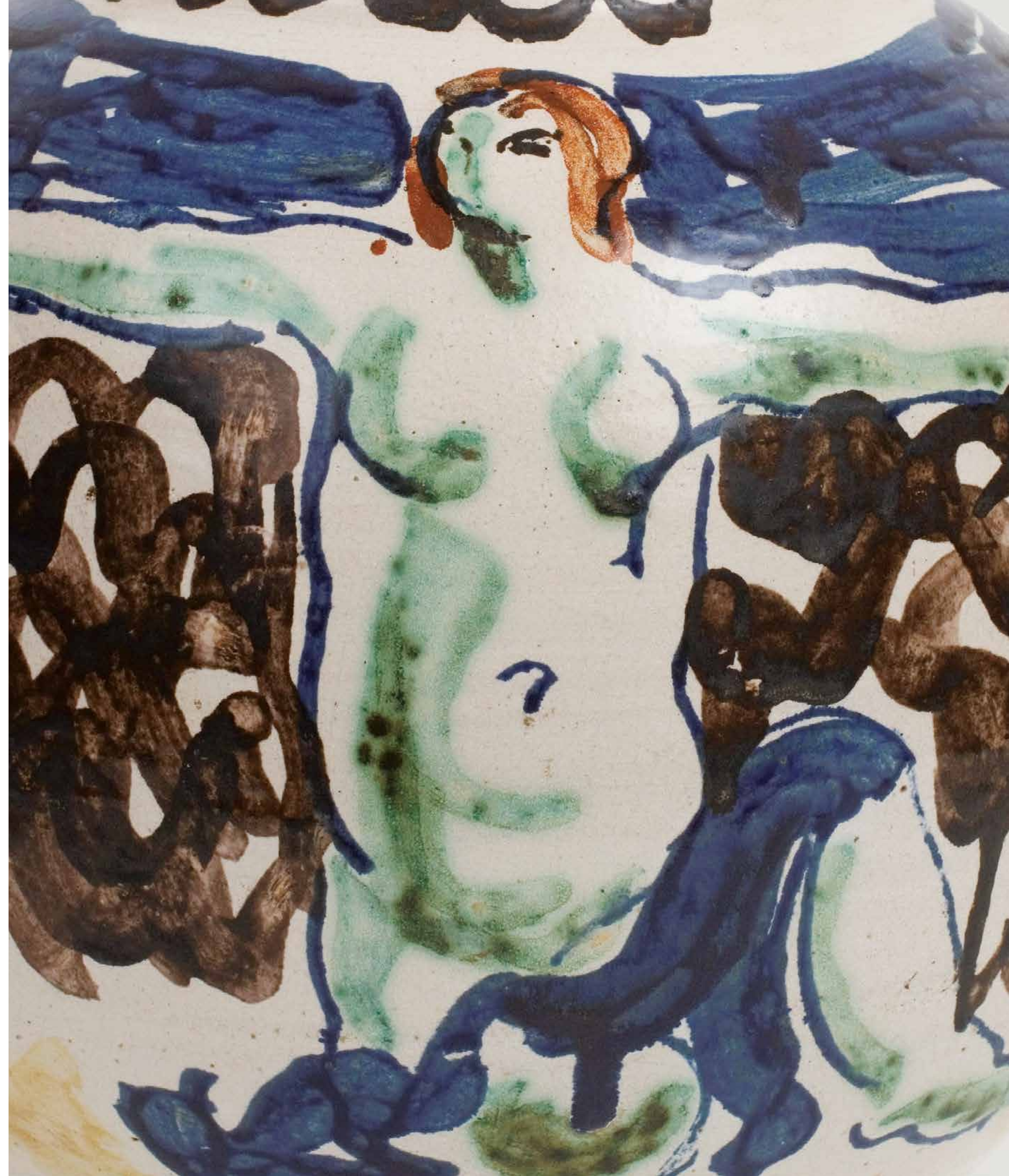

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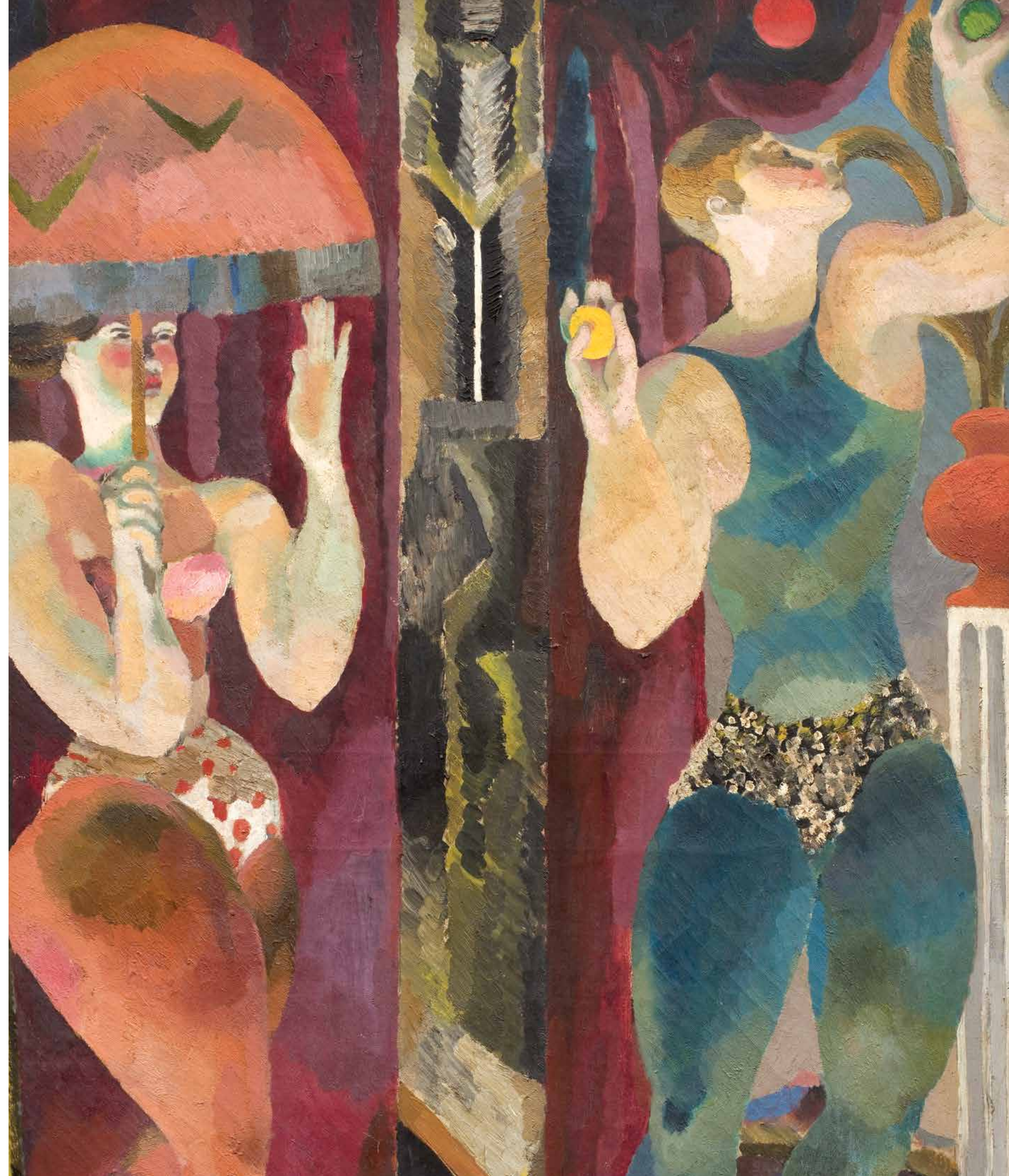

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Front and back cover:
Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, *The Famous Women Dinner Service*, 1932-34, Cat.32 (detail)

Frontispiece:
Duncan Grant, *Paper Flowers*, c.1917, Cat.18 (detail)

Page 4:
Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, *The Famous Women Dinner Service*, 'Virginia Woolf', 1932-34, Cat.32 (detail)

Page 253:
Duncan Grant, *Juggler and Tightrope Walker*, c.1918-19, Cat.20 (detail)

Page 255:
Duncan Grant, *Painted Gramophone Cabinet*, c.1926, Cat.27 (rear view)

Endpapers:
Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, and Duncan Grant, Stencilled wall design, The Dining Room, Charleston, 1939
Duncan Grant, *Lily-pond table*, c.1913-14, The Charleston Trust

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