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by Dominic Green

On "The Encounter: Drawings from Leonardo to Rembrandt" at the National Portrait Gallery, London; "Alma-Tadema: At Home in Antiquity" at Leighton House Museum; and "Quentin Blake: The Only Way to Travel" at the Jerwood Gallery, Hastings-on-Sea, UK.

Carlo Cesare Malvasia, in Life of the Carracci, describes how Annibale Carracci stuffed eight hundred scudi, the payment for his work on the Herrera chapel, "into two saddlebags and dumped them on the shoulders of a young scamp from the Piazza Navona, of whom he knew nothing other than that he had occasionally got him to carry his shopping bag home." When Carracci told the boy to "go on ahead and wait for him as usual," his companion, the painter Francesco Albani, warned that the boy might steal the money.

"You always expect the worst of people," Carracci replied. "Do you really think that this poor little fellow would ever do something like that, and that he would ever have that much cunning in his head?"

As Malvasia does not relate what happened next, we can assume that the boy did as asked, and that the money ended up with the rest of Carracci's cash: in his paintbox, which he left "lying in the workroom for weeks on end."

Carracci, Malvasia writes, was "so good-hearted that he sometimes seemed simpleminded or foolish." He was neither, though passing impressions could mislead. Carracci could afford to be goodhearted, because he was a deep reader of appearances—a visual psychologist.

A red chalk drawing attributed to him, *Young Boy Wearing a Round Cap* (*ca*. 1580s), might depict one of the boys who trained in the Carracci's studio and ran errands for them. The boy's gaze is direct; he is as fascinated by the drawing process as the artist is. His face is strong and unrefined, and he presents his chin with a mixture of street cockiness and aristocratic hauteur. In his raised right hand, he holds a rolled paper, tied with a bow: a letter, perhaps, or a drawing.

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"I like this directness so much," Carracci wrote his cousin Ludovico after seeing Correggio's work on a visit to Parma in 1580, "and I like this purity which is real not verisimilar, and natural not contrived or forced. . . . I don't know how to say it, but I know how to go about doing it, and that's enough."

It is hard to say it, because realness and likeness are close but not identical, and because naturalistic representation requires technique. Carracci liked to draw the people with whom he interacted each day, but the likeness of a real person requires contrivance and force—the suspension of daily activity for a sitting, the arrangement of the sitter and artist, the holding of poses and gazes, the pressure of chalk and pencil on paper.

In *Young Boy Wearing a Round Cap*, a strong light comes from the upper left margin. The deep shadow that it casts behind the boy's left shoulder tells us that Carracci has positioned him against a wall, presumably to create this effect of depth. The boy's natural response to the light would be to shade his eye by frowning or squinting. Instead, he raises his right eyebrow in order to expose the eye to the artist. But the pose is difficult to hold. The involuntary impulse to shade his eye causes his right eyelid to drop a little, obscuring the top of the iris.

Annibale Carracci, Giulio Pedrizzano, The Lutenist Mascheroni, *ca. 1593–94*, B*rown ink on paper*, *© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*

Carracci works quickly. The boy's shirt collar and the fingers of his raised hand are less developed than his hat, and his hat is less developed than his head. It is the fall of the light on the boy's face that Carracci wants to describe, and the complication of character that arises from the contrast between the lit and shaded sides. To finish, Carracci heightens the contrast with lateral strokes of white bodycolor on the right forehead and brow, and a patterning of shorter vertical touches of chalk on the right nostril and upper lip.

The effect is direct, natural, and spontaneous. It is as though Carracci has just passed the rolled paper to the boy, as though the boy hovers below the window and opens his right eye to show that he is listening to his instructions for delivery, and as though Carracci has transcribed the moment instantly. But *sprezzatura* is the highest effect of technique. In the long, rapid lines that sketch the boy's soft collar, the hand follows the eye from long practice. In the careful accumulation of contrasts in the lighting of the face, the red shading and the white highlighting combine to express personality, the play between inner life and surface expressions.

Young Boy Wearing a Round Cap is one of fifty Renaissance and Baroque drawings in "The Encounter: Drawings from Leonardo to Rembrandt," at the National Portrait Gallery in London.1 The curators, Tarnya Cooper and Charlotte Bolland, have selected works from thirteen British collections in order to address two questions. One, concerning the practice and purpose of drawing in this period, can often be answered from documentary sources. The other, of how the "encounter" between sitter and artist leads to the sitter's physical and psychological "presence" in the finished drawing, is harder to answer, possibly because the terms of the question have changed.

In the Renaissance studio, drawings were a means to the end of painting. The term *disegno* denoted the act and results of drawing, but also the planning of a picture. A drawing could be a preparatory study, like Carracci's rapid ink sketch of Giulio Pedrizzano for *The Lutenist Mascheroni* (*ca*. 1593–94). A drawing could be an exercise after the pattern or model books from which apprentices learned stock motifs and poses, like the *Studies for Four Character Heads* (*ca*. 1500–15) from the workshop of Holbein, which has "hensly" and "brosy," the nicknames of Holbein's sons Hans and Ambrosius, inscribed on the back of the sheet.

A drawing could be a doodle or a life study, a teaching aid, or a running notation of what was happening in the studio—or all of these. Rembrandt's *A Sheet of Figure Studies, with Male Heads and Three Sketches of a Woman with a Child* (*ca*. 1636) might have begun as a successor to the model books, but ended as a hybrid. The largest and most developed of the five male heads, an old man in a plumed hat and fur collar, may well have been dressed from the studio's box of props; he might also be related to the figure in one of Rembrandt's etched sheets of figure studies. Two younger men are posed in hats and given highly individualized faces; they might be students in Rembrandt's "academy," acting out the stock poses of the model book for life drawing.

A pair of turbaned old male heads in the top left corner are characterful but less detailed and individual—typological in their distance. On the right margin, there are three fast studies of a woman cradling an infant who has fallen asleep at the breast. These were surely drawn from life; the most developed of the three strongly resembles Rembrandt's wife Saskia. At the bottom of the sheet, there is a quick sketch of a young man in the act of drawing. All the other drawings on the sheet are in pen and ink; only the large old man in the hat and fur collar receives a brown wash for body. But the sketch of the student is made in red chalk, with a few accentuations in black chalk.

Rembrandt's sheet records at least four different moments, and four different motives for drawing: the model book study, the preparatory study, the opportune sketch, and the final, reflexive sketch in chalk, a drawing about drawing. It also suggests that the most valuable aspect of a drawing could even be the paper on which it was made. The black and red chalk of Domenico Beccafumi's *Self-portrait* (*ca*. 1525) has acquired an accidental wash from the pen-and-ink sketches of figures and grotesque dolphins on the verso of the sheet.

We cannot help but perceive these drawings as autonomous works, created for public consumption. But few of them were intended to leave the studio or the artist's possession, and none of them was signed. If they did change hands, they went as gifts. Filippino Lippi's *Man Wearing a Cap, probably Mino da Fiesole* (*ca*. 1480–83) was likely given by the young Lippi to Mino the older sculptor as a private tribute. The weary, elfin old man in Carlo Dolci's *The Artist's Shoemaker* (*ca*. 1630) might have received his exquisite portrait as a gift; Dolci had been raised in poverty after the death of his own father, a tailor. Malvasia records that Annibale Carracci could not bring himself to refuse "even the barber or the cobbler who patched his shoes when they asked him to do their portrait."

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Carlo Dolci, The Artist's Shoemaker, *ca. 1630*, *Black and red chalk on paper*, Courtesy of the Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement / Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.

The first question raised by "The Encounter," how artists went about making drawings, confuses the second question, how marks on the page aggregate into the perception of "presence." We assume that presence is authentic, because the faces that we see in real life belong to individuals. This assumption is confirmed by the Burckhardt at our shoulder, who whispers that the subjects in these drawings achieve presence because they are modern individuals. And the connoisseur finds the fragment and the sketch, the moment and the signature, more authentic, and more revealing of

process, than the finished work. But Renaissance drawing was directed towards painting, and the naturalism of Renaissance culture towards Neoplatonic idealism.

Domenico Beccafumi's self-portrait correlates to a self-portrait sketch in oils from the same period, now in the Galleria degli Uffizi. Both resemble another oil sketch, of a bearded man, now in the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery. The curators of "The Encounter" suggest that Beccafumi "may have used his own features as a mode for a range of subjects." If so, the effect of "presence" in a portrait is not biographical so much as autobiographical. It is not a direct extension of the physical presence of the sitter, or the encounter between sitter and artist, but a complex manufacture, a discreet elision of appearances and typologies.

The lutenist Giulio Pedrizzano, known as Mascheroni, was, along with the architect Floriano Ambrosini and the sculptor Giulio Cesare Conventi, part of a group of friends whom the Carracci welcomed to their studio. Malvasia records that there was so much "joking, wit, gossip, and lively exchange that the difficulties of the discipline seemed lightened by the constant merriment and were scarcely noticed." Amid the *sprezzatura*, Annibale Carracci pushed his image of Pedrizzano the artisan with a lute towards the ideal of Mascheroni the performer.

When Pedrizzano sat for the preliminary drawing that we see in "The Encounter," he did what any musician does before an audience. He stands erect, raises his chin, and catches the viewer's eye. The performing stance is also aggressive, pushing into the space between performer and audience. Baggy-eyed, Pedrizzano challenges us like a duelist with a hangover. Carracci emphasizes this belligerent intensity by using a thick quill and plenty of black ink. We see Pedrizzano's confidence in his craft, and his defiance of judgment. We also see the wounded pride of the artist who lives by making background music; the thick ink strokes of his moustache cover his mouth entirely.

In the red-chalk *cartone* for the portrait, Carracci modulates away from raw personality. In his chalk study of Pedrizzano's head and shoulders, now in the Albertina, Vienna, the shoulders are less stiff, and the brow less furrowed. The moustache is thinned, and the lips are visible. Where the ink sketch broke up the cheeks and forehead with loose cross-hatching, the *cartone* refines the features with highlights of white chalk. Giulio Pedrizzano is becoming the lutenist known as Mascheroni.

In the oil portrait, now in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, we see only Mascheroni. The body conforms to the lute, not the confrontation with the audience. The features are delicate, the eyes soft and unshadowed, the moustache dapper, the lips gracious. We see Mascheroni's hands at work and are prompted to imagine the music that they elicit. In *The Lutenist Mascheroni*, we encounter an incarnation of *sprezzatura*, and a reflection of higher ideals.

In the sixteenth century, a portrait was often called a "counterfeit": "made against" reality as much as made from it. Pedrizzano and Carracci might not be surprised to discover that for Pedrizzano's twentieth-century musical heirs, "Presence" was a control on a guitar amplifier. It is an enhancement to be added at the last moment, just as the sound leaves the amplifier and enters the

air between player and listener.

A painter after all can only render everything it is possible to ascertain from the outermost layer, the skin," Erasmus wrote in 1528. A painter could not capture "man's special characteristics, mind, intelligence, memory, and understanding." Perhaps Erasmus was thinking of how, when he sat for Dürer in 1520, the arrival of a group of courtiers had prevented Dürer from finishing the drawing. Perhaps the reformer and intellectual knew that the image that worked "stealthily into people's consciousness" was an artist's ideal as much as a sitter's image. The Florentine writer Cennino Cennini (ca. 1370–1440) noted that an artist, by practicing with a pen, became "capable of much drawing out of one's own head"—and capable of overriding his subject matter.

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, The Finding of Moses, *1904*, *Oil on canvas*, *the Leighton House Museum*

Speaking of which, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) is back in London for the first time since the posthumous exhibition of 1913.[2] Few artists have overridden their subject matter so determinedly, or so profitably. Alma-Tadema used Athenian and Roman marble as stages for Victorian melodrama. He did not fully deserve a century of obscurity and ridicule, for he was an excellent technician. But he was a shameless corrupter of the visual encounter, inadvertently pastiching the Renaissance drive towards idealism.

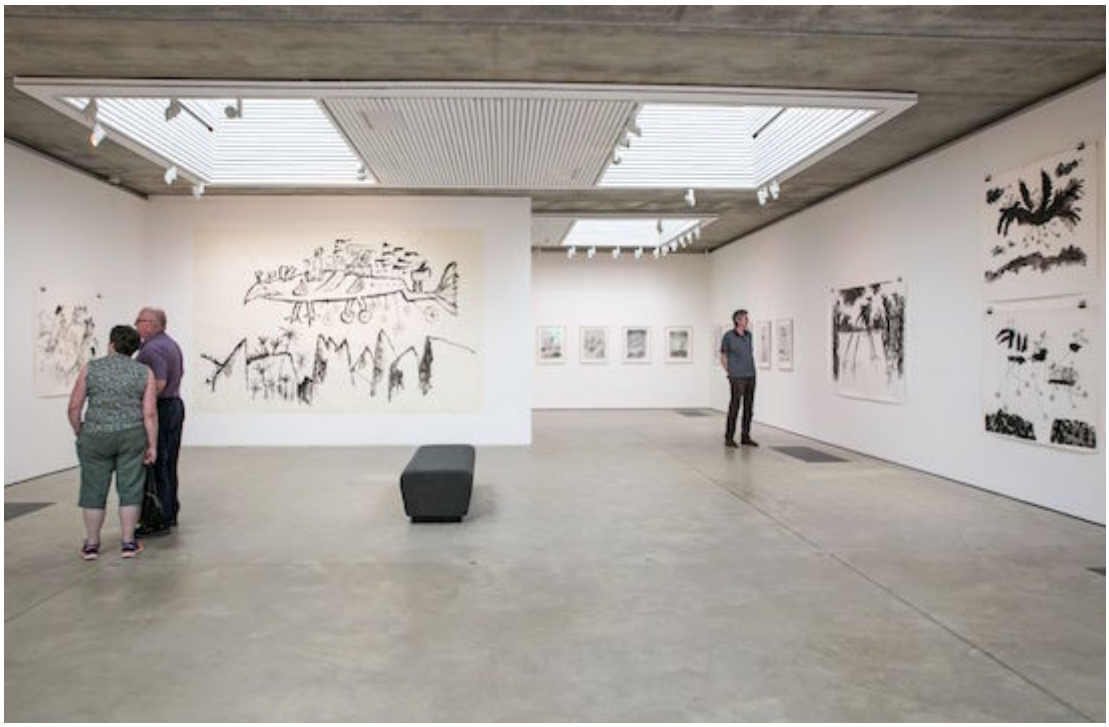
The Victorians encountered themselves in Alma-Tadema's oils, and we encounter the Victorians: the hygienic Classicism, the heroics and languor of empire, the whiff of Aestheticism and sex. His women live in Holland Park, not Athens. The décor is punctiliously accurate—Alma-Tadema honeymooned at Pompeii—but the love triangles and awkward courtings owe more to Bulwer-

Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* (1834).

His legacy is in the filmic genre of swords and sandals, not painting. From the Italian black and white silent *Quo Vadis* (1913) to Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), the plagiarist has been plagiarized. Now we encounter truly living presences on Alma-Tadema's stagings. All are alive, and none authentic.

Alma-Tadema's legacy is in the filmic genre of swords and sandals, not painting.

Sir Quentin Blake (b. 1932) is probably Britain's best-known living artist, and an authentic master of the cartoon. He is certainly one of the world's most familiar artists. He is known, however, like a medieval artisan, by style rather than name, through his illustration of Roald Dahl's stories for children. Dahl's stories are nasty pieces of work. So, it seems, was their author, a self-described anti-Semite who thought it droll to call Cinderella a "dirty slut." Dahl's books would not be the same without Blake's good-hearted, subtly complex drawings. Nor would they have attained their popularity with children, for Blake's compassion humanizes Dahl's self-pity.



Installation shot of "Quentin Blake: The Only Way to Travel" at the Jerwood Gallery. Photo: the Jerwood Gallery

At the Jerwood Gallery at Hastings, Sussex, Blake presents more than a hundred pictures in his spiky style, Ronald Searle by way of Jackson Pollock.3 Unanchored from the illustrator's obligation to narrate, he has improvised a series of interior epics. Some are as small as postcards and drawn with pencil, but the largest is twelve by nine feet and was drawn *in situ* with the help of a cherry picker and a thick brush.

The recurring figure is a vaguely Victorian explorer, riding a bicycle with or without wings through mountains, seas, and deserts. He often carries a map, and is always accompanied by half-bird, half-human figures. The birdmen resemble vultures or albatrosses, fatal creatures or *idées fixes* , but the bicyclist, more Edward Lear than King Lear, seems untroubled by his isolation and the dangers of the journey. Many of the drawings feel like metaphors for artistic creation—the solitary encounter with method and materials, the pursuit into deserts of unreason—but Blake also applies this personal imagery to the troubles of the age. In one drawing, we encounter the moral crisis of modern Europe.

A group of migrants are on a rowboat in a heavy sea. The mother protects the child, the headscarved grandmother secures their bags, the younger son searches the horizon for land, the older son leans forward like a prow, and a man in a skullcap, the grandfather, rows for all their lives. All of them are types, but all of them are individual, and rendered with uncompromising, painful humanity, and deceptive, profound simplicity. Below them in the heart of the sea, whales and fish float in a dark blue wash. But only we can see the fullness of the encounter—and that's enough.

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1 "The Encounter: Drawings from Leonardo to Rembrandt" opened at the National Portrait Gallery, London, on July 13 and remains on view through October 22, 2017.

2 "Alma-Tadema: At Home in Antiquity" opened at Leighton House Museum, London, on July 7 and remains on view through October 29, 2017.

3 "Quentin Blake: The Only Way to Travel" opened at the Jerwood Gallery, Hastings-on-Sea, UK, on June 14 and remains on view through October 15, 2017.

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