

*d'Épinal* was the identification of the curatorial voice, in real and philosophical terms. I was unable to locate the curator's name, an explicit statement of the show's rationale, or the name of the organizing museum until I found a catalogue at the exit door.

Minor criticisms aside, *Images d'Épinal* remained an informative and engaging show which presented Épinal imagery to novice North Americans with a pleasing balance of instruction and entertainment. *Images d'Épinal* reminds the archival and museum communities of the importance of preserving things ephemeral. The French art critic Champfleury complained in 1869 that "We see fit to preserve Assyrian monuments; but popular images are nowhere to be found...." Often printed on cheap paper and made for everyday use, countless Épinal images over the centuries met an inevitable demise in the gutters and garbage bins of Europe and its colonies. A representative selection, however, has been preserved in the collections of the Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain in Épinal, the Bibliothèque nationale, and the Musée national des arts et traditions populaires in Paris, thus allowing us access to this multivalent visual heritage.

**Sandra Dyck**

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**Houghton Hall: The Prime Minister, The Empress and the Heritage. The Reconstruction of the Collection of Sir Robert Walpole. KENWOOD HOUSE. London, England. February to April 1997.**

Britain's notorious lack of financial support for its arts and cultural heritage comes as a rude shock for those Canadians who go beyond the role of the awestruck tourist and become involved in the museum world. British heritage is so overwhelmingly rich in comparison, that the paltry government funding which is allotted to the hundreds of museums and historical sites is incomprehensible to North Americans. The National Lottery, instigated in order to raise money for the arts, is seen increasingly as a means by which government can opt out of cultural support altogether. The process by which Lottery funds are applied for is so complicated and restrictive that only museums with huge budgets and political connections can hope to access its wealth.

For those familiar with the Canadian system of donation for tax relief (imperfect as it may be), the lack of an equivalent process in Britain is unfathomable. How can any museum hope to attract gifts without some sort of incentive? That any museum in Britain does, is a testament to the reputations of the museums themselves, but again, smaller institutions lose out against the big names (why give to the local county museum if the British Museum is interested?). The scenario occasionally proceeds as follows: penniless aristocrat with marvellous collection auctions prize pieces to highest (and always for-

eign) bidder, after failing in attempts to interest the British government in purchasing it for the nation. As the press seize upon the auction price, a public hue and cry forces the administration to step in and purchase the object at the hammer price, usually many times the value first requested in the initial negotiations between the seller and an appropriate museum in Britain. Ironically, the seller in question has often been impoverished by death duties or other taxes, and relief in that form would only be too welcome (after all, additional tax will be levied on the money earned at auction). Most frequently and more disturbing, the objects sold are below the minimum values set to restrict the export of objects of national importance, and leave Britain freely. Yet the idea of donation for tax relief is unknown in Britain.

This problem of retaining artistic treasures is not a twentieth-century one in Britain. The most famous example is the sale of the collection of Sir Robert Walpole, First Earl of Orford, to Catherine the Great in 1779. Walpole (1676-1745), Britain's first prime minister, who served from 1715-1717 and 1721-1745, used his position to amass a considerable fortune for himself. Between 1721 and 1735 he built Houghton Hall in Norfolk, employing the leading architects of the day, including James Gibbs, Colen Campbell, Thomas Ripley, and William Kent. This magnificent palace was furnished with the best furniture, silver, and china, as well as a superb collection of paintings, many acquired by Walpole's son Horace, the renowned diarist, while he was on the Grand Tour from 1739 to 1741. Among the paintings were works by Van Dyck, Velazquez, Poussin, Rubens, and Salvator Rosa.

Unfortunately, by the early 1770s, Walpole's heir, his grandson George, Third Earl of Orford, had squandered most of the family fortune and was in the market for a purchaser for the Houghton paintings. John Wilkes, Member of Parliament for Middlesex, proposed that the collection be purchased to form a national gallery of art in part of the British Museum. Walpole hired James Christie, founder of the famous auction company, to evaluate the collection in 1778. On 29 November, Christie wrote to Walpole's attorney, Carlos Cony, that

"If the Minister had a mind to immortalize himself I could put him in the way to do it effectually by causing this collection to be purchas'd at the expense of the publick and Building a Room at the British Museum for their reception. I would undertake that it would be the means of bringing all the Foreigners of Taste from different Parts of the World to see them and it would most undoubtedly correct the Taste and qualify the Judgements of our Modern Artists."

However, the government was obviously reluctant to purchase; Horace Walpole made one last attempt by appealing to the King in a letter dated 2 August 1779, but to no avail. James Christie secured a deal with Catherine the Great and 181 of the Walpole paintings were sold to her that month for the sum of £40,455.

There was a public outcry at the loss of such an important collection, but Britain would have to wait until 1824 and the foresight of the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, to get a National Gallery. Despite the huge sum the Third Earl of Orford received for the Houghton paintings, he still managed to leave debts of £87,000 when he died in 1791!

The exhibition has been organized by Andrew Moore, who set about trying to reconstruct and track down the Walpole collection, now dispersed over dozens of museums in Europe and North America. This proved to be a task of considerable archival detective work. Many of Sir Robert Walpole's papers are now lost. Indeed, by 1721 they were already under threat; his steward, Jonas Rolfe, wrote about their condition:

"the vermin having nibbled holes and made free passages in to the drawers, they roame in such numbers 'tis impossible to think of destroying them unless the whole be removed."

More deliberate was Walpole's own destruction of his accounts in light of the investigations of the Committee of Secrecy in 1742, which sought to impeach him. However, some bills still survive in the possession of the family.

Just before Walpole's death, a description of the collection, entitled *Aedes Walpolianae, or a Description of the Collection of Pictures at Houghton Hall in Norfolk, the Seat of the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*, was published with an introduction written by Horace Walpole. Various editions of *Aedes Walpolianae* in the family collection include manuscript lists of the paintings. A 1744 inventory of the pictures includes plans of where each was hung at Houghton. By far the most comprehensive account of Houghton's holdings is the inventory made after Walpole's death in 1745. Typical of such death inventories, it includes everything right down to wheelbarrows, chisels, and the crabapple press! The Norfolk Record Office holds the crucial correspondence between Walpole's attorney and James Christie detailing the final destiny of the paintings. A great deal of time was also spent by the curator in tracking down the final destinations of all the paintings and searching through museum storerooms.

The exhibition is quite small; no attempt has been made to bring all 181 of the paintings back together. Most of the items come from Houghton Hall. No doubt the financial cost of borrowing extensively from abroad proved prohibitive. Nevertheless, there are several paintings from the Hermitage, including a *Holy Family* by Nicholas Poussin and a *Portrait of Pope Clement IX* by Carlo Maratti in addition to a *Portrait of a Seated Man* by Frans Hals from the National Gallery in Washington. It is interesting to note that most of the paintings by British artists remained with the family. Was it because they were primarily family portraits, with which George Walpole could not part, or was it

because Catherine did not hold the work of British artists, such as John Wootton's *Classical Landscape*, an attempt at the style of Claude Lorrain, in very high esteem?

We are fortunate that Walpole was not so destitute that he had to sell the magnificent Houghton furnishings. These remain a fine collection of late seventeenth-century tapestries and early eighteenth-century English furniture and pewter, as well as a set of Chinese export porcelain with the Walpole crest, examples of which are on display in the exhibition. Unfortunately, the Walpole silver, a superb ensemble by Huguenot silversmiths, has been dispersed over time, sold off at the death of the Third Earl of Orford and at the Strawberry Hill sale in 1842. About a dozen pieces have been borrowed from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, and a private collection.

Displays of architecture not in situ are difficult to mount, but a series of colour photographs of each main room at Houghton, with clear descriptions of their decor and function, give a good impression of its grandeur. Interspersed with the photographs of Houghton and the paintings, furniture, silver, and archival documents are a series of labels relating to the day-to-day housekeeping which would have been carried at Houghton, as at any stately home in Britain. These include how to clean mahogany and marble. The latter recipe would surely make a modern conservator shudder – it involves leaving a mixture of quicklime and strong lye on the sculpture for a day or two before washing off! More sympathetic to twentieth-century methods is the advice given for cleaning silver: never use polishing powders, as they will scratch and obliterate the engraving and ornament. These, plus a short anecdote about Sir Robert's love life and a list of the wine consumption at Houghton for the year 1730 (8,950 bottles at a cost of £1302.0.4d!), add amusing commentary for the non-academic audience.

Houghton Hall and the remains of Walpole's collection have come down through Sir Robert's daughter, Mary (1705-1731), who married George Chomondley, Viscount Malpas, later Third Earl of Chomondley. Through the nineteenth century, the Chomondleys have attempted to rebuild the collection of paintings at Houghton and the hall now includes a Hogarth and a Gainsborough. Fortunately, Houghton was spared the "improving" impulses of the Victorians, and much of the interior decoration as installed by Sir Robert Walpole remains in place.

Sadly, this well researched and skilfully presented tale of Britain's neglect of its artistic treasures seems not to have made much of an impression on the cultural establishment. In an editorial in *The Evening Standard*, 21 April 1997, entitled "Going, going, gone, but spare us the tears," historic buildings consultant John Martin Robinson upholds the continuing drain of Britain's heritage as "the working of the free market," enabling London to maintain "its position as the centre of the international art trade," a sentiment worthy of Maggie Thatcher

and the Greedy Eighties. Will Chris Smith, the new Secretary of State for National Heritage, address the situation? It seems most unlikely that the new Labour government will do anything to relieve the aristocracy of their taxes, even if it would benefit the museums of the nation. Canadians would do well to ensure that the principle of donation of cultural property for tax exemption is never eroded.

**Susan North**

Victoria and Albert Museum

**Treasured Memories – A National Archives of Canada Exhibition Celebrating 125 Years.** NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA. Ottawa, Ontario. May 1997 - 2000.

“Treasured Memories” is the new permanent exhibition curated by archivist Martin Tétrault to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the National Archives of Canada (NA). Upon entering, you are immediately surrounded by bright red and blue walls, hushed music, and that intangible sense of the sacred that often accompanies exhibitions of historical material. Along the right wall in the first room, pools of shimmering light illuminate single precious documents, which are supported on pyramidal structures. Along the left wall, brief text panels recount the history of the NA, state its mandate, and list its leaders. Ahead looms an interactive computer terminal next to a rare and exquisite eighteenth-century painting, *Portrait of Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow* (christened Brant), an excellent juxtaposition of means of communications, new technology vs. history.

The mandate of the National Archives of Canada is to acquire, preserve, and make available the records of the country’s history and to act as the collective memory for the nation. At its most basic, this exhibition illustrates how over the past century and a quarter, the staff of the NA has faithfully, and with great attention to detail, acquired and preserved fascinating, historically significant, and often beautiful documents. The records selected for this exhibition are outstanding in their quality and in their importance to Canadian history. The curator is to be commended on his choices, as he has clearly selected documents which are the highlights of the NA’s holdings.

My first problem arose, however, when I tried to find the focus of this exhibition. Is it about the history of the National Archives for its 125th birthday, or is it about the history of the country in which the NA grew up? Other questions came to mind: How do these treasures reflect the history of the NA itself? What difference did each Dominion or National Archivist make to the collection of these treasures? The history of the institution would make a fascinating study and I admit to being slightly disappointed that there were only two text panels in the introductory area which focus on this. Why did Arthur