

From the Chair

I am both delighted and daunted to be taking over from Claire Robinson as chair of the Scottish Society for Art History, having had the great pleasure of working alongside her as co-chair for the past year. Claire has done a huge amount for the society over many years and we wish her well for the future.

The SSAH has had a busy few months with several events taking place. At our AGM on 5 March we had a presentation from Sandy Wood and others from the Royal Scottish Academy, outlining their ambitious plans to celebrate their bicentenary next year. The SSAH will be joining in with a joint conference in February, and we hope to circulate a Call for Papers in the autumn.

On 15 March we enjoyed a thought-provoking tour by Lily Barnes of the *Collecting the Contemporary* exhibition at Kirkcaldy Galleries, showcasing some notable new acquisitions for ONFife's collections. On 5 April, Hildegard Berwick gave us a fascinating walking tour of sites in Glasgow associated with the artist Bet Low, showing how interconnected the various societies and galleries of the time were. Most recently, on 7 June we enjoyed another walking tour, this time of public art in Livingston led by Andrew Demetrius. This featured many of the innovative 1970s pieces by town artist Denis Barns, including a beautiful collaboration with Ian Hamilton Finlay that deserves to be much better known.

We are currently working on proposed events for later in the year and will keep members up to date. As always, if you have ideas for events you'd like to see, please let us know.

Our Art & Text conference back in February was a great success, and both this issue of the newsletter and the next will feature a selection of the presentations given. Others will, as usual, form the basis of this year's Journal later in the year.

Carla van de Puttelaar

SSAH Research Grants

The SSAH promotes scholarship in the history of Scottish art and art located in Scotland. To facilitate this, we offer research support grants of up to £400 to assist with research costs such as fees for the provision and licensing of images, and travel and accommodation expenses. Practice-based research is also eligible, though research should contribute to the understanding of art history and be connected to Scottish art, art located in Scotland, or existing research related to Scottish art history or art located in Scotland. There must also be a tangible and publicly accessible research output such as an exhibition, display or journal article.

We do not fund attendance at conferences, hire or purchase of equipment, indexing costs or subsistence. Applicants must be working at a post-graduate level or above and should either be resident in Scotland or doing research that necessitates travel to Scotland.

Recipients will be given a one-year free membership of the SSAH and will be asked to write a report for the SSAH Newsletter, explaining how the grant was used. Please download the guidance notes for more information, accessed by visiting

Orlando's own experience of bringing their written manuscript of 'The Oak Tree' to completion and beyond, and indeed were made using a writing nib to echo Orlando's own act of writing. Each plant was collected and drawn directly from life; the work is underpinned by extensive research, close observation, knowledge and patience, as plants appeared and disappeared with the seasons across the years that this work took Hyslop to complete. This drawn manuscript, or visual edition, replaces words with imagery to create a new experience for the reader, through a translation of sorts, offering depth through layers of meaning.

The Oak Tree is accompanied by notes which, in a reversal of editorial convention, annotate the visual edition with quotations from the written text, indicating the specific sections of Woolf's novel which inform the imagery. They also explain the historical events depicted in the work until the present time, and speculate on the future. This approach offers numerous different modes of viewing and/or reading the work, and prompts broader reflections on what it might mean to produce a new edition of an existing work. The richness of Woolf's work, its densely allusive quality, its panoramic historical sweep, and its challenging engagement with questions of genre and creativity have offered Hyslop a vast array of paths to follow and points to encounter. The joy which suffuses the novel, in tandem with its sharp satirical edge, seduces the reader into engagement with a multitude of questions that are in many ways as pressing now as they were when it was written, almost 100 years ago. *Orlando* was written at a pivotal point in history and its playful temporality, taking the reader through centuries right up to the very day of its publication, requires us to rethink questions of history and of scale. We are at another pivotal point, in which the stakes could not be higher and taking a wide – planetary – view is essential to our survival. *The Oak Tree* embraces the notion of the pivot in time; its two-part form explores fiction and reality, and how these can be intertwined, to help understand our position in the world. It follows Woolf's groundbreaking novel in drawing attention to the very moment of the present, while urging us to look to the future. This expansive temporality is alluded to in the subtitle to this work, *a tribute to eternity*, which references Orlando's description of their own manuscript and offers a fitting ambition for this work.

All images: *The Oak Tree: a tribute to eternity*. Limited edition artist book signed and numbered by the artist, litho printed on Fedrigoni papers, 23.4 x 15.5 x 1.8cm, Jane Hyslop 2024. Image credit Oana Stanciu.

The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods: A Surrealist Awakening

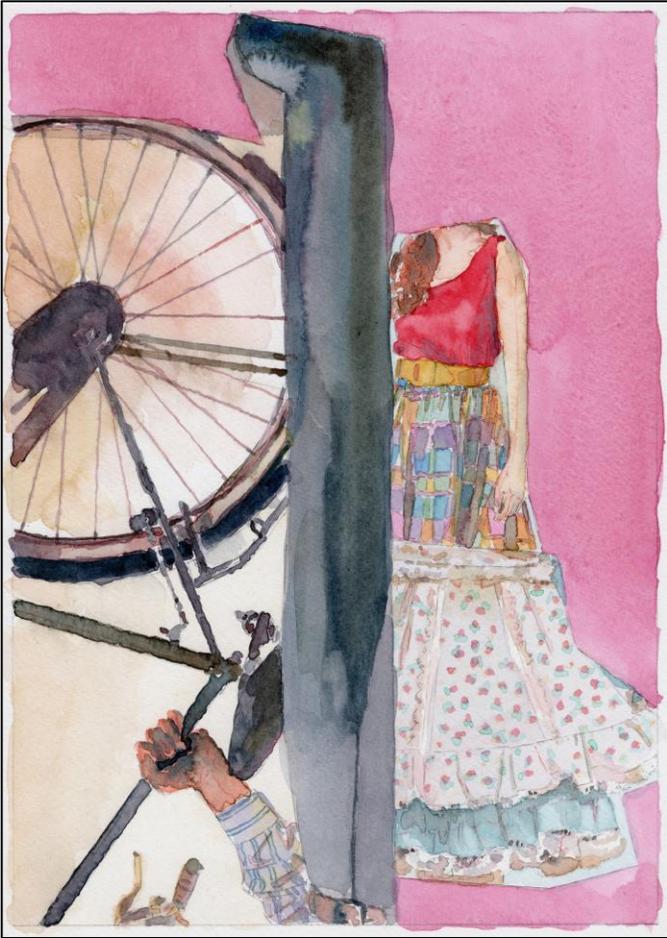
By Laurence Figgis, Artist & Writer

André Breton did not have an unalloyed respect for fairy tales. He found them 'puerile' and conformist; in his view, these stories were 'addressed to children', and, as such, could not substantially influence the adult mind with their fantastic visions. He held out hope that fairy tales could be 'written for adults, fairy tales still almost blue'.

In the 100 years since Breton made this statement, fairy tales 'for adults' have become much more prominent—and their relationship to Surrealism much more tangible. In her book *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994), the writer and critic Marina Warner acknowledged the vexed relationship of these two genres of 'the fantastic'. She gives special emphasis to women artists connected with the movement (such as Leonora Carrington and Meret Oppenheim), whom she regards as modern fairy tale 'tellers'.

My own creative practice emphasises the role of *visual* material in shaping our experience of these contradictions. I am a painter and writer who has lived in Glasgow for more than 25 years. My ongoing interest in fairy tales and Surrealism has been nourished by that context—notably through dialogue with the Scottish writer and art historian, Catriona McAra, who has written extensively on these subjects. As McAra has shown, through her perceptive analysis of the work of Tanning and Carrington, the 'surrealist fairy tale' is a hybrid genre that subverts the reader's (or the viewer's) expectations, bringing about a contradictory relation of 'text' and 'image'.

In the summer of 2024, I began making a series of 26 illustrations to *La Belle au Bois Dormant* - the frequently censored baroque version of the story more commonly known as Sleeping Beauty (first published in 1697). Intended for both an exhibition and an artist book, these works stage a material encounter of surrealist aesthetics and the literary fairy tale. Taking the form of watercolour paintings derived from 1980s-era magazine pages and film-stills, these images are counterpoised to a well-known story.



Laurence Figgis, *Illustration to 'La Belle au Bois Dormant': 'She entered a little garret, where an honest old woman was sitting by herself with her distaff and spindle'*, 2024, watercolour on paper
293 x 210 mm © Laurence Figgis
(reproduced by permission of the artist)

The brainchild of Charles Perrault - a French civil-servant and philosopher who had served at the court of Louis XIV and participated in the 'Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns' - *La Belle au Bois Dormant* (The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods) played a key role in the imperfect historical process of 'civilising' fairy tales. According to the Marxist folklorist, Jack Zipes, this was not a straightforward process; fairy tales were not always 'approved for children':

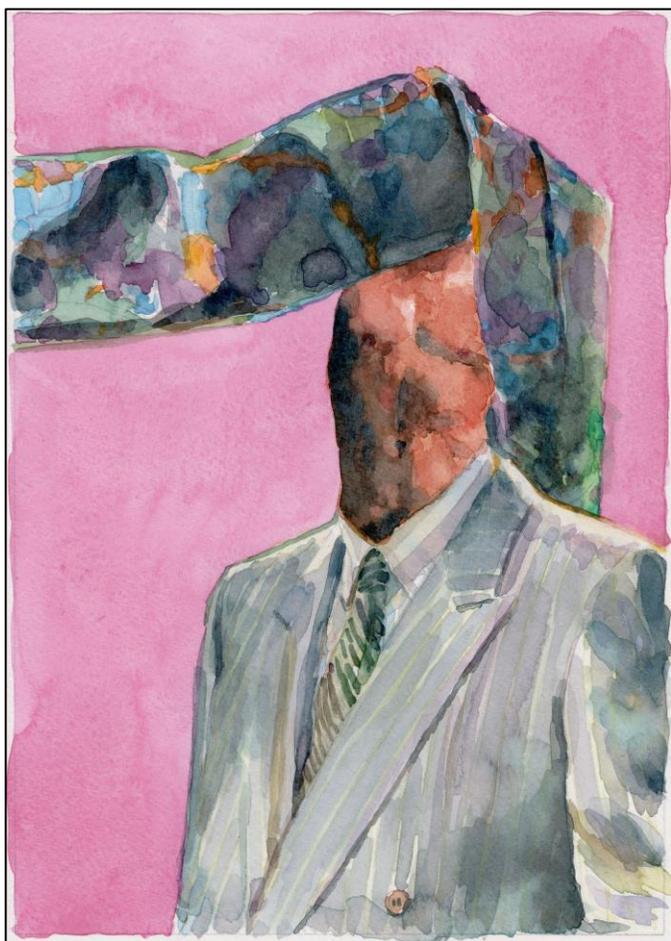
[...] they were so symbolic and could be read on so many different levels that they were considered somewhat dangerous: social behaviour could not be totally dictated, prescribed, and controlled through the fairy tale, and there were subversive features in language and theme.

Indeed, the story of Sleeping Beauty, as told by Perrault, proves to be surprisingly 'adult' and 'subversive' in its 'language and theme'. In Perrault's rendition, we are told, the Sleeping Beauty has 'the pleasure of very charming dreams during her long slumber'; when she wakes, she is able to hold the prince in erudite conversation. This makes sense from a surrealist perspective. As Warner writes, echoing the Surrealist Manifesto, 'dreaming gives pleasure in its own right' but 'also represents a practical dimension to the imagination, an aspect of the faculty of thought, and can unlock social and public possibilities'. The suggestive pricking of the spindle (a rupture— like the incision of collage in surrealist or modernist picture-making) cracks open the fabric of reality, suspends the patriarchal social order and disrupts chronological time. Out of this wound leaks a horror story reminiscent of the gothic novels that enchanted Breton—the Sleeping Beauty, in this version, awakens into a nightmare. The prince's mother is an ogress, who wants to eat the princess and her young children – served with a delicious French sauce. After she is herself devoured (in a cauldron filled with 'toads, adders and serpents'), the prince sheds a tear; he 'could not help but feel sorry,' Perrault concludes, 'for she was his mother, but he speedily consoled himself in the company of his beautiful wife and children'.

My response to the tale is shaped by an intuitive understanding that these rather mawkish images of devouring, piercing and dreaming lend themselves to surrealist interpretation, perhaps especially to the language of collage - a favoured surrealist technique. The methods I used to illustrate the story were closely informed by Hal Foster's analysis of Max Ernst's 1934 collage novel, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, a famous work of Surrealism. As Foster observes in his 1993 book *Compulsive Beauty*, Ernst's process of cutting and re-assembly 'articulates' the psychological and political content repressed in his source material:

Many of the sources are overtly melodramatic. Several images in *Une Semaine de bonté* are based on Jules Marey illustrations for *Les Damnées de Paris*, an 1883 novel of murder and mayhem. These illustrations depict *dramas de passion* [...] In his appropriation Ernst relocates these particular scenes in psychic reality through the substitution of surrealist figures of the unconscious.

Following Ernst's use of 1880s book engravings that were 40-50 years out of date when he appropriated them for his collage-novel, I made use of images dating from my own childhood—from the last two decades of the 20th century. This approach constitutes an apt vehicle for Perrault's enchanted princess who, waking from a 100-year sleep, is herself a form of anachronism. As Lewis C. Seifert has written in his essay 'Queer Time in Charles Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty"' (2015): 'By deviating from the ordered sequence of chrononormative time' the story opens a space for 'other ways of being and desiring'.



Laurence Figgis, *Illustration to 'La Belle au Bois Dormant': 'One day the son of the king went hunting in that neighbourhood'*, 2024, watercolour on paper, 292 x 207 mm © Laurence Figgis (reproduced by permission of the artist)

There are no spindles or thorns in this depiction of the story; instead, shiny corporate artifacts and 'white-collar' fashions of the 1980s (emerging in such sources as *Dynasty*, *Playgirl* and *Vogue*) replace the *ancien-régime* symbols of the original. These

postmodern images are, for me, expressive of what Foucault named the 'administrative grotesque', albeit in a more glamorous form. 'The grotesque,' he stated, in his 1974 lecture *Abnormal*, 'is a process inherent to assiduous bureaucracy' (and its effective abuse of power). What the meaning of this imagery might be, arising as a visual response to 'Sleeping Beauty', remains enigmatic—a site of tonal and aesthetic discordance. (We readily attribute the grotesque to fairy tales, but the language of 'administration' has been claimed by Orwell, Kafka and the dystopian fictions they inspire.) Further analysis will reveal whether this particular re-imagining of the story constitutes an eccentric anomaly or whether it substantively illuminates the political significance of Perrault's tale. In the meantime, these non sequiturs are welcome, arising from my intention to utilise the chance methods of Surrealism as expansive forms of fairy tale illustration, to observe what 'spaces for imagining' arise from this interpretive method.

Exhibitions and More

Exhibition - Mella Shaw: Sounding Line

The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum
24 May 2025 - 18 January 2026
Free admission

Sounding Line is an immersive ceramic installation that explores the devastating effect of marine sound and sonar pollution on whale species. The large-scale sculptural forms are inspired by whales' tiny inner-ear bones. They are made from a unique clay body using whale bone ash - the same way cow bones have been used for centuries to make bone china.

The project takes its name from a sounding line, a length of rope with a weight used by mariners to measure the depth of water. In the installation, Mella wraps her sculptures in red marine ropes that resonate with sonar pulse. Encouraged to touch the ropes, visitors will feel these vibrations, reflecting how marine life experience sonar underwater.

The installation is accompanied by photographs and a short film. The film documents a journey the artist made to South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. Here she returned one unfired sculptural form back into the sea, where it slowly dissolved in the sea water.

It is fitting that this work is staged in Dundee, Britain's leading whaling port in the second half of the 19th century. Against the context of the city's maritime and whaling heritage, *Sounding Line* invites us to reflect on the human impact on our environment.

Online Course - The History of Scottish Design in Six Objects

Join the University of St Andrews' School of Art History and V&A Dundee on a journey of discovery of some of the most interesting designs to ever come out of Scotland.

In this unique partnership with V&A Dundee, this six-part course highlights six carefully curated pieces from V&A Dundee's Scottish Design Galleries, spanning the 17th to the 21st century.

During this course, you will explore the works of Robert Gardine, Robert Adam, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Muirhead Bone, Vivienne Westwood and the V&A Dundee itself. Explore each object in the context of the Scotland it created and the impact it has had in guiding Scottish design in the future.

The course is taught by curators from V&A Dundee and academics from St Andrews. This asynchronous, flexible course is designed to fit around your work and home life. Through readings, videos and interactive learning activities with experts, this fully online course allows you to explore the best of Scottish art and design in one of its most iconic museums. From oak to marble, silver to tweed, and print to plastic, discover the in-depth stories behind each object's origin and place them in the context of their time.

Book now for just £150 on the [University of St Andrews website](#).

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