***A mansion of many apartments***

I will begin with Gray’s illustration and a quote from ‘*A Unique Case’* (1983), in ‘*Every Short Story by Alasdair Gray 1951-2012*’ [[1]](#footnote-1)as a lens to view Gray’s visual practice through.

The narrator visits his friend in hospital, who has had the unfortunate accident of a sheet of glass shearing off the side of his head:

*‘In war films, I had seen many buildings with an outer wall missing and the side of my friend’s head resembled one. Through a big opening I saw tiny rooms with doors, light fittings and wall sockets, all empty of furniture but with signs of hasty evacuation. There was also scaffolding and heaps of building materials suggesting that repair was in progress. I said hesitantly, ‘You seem to be mending well’.* [[2]](#footnote-2)

I would like to suggest that the head we see here, is *‘a mansion of many apartments’*. This is a phrase John Keats (1795-1821) wrote in correspondence to John Hamilton Reynolds (1794-1852) in 1818 *– ‘I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments’*. Keats placed those who did not consider the world around them, in the first room, the ‘thoughtless’ chamber. He inferred that many did not go beyond the first two chambers (the second, the chamber of ‘Maiden-Thought’ where we delay for delight).

Both Gray’s written and visual art work encourages the reader or viewer to consider that an infinite amount of rooms or worlds exist. Even in Gray’s simpler art work, the portraits of friends and their families, domestic interiors have windows that lead off into other worlds that are always visible to the viewer, if never to the occupants themselves. In other series, such as this cover design for *‘Old Negatives: Four Verse Sequences’* (1989), bodies become architecture for other worlds to exist within. In works like the Lanark frontispieces, the pictorial space of the page itself is divided like a Piero della Francesca (1415-1492) painting allowing different realms to co-exist. However, in comparison between Francesca’s ‘*Annunciation’* (1464), and Gray’s *‘Lanark (Book 4 Frontispiece)’* (1982), whereas God rules the realm in the former, Gray casts ‘The State’ in the latter.

If we look in the other direction to the abyss, here we have Gray’s work ‘*That Death Will Break the Salt-Fresh Cockle Hand’*, from preparatory work, a monochrome version in 1970 and a screenprint from the series *‘From the Soul’s proper loneliness’* (2007). There is trompe l’oeil at play in this work – the flatness of the paper, the table that becomes the tablet, the floor, and then the rug, which in dark relief, suggests another realm, when read with the title, that the foot is stepping into.

There is, of course, a biblical reference to the phrase, *‘a mansion of many apartments’*. In John chapter 14: verse 2, ‘*In my Father’s house are many mansions’*. In Gray’s short story ‘*Prometheus’*, the narrator punctures this view of heaven somewhat, calling it a ‘luxury’ mansion, a ‘large private property’, [[3]](#footnote-3) where the void exists below.

***What the keynote will do***

In examining Alasdair Gray’s visual art, I would like us to consider that this head, is the head of Gray himself. What rooms existed inside the head of this polymath, who has been coined the *‘Riddrie Romantic’*[[4]](#footnote-4), a ‘*Glasgow visionary’*[[5]](#footnote-5) or *‘Strathclyde Michaelangelo’* [[6]](#footnote-6)? Today we will look through the doorway of some of the rooms, whilst making ourselves more comfortable in others. I hasten to add, this is not about compartmentalising Gray’s visual practice. Susannah Thompson noted such an approach with his visual art, just as it is with his writing, is foolhardy, in her essay for ‘*Now and Then’* catalogue:

*‘His work in the realm of fine art is similarly slippery in terms of categorisation. Decades before a pluralistic approach became de rigeur for many young contemporary artists, Gray was accomplished across a range of media and styles’*. [[7]](#footnote-7)

Instead we must understand that his visual work exists across space and form. Gray was equally at home in printmaking, painting, illustration and mural painting. Art on walls moves into book covers and illustrations, and back again. From inked lines on brown wrapping paper, or the blank side of a strip of wallpaper, images replicate multiple times before they take up residence on the front cover or the yellowing pages of a much-loved book. The scale of Gray’s work dramatically alters, sometimes by the mechanical plus or minus percentage of a photocopier, or by the sizing of a drawing for a mural, to live directly upon the walls and ceilings of churches, an ‘A’ listed building, a synagogue, a flat and at a nature reserve. Cordelia Oliver referred to this as *‘a prodigious gift for effective space-filling, capable on one hand of expanding his visual concepts to occupy large areas of wall, and on the other, of condensing them to fit neatly into the page of a sketchbook*. [[8]](#footnote-8)

Work also time-hops, with drawings, paintings and prints being started in one decade and finished in another. Here we have two examples, *‘Andrew Gray Aged 7 & Inge’s Patchwork Quilt, drawn 1972, painted 2009’* and *‘Alasdair & Ann, drawn 1982 and painted 2009’*. Above all, Gray’s art work is not solely for the rarefied walls of galleries. Rather it exists in the *‘many apartments’* of peoples’ homes. Whilst this encapsulates a wonderful democracy of ownership of Gray, it also, it should be noted, created an administrational headache at times, both for Gray and those he worked with, of getting works on loan from multiple lenders for exhibition.

In this keynote I aim to move from the ‘unfinished’, the beginnings and stuff of making and materiality, through to the ‘finished’ artworks and how they inhabit the world. I will look at Gray’s visual analogies in order to see what this tells us about his working process and themes; and then move through a chronology of his exhibitions. Here, I will place Gray as an artist, in a wider context.

This all draws on writing by Gray himself, from his own exhibition interpretation and correspondence; as well as secondary sources who have written about his visual art work, including Cordelia Oliver, Susannah Thompson and Clare Henry, as well as critical anthologies such as ‘*The Arts of Alasdair Gray*’[[9]](#footnote-9) (1991) and ‘*Alasdair Gray Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography’* (2002)[[10]](#footnote-10) ; to key figures in commissioning and promoting his work - primarily (firstly his dealer, then custodian of the Alasdair Gray Archive) Sorcha Dallas and Elspeth King (former curator, The People’s Palace, Glasgow); to exhibition catalogues from other exhibitions including his work, such as *Campbell’s Soup* (2005) and *‘The Two Alasdairs’* (2008). This approach aims to aid an understanding of Gray’s position as an artist, over the decades, in the context of Glasgow, Scotland, UK and abroad.

To come to this view of Gray’s work, I have sat in different rooms, from the neutral reading room, top floor of University of Glasgow Special Collections, with its view over Glasgow, like a Gray topography for Hillhead, pouring over the handwritten jotters containing different drafts of ‘Lanark’ chapters; to the small room lined with archival boxes at CCA Glasgow, looking through folders relating to Gray’s and The Third Eye Centre’s correspondence, containing the hard thinking and shaping of an exhibition into existence; to the portal of the Alasdair Gray Archive, very much a room leading the temporary inhabitant down into the mansion of many apartments; and finally the convivial reading room of GSA Archives and Collections, where the different histories of Glasgow School of Art and the many students and staff who have passed through, jostle for attention.

As a curator, I have also considered Gray’s work in two very different gallery architectures at The Glasgow School of Art- firstly in the group exhibition *‘Live your questions now’*[[11]](#footnote-11) (2011) Mackintosh Museum, looking at the questions that an artist asks over the longevity of a career; to the white cube of the Reid Gallery, and the exhibition *‘Spheres of Influence II’,* (2014/2015), which sought to explore Gray’s art work through surrounding it with the works of artists who had influenced him, to that of artists Gray, in turn had influenced.

***Beginnings***

Let us join Gray and his time at The Glasgow School of Art through this photograph by Bill Tait, from the ‘Session 1955-56’ photograph album held at GSA Archives and Collections. In particular in this section, I wish to draw on materials from GSA Archives and Collections; in particular correspondence that Gray had with two GSA Directors- Douglas Percy Bliss (1900-1984) who experienced Gray as a student and graduate, and Sir Harry Jefferson Barnes (1915-1982) who took over from Bliss as GSA Director in 1964 and was called upon by Gray for support. This included writing references for grants and job positions. For anyone interested in this early period, Gray gives a fulsome account of his art school years in *‘A Life in Pictures’* [[12]](#footnote-12).

Bliss wrote in one such reference that he had first encountered Gray in 1952, when Gray had applied to join the Evening classes at The Glasgow School of Art: *‘As evidence of ability, he produced an illustrated History of the World, which impressed me enormously that I took for me, a most unusual step of digging him out of his job in a library, getting a grant and starting him on the Diploma Course*.’[[13]](#footnote-13)

Following two years on the General Introductory Course, Gray’s first choice had been the Painting Department, which in 1955 had just been taken over by William Armour (1903-1979), but Gray was refused. He wrote in a *‘Life in Pictures’*, ‘… *the teachers in the Painting Department did not want me. They liked pleasant pictures and none I had made were very beautiful*.’ [[14]](#footnote-14) Instead, he was successful in his second choice, the Mural Department, under Walter Pritchard (1905-1977). The course description from the 1956-57 prospectus[[15]](#footnote-15) of the final year of Gray’s diploma, describes the art of murals and the opportunity for students in the public realm as follows:

*‘Mural decoration tends to grow more and more popular, not only in the embellishment of public but also private buildings. Students of the subject carry out murals, wherever possible, on a large scale at schools, hospitals and other such places during long vacations between their third and fourth sessions.’*

Bliss was to write quite an extraordinary press release on Gray’s final student mural, for Scottish-U.S.S.R. Friendship Society. The mural had been completed over two years between course work, ill health and extra-curricular activity with fellow students:

*‘The painter of the murals at 8 Belmont Street Crescent is Alasdair Gray, a Glasgow visionary aged 22, who this week completes five years of studentship at The Glasgow School of Art… He kept coming back to these walls, adding, erasing, revising, strengthening his original shapes. Harsh, angular, alarming, his apocalyptic visions have grown more and more intense as the work proceeded. Yet these are not the conventional outpourings of an angry young man in the days of atomic power. It is rare to find a student so independent, one who owes less to others’. [[16]](#footnote-16)*

Bliss’s description of Gray’s working process as a student, to continuously return, revise, erase and add, is a way of working which Gray maintained, in his making, throughout his life. This particular document is also intriguing, as it again establishes Gray’s lifelong preoccupations, subject matter and style, at this early stage of art school. Bliss wrote:

*‘Ideas pour from his brush. He has a haunted mind, a brain swarming with phantasies. He broods over the Old Testament – indeed the prophet Jonah has been his King Charles’ Head for some years now. He broods over industrial Glasgow – its tenements, its cooling towers, its railways and cemeteries, and he turns his thoughts into decoration. When he puts down a line whether on paper, lithographic stone or on these walls, it is a forthright statement, emphatic, unhesitating and withal superb in style. It is rare indeed to find such capacity in one so young.*’ [[17]](#footnote-17)

The phrase ‘King Charles’ Head’ refers to a *‘recurrent or irrational obsession’[[18]](#footnote-18)*, attributed to Charles Dickens, ‘The Personal History of David Copperfield’ (1850), where a character has his head always filled at inopportune moments by the haunting image of King Charles’ dismembered head. We shall also return to this idea of ‘decoration’, and a certain snobbery around Gray not having his diploma in Drawing and Painting, later on, in an observation by Elspeth King.

 It should be noted, when reading through Bliss’s later references for Gray, in the decade that followed, such as in support of Gray’s maintenance grant application to the Arts Council, Bliss is still in no doubt that Gray was, *‘… one of most interesting students to have attended the School during the 24 years’,* of his directorship.

The handover of the GSA Directorship to Barnes was in 1964. It gives a second opinion of Gray’s abilities to work equally across different forms, in particular the balance between his writing and art. In a 1968 reference, Gray’s play ‘*The Fall of Kelvin Walker’* was on BBC television. Barnes stated:

*‘In my opinion he has too many rather unevenly balanced talents… Alasdair has undoubtably very considerable gifts. Perhaps because I am less able to assess them I still cannot help wondering whether his gifts as a writer and poet are not really maturing more than his gifts as a graphic artist.’[[19]](#footnote-19)*

Barnes concluded in another open reference: *‘His [Gray’s] whole outlook in life is extremely personal and individual and he does not fit into any convenient category’.[[20]](#footnote-20)*

These summaries from both Directors, seem as good a point as any to move onto looking at Gray’s working processes and the very materiality of his work.

***Some working processes***

In the University of Glasgow holdings, there are over 30 jotters and notebooks containing the first handwritten drafts of Lanark, which Gray began writing in 1952. *‘The End’*, Chapter 31 of ‘Lanark’ draft, is contained within a red Silverine brand exercise book with a blue binding[[21]](#footnote-21). Whereas with many of the jotters contain drawings dispersed through the drafts, to be seen in the current Hunterian exhibition *‘Alasdair Gray’s Lanark: A World Made on Paper’* (2022), the only drawings in *‘The End’*, are on the front and back cover. On the reverse-side, a drawing of a bearded man appears, with handwriting positioned to the side saying:

*‘Drummond left the room and returned with painting material and an unfinished canvas. The pleasant smell of the turps and linseed oil spread through the room.’*

Let this sensorial reference to the act of making, start this section and pervade this particular room as we consider the materiality and stuff of Gray’s processes of making.

***Colour and Gray’s choice of materials***

The plan chest in the Alasdair Gray Archive, allows us, when the first two drawers are opened, to see the tubes of oils and acrylic paint in all their glory. The first thing which struck me was their selection of colours -not entirely usual in the range of a painter’s palette. A purist painter would be mixing a brown and a blue to achieve black, such as Burnt Umber and Ultramarine Blue. Lamp black, as we see in the drawer, is often dissuaded from a student’s palette. However, more unusual is the predominance of secondary colours in Gray’s choice – permanent green light, chrome green hue, emerald green for example in the oils alone. Deep Violet and Silk Purple in the acrylics are another example. Dallas Gray attributes this to the heightened colour that Gray would have experienced as a child in the colour illustrations of the books he poured through, in Riddrie Library such as the Harmsworth Encyclopeadia.

Gray also worked with Indian ink, gouache, pen, pencil, watercolour, crayon and ballpoint; his choice of material ultimately dictated by cost. Yet he used these cheaper materials to his advantage. Brown parcel paper, the economical paper of choice, was left blank so it became the register for skin. In the artwork notes in the catalogue for *Retrospective Exhibition*, he notes the use of paper as a skin tone and also, the evolution of addition of colour itself to the line drawings:

*‘In portraits, for a long time, I feared to use colour at all and kept to line and wash: but about 1967, when drawing women, I began bringing colour as near them as I dared. Leaving their skin the colour of paper, I would add strong red to a jersey, or green to a chair; or invent a flowery wallpaper background.’[[22]](#footnote-22)*

In the *‘Sixty Years of Print’* exhibition catalogue (The Hidden Lane Gallery, 2015), Gray goes on to speak about about the use of paper as skin, in the screenprint ‘*Julie’* (1985), which, *‘… is printed black with a printed white background. Her skin is therefore the colour of the original paper as will become more evident with the passage of time’*. [[23]](#footnote-23) The directness of how Gray uses colour on the page, is often in a flat expanse, without tone, and I would argue it echoes his use of colour in written descriptions. Here follows a description of Rima:

‘*Lanark stepped into the hall before turning to him. The Provost said ‘You came here with a girl . She had black hair and wore a black sweater and her skirt was …. I forget the colour’. ‘Black’, said Lanark.* [[24]](#footnote-24)

Gray has just as emphatic a use of colour in his visual work. Clare Henry noted in her review of his 1981 exhibition in The Third Eye Centre’s Bar, that:

*‘His art has been essentially graphic or linear. Even his oil paintings are hard edged and he is worried about the precision of the clouds in his Glasgow synagogue mural since it’s been repainted. However, he's been trying to change himself into a different kind of artist and is working towards a 'volume in paint'. A recent nude on red sheet is, he feels, going in the right direction.*

The painting Henry refers to, is likely ‘*Janet on Red Felt’*, (1980), where the outline of the prone figure has been softened to more of an earthy red line, and both the tone of the body and red blanket has been introduced through the changing tonal range of the paint itself. However, this work stands as an anomaly with Gray’s favoured approach for block colour, with his confident line introducing form and indicating movement of surface, through cross hatching, and pattern.

In these three works, we see Gray’s confident line, and use of pattern, delineating the form of the three sitters. In the drawing, *Carole Gibbons*,(1959) the lines of the patchwork squares on her top, curve over the arm and fold over under the roll of the bottom of the jumper. The foreshortened plane of the thigh and the skirt is dealt with, with some swift upward shading, whilst the narrow rib of the tights, with their slight squiggle, dictates the curve of the knee. Gray simply describes the boots by staking out the sewn lines of leather, observing where the boot leather has bunched up at the ankles through wear. There is so much to take in, in this drawing, in the detail of the frill around the cushion, the abstract leaf pattern of the chair fabric itself, showing where the material is studded to the frame. In the second work, *Inge Sleeping*, from 5 years later, (1964), Gray is even more assured in a yet more economical line, utilising the vertical stripe on the bodice to show different planes of the rib cage moving into stomach. Inge’s left arm rests on a blank area of the paper – however, the draughtsmanship of the foreshortened arm convinces the viewer that the arm does indeed rest rather than float. The graphic lines of the dress are offset by the large, soft curve of hair coming up to meet the side of Inge’s face. The figure drawing of *Mrs Nanni*, from 1967, retains pattern as an important component, in the undulations of the stripe of the mat and the sweet, crosses of the slip on sandals. However here, Gray brings in blocking. The white in the background, which we saw last in ‘*Julie’*, forces the figure of Mrs Nanni forward. The intense black blocking of the stockings, creating essentially a void on the page, is counterbalanced by the delicate frill of the garter, and the gentle way he has rendered her toes in the sandals.

**Layering, flipping, copying**

Gray’s studio was always at home. Before Marchmont Terrace, and Morag McAlpine, Gray had always lived and worked in one room.[[25]](#footnote-25) Let’s glimpse into this photograph by German photographer Renate von Mangoldt, past Gray himself to the easel on the left. There are several sheets of paper layered on the easel. And there it is, the insouciant cross of the leg in the top sheet, unmistakably the ‘*girl met at party circa 1973*’, who became titled as ‘*Anita’* in the later screenprint, who even later would be on the front cover of Scottish literary Magazine *Chapman 46*,[[26]](#footnote-26) monochrome save for an electric blue top, to return to a resplendent line drawing of zips, leather fishnet tights and lace glove, for Gray’s collaboration in 2006 with Lucy McKenzie, for the vinyl label *Decemberism*. We can see from her stare, Anita very much dresses for herself. To return to the easel, this is the animator’s trick, to have several thin layers overlapping, in order to trace the same figures multiple times, but have the ability to adjust an element.

In these two photographs by Alan Dimmick, we see Gray working on a fashioned lightbox, allowing him to position and trace in the head in the background. Gray, from his screen-printing knowledge and preparing illustrations for books, will have been able to isolate figures, and areas in this way, to build the picture he was after in several layers. When looking through the sketches and drawings, and the cut outs, we can see Gray used these methods to quickly illustrate what configuration worked best in the image.

***Danielle as Prometheus***

For example, **Prometheus** originates from a Life Drawing. Gray speaks of the initial drawing in *‘Life In Pictures’*, [[27]](#footnote-27) where he describes the model, Danielle, lying on the floor, ‘*one leg on the seat of a chair, the other leaning against its back. Turned upside down, she appeared (although a small person), like a mighty goddess springing forward.’* As we see from the original life drawings, which became the drawings for ‘*Prometheus’* (1995, Tag Theatre Company poster; and 2014 screenprint), there is a further re-orientation of the page. The drawings in the plan chest at Alasdair Gray Archive, show the figure holding hair in the right hand, but as the drawing is on thin newsprint, with the line shining through in reverse, the final image of Prometheus now has flipped in orientation, with the hair held in the right hand.

***Working drawings***

Works on paper in the plan chest at Alasdair Gray Archive are intriguing, as when placed in a series like this, they are very much working drawings. The first template of Kate Clydesdale, when placed isolated on a blank sheet of paper, shows her damaged by time, like a weathered Greek statue. However, she, like her husband Ronnie Clydesdale, are templates for Gray to plot up the final scheme. Here we see colourways for their final configuration for their part of the mural at the Ubiquitous Chip.

Each element of the whole, with Gray, is considered. The cut out also becomes a device that will join and become part of the totality of a drawing on a book page in ‘*Design for Corner of Lanark*, 1st edition (1969). Here we also see in Gray’s corrections, his love of using Tippex and also white address labels, to cover errors and re-work. The three figures are reversed for the subsequent book cover, and re-orientate in position for the later screenprint ‘*Woundscape*’ (2013).

***Visual themes***

In this section I would like to select some visual themes within Gray’s work, in particular, the body as architecture, interiority, a sense of place and duality.

***The heads***

We return to the metaphor of the head, that I began this paper with, tracking the different guises it appears in throughout Gray’s work. The brain as a font of knowledge, lies within the head resting in the open book, in the foreground of ‘*Poor Things’* (1992) cover. Inspired by William Blake illustrations, Gray places the baby within the skull (Blake himself had the cherub hatching from an egg). Morag McAlpine props herself up on the teeth of a skull. In the last image on this slide, an illustration from the plan chest in Alasdair Gray archive, a city complete with the tree of knowledge at its centre, sprouts out of the bespectacled man’s head. This particular illustration was for the book cover of *‘A Sense of Something Strange: Investigations into the Paranormal’* by Archie E. Roy (1990).

***The body as architecture***

Whereas earlier in the paper, I highlighted that many of Gray’s portraits in domestic settings offer routes through windows into other worlds; we see in other examples of Gray’s work a concurrent kaleidoscopic view of looking inwards. The earliest example of this can be seen if we return to Gray’s ‘King Charles’ Head’ – Jonah- where we see a pre-art school work, ‘*Jonah in the fish’s belly’* (1951). In later works, such as ‘*Old Negatives’* cover design, of which the screenprint ‘*Inside’* derives from, the body is seen as architecture. The male houses a woman, his arms shown as city walls. In the second screenprint, from the series ‘*The Soul’s Proper Lonlieness’*, Gray casts a woman in ‘*Corruption’*, with Adam and Eve in her belly. There is a tension in the allegories provided in these three images. The whale swallows Jonah as a punishment, but shelters him until Jonah will obey God; the flags declare ‘command’ and ‘obey’, yet the poem concludes that the sheltered woman has ‘wounds not worth protecting’; and it is an archetypal hag who is pregnant with Adam and Eve.

***We will all go down into the streets of water***

The Alasdair Gray Archive holds ‘Ledger 3’ (1958). Gray found the ledger in a skip and worked into it as a sketchbook. Gray still holds the ability to surprise, and for me, and no doubt others who peruse its pages, his photographs of Glasgow streets are a real revelation, where the tenements are reflected really oddly in the water. I’d like us to look at the photograph I have zoomed in on. The flooded street creates an eerie mirror image, of the tenement as Narcissus. If we look at the detritus, the cones, the strips of wood and the exterior of a wooden crate, they appear to pierce the surface of the photograph and appear quite futuristic. It is only on closer inspection we can see that Gray has turned around the image, with the reflection now appearing as the upper world, and reality the lower. The photographs from the ledger potentially offer new insight into Gray’s later work, ‘*We will all go down into the streets of water’* (2008 version). Instead of the tenements we have the mirrored image of the man and woman. I propose that this memory of a Glasgow street, both influenced the title for this screenprint- *'We will all go into the streets of water'* – and also in the uncanny dismembering of the reflected bodies.

***Industrial mechanical: Faust in his Study***

The original ‘*Faust in his Study’* was painted by Rembrandt circa 1652. It shows a scholar transfixed by an orb of light that holds a secret code. In Gray’s version, all the knowledge of life and experience teems through this incredibly detailed work, intertwining symbols of death, love and human endeavour alongside what lies beyond our world. What struck me with revisiting this work, after seeing Ledger 3, were Gray’s drawings of machinery, of an industrial Glasgow. Did they inspire the mechanical cogs that divide and order the worlds in ‘*Faust and his Study’*.

***City Recorder***

City Recorder is the standalone series in Gray’s visual output, admirably demonstrating that Gray was a true chronicler of people and place. As Artist-Recorder, Gray captured Glasgow and its people over 32 portraits, over the summer of 1977. For Elspeth King, the commissioner when curator at The People’s Palace, Glasgow, the significance and legacy of this work lies in the fact that ‘*the paintings are about the recognition and survival of Glasgow culture.’* She goes on to recount:

*‘The opportunity to employ Alasdair came about through the new Job Creation scheme promoted by those working on the Glasgow Eastern Renewal Scheme in 1977. The suggestion of getting Alasdair Gray to do paintings of contemporary Glaswegians came not from me, as I did not know his work, but from my partner Michael Donnelly[[28]](#footnote-28), who had seen Alasdair’s paintings in the legal office of Glasgow solicitor Keith Bovey, and at the new Collins Exhibition Gallery run by the University of Strathclyde.’*

Gray in ‘Life in Pictures’ outlined that in making a record of contemporary Glasgow, *‘We agreed I would paint the following: 1) Streets about to be changed or demolished 2)Folk in politics and the arts 3) Private members of the general public 4) Interiors of work places and the workers*.’ [[29]](#footnote-29)

Gray’s process for the works was to sit and sketch in pen and ink, then return to the People’s Palace store, ‘*to paste them onto boards and colour them as much as necess*ary’, predominantly using mixed media of watercolour and acrylic on paper. King recalls that some of her wider colleagues viewed Gray as *‘anti-establishment’* and ‘… *not a ‘real artist’; ‘real’ artists worked with oil on canvas; works in Cryla [a brand of acrylic paint] were not worthy of the collections’*. [[30]](#footnote-30) How fortunate Glasgow is that King stood her ground, that Gray completed this magnus opus over a short period of four months before unexpectedly taking on a new role as writer in residence at University of Glasgow; and that these works were the forerunners of a new kind of contemporary work being accessed into collections. There are intriguingly some of Gray’s collages that are part of the work – *Reo Stakis*, Hotelier (1977) is surrounded by brochures of his hotel empire; Inspector Derek O’Neil, by photographs of Tobago Street Police Station; and *Frances Gordon: Glasgow Teenager*, the temporary secretary King employed on the same scheme, surrounded by ephemera from concerts that she kept in her handbag.

In ‘*Old Men in Love’*, in the ‘*Gadfly’* chapter, Gray quotes from Dickens’ *’Barnaby Rudge’*, to say:

*Chroniclers are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go through keyholes, to ride upon the wind, to overcome, in their soarings up and down, all obstacles of distance, time and place’.[[31]](#footnote-31)*

Gray moves through offices including the mild administrational chaos of Tom McGrath in the Third Eye Centre; the BBC News Gallery, with its multiple eyes out onto different worlds in the bank of tvs; the Old Broomielaw Newspaper building, peopled almost entirely by men ruled by a shirt and tie code; to Sweeney Todd hairdressing salon, with its young hairdressers far more dressing to the beat of popular culture. Intriguingly, in terms of ‘*folk in politics*’, Gray selects to represent people from all the parties, including the pin striped Teddy Taylor Conservative MP, as well as the upcoming Margo Macdonald, who sports the yellow rosette on her trench coat of the Scottish Nationalists. Again, in terms of religion, Gray took an ecumenical approach with portraits of Scottish Protestant preacher Jack Glass and Roman Catholic Priest Canon Collins. Gray truly ‘*soared up and down’*, creating a wide church in this series.

***Changing Glasgow; Changing things***

Just as Gray captured the changing fabric of the east end of Glasgow in *City Recorder*, demolished through ‘planners’ blight’[[32]](#footnote-32), Glasgow continued to alter around Gray as he returned to a far slower process of working on his art works. In his description of *‘North Glasgow Landscape’* (1964-7)[[33]](#footnote-33), from the *Retrospective Exhibition* catalogue, he wrote:

*‘Day has come at last, but the sky is oppressed by far too solid clouds. If I finish this picture the sky will be fresh and bright. The tenement is knocked down now and the foreground and middle-distance is half covered by the ringroads and multistoreys. That doesn’t matter, I have sketches to work from’.*

In the painting note for **Cowcaddens Landscape** (oil on hardboard) a work that took Gray a decade to complete, from 1953-1963, he wrote: *‘This is my first successful big landscape. The surface is* ***ridged with underpainting****, some detail is clumsy, but I think it is a harmonious picture of a real place: Phoenix Park Terrace, Cowcaddens, with the Monkland Canal uphill to the left and Garscube Road downhill on the right. Sketches for this painting were begun in the first year at art school so the view shows the place as it looked in the teddy-boy era. When I finished it in 1963 the asphalt and air raid shelters of the little park on the left had been changed for glass plots lined with brick. Now most of the place is covered by motorway.’* [[34]](#footnote-34)

Th ridges of underpainting echo the barely perceptible traces of a previous Glasgow in its fast disappearing topography. Cowcaddens Landscape is one of Gray’s iconic works, featuring as the cover image of the book ‘*Noise and Smoky Breath’*, an illustrated anthology of Glasgow poems 1900-1983 –a Third Eye Centreproject from 1983.

***Duality***

As we have seen, Gray often returned to making portraits of couples within his work. In thiscover design for the novel ***‘A Working Mother’*** by Agnes Owens, (1994), this is not a straight forward portrait as it expresses a psychological aspect with the smoke from the cigarette separating the couple. The dissolution of another couple is showed by two frames on the right.

As we move to the biro portrait, ‘*Two Views of Inga’*, (1961) we see Gray’s device of showing the same person but in different poses and sometimes different moods, on the same page. Inga looks towards him, and looks away. I really love these double portraits. The acknowledgement of the duality on the page appears to show that any person is not a fixed identity.

In the second work, the tinted ink drawing, ‘*Two Views of Katy Mitchell’*, (1980), Gray writes in the ‘*5 Scottish Artists Retrospective’* catalogue notes, ‘*While trying to improve a work Gray sometimes makes two of it and doesn’t know which to prefer’*. The title of the work appears slightly differently as ‘*Katy Mitchell, Twice’*.

***The Self Portrait***

Here, the double portrait is carried through into the self-portrait. ‘In media res’, Latin for ‘in the midst of things’, refers to a literary device of plunging into the middle of a narrative or plot. If we extend out the title, ‘Author of Lanark in Media Res’, we get the perfect circular economy of the drawing referencing the writing, which deliberately places the Books out of sequence. In the second, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man (Seven Days), 2004, the title echoes Rembrandt’s self-portrait as an old man. What is Gray trying to capture here? Is it recording a likeness at a particular stage of life? This is a double portrait, illustrating him drawing himself. Perhaps it represents his need to keep on making work and the desire to never finish. Gray’s written description of a younger 52 year old self, in ‘Self Portrait’, 10.30pm, Monday the 18th May 1987, does not shy away from the aging process: ‘According to the scales in the lavatory I weigh 13 stones and 7 pounds in my socks, semmit, underpants, bathrobe, national health spectacles and false upper teeth: from all of which a doctor will deduce I am not in the best of health.’ [[35]](#footnote-35)

***Is Scotland a Possible Nation?***

In concluding this section on some visual themes, it would be a misnomer not to mention the political message within Gray’s work. The White Dog, who operates out with polite society in the short story ‘*The Comedy of the White Dog*’, becomes the symbol for corporate greed, in the print ‘Is Scotland a Possible Nation?’. Its stumpy white tail splits the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ vote. The year that the Dalmarnock Power Station was being closed by the South of Scotland Electricity Board, 1977, is the year and the place that ‘*The dear green place’* author Archie Hind chooses to be portrayed in front of it for the ‘*City Recorder’* series.

**Exhibitions**

What further information can we glean about Gray as an artist and his artwork from the exhibitions he took part in?

As we have seen elsewhere in this paper, there was often a duality at play with Gray. For example, in his artist’s biography for the exhibition ‘*Men and Women’* at Regent Gallery, Glasgow, (year unknown), he wrote in the third person*: ‘Most Glasgow painters think he is basically a writer. Many writing friends feel his real talent lies in Art.’*[[36]](#footnote-36) There is evidence that Gray sometimes took advantage of this dichotomy, holding an exhibition aligned with a book launch. In 1981, Clare Henry reviewed Gray’s small exhibition in the Third Eye Centre Bar, which heralded ‘*Lanark’*, writing, ‘*The elaborate allegorical title pages and illustrations of Lanark, even the book jacket itself, were designed by Gray and his art is an important side of his life. An exhibition of this work is hidden away in the bar of the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow but is well worth the hassle*.’[[37]](#footnote-37) Three years later, Henry again reviewed another solo exhibition of his work at ‘Corners’ Gallery[[38]](#footnote-38), Gibson Street, Glasgow, remarking, *‘… this opening show of drawings, prints and oils by Alasdair Gray coincides with the launch of his new book 'Janine', which promises to be an even bigger success than Lanark*.’

Why, however, was Gray’s artwork not commanding larger platforms when his books were achieving relative early success? In this section, I will endeavour to answer this question by looking at two distinct periods in his artist career: from the early sixties through to the mid Noughties; then mid-Noughties through to his death in 2019. I will speak about two key shows from the seventies and one from the eighties. I shall then look at some curatorial approaches to his work following a resurgence in interest, from the mid-noughties to present day.

The ‘artworld’ will enter into this discussion and it is a nebulous phrase at best, particularly monoglot in considering the pluri-verse of Gray. For the earlier period I will use Gray’s categorizations gleaned from his writing, where the art world comprised of galleries (the administrators and managers), museums, dealers, collectors and the city of Glasgow. For the later period, these players still define the artworld, however it was a wider national and international network of interested parties.

***The 60s – mid Noughties***

Gray established loyal, long-term professional supporters of his art work over this period, such as Elspeth King when she was Curator at the People’s Palace, Glasgow, (1974-1990) with the City Recorder series[[39]](#footnote-39); and loyal collectors of his work like Angela Mullane. Of upmost importance, more of Gray’s works hung in domestic rooms rather than the rareified gallery wall. His long association with Glasgow Print Studio also began. However, in terms of public institutions, and wider recognition as an artist, whilst there were key important commissions and exhibitions, Gray felt his art work was overlooked – the strange equivalent of not being able to enter the Elite Café- which in turn meant he was not in a position to sustain a living from either art nor writing alone.

***Visibility, the wider context***

Two key exhibitions in the seventies, *Retrospective Exhibition* (Collins Gallery, University of Strathclyde, 1974) and ‘*The Continuous Glasgow: New and Old Paintings of Glasgow People and Places’* (People’s Place, Glasgow, 1978) should have, on the face of it, increased Alasdair Gray’s visibility as an artist. However, in Glasgow’s museums, Elspeth King outlines the tide set by the arbiters of taste was against living artists, with it being the case that *‘the only artists of any value were dead artists’[[40]](#footnote-40)*. This Glasgow position was not just particular to this decade. Bet Low in the sixties had remarked on ‘*mausoleum-like institutions’* with no gallery in *‘Glasgow and the West of Scotland willing to market the work of modern painters*.’[[41]](#footnote-41) Gray in his essay ‘*Portrait of a Painter*’[[42]](#footnote-42) (1984), echoed this position, saying the lack of galleries and public to buy in Scotland had led to such contemporary artists being overlooked*: ‘Where Angus Neil, Pierre Lavalle, Tom McDonald, Bet Low and Carole Gibbons matured their styles, hardly anyone noticed’*. [[43]](#footnote-43) In the same essay, he put this scarcity down to Glasgow’s fall from its heyday of industry and shipping. He also noted that the city had been gifted Burrell’s collection, so all cultural funding was being diverted into housing and staffing it. King, reflecting on her then position of Curator at The People’s Palace, goes further to place this institutional attitude in the wider context of ‘*a time when the Glasgow government had no particular interest in Glasgow’s own culture’*. A double whammy for a living artist, in Gray’s case albeit white and male, making work about Glasgow.

***Retrospective Exhibition, Collins Exhibition Hall***

Gray’s 1974 ‘*Retrospective Exhibition’* at Collins Exhibition Hall (latterly Collins Gallery, Strathclyde University, 1973-2012), happened when he was forty, with Glasgow’s Lord Provost Bill Gray, noted in the catalogue introduction, as having opened the exhibition. The Collins had only opened a year earlier. Gray described in the catalogue’s foreword how he and Stephen Elson, the venue’s curator, had decided to take a chronological approach *‘… so that the show would present not a hoard of items, but a development.’* If we think back to the ‘mansion of many apartments’, which is a metaphor for the scale of a human life, Gray took this opportunity of a retrospective to look at his lifetime in its entirety. This *Retrospective* showed artwork from his schooldays, alongside student work from Glasgow School of Art through to his work as a mature artist. The retrospective as an exhibition type, if it were to be given a value, is akin to a medal bestowed upon an artist who has reached a certain prominence in their field. It is also an orderly exhibition-making device, looking at periods of work, logically building a picture of an artist’s practice. It is highly unusual to include work from the time before being a professional artist. In art terms, this would be gauche to present ‘lesser’ work; work that leads away from the main body of work or detracts and endangers the quality. The retrospective is about the edit and ultimately, order. However, the retrospective as a device in Gray’s hands, meant he bent it into the autobiographical ordering - boy, young adult, man. However, we should not get too comfortable in that order. Gray is there in the catalogue foreword to trip the reader up. In amongst citing his influences as William Blake (1757-1827), Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) and Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), Gray refers to Jimson, ‘*the greatest of the modern English painters… his autobiography showed a way of seeing and handling the world which I took very seriously’*. Here, as is often present in both Gray’s written and visual work, reality and fiction are side by side. Jimson is Gulley Jimson, a fictional artist in *‘The Horse’s Mouth’* (1944) by Joyce Cary. Jimson, overlooked by the establishment and an artist in penury, is forced to steal materials as he cannot help but paint. Jimson also cites Blake as the ‘greatest artist who ever lived’. [[44]](#footnote-44) Gray’s *Retrospective Exhibition* as I alluded to earlier, prompted Donnelly’s recommendation to King, which led to his next significant series of work.

***The Continuous Glasgow Show***

Gray’s next solo exhibition ‘*The Continuous Glasgow Show: New and Old Paintings of Glasgow People and Places*’ took place in 1978 at the People’s Palace, and presented his work from the Artist-Recorder series.

The *‘New and Old Paintings*’ reference, comes from the means by which King worked out she would have to employ to get Gray in the position. King knew it would be difficult in her workplace explaining why there was a *‘living artist on the staff’*. In the end, *‘…we said he was cataloguing the historic collection with a view to updating it. In reality, he was out every day making sketches and portraits, and making suitable back grounds so that every subject would be set in a recognisable cityscape of their choosing.’*

The *‘Old Paintings’* of the exhibition title was not as numerous as a perhaps a true cataloguer of a historic collection might have presented. However, Gray’s portrait of *‘Jimmy Reid and Family’* was based on the Glassford Family portrait by Archibald McLauchlan, c 1767. King describes the juxtaposition beautifully:

*‘Both families are depicted with their living room windows, the Reids looking out of their council house window in Clydebank; the Glassfords in front of their mansion window with a deer park behind them while the mirror reflects a view of the Trongate*.’ [[45]](#footnote-45) Gray’s contrast of both families speaks to class, and the entitlement of who owns Glasgow. I should note that present day, the Glassford portrait, in terms of Glassford being a tobacco merchant and enslaver has been the focus of new work undertaken by the ‘*Legacies of Slavery in Glasgow Museums and Collections’*.[[46]](#footnote-46) The ‘Continuous Glasgow’, of the title is thought provoking. Does it refer to the continuing interest of both historical and contemporary artists in making Glasgow and its people their subject matter? Or a snider allusion to the continuous alterations by town planners to Glasgow’s fabric? ’Continuous’ sits well as a description of Gray’s visual art practice, namely in his return to revisit his older works in order to revise or restage.

***Print Studio Press***

In the late seventies, another notable long association began for Gray, this time with Glasgow Print Studio. This link was made through its previous director Calum McKenzie (1944-2012)[[47]](#footnote-47), whose friendships with writers and poets including Liz Lochhead, James Kelman, Tom Leonard (1944-2018) and Gray, had led to McKenzie offering the studio as a meeting place. The group as a writing collective began to publish a small number of works under the imprint *‘Print Studio Press’*, including Gray’s ‘*The Comedy of the White Dog’* in 1979. McKenzie designed the cover. Glasgow Print Studio worked with Gray to publish ‘*a suite of prints, Lanark, to coincide with the publishing of his novel in 1981*’.[[48]](#footnote-48)Gray also exhibited in smaller shows with artist peers, including, from undated posters residing in Alasdair Gray Archive, *‘Man and Woman’*, at Regent Gallery, Glasgow.

***‘I’m afraid we’re too late, they’re dead’: 5 Scottish Artists Retrospective Show***

This particular group exhibition, held in 1986 in MacLellan Galleries, is an important one for showing the collaborative way that Gray wished to exhibit with and promote the work of his peers – on this occasion, Carole Gibbons, Alasdair Taylor, John Connolly and Alan Fletcher. The genesis of the exhibition had had numerous setbacks, with timing, venue and funding. It had originally started out as the promise of a solo retrospective for Gray at The Third Eye Centre, with a hope to tour. Gray wrote in ‘*A Life in Pictures’*, *‘… few arts administrators in Scotland, especially the Scottish West, thought local artists deserved public exhibitions unless dealers were selling them in London. Chris Carrel thought I might be an exception to the rule*.’ [[49]](#footnote-49) The Archive at CCA Glasgow contains all the correspondence on the exhibition, including Third Eye Centre’s approach to other venues. On the biography information they sent out, they noted, *‘… outside Glasgow his writing has been most noticed… however Third Eye wishes to present him as an artist.’* Over 40 galleries were contacted by letter. Almost all sent stock answers, of the ‘*programmed too far in advance’* variety.

Over this period Gray had recommended Alasdair Taylor’s work to The Third Eye, with Taylor believing from studio visits that a solo exhibition was a distinct possibility. When it became apparent this was not the case, Gray then developed the idea for a concurrent exhibition between The Third Eye Centre and Maclellan Galleries, with the Maclellan showing the work of Taylor, Connolly, Fletcher and Gibbons. In correspondence (dated 14.5.85) with Carrel, Gray had hoped that his profile as a writer, gained by the publishing of Lanark would be key in getting funding:

*‘The fact is I am an interesting second-rate painter whose work – by a fluke of publicity- may be useful in drawing attention to some first rate painters who have been largely ignored by a society which pays managers and advertisers steady wages and keeps producers and makers of things hanging on by their fingernails – or else kicks them off.’*

Gray’s funding application to the Scottish Arts Council was refused. With further setbacks of The Third Eye Centre unable to publish a catalogue covering both shows [[50]](#footnote-50) , by March 1986, correspondence shows Gray letting Carrell know that the entire exhibition would be in MacLellan Galleries.

The catalogue is both a triumph of representing the five artists work, as well as capturing, through its self-irony, a diy gesture of bestowing themselves retrospectives. ‘*I’m afraid we’re too late, they’re dead’*, is the epitaph illustration, by Alan Fletcher (1930-1958) is on the back cover. In the exhibition catalogue, under the headline ‘*Organiser Tells Everything; Astonishing News’*, Gray, now in his fifties, alluded to his group of peers as being overlooked as a new generation of artists from Glasgow School of Art had come along:

*‘Last year the British publicity machines broadcast a news and astonishing fact: four recent graduates of Glasgow School of Art are making enough money from the sale of their paintings to live by painting alone. Their work was admired by a Glasgow Art School director with the enthusiasm, knowledge and contacts to promote it in New York and therefore also in London, and thus in Scotland too. So painting in Glasgow is now in the news: news flowing through catalogues, television, documentaries, Edinburgh literary magazines, English quality papers and the Glasgow Herald’.*

The *‘Glasgow Pups’* as Gray refers to them in the same catalogue introduction were the New Glasgow Boys – Stephen Campbell (1953-2007), Peter Howson, Ken Currie and Adrian Wiszniewski. One can feel the ironic injustice in Gray’s writing. In marked contrast to their *‘ability to live by painting alone’* and be lauded by the international art world, Gray, in the end, financed venue hire and catalogue costs alone, to a scale of being in significant debt.

***2005-present day***

We pivot into the second period, of the mid noughties, where Susannah Thompson pinpointed *‘a resurgence’* of interest in Gray’s visual work. An example of this would be Neil Mullholland who placed Gray’s work in the wider context of a younger generation of artists, including Rabiya Choudhury and Lucy Stein, in the group exhibition *‘Campbell’s soup’* (2005), evolving around the themes of Steven Campbell and other artists drawn to ‘*labyrinthine narratives’*[[51]](#footnote-51). Mulholland in this gesture, curatorially reconciles and re-aligns Campbell and Gray. Gráinne Rice, curator of ‘*The Two Alasdairs’* (Mackintosh Gallery, GSA, 2008), a two-person exhibition of Alasdair Taylor and Alasdair Gray, wrote in the catalogue essay that the spotlight was back on Gray due to a national institutional ‘*revival in interest in the 1950s’ generation of artists trained at Glasgow School of Art’*[[52]](#footnote-52).

Another major factor of this later period was Gray finding a gallery and dealer in Sorcha Dallas. She saw that a re-framing and repositioning of his visual work would be key, as a way to increase Gray’s visibility as an artist in the contemporary visual artworld. Dallas saw that Gray’s work did not ‘*look like historical objects’*, when seen with work by a younger generation of artists on her roster, such as Kate Davis and Henry Coombes. Dallas also showed Gray’s work in art fairs which brought his work to more prominence amongst a wider contemporary network of national and international arts professionals. Dallas Gray was also, in Gray’s lifetime, by devising The Alasdair Gray Season, to celebrate Gray’s 80th birthday, curating a significant retrospective of his work, *‘From the Personal to the Universal’*, at Kelvingrove. This was the museum he had attended Saturday drawing classes at, as a child. It should also be acknowledged that this later period has also been supported by a scholarly championing of his art work as part of a consideration, rather than separate to, his writings, by the lifeforces that are Rodge Glass, Sorcha Dallas and Alan Riach.

***Now and Then***

Dallas saw the contemporary relevance of Gray’s artwork, understanding that a key role for her would be the equivalent editor working with him in exhibitions, as Stephanie Wolfe-Murray, for example at Canongate, was for his literary work. *‘Now and Then’*, for Glasgow International Festival of Art and Design in 2008 was the first solo exhibition of Gray’s work at her gallery.[[53]](#footnote-53) *Now and Then* brought together a series of previously unseen works from 1972. Gray had been invited to create a series of images that would be part of a BBC short film by Malcolm Hossick, led by the female protagonist’s interior life, with her memories of a doomed relationship. Liz Lochhead created the script, comprising of a series of poems. If we think back to Gray’s earlier exhibitions such as ‘*Retrospective Exhibition’* involving his works from school days, art school and as a professional artist, it is a feat, and indicative of the trust between Gray and Dallas, that this first solo exhibition would be a concise gathering of one body of work. All of the artworks were owned by separate individuals, so preparation involved borrowing back the works, and re-framing, to present as a ‘whole’. Dallas Gray also wanted to ensure the collaborative nature of *‘Now and Then’* was forefronted, with an important element of including Lochhead’s original poems in the exhibition and catalogue.

**‘*The Two Alasdairs’***

*The Two Alasdairs*, Alasdair Taylor and Alasdair Gray, is a key exhibition again to show the importance of Gray’s peers. If we think back to correspondence in The Third Eye Centre archive, it revives and delivers on Gray’s unfulfilled wish from that period, to be in a two-person exhibition with Taylor. Gráinne Rice, the curator, fore-fronted Gray’s landscape work alongside his better-known works relating to Glasgow. We can glimpse that aswell as ‘*Cowcaddens in the fifties’*, (1964) re-appearing in the Mackintosh Museum, she selected ‘*The Rock (Arran)’* (1967), a fantastic work which shows Gray’s ability at times to transform the figurative into the abstract. The rock becomes this amorphous void in the centre of the painting, its scale a trick, as rather than a rock it could be the bay.

**‘*The British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet’***

Clare Henry’s papers in GSA Archives and Collections, includes her review of the British Art Show first coming to Glasgow in 1990, European City of Culture, where it re-inaugurated a restored MacLellan Galleries and was opened by the Queen. Henry outlined that the 1990 British Art Show, funded by Arts Council in London, with a budget of over £/4 million, ‘*focussed on 42 very young, untried, unknown artists, [and] took a narrow, cold minimal view’*, to be ‘*condemned by critics and public alike’*. Her damning words were, ‘but it was not a Glasgow show’, nor representative of the visual arts in Britain. It did not include Gray’s work. Thankfully, ‘The British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet’ (2010/11) redressed that balance. Curated by Tom Morton and Lisa Le Feuvre, significantly, whilst only six of Gray’s works, they introduced key themes in Gray’s work, in particular autobiography and the portrait. The exhibition toured from London Hayward, to Nottingham Contemporary and Glasgow Tramway.

***Gray Stuff***

In acknowledgment of Gray’s art work moving, as we have seen, across space and form, *‘Gray Stuff’* in Talbot Rice Gallery in 2010, was a comprehensive focus on Gray’s working processes, in particular examining his book covers and posters.

***Collections***

Whilst *City Recorder* commission for People’s Palace lies with Glasgow Museums collections, his work is also now in the Arts Council Collection. Mark Sladen curated Gray’s work in the group exhibition *POOR.OLD.TIRED.HORSE* (2009) at ICA, London, an exhibition exploring artists from the 1960s and 70s’who combined image and text. He had found his own way to Gray’s art work through the illustrations in Gray’s literature. Sladen showed Gray’s illustrations of Lanark, as well as a ‘*set of illuminated versions of his own poems’*[[54]](#footnote-54), including the monochrome *‘We will go into the streets of water*’ (1965) in a room alongside Robert Smithson (1938-1973), David Hockney and Philippe Guston (1913-1980). Of particular resonance, is, through Sladen’s selection of early figurative allegorical drawings by Smithson, a shared interest in William Blake as a ‘painter-poet’[[55]](#footnote-55). Sladen, working as a guest selector for the Arts Council Collection, was to recommend the acquisition of two of Grays works, *‘Juliet in Red Trousers’* (1976) and *‘Marion Oag and the Birth of the Northern Venus’* (1978).

***Influences and who he in turn influenced***

As part of Alasdair Gray Season in 2014 a two-hander between GOMA and GSA, explored different approaches to Gray’s influences. Katie Bruce at GOMA included works from Glasgow Museum’s collection including William Blake. Glasgow Museums lent two Aubrey Beardsley works to the Reid Gallery exhibition – ‘*Murders in the Rue Morgue*’ (1895) and ‘The Masque of the Red Death’, (1894-1895), allowing a further exploration of a key influence on Gray, in particular the use of the black line.

Two other connections I would like to draw out, in an exhibition that also contained the ‘Glasgow Heads’ of Peter Howson’s, and Denis Tegetmeir’s work relating to his experience of First World War, are curatorial links made between Gray’s work to American artist Dorothy Ianonne and Glasgow artist Stuart Murray. Dorothy Ianonne (b.1933) was, born the year after Gray. Her work *‘The Next Great Moment In History is Ours*’ (1970) provides a bold counterbalance to Gray’s work, with her strong female protagonist, and diarist approach to her work. She also divides pictorial space, somewhat like a cartoon. The snake, held almost as a tail, in her work, is a shared metaphor with Gray’s. If we think of the serpent winding its way through many of Gray’s works, from the silhouetted snake in the foreground of the north wall mural in *‘Horrors of* War *(for* *Scotland U.S.S.R. Friendship Society’*, 1955-57), to the game in *‘Snakes and Ladders’* (1972), from the ‘*Now and Then*’ series, to the serpent with the yellow egg in its mouth in *‘From The Soul’s Proper Loneliness’* (2007).

Stuart Murray’s *‘Gateway to Work’* (2014), was reprinted for the exhibition. Murray is an artist who draws from memory the encounters he has with the people he meets in Glasgow’s streets and pubs. He shares with Gray the importance of the line and use of text and image – for Murray it is recording verbatim what people tell him.

***Gray’s own house***

I will conclude with reading from these pages in ‘Ledger 3’ (1958), which casts Gray as the omnipotent narrator, considering the scales of life:

*And yet Narcissus like I want to justify that head, and do so by assuming that the qualities of will, strength etc which I read in it exist in a form that by-passes normal social living. Oh when I consider the litter of ideas and writings, doodles and deliberate sketches, fragments of verse and prose I accumulate as I live it seems not to be an assortment of activities but parts of a single effort to redeem experience, totally, for the tiniest fragment from years back may become the seed of a new picture or provide the only detail which will complete a poem or give exactness to a scene. I have the power and the patience to reconstruct my own lost civilisation from the scraps in my middens. I want my art to use all of my life, make all of it significant, redeem it completely for as it stands it is pawn to necessity belonging to those who employed me or instructed me, to my wife and friends.*

If we think of the lights in the window of *‘Cowcaddens in the 1950s’* for example, I would like to conclude with this photograph taken by Fiona Watson, for Alasdair Gray Archive. Like *‘the mansion of many apartments’*, we stand outside on the street and can see the artist’s materials on the windowsill. On the back wall, the many worlds created by Gray can tantalisingly just be seen.

**Jenny Brownrigg, June 2022**

1. *‘A Unique Case’* is attributed to *‘Unlikely Stories, Mostly’*, listed as its fourth short story in the Table of Contents of ‘*Every Short Story 1951-2012 by Alasdair Gray’* (Canongate, 2012). However, ‘*A Unique Case’* does not appear in *‘Unlikely Stories, Mostly’* (Penguin Books, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, P.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. P.187, ‘*Every Short Story 1951-2012 by Alasdair Gray’*, (Canongate, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Susannah Thompson, Alasdair Gray bio for sorchadallas.com <http://www.sorchadallas.com/alasdair-gray/bio> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. GSA Director called Gray a ‘*Glasgow visionary’*, on the point of Gray completing his diploma. Barnes wrote a press release for Gray’s mural for Scottish-U.S.S.R. Friendship society (1957). GSAA/DIR/13/7/7, GSA Archives and Collections. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. James Campbell 20 Oct 2007, ‘*Clydeside Michaelangelo’*, The Guardian, review of ‘*Old Men in Love’*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. P. 13, *‘Now and Then’* exhibition catalogue (2008), Sorcha Dallas Gallery [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. P.23, Cordelia Oliver, ‘Alasdair Gray, Visual Artist’, ‘The Arts of Alasdair Gray, edited by Robert Crawford & Thom Nairn. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Editors Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn, University of Edinburgh Press (1991) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Edited by Phil Moores, The British Library (2002) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. With the focus of survey shows predominantly on emergent artists, what can we learn from a later generation of contemporary visual artists? ‘Live Your Questions Now’, Mackintosh Museum, The Glasgow School of Art was a survey exhibition of Scottish, UK and international contemporary artists over 60 years old. The exhibition included Sam Ainsley (UK), Alasdair Gray (UK), Joan Jonas (USA), Ana Jotta (Portugal), Michael Kidner (UK), Běla Kolářová (Czech Republic), Helena Almeida (Portugal) and Lygia Pape (Brazil). Curator: Jenny Brownrigg [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ‘*A Life in Pictures’*, Canongate Books Ltd, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Reference for Gray, 24th May, 1968, H. Jefferson Barnes, GSA Archives and Collections, GSAA/DIR/13/7/7. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. P.44, ‘A Life in Pictures’, Canongate Books Ltd, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Prospectus 1956-57, The Glasgow School of Art, GSAA/Reg/1 GSA Archives and Collections. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. GSAA/DIR./13/20/5, transcript, Mural by Alasdair Gray - Scottish USSR Friendship society. 8 Belmont Crescent, Glasgow. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://wordhistories.net/2017/08/28/king-charles-head-origin/> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Reference for Gray, 24th May, 1968, H. Jefferson Barnes, GSA Archives and Collections, GSAA/DIR/13/7/7. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 24th April, 1968. H. Jefferson Barnes’ reference for Alasdair Gray. GSAA/DIR/1317/7/3 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. MSGEN 1959/1/24-25 Notebook drafts Book 2, University of Glasgow Special Collections [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Retrospective Exhibition, Alasdair Gray, exhibition catalogue, 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *‘Sixty years of Prints’*, The Hidden Lane Gallery Glasgow, catalogue, first published by Ponies and Horses books / Joe Mulholland in 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This needs Lanark number – I didn’t attribute it [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sorcha Dallas Gray [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Editor Joy Hendry. Gray along with Naomi Mitchison was to be the key feature in Chapman 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. P.153, ‘Life in Pictures: Alasdair Gray’, (2010, Canongate) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Michael Donnelly was Assistant Curator of the People’s Palace Museum, Glasgow (1972-1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. P. 175, *Life in Pictures* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Transcript supplied by Elspeth King, 27 May 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. P.12, ‘*Old Men in Love: John Tunnock’s Posthumous Papers’*, Alasdair Gray, Bloomsbury, (paperback 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. P.175, *Life in Pictures* [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. P.9, *Retrospective Exhibition* catalogue, University of Strathclyde, (1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. P.7, Cowcaddens Landscape, painting note, oil on hardboard 1953-63, Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. P.1, Alasdair Gray, ‘Saltire Self Portraits’, (1988, The Saltire Society). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Alasdair Gray Archive, Box 5, Item 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. 4 March 1981, Clare Henry papers, GSA Archives and Collections DC 030/ 1/1. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. 17 April 1984, Clare Henry papers, GSA Archives and Collections DC 030/ 1/4. Henry wrote that Corners Gallery was run ‘by the indomnitable Ronnie Nixon’. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Gray was to work with King again, later in their careers, with King commissioning his mural ‘*The Tree of Dunfermline History’* (2015) at Abbot House, Dunfermline. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Transcript, Elspeth King, 27 May 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. From Bet Low’s correspondence with David Baxendall, promoting the purpose of New Charing Cross Gallery, providing a much-needed space for modern painting in Glasgow. Acc. 12177/1, National Library of Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. First published 1984 (Cencrastus), then 1985 ‘*Lean Tales’* (Jonathan Cape Ltd). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. P.258, ‘*Portrait of a Painter’,* Alasdair Gray, *‘Lean Tales’* (Sphere Books Ltd, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. P. 8, *‘The Horse’s Mouth’*, Joyce Cary (Penguin Books, 1944). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Transcript supplied by Elspeth King, 27 May 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. <https://glasgowmuseumsslavery.co.uk/2018/08/14/john-glassfords-family-portrait/> [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Claire Forsyth, Glasgow Print Studio, email correspondence with the author, 9 June 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘*Omnium Gatherum, Alasdair Gray’*, exhibition catalogue (2020, Glasgow Print Studio) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. P. 224, ‘*A Life in Pictures’*. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. 11 Sept 1985, letter from Alasdair Gray to Chris Carrel [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. P. 7, *Campbell’s Soup* catalogue (2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. P. 8, Introduction, Grainne Rice, ‘*The Two Alasdairs: Alasdair Gray & Alasdair Taylor’*, exhibition catalogue, Glasgow School of Art (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Sorcha Dallas Gallery operated as a commercial gallery (2004-2011), over a period when there were only three commercial contemporary art galleries in Glasgow - The Modern Institute (founded 1997), Mary Mary (2006-2019) and Kendall Koppe with a gallery in Glasgow since 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. P.13, ICA Gallery guide ‘Roland / Issue 2 / June-August 2009’, POOR.OLD.TIRED.HORSE. (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. P. 11, Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)