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Egyptian Antiquities from Private Collections. Durham, Oriental Museum

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poignant in its placing of a real contemporary figure against the glories of nature – and the distant power station. Too many of the works were indicative of their maker rather than the place, such as a beautiful small Le Brun painting of something a bit like Snowdonia, or Adrian Berg's painting of Derwentwater that looks remarkably like his familiar images of Regent's Park. The best works within the context of this exhibition were those that carried some narrative, such as Keir Smith's carved railway sleepers, or eight large drawings by David Nash in which the circular declivity made by sheep forms a leitmotif (Fig.73). Both brought an element of surprise into the landscape rather than allowing it to lapse into atmospheric or be used as a ground for formal play.

Where both these exhibitions ultimately faltered was in their disregard for the way romanticism and landscape are endlessly used in the mass media. What is more romantic than the Marlborough cigarette advertisements setting cowboys against the buttes of the West? Both exhibitions existed in a vacuum: that at the V & A too easily sank into the smug or mystificatory, *The Romantic Tradition* lapsed into solipsism, and crucially lacked a working definition of romanticism. (Perhaps T.E. Hulme's definition of it as 'spilt religion' could have been used to bring out the unsaid tensions.)

Nash, Long and Keir Smith were among six artists included in the exhibition *Sculpture in the Close* at **Jesus College, Cambridge** during July in the delightful setting of its grounds. If this 'landscape' was more genteel than any of the national parks at the V & A, the exhibition served to show how a work sited in the landscape can stand in for the missing figure in nature. Long's concentric circles dug in the turf, simple in themselves, were so precisely placed as to set up a wealth of associations; the conceit of Keir Smith's railway sleepers made better sense on the grass. Nash's sculptures, one rhyming with the bushes nearby, two others extending his fascination with open forms, show how expansive his formal vocabulary has become. It is a reminder that substantial work towards a new approach to landscape has been done.

TONY GODFREY

*At **Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Cumbria** to 13th November.

Durham, Oriental Museum Egyptian antiquities from private collections

The Oriental Museum, Durham, houses one of Britain's finest collections of Egyptian art: formed during the early years of the nineteenth century by Lord Algernon Percy, 1st Baron Prudhoe and 4th Duke of Northumberland, it was acquired by the University of Durham in 1950. No more appropriate venue could have been chosen for *Collectors' Choice. Ancient Egyptian Antiquities from Private Collections in England*, the first exhibition for many years to be devoted to Egyptian material culture outside the major public museums (closed 4th September).

74. Bronze figure of a lioness-headed deity, surface originally gilded. 3rd intermediate period, 1075-716 B.C. Height 34.5 cm. (Private collection; exh. Oriental Museum, Durham).

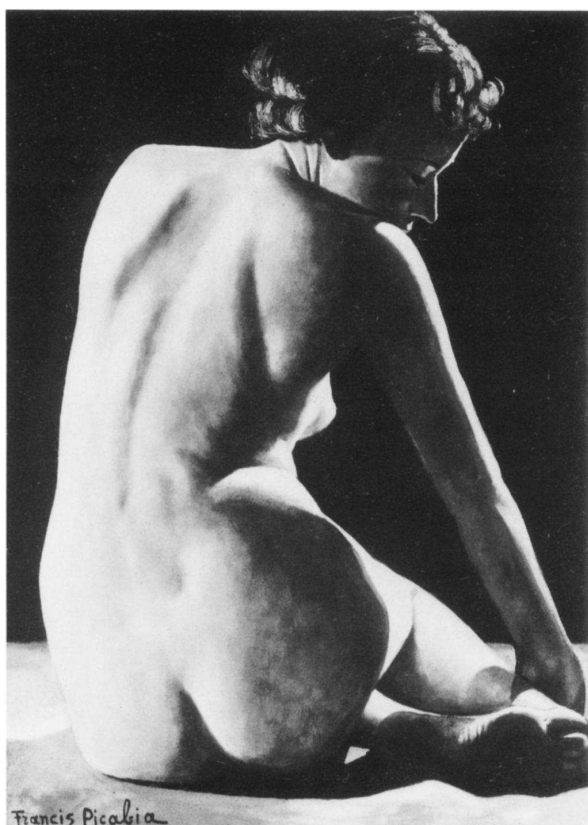


The Durham exhibition represented a cross-section of the holdings of fourteen private and otherwise little known collections. The greater proportion of the 116 objects or groups of objects displayed belongs to private individuals, and of this proportion a fair number have been acquired during the past decade. Other objects displayed were on loan from three older private collections: that at Harrow School, which was collected in Egypt by J. Gardner Wilkinson in the nineteenth century; that at Chiddingstone Castle in Kent, drawn together by the late Denys Eyre Bower during the second quarter of the present century (in large part from the sales of the Amherst and MacGregor collections); and that at Castle Howard in North Yorkshire.

The illustrated handlist which accompanied this exhibition has been compiled by J.R. Harris and John Ruffle. One of the finest pieces on display is illustrated in colour on the front cover: a large bronze of a lioness-headed deity (No.116, private collection; Fig.74), originally gilded, which is attributed to the Third Intermediate Period. A notable addition to the corpus of Egyptian bronze sculpture, it perhaps originally surmounted a religious standard. Two of the most important exhibits, long-known though somewhat neglected, were a sizeable (73 cm.) kneeling granite figure of Amenophis II (No.100, from Castle Howard; cf. G.B. Waywell, *Classical Sculpture in English Country Houses. A Hand-Guide*,

ICCA, XI [1978], p.26, No.30), disfigured by a poorly restored nose and mouth, and the rare imperial porphyry head of a queen or goddess (No.106, from Chiddingstone Castle). Formerly at Doughty House in Richmond (Frederick Lucas Cook collection), this latter piece was originally dated (albeit with some hesitation) to the third century B.C. by Delbrueck (*Antike Porphyrywerke*, p.38, No.6), and subsequently to the first century B.C. or later by Bothmer (*Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period*, p.162, *à propos* the dating of No.125). Harris and Ruffle now suggest that it is to be recognised as Roman, possibly after a Ptolemaic original.

The smaller types of object were well represented in the Durham exhibition. Among the more interesting may be noted the gessoed and painted wooden figure of an underworld deity (No.97, Chiddingstone Castle), of New Kingdom date, similar to figures found in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes; a faïence hippopotamus (No.49, private collection), originally green glazed, dating from the Middle Kingdom; a well-preserved Late Period magical stela (No.33, private collection; perhaps of serpentine rather than steatite as described); and the limestone head of what appears to have been a sphinx (No.102, Harrow School), probably of nineteenth dynasty date, wearing the *nemes*-headcloth surmounted by the double crown(?). Other noteworthy exhibits were an Early Dynastic faïence frog (No.34, private collection), a New



75. *Nude from the back*, by Francis Picabia. 1940-42. 105 by 76 cm. (Galerie Neuendorf, Frankfurt; exh Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh).

Kingdom polychrome glass chalice (No.65, Harrow), a fine, Late Period shabti of the admiral Tjanihebu (No.85, private collection; previously illustrated in J. Yoyotte, *Les trésors des Pharaons* (Geneva [1968], pl. on p.208, incorrectly attributed to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), and an array of amulets, small votive bronzes and good quality faïence (particularly appealing was No.69, private collection, a green faïence sherd with a fine head of Bes in relief). A limestone lion (No.105, private collection), attributed to the Greco-Roman period, carries an interesting hieroglyphic text, not easily translated but evidently alluding to the joys of sexual union. It may be noted that the elements of gold, semi-precious stones and glazed steatite which make up the falcon necklace (No.42, private collection) are of uniform Middle Kingdom date.

In the introduction to the handlist, the organisers are at pains to stress that the exhibition was intended 'to show what kinds of object are to be found in private collections today' – and not the sort of material which the present-day collector might expect to obtain on the open market. The availability of fine Egyptian antiquities has greatly decreased over recent years, and it is symptomatic of this that the majority of the better objects exhibited at Durham came from the older collections. *Collectors' Choice* nevertheless included a sufficient number of interesting pieces, recently acquired, to give heart to today's collector. For the minor arts, clearly, a fair amount of worthwhile material is still available; one simply has to search all the harder for it.

NICHOLAS REEVES
The British Museum

Edinburgh and Frankfurt Francis Picabia

'Picabia has played an important rôle in avant-garde painting since before the First World War . . . But . . . his enormous influence on almost all abstract and non-figurative artists is nearly always ignored today. At all events, no serious historian can fail to take Picabia into consideration to any understanding of the evolution of art in our time. That is why I left the Picabia exhibition in a rather melancholy mood. Emphatically, I do not like injustice – and I like it still less when it is collective.' So wrote Amédée Ozenfant in 1950 on the occasion of a little noticed retrospective of Picabia's work at the Pinacoteca Gallery in New York. Injustice was to continue for some thirty more years, however, for it was not until the beginning of the eighties that the 'serious historian', and others, began to reassess the achievement of this 'Christopher Columbus of Art', as Hans Arp dubbed him.

Of course Picabia's seminal contribution as one of the key Dada luminaries had long been secure. It was the work he produced later that caused the problem. Following his collaboration in 1924 on the vanguardist ballet *Relâche* this immensely talented, witty, intelligent dandy seemed to succumb, as did a number of pioneer modernists before him, not least de Chirico, into an unmitigated degeneracy. While the Italian increasingly immersed himself in the styles and subjects of Old Master painting, Picabia, by contrast, plunged into a kaleidoscopic miscellany of modes, skittering recklessly from figuration to abstraction, high art quotation to parody

and kitsch. The blatant vulgarity of works like the salacious nudes of the early forties (Fig.75) finally proved so unpalatable that even his more orthodox abstractions of the post-war years failed to secure any recognition outside certain select Parisian art-world circles. The taint of his volatile past had become ineradicable by the end of his career. The eighties have witnessed something like a reversal of earlier opinion. That his post-1924 works should now have become the focus of much fashionable interest bears witness to his new status as progenitor and patriarch of post-modernist painting: Picabia's chameleon-like changes of style, dandyish posturing and ironic detachment have gained him a plethora of disciples.

The exhibition, recently at **Edinburgh** (closed 2nd September), where it was the first retrospective in Britain since 1964, and now at the **Galerie Neuendorf, Frankfurt** follows current taste, in its emphasis on the later years. Those virtuoso set pieces in an Impressionist vein that first occasioned enthusiastic recognition for Picabia's considerable talent are totally absent, and the Cubist and Dadaist periods are sparsely surveyed (Fig.76). However, the 'monsters', transparencies, nudes and fifties abstractions are strongly represented, largely thanks to the extensive holdings of the Neuendorf Gallery on which this show draws heavily. In the beautiful galleries of the Royal Scottish Academy the hanging was dense, perhaps too much so, for it tended to homogenise groups of works, aestheticising them, and thus making them more palatable than they might otherwise be. This was nowhere more true than with the provocative nudes (Fig.75) whose racy style draws closely on sleazy pulp fiction illustrations, cinema posters and other media stereotypes. They were massed into a large tableau, rendering them less challenging than if they had been encountered in a more conventional and spacious 'museum' hang.

At Picabia's funeral in 1953 André Breton characterised his work as 'An *œuvre* based on the sovereignty of caprice, on the refusal to follow, entirely based on freedom, even to displease'. And concluded, 'Only a very great aristocrat of the spirit could dare what you have dared.' After quoting this incisive observation Sarah Wilson makes the claim in her informative essay on the late works, that Picabia is 'the greatest moralist of all painters of the twentieth century'.¹ Bold though it may be, this assertion deserves careful consideration. For Picabia's deep indebtedness to the writings of Nietzsche, as well as to Max Stirner, shaped an aesthetic that must be seen as a desperate attempt to continue in the face of the loss of all faith and the disintegration of spiritual values and of transcendental truths. Consequent on this loss of communal values came the relinquishing of any external canons or claims by which art might be judged or measured, and of any authority other than that based on the maker's own judgment. In 1921 Picabia succinctly stated his position: 'One must be a nomad, go through ideas as through lands and cities'. It was a stance that, he